



THE EFFECTS OF LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM IN EFL CLASSROOM

MARY ADDISON ROMERO PINTO

Received: 16-06-2010
Accepted: 06- 04- 2011

Abstract

This article attempts to analyze and reveal the effects of linguistic imperialism in English Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. First, it will address global English language as the global standard language; that has imposed American and British methodology and resources in the entire world, and this universal language will also be studied as a symbol of power over the foreign language policies in Colombia. Secondly, the article deals with the fact that the linguistic imperialism controls from beginning to end in “Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas xtranjeras: inglés. Formar en lenguas extranjeras: ¡el reto!” (Basic standards for competences in foreign languages; English. Teaching in foreign languages: The challenge!). It means that the Anglo-American hegemony sets the parameters of how, what, and to whom perform an EFL class. Lastly, conclusions will be drawn to stimulate EFL

Resumen

Este artículo intenta analizar y revelar los efectos del imperio lingüístico en la Enseñanza y aprendizaje del idioma Inglés. Primero este artículo se referirá al Inglés, idioma global como lengua única y estándar en el mundo; este ha impuesto la metodología y recursos estadounidenses y británicos en el mundo entero, pero también esta lengua universal será estudiada como el símbolo de poder sobre la política de lenguas extrajeras en Colombia. En segundo lugar el artículo tiene que ver con el hecho de que el imperio lingüístico controla de principio a fin los Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés. Formar en lenguas extranjeras: ¡el reto!”. Esto significa que la hegemonía Anglo-Americana son el parámetro de Qué, Cómo y a Quién enseñar en las clases de Inglés como idioma extranjero. Finalmente, se esbozan unas conclusiones para estimular

teachers to work on autonomous EFL teaching. Namely EFL teachers should focus on intercultural communication and competence, instead of fostering the spreading of English as the global language.

Keywords: Linguistic Imperialism, EFL classroom: teaching and learning, and Colombian bilingualism program.

a los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera en la enseñanza autónoma, en la comunicación y competencia intercultural en lugar de fomentar el esparcimiento del inglés como imperio lingüístico.

Palabras clave: Imperio lingüístico, clase de inglés como idioma extranjero: enseñanza y aprendizaje y Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo.

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to analyze and reflect on how linguistic imperialism has been a movement around the world and has had great effects in the EFL classroom. Firstly, it will consider American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) as the dominant and standard languages through the imposition of methodology and resources from the United States and England in other countries such as Colombia and Japan; besides, this universal language will be studied as a symbol of power over Colombian foreign language policies. Secondly, it will analyze the bilingualism program in Colombia and the imposition of *basic standards of competences in foreign languages: English (Estándares básicos para lenguas extranjeras)*. These are proofs of global English's linguistic colonization in EFL classes.

Globalization has brought the need to master English because it is the lingua franca of science, technology, and diplomacy around the world. There is a high number of English speakers in the world; as

a consequence, there are more non-native English speakers than native speakers (Crystal 1997). This spreading of English through globalization has left great effects on English Language Teaching and Learning, such as methodology, material, teacher's professional development, and standardization of language through American and British tests. A clear example of this idea is the imposition of teaching English as a Foreign Language using American methodology and resources in Japan (Wilson 2005).

In addition, this linguistic imperialism is evident in Colombia. Two authors are concerned with this issue: in the first place, Usma (2009) suggests that Colombian people have been influenced for about two decades by English. In the second place, Guerrero (2008) focuses on the critical discourse analysis and symbolic power (language as symbol of power) of the document *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés. Formar en lenguas extranjeras: ¡el reto!* (Basic standards for competences in foreign languages).

Currently, the Colombian Ministry of Education is developing the National Bilingualism Program (Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2006). This national program is influenced by the authoritative English of England and the United States. "There is a strong emphasis on a prescriptive approach to the use of the language" (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009, pg8). In this section I will describe the disadvantages related to public teaching settings, the lack of material, and the methodology. Likewise, this article will provide a brief analysis of some of the descriptors in the Basic Standards of Competences (Guerrero & Quintero, 2009), which demand a high level of control in respect to teaching and learning in EFL classes.

English language teaching must be an autonomous process in which EFL classes should take a position regarding the development of intercultural communication and competence. In addition, EFL teachers in each country should reflect about how learning English as a Foreign language implies learning a foreign culture, as well.

LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM: THE AMERICAN & BRITISH ENGLISH-DOMINANT AND STANDARD LANGUAGE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Nowadays, due to globalization, English is the standard language in every field, especially in education. For this reason, there is a need for English learning. This linguistic imperialism has caused some effects in EFL learning and teaching. First, American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) became the dominant and standard

languages through the imposition of methodology and resources from the UNITED STATES and England in other countries, such as Colombia and Japan.

The first consequence deals with the great influence this global standard language has in EFL teaching and learning. Modiano (2001) states the following:

Foreign language learning can have potentially adverse effects on the cultures and languages of the learner. For this reason there is a need to gain a better understanding of those aspects of the ELT practitioner's behavior which can be perceived as furthering the forces of linguistic imperialism. (p. 5)

Analyzing and supporting Modiano's perspective, EFL classes have been shaped by AmE and BrE. Therefore, EFL teachers around the world have focused their teaching on American and British parameters, without taking into account that EFL teaching and learning is different for non-English speaking countries. "Then, the entire world is learning English by means of a dominant methodology and a particular type of pedagogical material is an example of hyper-globalization" (Block, 2004, p.12). The governments of some countries have imposed policies on Minister of education related to the development of ELT using Communicative Language Teaching methods as the unique model and European frameworks at public and private schools.

Japan is testimony of the imposition of Communicative Language Teaching methods as the mandatory methodology to teach English as a second language (Wilson

2005). Japanese public schools have been in trouble because teachers are not able to apply this methodology due to the fact that Japanese culture is significantly different from Western culture and teachers mentioned that there is a lack of understanding of Communicative Language Teaching. In addition “most English teachers are Non-Native English Speaker Teachers (N-NEST) and it is not appropriated for the development of the project in Japan” (Wilson, 2005, p10). However, Japanese private schools are motivated in the accomplishment of this project because most of teachers are native English speakers. As a result, ELT in private schools is more involved in authentic second language learning processes. Linguistic imperialism is taking advantage of globalization. “American English: symbol of liberty, democracy, and freedom; British English: commonwealth, the British Empire and the proper English” (Modiano, 2001, p.4). These are the standardized languages, and only for few and privileged people. For instance, in Japan and Colombia, public institutions do not have as many updated labs or scholarships for students and teachers in English countries as private institutions.

Likewise, the article “Bilingual Colombia: What does it mean to be bilingual within the framework of the National Plan of Bilingualism?” gives more insight to the EFL classroom in order to face linguistic imperialism through this national project. This national project was carried out by the Ministry of Education and the British Council. The study focuses on critical discourse analysis and symbolic power (language as symbol of power) of the document

“*Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés. Formar en lenguas extranjeras: ¡el reto!*” (*Basic standards for competences in foreign languages: English. Teaching in foreign languages: The challenge!*), analyzing “how these two powerful institutions construct a discourse that redefines what being bilingual in Colombia means” (Guerrero, 2008, p9). This project is a symbol of power of global English in the EFL classroom and in Colombian society. For instance, according to “the findings of this study being bilingual means speaking English; it is further emphasized as these following excerpts demonstrate”(Guerrero, 2008, p. 7):

1) *Ser bilingüe es esencial en el mundo globalizado (MEN, 2006, p. 5)*

Being bilingual is essential in the globalized world.

People need to be bilingual to survive in both Colombian and global society. Hence, English is necessary because it is the universal language.

2) *En el contexto colombiano y para los alcances de esta propuesta, el inglés tiene carácter de lengua extranjera. Dada su importancia como lengua universal, el Ministerio de Educación ha establecido como uno de los ejes de la política educativa mejorar la calidad de la enseñanza del inglés...* (p. 5)

In the Colombian context and for the sake of this proposal, English is considered a foreign language. Given its importance as a universal language, the Ministry of Education has established, as one of the core points of its educational policy, the improvement of the quality of the teaching of English...

3) *El Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo se orienta a “lograr ciudadanos y ciudadanas capaces de comunicarse en inglés, de tal forma que puedan insertar al país en los procesos de comunicación universal, en la economía global y en la apertura cultural con estándares internacionalmente comparables” (p. 6).*

The National Bilingualism Program is oriented toward “having citizens able to communicate in English in such a way that they move the country into universal communication processes, into the global economy, and into a cultural openness with internationally comparable standards.

The examples above show how English takes a powerful position over Colombian citizens. English is seen as a safe boat in EFL class. Its purpose is to form students with access to international education, culture, communication, and economy. Due to globalization, the National Bilingualism Program needs to form bilingual people according to international standards. Quintero (2009) states in his article “¿Es usted bilingüe? Concepciones y alternativas para la educación en idiomas en el contexto Colombiano” (“Are you bilingual? Conceptions and alternatives for Language Education in Colombian context”):

“Al presentar “inglés” después de los dos puntos, la idea que los autores desean institucionalizar es que la lengua extranjera que los colombianos deben enseñar, aprender y por lo tanto usar es la lengua inglesa.”(pg 5)

By introducing the word English after colons, the authors want to convey the idea

of institutionalizing the English language as the foreign language that Colombian people must teach, learn, and use.

The power of English throughout this official document is taking advantage of the development of global economy, communication, and culture. For instance, if people need a certificate of their English proficiency because of their job, studies, or personal interest, they have to take a variety of teaching courses about grammar, speaking, listening, vocabulary, and reading, in certificated institutions (Quintero & Guerrero, 2009).

Namely, the government adopted standardized models of professional development by embracing the ICELT (In Service Certificate for English Language Teaching) and the TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) in order to measure the knowledge in-service and pre-service language teachers (Usma, 2009). Institutions such as the British Council and the Colombo-Americano are “official and model institutions.” They offer training courses of some standardized tests like Michigan, TOEFL, IELTS, proficiency tests, and language aptitude tests. In addition, they offer training courses for teachers and schools. Nevertheless, many people get low scores because the test is based on native English and their services and material are very expensive. It is not enough help public schools, English varieties, non-native English teachers, and learners.

After all, methodology, materials, and resources constitute another topic to discuss in respect to the global English language. In ELT most of the language-teaching

materials are made in the United States and England. They make materials taking into account their culture and the spreading of their language (Cárdenas, 2009; Block, 2004; Modiano, 2000; Quintero & Guerrero, 2009). These kinds of materials are sometimes inappropriate for the different contexts that non-English speaking countries have in urban or rural areas. For instance, the material for Second Language Teaching is used in Foreign Language Teaching and there is a meaningful difference between the second and the foreign language. Some of these differences could be the English level, the vocabulary, the idiomatic expressions, and, most importantly, the teaching setting. These mismatches make English teaching and learning difficult for non-English speaking countries in Asia or South America to achieve bilingual programs.

Taking into account the concerns mentioned above, the Colombian Academic English teachers have analyzed, searched, worked, reflected on, and evaluated those main issues to provide a better way of teaching and learning EFL. The Colombian Academic English teachers' COFE (Colombian Framework For English) hastaken into account the local differences of students and teachers as well as it has searched for the importance of a multilingual and intercultural view of the world based on autonomous teaching (Cárdenas, M. 2009). ASOCOPI (Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Ingles) consists of a group of teachers from different Colombian universities and schools that have researched, studied, analyzed, shared, and guided other English teachers in their professional development and teaching practice. Unfortunately, the Ministry

of Education did not appreciate the searching and experience in EFL of this group of teachers. "The Ministry of Education preferred to contact an international institution to work on the Bilingualism Program, fostering a monolingual teaching communication and competence" (Cárdenas, M. 2009, p8).

LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM: THE BILINGUALISM PROGRAM IN COLOMBIA

This second part of the paper attempts to analyze and reflect on this movement, along with widespread exposure, learning and how use of English profoundly impacts on the education system of non-English speaking countries. The bilingual program in Colombia and the imposition of *Basic Standards of Competences in Foreign Languages: English (Estandares básicos para lenguas extranjeras)*. These are proof of the colonization of global English in EFL classrooms.

In Colombia after the World War II, specifically in 1982, the National Ministry of Education, in partnership with the British Council and Centro Colombo Americano, designed a plan to address students from 6th to 11th grades and teachers with low English level (Usma, 2009). They applied the Communicative Approach methodology. The results were not satisfactory, due to lack of oral proficiency of teachers, number of classes, and resources (Valencia, 2007 cited by Usma in 2009). Cardenas states that globalization has promoted some bilingual programs in some countries like Colombia:

Con los argumentos de la globalización se promueven programas denominados

'bilingües', que en su esencia centran sus acciones en un monolingüismo, como en el caso del Programa Colombia Bilingüe, cuyo énfasis radica en el idioma inglés (Cárdenas. 2009 p 17).

Globalization is an argument to promote "bilingual" programs, which focus their action on monolinguals, like in the case of Colombia Bilingüe, whose emphasis is on the English language.

Colombia, like some other countries in Latin America and in the world, has adopted language policies aimed at spreading English as a foreign language, namely the "Bilingual Colombia in 10 years" (Guerrero, 2008) program. The Ministry of Education has developed a project in foreign languages: *El Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo: Inglés ¡el reto!* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2006).

This project has an advantage and some disadvantages in respect to Teaching English as a Foreign language. The advantage is that students and teachers from public schools have the opportunity to learn a foreign language in order to improve their communicative competence. For instance, public schools are teaching English from first through eleventh grade. In the last decades, teaching English was taught only in public and bilingual secondary schools. It was a privilege in terms of education.

The disadvantages of this program of bilingualism are that, first, teachers wonder about how they are going to teach EFL if teachers in primary school do not know the language. Second, the methodology and strategies do not fit the context in which

pedagogical practices take place. Third, there are not enough resources and teaching materials to perform the EFL class. Usma states some constrains,

"Public education contrasted with the lack of teachers, few materials, limited professional development opportunities, and constraining school structures that conflicted with the policy mandates" (Usma, 2009, p10).

Most primary teachers in public schools are not able to accomplish this huge goal. In addition, some public schools have resistance to this program because the Colombian context is different from the European one (44THASOCOPI: The Symbolic Power of English, 2009).

Hence, some public schools in Boyacá do not have lab rooms or enough reference material in their library; there are few books and dictionaries, but these are not updated (44THASOCOPI: The Symbolic Power of English, 2009). These concerns belong to the rest of Colombian departments, too. While Boyacá is a rich department and its education system is one of the best in the country, other states such as Vaupés, Guainía, Vichada, Chocó, among others, face worse difficulties in EFL teaching and learning. They have insufficient economic resources and fewer tools to achieve the goals of the bilingualism program.

In an effort to construct evidences of linguistic imperialism through the bilingualism program in Colombia, I have briefly analyzed the program. For instance, the Ministry of Education has used the European framework in order for Colombia

to become bilingual. The Ministry of Education and British Council made a deal to construct a discourse for defining “*Estandares básicos para lenguas extranjeras*.” The imposed idea of English as a symbol of success makes it a powerful language to be taught under specific norms and patterns, which are affecting the teacher’s role, student’s role, methodology, and the curriculum of the institutions (Shohamy, 2004 cited by Guerrero & Quintero 2009). This linguistic imperialism has made EFL teachers lose their autonomy in their teaching practice. It has made EFL classes employ a foreign methodology without taking into account teaching settings and students’ skills and weaknesses.

Concerning the “*Estándares Básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés*” (Basic standards of competences in foreign languages: English) for the achievement of EFL learning and teaching, the Ministry of Education has established the Basic Standards for Competences in Foreign Languages: English. These standards controlled the teaching practice and the learning process of the students in all the grades from first grade to eleventh grade (Guerrero & Quintero 2009). English must be taught as neutral and structured language following formats and patterns. Consequently, English language in EFL classes is shown as a language structure that students must use in specific situations and there is no place for creativity and free production by students and teachers.

At the same time, English is neutral; there is a strong emphasis on a prescriptive approach to the use of the language (Guerrero & Quintero 2009). This means teachers and

students must do what Basic Standards of Competences stipulate without taking into account teachers and students’ voices. For instance, the descriptors for writing were analyzed by Guerrero & Quintero (2009), who found that most of them are limiting the students’ learning and the English teacher’s labor.

a) *Copio y transcribo palabras que comprendo y que uso con frecuencia en el salón de clase (Estándares, Escritura, p. 19).*

I copy and transcribe words I understand and which I use frequently in the classroom.

b) *Escribo mensajes de invitación y felicitación usando formatos sencillos (Estándares, Escritura, p. 19).*

I write messages for congratulations and invitations using simple formats.

c) *Estructuro mis textos teniendo en cuenta elementos formales del lenguaje como la puntuación, la ortografía, la sintaxis, la coherencia y la cohesión (Estándares, Escritura, p. 27).*

I structure my texts taking into account formal elements of language such as punctuation, spelling, syntax, consistency and cohesion.

The descriptors mentioned above are not leading students to produce and experience by themselves. It means there is not free production and interaction between students and language; these descriptors limit the students’ thought. Therefore, EFL classes become a class of repetition and memorization of structures and patterns. English as a Foreign Language teachers do not have autonomy to work on their teaching context; they only obey rules,

imitate, and adopt the methodology and resources that some institutions sell to the Ministry of Education (Cárdenas, 2009, p. 17).

CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, American and British English, which come from two powerful countries, the United States and England, insists that the best and purest language is theirs. "Who, then, might be considered as being the 'rightful owners' of these languages or dialects" (Sifakis & Sougari, 2003, p9). Currently, that belief is not accurate. For instance, in countries such as Norway, Sweden, Puerto Rico, and Mexico, people speak English as first, second, or foreign languages. They have their own language and dialects with linguistic and sociolinguistic issues. Every language represents customs, beliefs, folk, politics, and religion of a society. There are no reasons to point out the best English language or the worst English language. All the English varieties are unique and valuable. The most important aspect is that people are able to perform in a communicative situation.

The exposure to English as an international language goes further. It is more than a tool for communicative purposes. The globalization of English as the universal language benefits few people and many people suffer the consequences of it (Pennycook, 1994 cited by Modiano, 2000). There are many domains in which English plays, roles such as teaching, learning, local language, and culture. Another consequence of Global English is the problematic situation that many non-English speaking countries face due to the imposition of English as a

foreign language and English as a second language.

This is a call for EFL teachers to reflect on the position they should take on EFL classes about English as standard language. To begin with the Ministry of Education's bilingual program, it is not appropriate for the Colombian context because it does not cover the teachers' and students' needs for teaching and learning a foreign language. Second, there is an imposition about how, what, to whom, and when to teach English. Consequently, English teachers must follow the Anglo-American English parameters, which include standardized tests, methodology and resources.

Nevertheless, a relevant question can be posted: why don't non-English teachers make resources according to their teaching context? It will be a solution to struggle against linguistic imperialism. In other countries, English teachers have decided to design their own teaching materials taking into account the weaknesses, strengths, and culture of their country. Despite the ability of periphery cultures to resist the imposition of unsuitable materials, McKay (2003) feels that cultural representation in EFL materials must move away from center countries. Course materials should be tailored to allow learners to express their culture and beliefs in English. The 'Go for Chile' course book as an example of methodology and material that is both culturally and pedagogically appropriate. The book takes a global view by presenting Chile in context with the rest of the world, but, at the same time, it resists linguistic imperialism.

After all, EFL teachers should explore the positive facts of Global English language in EFL classes. The development of a better students' communicative competence is relevant; learners and teachers should take advantage of this new language in order to get a wide view of other world languages and cultures. This is called an intercultural interaction in which English teachers should address four dimensions in class: language learning, Language awareness, cultural awareness and cultural experience (Byram 1989 cited by Hall & Ramirez, 1993).

Likewise, EFL classroom should undermine linguistic imperialism focusing on English as the international language for communicative purposes. Also EFL teachers should highlight the importance of developing intercultural communicative competence along with linguistic competence, concerning learners' needs for acquiring intercultural skills for cross-cultural communication in which they may encounter linguistic and cultural barriers (Kiet Ho, 2009). Nowadays, the most important thing is to obtain conversational skills in the foreign language in order to achieve a good communicative competence instead of being an English linguistic expert.

References

- ASOCOPI. (2009). The symbolic power of English 44th conference, *Newsletter, March, 2007*. Retrieved May 08, 2008 from ASOCOPI Web site: www.asocopi.org
- Block, D. (2004). Key concepts in ELT globalization and language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 58 (1)75-77. Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cárdenas, M. (2009). A propósito de la autonomía y las políticas de Colombia bilingüe. En Cárdenas, M.(Ed.), *Investigación en el aula en L1 y L2. Estudios, experiencias y Reflexiones*. (pp. 69-87). Bogotá, Colombia: Centro Editorial Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional [MEN]. (2006). *Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras: inglés. Formar en lenguas extranjeras: ¡el reto! Lo que necesitamos saber y saber hacer*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional.
- Guerrero, C. (2008). Bilingual Colombia: What does it mean to be bilingual within the framework of the National Plan of Bilingualism?. *PROFILE Issues in teachers' Professional Development*, 10, 27- 45.
- Guerrero, C. (2009). Language policies in Colombia: the inherited disdain for our native languages. *HOW*, 16, 11-24.
- Guerrero, C, & Quintero, A. (2009). English as a neutral language in the Colombian National Standards: A constituent of dominance in English language education. *Profile*, 11 (2) p.135-150. <http://www.scielo.unal.edu.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S165
- Hall, K. & Ramirez, A. (1993). How a group of high school learners of Spanish perceive the cultural identities of Spanish speakers, English speakers, and themselves. *Hispania*, 76 (3), pp. 613-620. Pub-

lished by: American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/343839> .

Kiet Ho, Si Thang. (2009). *Addressing Culture in EFL Classrooms: The Challenge of Shifting from a Traditional to an Intercultural Stance*. Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching. 2009, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 63–76, © Centre for Language Studies. National University of Singapore.

McKay, S. L. (2003). Toward an appropriate EIL pedagogy: Re-examining common ELT assumptions. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 1-22.

Modiano, Marco. (2001). Linguistic imperialism, cultural integrity and EIL. *ELT Journal*, 55 (4), 339-346.

Quintero, A. (2009). ¿Es usted bilingüe? Concepciones y alternativas para la educación en idiomas en el contexto colombiano. *El educador*, 2 (7), 4- 10.

Sifakis, C.&Sougari, A.(2003). Facing the globalization challenge in the realm of English language teaching. *Language and Education*, 17 (1), 59-71.

Usma, J. (2009). Education and language policy in Colombia: Exploring processes of inclusion, exclusion, and stratification in times of global reform. *PROFILE Issues in teachers' Professional Development*, 11, 123-141.

Valencia, S.(2007). Implications of “bilinguismo” and globalization processes in Colombia: Insights from research on ELT policy and practice. *ASOCOPI Newsletter*, Retrieved May 08, 2008 from ASOCOPI Web site: www.asocopi.org

Wilson, R (2005). Imposition or adoption? The Globalization of ELT Practices.

Published MA. Assignment, University of Essex.

THE AUTHOR

MARY ADDISON ROMERO PINTO is a candidate for the Master Degree in Foreign Language Teaching at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia (UPTC). She is currently a full time language teaching at Francisco de Paula Santander School in Ventaquemada, Boyacá and a part time teacher at Juan de Castellanos University in Tunja.