CRITICAL PRAXIS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: ITS PEDAGOGY AS CULTURAL ACTION

INDICE

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This article aims to consider current ELT practices under the approaches of criticism and possibility. It seems essential to the rational exercise of criticism to question the very nature of certain "applications" of linguistic research as well as to continually subject many "commonsense" routines and their underlying assumptions to the scrutiny of other perspectives. In these regards, the English language, as perhaps *"an-other* tongue" could well act as a "kindly friend from another culture" who may enable us to look at our own social milieu "with dispassionate eyes" (Doris Lessing). That view is adopted in order to unmask "linguicist" abuses (Phillipson) under the guise of applied linguistics, that is, language teaching initiatives put to the service of unequal divisions of power between groups. As citizens of an international world in which the English language today has the potential to help oppress or emancipate, it may be worth attempting to set some guidelines as a means of resistance against imposed policies, disinformed decision-making processes or intellectual forms of colonization. We will try to present some such proposals in the hope that they may address issues of educational import within both linguistic theories and practices and society at large.

INTRODUCTION

From our standpoint as on the one hand English language teacher educators, and thus actors and spectators of the current national debates on the educational reforms in the United Kingdom and Spain, and on the other hand researchers into the social space in which language, education and culture converge, our main concern is enhancing awareness of the interplay of the micropolitics of the classroom and the macropolitics of language policies, economic agendas and conflicting cultural domains in a profession with increasingly blurred contours.[1] Our critical discourse has been mainly informed by the challenges posed by teachers and researchers such as Paulo Freire (1990), Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis (1986), Michael W. Apple (1989), Luke Prodromou (1988, 1992), Norman Fairclough (1989), Braj B. Kachru (1992), A. Pennycook (1989), J. W. Tollefson (1991), Robert Phillipson (1992), Henry Giroux (1990), Celia Roberts et al. (1992), and many colleagues and students. We feel that it is essential to the rational exercise of criticism to question the very nature of certain "applications" of linguistic research and to continually

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[1] Our position on the fringe, between theory and practice, schooling and university education, teaching and research, collective and individual action, personal and professional loyalties, prompted us to write this paper which is based on a 10 hour course which was part of the English Department of the University of Salamanca's contribution to the 1993-1994 doctoral programme. The course was conceived of as a space for critical debate for pre-service and serving teachers of English in primary and secondary schools, as well as teachers of English for general and for specific purposes and teachers of other languages and teacher educators.

subject many "commonsense" practices and their underlying assumptions to the scrutiny of other perspectives so that they do not become instead "common-*nonsense*" mechanical behaviour. In these regards, the English language, as perhaps "*an-other* tongue", could well act as the "kindly friend" of whom Doris Lessing (1987: 47) has this to say:

> We are all of us, to some degree or another, brainwashed by the society we live in. We are able to see this when we travel to another country, and are able to catch a glimpse of our own country with foreign eyes. There is nothing much we can do about this except to remember that it is so. Every one of us is part of the great comforting illusions, and part illusions, which every society uses to keep up its confidence in itself. These are hard to examine, and the best we can hope for is that a kindly friend from another culture will enable us to look at our culture with dispassionate eyes.

However painful it may be, a detached yet engaged "look" from the language of another culture may well prove to be one concrete step towards personal and collective emancipation. Critical praxis should not be thought of as putting the blame for any social evils on ourselves or "others" but rather as a means of discovering, that is, a commitment to bring up to the surface what, consciously or unconsciously, by external imposition or by inner censorship, still remains hidden. Since language keeps a dialectical and simultaneous connection with thought and action, using it or being used by it plays a seminal role in respectively "voicing" and "silencing" the lived experiences, in fact the cultures, of specific human groups in historical contexts with structural differences and inequalities.

We will try to explore our own vision of teacher education settings by initially hypothesizing that, beyond the reproduction of the social order, they could very effectively act as "shared ground", a real meeting point of different cultures and a space in which to discover and transform oneself and others through a second language. In order to demonstrate this we will combine the "factual information" and "discourse-as-action" modes and we will very carefully try to use interrogative, tentative, "exploratory" styles rather than assertive or conclusive ones. Basing our approach on the above mentioned authors, we will introduce some topics of discussion in a way that addresses some of the key questions of the profession linking them to our own teaching experience and that of our students' teaching experience without necessarily providing any definite answers but perhaps generating more questions such as these: Why is English being promoted in our country now and not before? Why English more than any other language? Which English variety are we supposed to be teaching and why? Are we serving educational purposes which are ethically valid or are we simply at the mercy of uncontrollable economical trends of a questionable nature under a neutral guise? Are we "importing" ELT methods at the risk of becoming consumers of methodological fast-food, or are we instead devising our own syllabuses according to local contexts while remaining fully aware of global issues and fully cognizant of the professional endeavours of our colleagues in other countries? Do we challenge the buzz-notion of "communication" and attempt to unveil its perversions or do we solely promote its most utilitarian functions? Do we favour the arguments of "psychological" aptitudes at the cost of neglecting "sociological" pressures and constraints? Do we teach the language through a "prescription" of its grammar (its rules and norms: its authority and its unchanging "essence") or through the "description" of its flux and contingencies? Do we have a feeling of isolation and atomization in our profession or do we have a sense of collective recognition and synergistic strength? Do we feel we have a say in language planning or do we perceive our job at the extreme end of a burdensome and unalterable bureaucracy? Do we start teaching by taking our students' knowledge of the language and of the learning processes into account, or do we meekly assume that they know what the "system" says they *should* know? Do we play the game of reducing the cul-

tures of the countries in which the foreign language is spoken to mass-media trivia under the pretence of motivating our students and meeting "their" interests? Is the Spanish case completely different from other Western or Eastern European countries or can we learn lessons from them, or even more importantly, with them? These are rather black and white questions, but they have the value of deliberately emphasizing certain aspects which may be obvious but are often disregarded by practitioners with tight schedules and little time to stop and look around, beyond the narrow institutional confines we may be forced to stay in, and outside our somewhat professional golden cages.

The paper will be divided into three sections which aim to bring together different threads basic to our teacher education practice: language, culture and society together with their specific texts and contexts when we place official documents and curricular contents in the British and Spanish educational reforms concerning the teaching of foreign languages under the complementary yet opposing angles of criticism and possibility. In this discourse of criticism and possibility the ELT profession can be viewed as a battleground for emancipatory action.

Within this focus we may find instances of epistemological dichotomies which create a sense of disintegration while the organization of our work becomes more "technical" and (apparently) more "efficient" (in its craving for measurable results), approaching the metaphorical model of a computer, with clear-cut data, well-defined tasks and a precise allocation of information items, as it becomes less "organical" and "analogical". Although we will not explore them in depth, mentioning some such dichotomies will help to appreciate the complexity of the whole issue: training and education, educational linguistics and linguistical education, means and ends, texts and contexts, instrumental reason and enlightened reason, objectivity and subjectivity, teaching and research, theory and practice, "humanistic" versus "technical" approaches, pure research and applied research, or qualitative and quantitative focus, which can all ultimately be linked, in Freire's terms, to the fundamental breach between "the word and the world". However philosophical this may sound, the teaching of English as a foreign language is directly, and very practically, related to these choices, which, insofar as they give shape to specific and vital assimilations of the profession, are all culturally loaded notions.

LANGUAGE AS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section we explore in more detail both some of the concepts that come together when we endow our work as language teachers and teacher educators with a socio-cultural and historical perspective and some of the socio-cultural contexts in which ELT is immersed in different parts of the world. By doing this, it is not our intention to present the reality that surrounds the teaching of English in the world with neat and clear-cut horizons but instead to see it as multicoloured, messy and overlapped by contingent social, cultural, political and economic issues. Through a questioning of stale, narrowing and restrictive ideas and concepts that have been common in the profession, we attempt to place ourselves in a position to analyse our language teaching and teacher education from a wider perspective so as to empower ourselves and others working with us. We are aware that the information presented below is not commonly worked on in university or teacher education curricula and yet we think it is vital to raise people's awareness of the macropolitics involved in our profession. The presentation of this information needs to be made relevant by discussing each teacher's experience so that THEY can solve their own problems which are, no doubt, more compelling, more "real" and in need of more urgent and immediate action.

ON LANGUAGE AND ELT

We understand language as a social activity; rather than just looking at it as a means of pragmatic communication or a mere systematic presentation and practice of its code, we examine it both as a way of maintaining social relationships in a *specific cultural context* and as an expression of values, attitudes and aspirations of individual societies to which it provides a sense of national identity (Quirk and Widdowson 1985). Seen in that way, language can not be regarded as neutral or trivial but as an extremely powerful tool for looking at, and creating reality in different ways (Roberst et al 1992: 29). Since our starting point is not an ideal speaker in an ideal community, but the actual use of the language in hetereogenous (English as a Second Language, English as a Foreign Language, English as Mother Tongue, henceforward ESL, EFL, EMT) communities, the very language we speak and the language we teach can in no way be the one "essential" language but is rather many "existing" dialects, registers or varieties, each with its own habits and values deriving from its local culture (Brown 1990). We therefore have to give these varieties the appropriate status acknowledging and respecting the varied functions that local forms of English perform in the dialy lives of millions of people living and sharing their experiences in countries other than where English is the native language. We are aware that, in understanding language from this perspective, we would be raising more problems and unresolved questions than solutions.

ENGLISH LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES TODAY

The list of bibliographic references and the experiences described in this section provide examples of very different contexts where English has different roles, status and meanings: EFL in Poland, China, Morocco, Greece and Spain, English as a SL in the UK and Zimbabwe, English as Standard Language in the UK and its implications and specifications in the National Curriculum, or Nativised English in Sierra Leone. We have grouped them in three main contexts: Firstly, in the UK, SL and Standard Language; secondly, Third World Countries, and thirdly, in Europe and Spain, EFL.

In these differing contexts the number of English speakers is increasing at an incred ible rate, as a result of economic, technical or/and political factors. For example, in Eastern Europe the demand for EFL has swallowed up thousands of Russian teachers since the collapse of the Iron curtain and EFL is replacing Russian, teachers are being re-trained to be able to cater for this demand for English and other professionals complement their salaries with English tuition at the same time that America, Australia and Britain are competing to teach their brands of English.

But these realities are not as neat, innocent or straightforward as they may seem at first sight. Underlying them there are crucial issues, usually not addressed in research agendas, or teacher education courses, which need to be raised because they affect and condition individuals in their personal and social milieu. We hold the view that it is not enough to acknowledge the fact that people use English internationally, but that it is also vital that we explore with what state of mind, attitudes, with which objectives, and under which specific circumstances they use it. The following sections will only outline some of the circumstances in different parts of the world. No matter how different they may seem at first sight, they all share common threads which underlie the specific contextual practices.

UK: STANDARD ENGLISH (SE) AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL)

In the UK, linguists, language planners and politicians have recently been involved in continuous debates about models and standards following the recommendations of the Kingman Report (1988) on the teaching of Standard English (SE).

Although for some linguists (Quirk 1985) the use and promotion of standard varieties seems to be linked to linguistic reasons, others (Pennycook, 1989, Tollefson, 1992) associate standard varieties with domination by groups having control of economic and political power. As Crystal (1985) observes, even this social dimension is included in the Longman Dictionary definition of standard: "something established by authority, custom or general consent as a model or example". The standard languages which emerge are those of the groups that have power and prestige in the community (Kennedy 1985). Standard varieties are associated with gatekeeping processses at different stages of the socialisation process: exams, job interviews, etc. With R. Clark, we wonder: "What will be the role of English in this brave new world?", and support his suggestion: "Evidently, where the social mission of 'English' used to be national cohesion, in the future it must be an introduction to pluralistic identities: the American, the Australasian, the European" (The Times 1993).

The Kingman committee strongly supported the primacy of SE as the best of the national heritage and the shared common language, free of geographical or class associations. SE was viewed as a great resource available to all, without considering whether the language of some groups may have closer associations with the Standard than others (Tollefson 1991). This belief led to the specification and imposition of attainment targets for English in the National Curriculum, thus ignoring language variation. Tollefson argues that the intent of these recommendations was to reassert the dominance of SE throughout the educational system to the detriment of MT education or other language varieties. Furthermore the Report attempts to associate SE with the nation and to deny its associations with class or prestige, assuming that SE is a national language, representative of all citizens while minority languages and non-standard varieties of English are only representative of specific groups. In other words, standard is *normal*, therefore normative. By emphasizing these aspects, the Report denies the arbitrary result of domination by its speakers, and *better* language replaces *most powerful* language in the report discourse. The consequences for school children are clear: it grants advantages to children whose language is SE and ignores the disadvantages of immigrant and speakers of non-standard varieties, while adopting a retoric of equality and of leveling out of social divisions.

Widdowson (1993) offers some sensible arguments for the coexistence of standard and dialect. He argues that the real issue is how we can at the same time teach the standard yet still respect the propriety of other forms of English as suited to different needs and purposes and concedes that one of the objectives of schooling is to provide students with the opportunity of learning the standard language for use where appropriate. But he sees no reason why other forms of speaking, whether these be varieties of English or other languages, should not be allowed, indeed encouraged, in the exploration of experience in the process of learning, precisely because of their richness or, as the Cox Report puts it, 'since dialect is so closely related to children's individual identity'. Widdowson's final thoughts run like this: "The standard language is a proper language to learn, and school is the proper place to learn it. But it is only proper to the extent it is appropriate, and it is not therefore the proper language, the one and only." (1993: 328)

The debate on SE is linked to the heated debate on cannons in English literature, and in particular with the recomendations for English in the NC. The government is provoking national outrage with its insistence on testing schoolchildren on the writings of prescribed authors from a cannon of great works of literature from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Spencer, etc. to the exclusion of writers fom commonweath countries like Derek Walcott,

Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, Anita Desai, etc. (Griffiths 1993; Nasta, 1993).

Regarding the issue of English as a Second Language, we will point out three defining characteristics of this situation, created in the UK after the increase in the number of immigrants during and after the 50s:

Firstly, the term 'Second-Language Acquisition' does not reflect adults' reality of having to learn and work in an entirely new language and culture. The question of how language is learned cannot be considered independently of the social context in which learning is available and which provides the social rules necessary for talk. Research in first-language acquisition has recognised that, as children learn a language, they learn and wish to be socialised into the particular culture in which they are brought up and are welcomed into it (Halliday 1975). However, the process of adult language socialisation for ethnic minorities cannot be compared with that of first-language development, because the social contexts are completely different (Roberts et al 1992: 17).

Secondly, the needs and purposes for learning English may vary from the youngster attending a local comprehensive to a mother who spends most of the time at home, interacting with other speakers of her MT, and only needs English to perform basic activities like shopping.

Thirdly, this increase of immigration in the U.K. was associated with attempts to provide and cater for them. Consequently there was an explosion of ESL programmes with growing use of part-time staff, separation of ESL from public funding, and an adoption of curricula in which language was reduced to a set of skills to be practiced for employment (Tollefson 1991). In British mainstream education, various committees were appointed which produced different reports with different conclusions. The Bullock Report (1975), was the first document to give primacy to a pluralist view of language education, but this view was soon overcome by a pressure, derived from a monolingual ideology, for a unified national policy on language and MT education. This was followed by the Swann Report (1985), preceded by the interim Rampton Report (1981) which concluded that Afro-Caribbean children were subject to stereotyping by teachers, thus suggesting that racism was at the root of poor school performance. The committee proposed 'education for all' as the educational solution to racism and the problems of minority children, concluded that educational programmes should not be designed for these children and consequently adviced against implementing separate language programmes for linguistic and ethnic minorities and ESL students. Some of the recommendations included: 1) ESL should not be taught in separate language centres or units within the school, but offered within mainstream classes as part of a comprehensive system of language education for all children. 2) MT education should not be supported except when it is taught as a school subject within the Modern Language Curriculum. The Report argued that MT classes increase social barriers between groups, and that equality of opportunity is offered only through ensuring that all students have a good command of English, and ignored the basic principle that the use of one's native language is an individual right that the government must protect and that bilingualism is, more than a drawback to be overcome, a resource which should be encouraged and fostered for all citizens. The committee recommended that MT classes should only be taught in weekends, at lunchtime or after school and should be organised and funded by ethnic communities without public funds.

Finally the Kingman Report (1988) focused on the role of English in British Education and showed an increased concern with SE and its importance in the school system, thus moving away from any consideration of bilingualism or multilingualism in schools.

ENGLISH IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES

Even if the experiences presented in this section may seem far removed from our own experience and the role of English may appear less than familiar, the fact that we teach English makes us part of this world. English becomes, then, an ideal medium to get us closer to realities different from the stale middle class, eurocentric images so familiar in the EFL literature and teaching materials.

The role of English in the context of traditionally multicultural and multilingual Third World countries, is usually seen as one of modernization. But this idea is very questionable because most people are automatically excluded from the process and English encourages and reinforces the existence of bureaucratic ÉLITES. In many of these countries enormous resources are deployed in the teaching of English for very meagre results. Large number of specialists are being encouraged to take advantage of rapidly expanding offers from foreign countries to study abroad. Those planning to go to English-speaking countries normally are required by the host institution to pass a stringent test of English. At the same time, the need for diplomats, bureaucrats, trade officials, and in-country tourist-guides to deal face-to-face with speakers of foreign languages, particularly English, has drastically increased (Podromou 1988).

Together with the language, the tradition of Third World countries has been to choose books for schools which were written in native or STANDARD ENGLISH, even in countries where a particular non-native variety of English is spoken. Sid Talib (1992) argues, however, that the "integrative goal in language teaching, which involves the enhancement of the students' social awareness, sense of self identity, and communicative competence within the community they live in, is more easily achieved with a literary text written in a variety of English which the students understand or can empathize with, than with that written in a native or standard variety". But it is not only this sense of ALIENATION that the imposition of a different language variety, strange to people's every day experiences causes, but the constant and unhealthy DEPENDENCY of the periphery on the centre that these practices generate, that needs to be addressed.

EFL IN EUROPE AND SPAIN

Much closer to our cultural experience, in Western European countries, like Spain, English has been part of the school curriculum for over 15 years and all European countries have seen an increase in the number of school children who study the language and the provision that governments need to make in terms of teachers and resources to deal with perceived social demands.

Since the mid-1950s there has been a great upsurge in foreign-language teaching, reflecting a growing utilitarian demand for foreign languages as tools of communication in work, leisure and education. As a result, the traditional academic approach to the study of FLs has been recognised as inappropriate. In European schools there has been a demand for FL study for every pupil regardless of academic level; many university courses throughout the world require a knowledge of a second language, and an increasing number of jobs require a working knowledge on an international language, mainly English.

This upsurge was accompanied by the introduction of new methods and materials in the classroom, particularly during the 1960s. But this revolution took little account of the varied contexts or motivations of the learners; it was about how people in general learn and what aspects of the language they need to learn. And while later work on communicative language teaching stimulated ideas and creativity on methodology and materials, the Council of Europe project still appeared to have two major limitations: a lack of analysis of

language above the level of the sentence and a lack of recognition of the complexity and unpredictability of context and meaning, particularly in inter-ethnic communication (Roberts et al 1992: 251).

Countries in the former Eastern block, nevertheless, see English from a different perspective. The new governments of these countries have hurried to replace the compulsory teaching of Russian with the teaching of English to which people attach all sort of ideas of liberty and democracy. But as Clark (1993) points out, the pressure towards vocational English is also evident in the funding of language to the detriment of literary studies in many countries and the under-resourcing of teachers and libraries. Colleagues in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, want English by the gallon. But what do they get? Let us get an answer from *Tesol Matters*:

> Not surprisingly, even corporations played a significant role in this new kind of professional happening (First annual conference of Moscow Association of Applied Linguistics and TESOL, December 1993) in a new Russia: Penguin Books printed the programmes and provided generous program "extras", while McDonald's and the Coca-Cola Company, those consummate symbols of a formerly world order fed the participants with Big Macs, apple pie, and gallons and gallons of coke. (Martin and Bochorishvili 1994)

In the midst of this Anglosaxon turmoil, how do other European languages fare? Which educational, socio-political or economic reasons can we advance to explain why in the last 15 years people are not interested in learning French anymore in Spain? Why are there only about 20 pupils learning French in Avila, scattered around a handful of schools as opposed to the hundreds that not only attend English lessons as part of the compulsory school curriculum, but also hurry after school to extra English lessons with native speakers? Why are our French teachers "recycling" into teaching something else? Why, even if EEC policies encourage the use of at least two European languages, does there seem to be stronger forces driving us all towards a kind of English monolingualism? Why, even though the Spanish Ministry of Education through different spokespersons has proclaimed that children should do two languages, is it that children leave school with just one language which in most cases is English?

Some governments, like the French and the Greek are repeatedly trying to take some measures to stop the avalanche of English words into their languages and ways of life. In Spain nothing seems to be done about this. But are isolated top down actions by single governments enough to stop powerful economic and social trends when both the market, which wants to present itself as modern and fashionable, and advertising, which is directed at the youngest and most vulnerable, are flooded with English "blurb"?

The introduction of English in Primary Education in most European countries has been welcomed by parents, teachers and teacher educators. Yet we need to look into the local situations in which English is being learned and taught. We need to look at groups of teachers with no resources at all. Some of them do not even have a textbook, let alone, flashy videos and all the other trappings of EFL, others need to travel to two or three different villages within a day to reach very small schools in very poor conditions.[1] We need to look into such local, real situations to be able to see what role English is playing in the lives of school children and teachers. We have reasons to be sceptical about the optimism of official reports about the numbers of children now receiving FL education. We just need to

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[1] Colegios Rurales Agrupados (CRAs) in Avila: Grouped Rural Primary Schools; schools that provide education for primary school children at different levels of the curriculum by one class teacher (in charge of up to ten children) plus specialist teachers for English, Music and Physical Education who tour around a group of these schools situated in very small underdeveloped villages.

-scratch the lifeless quantitative surface to get to the meaningful qualitative issues of pupils' and teachers' personal experiences. Pupils from non-urban and poor areas are bound to perceive English in a very different light from those who come from more privileged areas, who have more resources both in schools and at home and who consequently will progress faster. Yet the advantages these pupils have are based on their families' socio-economic status rather than on their individual abilities. Thus social inequalities are far from decreasing. Phillipson (1992) argues that the assumption underlying current language policies is that "more English or more ELT can only be good for the learners in question", but contrary to that naïve belief, the reaction from many primary school teachers who are under all sorts of daily pressures is to complain that "English is stealing the little precious time they have to teach Spanish". We need to find answers to questions similar to the ones Apple (1989) poses about computing and computing education in schools: Where is English used? What for? Does it improve the quality of life of some people? Whom? Does it harm anybody? Whom? Who decides where and how is English going to be used? We should explore whether the promised future for our pupils is real or fictitious, and wether it will be for all or just a few chosen ones. As teachers of English what can we do to try and make children aware of their situation, so as to see the role that English will play in their future? Are we contributing to increase social inequality through ELT?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND TEACHING METHODS

We have presented some of the contours of the EFL, SE and ESL socio-economic contexts, the macropolitics of language policies. We now want to discuss two of the main issues at stake when we transfer our discussion to the actual teaching of English, the micropolitics of the classroom. One of them is who sets the norms (linguistic and methodological) and the other is how.

On the one hand, in ELT, the native speaker has been sent worldwide to teach, train, advise and develop materials. Experts from the British Council and the ODA (Overseas Developmental Agency), lecturers and EFL trainers from linguistic and educational departments all over Britain travel to Third World and EFL countries every year to supervise exams, establish teacher training schemes or pilot teaching materials. There are, at least, three issues worth commenting on in this seemingly harmless activity. Firstly, those schemes may not work out as expected since the local socio-political and cultural situation (the foreground) was not given sufficient consideration in the planning stages. Secondly, schemes and materials which originated from the centre, help create a dependency not very dissimilar to economic colonialism. And thirdly, the native-speaker-teacher's ideas remain a central part of the conventional wisdom of the ELT profession with a common tendency to accept them without question. These models acquire wider recognition and circulation when they are marketed globally by the main ELT publishers (Phillipson 1992). For example, Harmer's *The Practice of ELT* (1991), a manual which is widely used all over the world to train FL teachers (the second edition is on sale now), is clearly a good example of what we are saying. The second chapter of the book is dedicated to "the native speaker". Everything else in the book shapes itself around the norm/the standard that the native speaker offers of the language and presumably of the teaching process."What the native speaker knows" (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, language skills) becomes "what the learner of English should know". But as Rampton (1990) points out, "if native competence is used to set targets and define proficiency, the learner is left playing a game in which the goal-posts are being perpetually moved by people they cannot often challenge" (: 99). And if we don't challenge this state of affairs, the supremacy of the native speaker would keep the UK and the USA at the centre of ELT. Could this

authoritarian idea of endorsing the native speaker as the cannon for authority be replaced then by others which would reflect reality more acurately? Could we not simply talk about the professional or expert teacher instead? The notion of expert, Rampton suggests, allows to shift the emphasis from 'who you are' (innate qualities) to 'what you know', and this may well be a more just basis for profiling teachers.

On the other hand, rarely, if ever, are methods or materials developed in countries other than those where English is the native language. For years anglocentric methods have been accepted and used at times blindly and unquestionably, to cater in the same way for very different contexts and needs, leading to frustration amongst learners and teachers when the promised success is not achieved. They are now being evaluated and questioned more and more in the light of local contexts and specific local situations. Burnaby and Sun (1989), for example, report the views of 24 Chinese teachers of English on the appropriateness and effectiveness of "western" language-teaching methods for use in Chinese situations. The obstacles to implementation of western methods include the school curriculum, traditional teaching methods, class sizes and schedules, resources and equipment. For certain cultures and groups of students, for example, activities common in communicative language teaching may seem like games rather than serious teaching (Pennycook 1989).

These challenges could require us teachers and planners to move towards a more respectful strategy, not without pragmatic advantages, which is to *adapt* anglocentric practices and materials to the local demands and conditions for language teaching and learning.[1]

ON CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN ELT

We have so far discussed the need to understand language and communication within an analysis of social and cultural contexts. More and more professionals and EFL teachers are voicing their feelings of discontent about the shallow and demotivating EFL syllabuses organised around a kind of content which is fragmented and disconnected from other areas of the school curriculum and irrelevant to our students.

At the 1993 TESOL Convention in Atlanta last april, more than 120 presentations were related to the topic of content-based instruction, as the october 1993 issue of *English Teaching Forum* points out. The overemphasis on performing functions with a certain degree of formal accuracy, seems now to be giving way to issues which will free the language classroom from the narrow focus they have been offering. These issues may include the world, the environment, peace education, citizenship, and the favorite one among teachers and syllabus designers, the culture and society of the country of the language of study. We are mainly interested in this last one since our discusion is based on a social and cultural view of language. First, we could look at the concept of culture not as a monolithic or static construct nor outside the realm of values, ideologies and political discourses. Thus it seems convenient to spell out different views about it which may then lead to different set of choices about the cultural and social component of language classes. We are all familiar with the idenfication of culture with the manifestations of art, poetry, literature, theatre, paintings, classical music through our secondary education, university degrees, and FL curricula. This cultural background allied to factual knowledge about the target language

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[1] Yet we are well aware that the counterargument may run like this: "this is all very well in theory, but we don't have time, how can you expect us to produce our own materials?"; Carmen, one of the students in our module of the doctoral programme, very clearly said in the last session: "¡No tengo horas!". This is a clear example of what Apple (1989: 48-52) calls intensification: pressures of all sorts: time, space, bureaucracy, meetings, courses, deadlines, corrections, projects ...

community may not be enough to establish cultural understanding and cooperation as needed in our present multicultural world.

Giroux (1990) argues that the concept of culture needs to be politicised and understood as a forum where people can become aware and criticise the ideological and material circumstances which are the cause of their own alienation. He holds that the anthropological tradition of identifying culture with people's lives has depoliticised the concept and fails to analyse patterns of domination and change in the developed countries. It does not attempt to understand the principles of life as they are lived and shared by different social classes and groups in the context of power relationships.

A more commited view of culture would necessarily imply a need for courses on society and culture to adopt a critical engagement with the social and political issues which would promote understanding of the different relationships of power and domination among different social groups. Thus courses on sociocultural aspects should provide students with the opportunity to research culture as a set of living and unfinished activities, developed within unequal power relationships. By contrast, if we describe and present it as the accumulation of cultural knowledge, it would give students the false impression that it has a permanent and fixed character. So there is a need to provide situations in which these power relationships can be discussed with students. This is why we understand that language courses embedded within a socio-cultural perspective need to develop a critical discourse and a language of possibility (Giroux & McLaren 1986; Giroux 1990).

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

There seems to be, then, an inseparability of language and culture teaching. Communicative methodologies, and in particular the development of communicative competence, imply that when we are teaching language we are also creating appropriate and believable cultural contexts in which our students can develop their linguistic capabilities. "It is important to recognize the nature of language as carrying social, cultural and ideological meanings and associations which are perceived differently by individuals, and particularly in EFL situations where cultures make contact and often collide" (Prodromou 1988: 82-83).

Learners need to be educated in cultural knowledge, not to acquire a collection of facts about the other culture, but to be able to interpret discourse, to infer culturally determined meanings from clues in a text. The root of the perpetual problem of understanding discourse in a FL may not be a lack of knowledge about the cultural background, and thus the solution is not perhaps the teaching of as many facts as posible about the culture and society of the country/ies where the FL is spoken. When the aim is to teach communicative competence, it may be more useful to teach explicit strategies for making inferences from the language used so that knowledge about the cultural background can be gradually constructed in an interactive process between the meaning in the text and the knowledge the reader or listener brings to the text from her/his experience of the world, that is, an interaction between the background and the foreground (Brown 1990).

SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: WHICH CULTURES? WHOSE CULTURES?

The above perspectives provide us then with at least four different aspects of culture and society that could be included in our English programmes, as opposed to the monochromatic anglocentric world presented in text-books designed for global use.

Firstly, we could present Britain as a complex, highly developed modern country, a multicultural society with a history of white and black immigration, a society peopled by

rounded individuals. We cannot ignore the fact and hide from our students that major urban areas of Britain have become multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural, in much the same way as in many other industrialised parts of the world and for a number of similar reasons: the need to fill unpopular jobs, historical chains of migration from less developed areas or countries to these urban areas, obligations towards refugees, the right of family members to be united (Panjabis, Afro-Caribbeans, Greeks…). To neglect this dimension is to sacrifice something fascinating and enriching. But we can also present Britain as a key to a wider world and allow the inhabitants of that world to speak for themselves. English can gain access to the experience of a girl of Asian origin living in London or to that of a Nigerian or South African (O'Shaughnessy 1994). Globally designed text-books have continued to be stubbornly anglocentric. Appealing to a world market as they do, they cannot by definition draw on local varieties of English and have not gone very far in recognising English as an international language either. What are they about? They are mostly about situations which were not only imaginary, but vacuous, empty of life. So far, they have been marketing a black and white cardboard cut-out world. As an alternative, development agencies could, for example, provide useful materials for teaching about developmental issues around the world (Amnesty International, Action Aid, Save the Children, Oxfam, New Internationalist Magazine). The use of songs, poems, stories from a wide range of literatures may also provide a rich context.

Secondly, we cannot ignore the importance of the cultural foreground (Prodromou 1992b). Is the local culture submerged into the dominant culture of the EFL? When dealing with culture in FL teaching the real challenge is "not how to deal with the cultural back-ground, but how to respond to the cultural foreground (local culture)" (Prodromou 1988). Interesting materials can be found in the local context where students can collect different sorts of materials, thus adopting a more active and critical role in their language learning.

Thirdly, the classroom is, as Prodromou says, a small world, a community linked with the big world outside. A community which could be represented on posters and other materials done by the students themselves. Interesting materials could be found in cross-curricular themes and multidisciplinary projects, thus offering opportunities for the teacher to reconcile the conflict between the real world and the imaginary classroom world, or between English and other subjects. Our third year student teachers in TP, for example, always report that very often children see English very differently from the rest of subjects in the school curriculum.

Last but not least, an important component in culture is attitudes. On the one hand, it is a common belief among teachers that cultural topics in the language classroom have a beneficial effect on attitudes and understanding, thus producing better language learning results (Byran and Esarte-Sarries 1991), but as Promodrou (1992b) argues most of these writers are basing their assumptions on an American or a British ESL context and they may not be applicable or relevant where English is taught as a FL as part of the compulsory school curriculum. A more educational and social perspective in the introduction of a cultural component could prove one way of reducing prejudice and ethnocentrism, expanding pupils' cultural awareness, and making pupils more aware, tolerant and understanding of other cultures in their full complexity and diversity.

This all begins in the early stages with the preconceptions and stereotypes which young learners bring to the classroom. Rather than attempting to ignore these and overcome them with enthusiatic uncritical accounts of the foreign country, prejudices can be brought into the open, analysed with respect to the reality of the foreign culture and turned back on the native culture. Learners' stereotypes of their own culture and their views of the foreign culture may be the subject matter of teaching to foster a change of perspective which begins

to introduce a critical awareness of themselves and their society, for the meeting between cultures is a process of interweaving radically different sets of beliefs.

TEXTS AND CONTEXTS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Many ambiguities and educational inconsistencies may be derived from an abstraction of ELT textbooks (which in many cases are familiarly known as and fully identified with "methods") from specific educational settings and from the messages conveyed by the rhetoric of the Ministries of Education official documents on curricular implementations. They often help create an educational climate which increasingly reduces the gap between the policies of economic enterprises and managerial "strategies" favoured within schools and universities (Popkewitz 1988; Gimeno Sacristán 1992).

THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS: THE SYNTAX OF TECHNOCRACY

Education today runs the risk of serving technocratic ends by subjecting its practices to two key and closely connected elements: technology and bureaucracy (Beltrán 1991). We need to consider the fact that the English language is closely associated to the world of science and technology as well as to the public spheres of international politics, business and finance to find that its internationality is not only geographical but, above all, structural, to see how the English language is perceived by many as the "key" to social success, [1] the way to gain access to a "new world order". While we agree that this is certainly not untrue it remains however half the truth, for it is doubtless that new rules seem to have cropped up to filter out the millions of individuals, entire peoples, who are excluded under the arguments that now they know the *right language* but not enough, not according to the "standard", not for the "specific" purposes sought.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT: COLONIZATION AND RESISTANCE

Again, cultures and colonial principles in an incipient "global village" seem to be adapting to structural rather than geographical molds. If "national" identities are at stake, how can a "lingua franca" such as English derive its strength as a unifying factor, a purveyor of identity? Firstly, we and our students have literally collected hundreds of instances in which English is "materially" used in Spain, namely in labels, commercial products, technological artifacts, popular goods: English "sells" and English is "sold". English is it-self manufactured while broadcasting a "packaged" culture. In this way we see how culture can be "reified", that is, identified with "products" and "outcomes", with an economy of objects, or it can be instead equated to human encounters, narratives of experience, and life stories and histories, to an ecology of language communication. Secondly, we see everyday how new forms of colonial domination can now be exerted through what Phillipson (1992: 47) calls *linguicism*, i.e., "ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material an immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language". And finally we would like to finish by revising two questions which Phillipson himself poses at the beginning and at the end of his study on linguistic imperialism, which are the two main concerns of this paper, and that hopefully have been answered, drawing on our particular experience, in this article: "How can one relate the micro level of ELT

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[1] See the job offers in every Sunday issue of EL PAIS.

professionalism to the macro level of global inequality?" (: 1, 2) and "Can ELT contribute constructively to greater linguistic and social equality, and if so, how could a critical ELT be committed, theoretically and practically, to combating linguicism?" (: 319)

THE LINGUISTIC CONTEXT: A NEW READING OF THE WORD AND THE WORLD

If society, culture and education are interdependent fields mediated by language operations, knowing the English language today may well mean gaining control over what Halliday (1975) calls the propositional, social and expressive functions of the language in the discourse of the three converging fields. Moreover, it may mean increased awareness of the processes of meaning production and new possibilities of meaningful communicative interaction. We tried to find ways in which learning English as a second language could act as the means of acquiring new linguistic and metalinguistic skills in contexts of schooling or university education, in an attempt to follow Hasan (1992) in her invitation to come to "a deeper understanding of how language is used for the living of life, how it acts in the creation, maintenance and alteration of human relations, which range from consensus to conflict, from cooperation to exploitation, and from accomodation to submission."

CONCLUSION: SOME PROPOSALS FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE DISCOURSE

Rather than give recipes, we can now conclude that in the teaching profession and as citizens of an international world in which the English language today has the potential to oppress or emancipate, it would be worth attempting to translate into practical terms the following guidelines as a means of resistance against imposed routines, disinformed behaviour or intellectual forms of colonization:

1.- Since we are primarily educators we must prepare students for their role as citizens in the local, national, and international community (O'Shaughnessy 1994). There seems to be no reason why the teaching of English should continue to be anglocentric.

2.- We are in great need of a full recognition of, and information about, different varieties of English both within the United Kingdom of Great Britain, and an awareness of Englishes and English literatures in different parts of the world. Since we cannot accurately predict which countries/cultures students will have contact with, nor what sort of contacts they will have, it is our responsibility to prepare them in the broadest possible way for contact with other cultures and societies (O'Shaughnessy 1994)

3.- Languages must be studied in their varied social and cultural contexts. It is necessary to introduce the English language in direct connection with its spread and use in local contexts, which will initially be the first and most important educational resources, with the aim of using the language as an instrument of self-expression and discovery of other cultures.

4.- ELT has the potential to teach emancipatory literacy of some sort, and its lessons should teach students to identify all kinds of bias, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination (The Council of Europe recommendations on Human Rights Education).

5.- Teachers, together with parents, educators and policy planners should hold a critical stand against "methodological marketing" invasions. In this connection, even "the whole mystique of the native speaker...should probably be quietly dropped from the linguist's set of professional myths about language" (Rampton 1990).

6.- It is urgent to exert a critical unmasking of some distortions which have cropped up around the myth of the "communicative approach", dangers like:

6.1.- universalizing patterns of "standard communicative" behaviour which may be alien to given cultures within their specific contexts which differ greatly from those of the native speakers (Burnaby and Sun 1989).

6.2.- trivializing the contents of the curriculum and "depolitizing" them so as to address wider and more neutral audiences or clients. We need to see English in its broader social and political context and fully recognise the ideological nature of language teaching.

6.3.- confusing popular cultures with populist campaigns to "win people to one's side".

6.4.- reducing the relevance of the English language to just one social model of development, thus associating almost exclusively the "form" of communication with the "content" of competition.

6.5.- equating the communicative approach with a collection of educational strate gies, ready-to-use activities or techniques of immediate efficacy but hardly any wisdom (Savignon 1983). Learning English is not just an acquisition of a set of skills but a part of an educational process of personal development (Prodromou 1988).

6.6.- combining the argument for English as a means of international communica tion with a subliminal defense of multinational manufacture and transaction.

7.- It may be healthy to acknowledge historical traditions within the language teaching profession to gain perspective, professional humility and a fair sense of indebtedness to our predecessors, despite the risk of not seeming so original, fashionable or glamourous. We should particularly cultivate what Reyes Mate (1991), a Spanish contemporary thinker, calls "anamnetical recall", which is a form of bringing to life in the *here and now* the voice of those who have always been forgotten and silenced by the official history records written by the powerful.

8.- We would like to recover and welcome back the creation of debates, forums of all sorts, opportunities for colleagues, students and community members to practice the art of "thinking together", in order to create a sense of true communality, to discover the power of sharing and thus to tap the potential of cooperative development (Edge 1994). Language teachers, apart from contributing with their own subjects, should seize the opportunity to work together with historians and geographers to create a critical awareness of European culture in all its facets: including most importantly the culture of everyday life.

9.- ELT teachers must be empowered through the generation of their own syllabuses. They should be allocated time and resources to set goals, design projects and cooperatively devise and update their own materials, rather than restricting their teaching responsibility to that of a technician, a mere extension of the thinking "expert" or theoretician blindly executing his/her commands. This is crucial in making teachers become mediators between theory and practice (Widdowson 1991).

10.- Teaching English has to be thought of as a very powerful form of cultural action. This form of action should not ignore issues of direct concern to educators such as feminist claims for an equal share of responsibilities in decision bodies and civil rights for people of all colours and different origins and upbringing.

11- Finally, syllabuses should always be designed to take the teaching/learning knowledge and experience of the learners of the English language into consideration (Gutierrez A. 1992).

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