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Abstract

This paper studies how socio-cultural factors are responsible for excluding English Language Learners in academia for being carriers of regional accents which reflect their marginalized backgrounds. Most research materials that are related to English Language Learning deals with either teachers being responsible for not being able to teach or that students are not motivated enough to read, learn and speak English. A lot of material is also available to teach the teachers the techniques of teaching or teach the students the techniques of learning English. A majority of the studies have said little about the socio-cultural factors excluding students from learning in the academia. In my study, I have tried to point out this subtle factor as the major reason intimidating learning.

Keywords: Accents, barriers, socio-cultural factors, English Language Learners

Introduction

Our love for or resistance towards English perhaps goes back to the colonial times. People learnt English and got jobs as clerks in the British era and so do millions of graduates across the globe get jobs in the current decade for knowing English. In higher education in most of the countries across the globe require English Language proficiency. Most software languages, technical papers need to be learnt, written and executed in English even though there are various language options. Many of us grew up with the desire to learn English and on the way many dropped out too. Those who dropped out, we attributed the cause being loss in motivation. In the following pages, we will try to understand deeply the socio-cultural factors in losing motivation.

Status of English in the present decade

According to David Crystal, the history of English emerging as a global language goes back to the times of World War I, in 1919, when nations consolidated to form League of Nations and the power to mediate moved to English speaking nations like, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. “But the growth of linguistic influence through political expansion was already on the wane. Far more important for the English language, in the post-war world, was the way in which the cultural legacies of the colonial era and the technological revolution were being felt on an international scale.” (Crystal, David)

English is also known as Englishes as many distinctive forms have emerged over the years. In the inner circle we are told that you find: Australian English, New Zealand English, Canadian

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English, South African English, Caribbean English, and, within Britain, Irish, Scots, and Welsh English. Among the countries of the outer circle, several varieties have also grown in distinctiveness in recent decades, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and they often collectively called South Asian English.

Dialects emerge because they give identity to the groups which own them. We all speak with a distinctive accent and dialect and of course use typical vocabulary of the region we come from. The varieties of English in the 20th and 21st century “represent different cultural contexts and world Englishes that represent these aspects of English.” (OECD) Why do people want to speak in English?

In a research done, about English in Korean society, it is noticed that the importance of English in different areas of society have been deeply and widely felt including education, economy, government and media. In Korea, English has been taught as a compulsory subject in secondary schools. According to Nesreen Saud Alhmadi “in the Arab world there has been an increased interest in learning English as a foreign language due to the numerous opportunities it provides its speakers in various worlds.”

According to Reddy, English is the dominant business language and it helps one to get a job anywhere. “Research from all over the world shows that cross-border business communication is most often conducted in English.” The best Hollywood films and music, fiction and nonfiction books are produced in English. Most of the content produced on the internet is in English.

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Since English gives access to better jobs, low income groups and “many immigrants hope that English education will allow their children to enter the middle class and have more secure futures as many researchers demonstrates. Kanno and Cromley’s recent (2013) research demonstrates that many of the reasons for ELLs’ lower success rates are not linguistic but instead have to do with socioeconomic level or class.

What skills are required in learning a language?

Since environment is also responsible for students’ learning outcomes, we need to look at the skills that a learner must have. According to a research done by Tesol about language learning, language practitioners focus on four skills that are central to communicative language teaching (CLT) and there are chances that learners in EFL classroom may forget:

1. Language is a tool for communication,
2. learning a language involves mastery of both skill and knowledge,
3. learners need to give serious consideration to the impact of feelings on language study, and
4. learners vary considerably in their preferred approaches to learning.

Source: Tesol, 2017

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What works as a barrier in learning and applying a language?

In our research, we wanted to see how other factors impact the environment of learning and we come very near to Oleksandr Polishchuk and Rajendra Babu, RaghuRam and Sai Krishna to understand the factors working as barriers on the path of learning. Oleksandr Polishchuk in her research finds that Ukrainian university students have a positive attitude towards learning English and they strongly agree that it is significant for their studies at university and communication in English is a life skill. So what causes the bumps in their learning.

It has been found out that the participants of this study face vocabulary and grammar barriers, fear of making mistakes in front of the class, lack of contact hours, inappropriate teaching methods, curricula and textbooks as factors that lead to the failure in effective communication. Another major factor is that many university students get confused when natives speak too fluently and with their different accents. Rajendra Babu Vemuri, Dr.M.V. RaghuRam and Sai Krishna Kota also focused their research on some of the above mentioned attitudinal factors in learning English. However, the latter group points out to something remarkable as Anglo Phobia and Prejudices.

They say those who have Anglo Phobia dislike speaking in English. Those students automatically switch off and show reluctance to listen when others speak in English. A majority of the students in non-English speaking environment expressed this type of attitude. It can be considered as one of the learning disabilities and attitudinal problem of English language learners.

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Sometimes weak students don't want to listen when the smarter ones speak, that's more like prejudice. The researchers also offered a lot of suggestions to overcome this mindset among students but they overlooked what can lead to divide and gap among students and push away students from participating in class discussions. To elaborate this point, I have selected excerpts from an advertisement and an online portal called RoundTable India where we get to hear voices from the other side in the following section.

International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

Social and cultural exclusion

The narrator, Maitreya Yogesh, tells us how students and teachers can exclude students from learning, if both teachers and fellow students harbor the thoughts that it's their class who can master the language alone.

"Once while returning from rural field work and conversing casually with a group of friends, I tried to imitate their urbanized English accents. A Brahmin friend, who sporadically carries an imported version of English, fabricated in one of the urbanised colleges of Delhi, reacted quickly "Oh! Don't speak that accent in Your English, you can't do it"."

Here we can see that instead of appreciating the content he is placing before the audience, the audience is more interested in its presentation. So this kind of mindset will definitely not lead to an inclusive and fertile base for learning. In the words of Yogesh Maitreya, this kind of behavior or attitude from fellow learners "destroy the morale of Dalit students who have been learning English while carrying the baggage of their vernacular background. Here, urbanised/Savarna

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dialects seem to hold the polemical right to prohibit the entry of Dalit/rural/non-convent students into any intellectual discussions by mocking their accent/manner of practicing English as unauthentic learning.”

This exclusionary practice is not only in India but also in other countries like Korea. According to

Dr. Kyung-Suk Chang “At most universities a variety of English courses are provided to help

their students to be better prepared for their career. The importance of English subject in schools has caused a social problem. Rich parents want their children to do better in English and have better chance in the future. This has brought about a gap among children from different family background.”

This advertisement below obviously shows language is also about class:

How to Be Posh? the accent to make you seem ‘posh’ (upper class and wealthy)

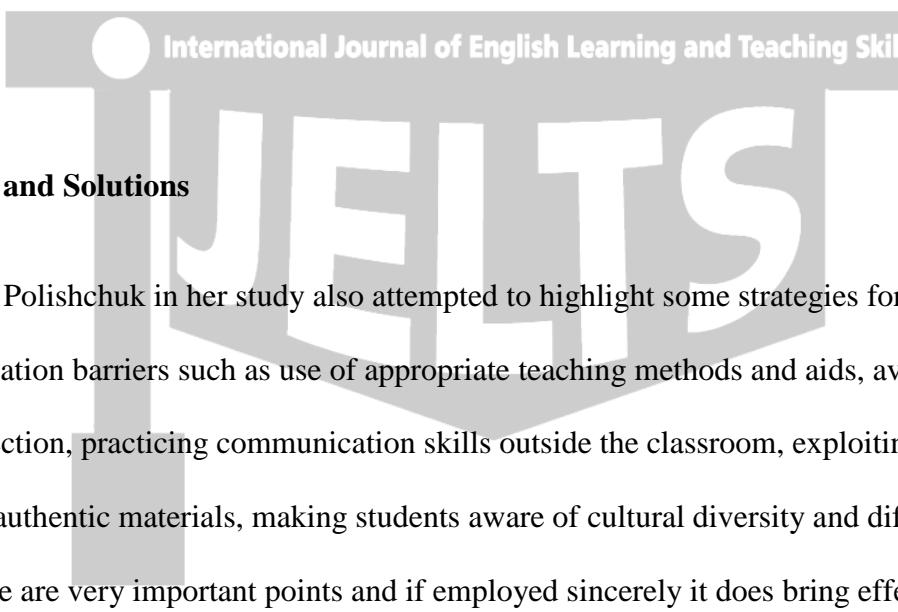
There are a large number of English accents which differ not just between different countries (e.g. Britain, America, Australia) but also within countries. Have you ever been to different places in the UK? You will notice that the accents are very different depending on which part of the country you are in, and if you are used to a particular English accent, you may find it difficult to understand when people speak (even native speakers often have difficulty). The Queen’s English (also known as Received Pronunciation or ‘posh’) is a well-known English accent spoken by the royal family and other members of the upper classes in the UK. It is an accent which fascinates many non-

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native speakers and many English language students try to copy the accent. Some native people also try to copy the accent to make themselves seem more ‘posh’ (upper class and wealthy).

Source: <https://www.bloomsbury-international.com/images/ezone/ebook/how-to-be-posh.pdf>



Measures and Solutions

Oleksandr Polishchuk in her study also attempted to highlight some strategies for coping with communication barriers such as use of appropriate teaching methods and aids, avoiding frequent error correction, practicing communication skills outside the classroom, exploiting collaborative work and authentic materials, making students aware of cultural diversity and differences as well. These are very important points and if employed sincerely it does bring effective results as experience in my classrooms. Another effective measure suggested by Rajendra Babu Vemuri et al. that college/school “management should recruit Psychologist to counsel and give training to mitigate attitudinal barriers in the students. A psyche with diffident manner needs continuous motivation in order to raise confident levels in learners of English as second language.”

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