

ON WRITING A HISTORY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA

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Abstract

English is clearly a case of historical beoming in India. It evolved gradually in time. English language and literature have coloured the Indian psyche. It is being taught in our schools and colleges not only as a compulsory subject but also as the medium of instruction. It is now considered indispensable in India. Considering the current status of English in India, ELT as a discipline has come of its own, during the past several decades both in India and abroad. As a result we notice that there is a considerable amount of Literature of ELT historiography devoted to this area. But when it comes to the Indian scenario, even though ELT as a discipline has been pursued for quite some time there is very little documental evidence which contains a comprehensive history of ELT in India. This paper is an ardent appeal in all earnestness for a written history of ELT in India dealing with the technicalities of the why, what and how of ELT historiography. As it is felt that it would enable the English language practitioners and students become more cognizant of the forces that are liable to affect their area of work or research study and its limitations.

Key Words: Historiography, ELT, Tols, Gurukuls, Madarsas, Proselytisation, Dubases, Peunes

Introduction

English although a foreign language is now as much an Indian language as any other. English is being taught in our schools and colleges for many decades. It occupies the position of an associate official language. It is used widely as a link language in offices and among the educated people. It is not only a compulsory subject of study at the school, college and university, but is also the medium of instruction to a large extent. It is the language of science and technology. It occupies the position of a second language in the school curriculum and for higher education. English language has been assigned the role of a library language, without

exception every secondary school child has to learn English as a subject, usually for six years, but in some cases for three years only.

Even though English language teaching has been going on for several decades in India, it has gained the status of a new discipline and has also gained relative importance in our educational programmes also, there is a large body of literature devoted to this area of study, there are very few books that talk about this area as a discipline, it is often seen as an appendage to the study of the English language and literature, there is no evidence of its history, or the scope as befits with dealing with any subject for a systematic study. As English Language Teaching has gained the status of a new discipline and also has gained a popular position in our educational programmes. It is felt that a comprehensive history of English Language teaching in India is needed.

As a history of any discipline or science is seen to throw considerable light on the nature of enquiry and on the processes that lead to its further development. By the use of such a history the English language teaching practitioners and students in India may become more conscious of the forces that are liable to affect their area of work or study. They could become more active to the nature of the methods they are using, more sensible of the direction in which they are going, more cognizant of the limitations under which their work proceeds and more aware of the things which ought to be judged or compared to factors of the related sciences which are likely to affect their field of study.

According to Lord Acton “there are two ways in which every branch of science is to be studied. First by its own forms of technical procedure and secondly by an examination of its history” So history necessarily informs current theories and practices and history –writings first purpose is to serve the needs of today. So it is time now to write more accurately in the first place a history of ELT in India. A history that incorporates the interests of language teaching practitioners in India concerns of history which is valid and central.

Socio-political factors of the Introduction of English in India

In India there was always a socio-political turmoil and advocations of for and against English Language Teaching. The increasing appearance of these perspectives suggests that the ELT practitioners in India perceive an increasing need for the theoretical depth and dimension that history provides. When it comes to his historiographic perspectives of ELT in India none exists at all. The English came to India in roughly around 1600 A.D, for a single main purpose that was for trade, but this does not mark the introduction of English language into the academic curriculum. The introduction of English in India was slow, it was spoken mainly in the areas of its trade centres (Sinha.S.P, 1978). Communication was possible with the help of ‘Dubases’ for the translation of daily business and also with the aid of ‘Peunes’ who were the earliest harbingers of English in India, they were mainly hired persons to act as interpreters between English traders and local banyans’. After the exigencies of trade it was the military contact that brought English into vogue. Another source which led to the introduction of English in India was that of Evangelisation with the hope that Christianity be propagated. Proselytisation, marriages and regular increase of the garrison resulted in an amazing increase of native Christians and English population. These in short were the factors and agencies which helped the contact of English with the Indian leading to the use of English by Indians mainly through social and official contacts till the middle of 18th century when East India Company emerged successful

from the struggle with the European competitors – the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the French, it was only then that the company made attempts to encourage its education as is done by the Hindu- Tols, Gurukuls and Muslim- Madarsas .

Why a History of ELT

History provides a source for recreating a present we can possibly control. The identification of what happens next and what came before are mutually determining in forming the present judgments that are inescapably inherited from a past we cannot control.

Looking briefly at the characteristics of historical explanations or historical accounts in general, there are two main shaping factors which regulates the historical account as Galley (1952) says

1. The nature of the historian's interpretation of his documents and
2. The kind of practical wisdom that can justly be attributed to the study of history.

When a historian interprets a document he always looks at the interalia for a characteristically historical explanation in the following stages

- a. What should be the concern of an ELT historian? The historian has to satisfy himself that what he has before him is a meaningful document.
- b. He must satisfy himself, on either internal or external evidence that this meaningful document is in part at least vertical in intention i.e. that it could not have been produced except by someone wishing to record some actual happenings.
- c. He must satisfy himself, usually on a combination of internal and external evidence that his document is also in some degree historiography that it could not have been produced except by some one relatively well informed about the happenings that are described.

The historian usually

1. Begins his reconstruction of the past
2. Calls for a characteristically historical explanation as the documents describe
3. He knows pretty well when he is pondering over the character of some past event
4. Interpret with reasonable or justification of the historian's assessment of it.

In this way the historical knowledge contributes indirectly to practical wisdom. So the historians claim that a sense of history is indispensable to the wise conduct of all human affairs.

The How of ELT Historiography

The historian's main problem is to discover what it really was that happened and offers an explanation of the form. "It was so and so". For this basic facts the historian concerns himself with names, dates and places the skimpy traces that the past leaves in the present has to make use of beliefs when he determines the authoritatively of the documents, tradition, reports and the like with which his work begins the actual evidence they have at their disposal for supporting these claims is frequently and perhaps usually discouragingly inadequate to overcome this an interpretation of history may assert that some variable or group of variables eg, economics, geography, technology are the most important causal agencies in history .

Conclusion

Basing on these tenets a History of English language teaching in India could be written. We can begin the enquiry by considering the received history as there is no exhaustive work in this area. The history of ELT IN India is not available to us clearly as if cast in stone but an attempt can be made by intertwining and incorporating from the events of General history of India by gleaning of various sources such as government reports documents relating to the teaching of English in our country and also of the popular textbooks of English. Intertwining these various concepts can produce a comprehensive history of ELT in India. Such a historiography in India could aim at an enriched vision of what language teaching must be. It could enhance the sources of ELT and its constituents. The knowledge of the history of such transmission of knowledge could be effected in libraries, journals, public documents relating to the field and subsequent introduction academic institutions.

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