

*Linguistic Imperialism and the Extrinsic Motivation of the First Generation L2 Learners
in a Heterogeneous ESL Classroom*

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the effect of Linguistic Imperialism on the extrinsic Motivation of the first-generation ESL learners in a heterogeneous classroom at the tertiary level in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. The study defines Linguistic Imperialism in an ESL class room as the dominant forces which inhibits the acquisition of Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and its sub skills of a sociolinguistic ally disadvantaged learner. The experiment is conducted at Loyola College, Chennai, India. The research design includes the use of research questions and a pilot study through the distribution of questionnaires. The data is analyzed through T-test and paired sample test through the use of SPSS software. The findings reveal that forces like Deductive Teaching, Traditional methods of Testing, Attitude of the dominant peer-group and non-communicative syllabus act as Affective Filters for the process of SLA. The study also suggests methods to overcome the dominant forces and enhancement of the extrinsic motivation of the ESL learners by providing a learner centric atmosphere for the learning of the Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and its relative sub skills. The study would be beneficial for the facilitators and learners of ESL at the tertiary level with the presence of marginalized learners in the ESL classroom. The study also presents the limitations and scope for further research.

Keywords: Linguistic Imperialism, Sociolinguistic Ally Disadvantaged Learners, SLA, ESL, Affective Filters

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Introduction

The paper explores the effect of Linguistic Imperialism on the extrinsic Motivation of the first-generation L2 learners in an ESL classroom. The study defines Linguistic Imperialism in an ESL class room as the as the dominant forces which inhibits the acquisition of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing skills of a sociolinguistic ally disadvantaged learner. The study refers to such learners as marginalized learners for they are relegated in an ESL class room due to certain factors. The paper also studies the consequence of Linguistic Imperialism in the process of Second Language Acquisition and its usage. The paper equally concentrates on the sociolinguistic dimensions and the psychology of the first generation L2 learners in a heterogeneous classroom and their reaction to Linguistic imperialism.

Linguistic Imperialism

Phillipson (1992) had opined that “one characteristic of the majority of the third world countries in which English is a dominant language is that the wealth English provides access to is very inequitably distributed.” (p.11). In the words of Pattberg (2015), “Linguistic imperialism is the replacement of one language by another, more dominant language. It’s a branch of cultural imperialism: one culture loses, and the other wins.” (p.44) The study views Linguistic Imperialism in the ESL class room as the dominance of certain powerful factors over the vulnerable, sociolinguistic ally disadvantaged marginalized L2 Learner.

The sociolinguistic ally disadvantaged marginalized L2 Learner: The sample population of the research could be defined as L2 learners from families which has not treaded into the portals of higher education. The learners are the first members from their families to receive higher education. The parents are either school drop outs or have attended only primary schooling. Moreover, some of the first generation L2 learners have pursued their schooling in their mother tongues and encounter tremendous challenges during interaction at the tertiary level.

The first generation L2 learners also hail from regressive and marginalized socio-economic backgrounds and at times could suffer from low esteem. The first generation L2 learners of the research are further characterized by:

- Higher IQ and learning abilities
- Comprehensive knowledge of the subject of their specialization
- High Intrinsic motivation
- Greater discipline and courtesy
- Low L2 fluency
- Minimum grammatical accuracy
- High degree of Interlanguage
- Low fluency
- Average accuracy

Data Analysis

The sample population of the study consists of hundred and twenty learners out of which fifteen learners belong to the sociolinguistically disadvantaged group. A questionnaire was distributed in order to gauge the experiences of sociolinguistic ally disadvantaged learners.

Table 1: Factors Affecting the First Generation L2 learners in the ESL classroom.

S.NO	FACTORS	SDA	DA	NEUTRAL	AGREE	SA
1	ESL class room culture	7	2	1	20	90
2	Attitude of the dominant peer group	1	2	2	32	83
3	Non Communicative syllabus	3	5	0	20	92
4	Deductive teaching and learning methods	1	4	1	14	100
5	Traditional methods of testing	1	2	1	6	110

Experiences of the First Generation L2 Learner and the ESL Classroom

Studying the experiences of the first generation L2 learner in an ESL classroom is a novel scientific experience. Davis reminisces the views of Chen and Carroll (2005):

Education professionals need to know exactly with whom they are working because of the statistics describing the success of first generations students are not good; in fact, they are succeeding at a rate half that of their non- first generation counterparts. (p.14)

The transition from the primary level to the tertiary level in the ESL classroom is an historic moment in the life of the L2 learners. It marks a new period in the process of SLA in the life of the L2 learners.

The transition is also indexed by unlearning, culture shock, awareness of sociolinguistic disparities and heterogeneous fluency. The first generation L2 learner is confronted with an alien learning environment, new facilitator, unaccustomed peer group, novel methods and language learning techniques. The degree of extrinsic motivation and Zone of Proximal Development is quite minimum for the L2 learners at the initial stage of learning.

Facets of Linguistic Imperialism and the First Generation L2 Learner

The pre dominant aspects of Linguistic Imperialism could be listed as Imperialism in culture, education, media and politics. The Linguistic Imperialism governing the first-generation ESL learner are as follows:

- ESL classroom culture
- The attitude of the dominant peer group
- Non-Communicative syllabus
- Deductive teaching learning method
- Traditional methods of Testing

ESL Classroom Culture

The first-generation ESL learner is suspended in the ESL classroom. Most of these L2 learners are from the rural background and are quite acclimatized to the rural language learning system and culture. The situation is quite similar to the views of Beck and Pace:

Given the largely monocultural nature of the teaching profession, and one's propensity to see the world and act in it from the perspective of a single culture, employing culturally relevant pedagogy, is neither easy nor intuitive. (p.58)

The environment of the ESL class room could be intriguing to L2 learners in the initial stages of entering the process of language learning at the tertiary level. The L2 learners are quite baffled by the presence and academic attitude of the proficient and superlative peer learning group.

The researcher had identified the following factors which could appear as 'Affective Filters' and retard the process of L2 learning. The factors could be listed as:

- an apparent difference in the sense and style of dressing of the affluent L2 learners
- style of the proficient Learners
- dynamics of Input (Class room instruction)
- possession and use of learning materials
- history of language learning at the primary level
- sociolinguistic alterations
- economic problems
- comfort zone with the facilitator
- nostalgia of language learning at the primary level

The first generation L2 learner needs to confront, comprehend, unlearn and outsmart the challenging factors in the initial stages of learning. It would be quite inevitable for the L2 learners to get acculturated to these complex factors.

The Attitude of the Dominant Peer Group

The study refers to the 'Dominant Peer Group' as the L2 learners from affluent and upper middle-class backgrounds possessing desirable proficiency and abilities in the use of LSRW skills. These L2 learners range from being innocent to condescending and indifferent.

The first generation L2 learners would experience a sense of culture shock in the presence of the affluent L2 learners. The first generation L2 learners could develop an inferiority complex which would obstruct the process of Second Language Acquisition. The attire of the affluent learners, their accent, style of communication, stationery and other possessions could be viewed as a sociolinguistic luxury by the first generation L2 learners.

The knowledge of L2 and the Language Acquisition Device of the insecure L2 learners is enfeebled in the presence of the affluent L2 learners. The proficient L2 learners would be unaware to the language learning impediments and sociolinguistic problems of the first generation L2 learners which would have a negative effect on peer learning. The proficient L2 learners who understand the predicament of the disadvantaged learners may be empathetic to the condition rather than approaching the learning problems sceptically.

Non-communicative Syllabus

In the words of Munby (1978), “ The input to the CNP reaches the parameter here known as the interaction (p.67). A rigid Content based and Grammar based syllabus could further convert the first generation L2 learners into ‘At-Risk learners.’ A sense of non-functionality could be dispersed by a rigid syllabus which would further disconnect the L2 learners from the process of English language learning. Further the rigidity of the syllabus fails to incorporate and address the socio-cultural document of the first generation L2 learner. The Localization of a rural or marginalized culture is absent. Learners from the remote villages and marginalized societies may not be in a position to connect with a learning material from Shakespearean world or comprehend the Romantic imageries in Wordsworth’s poems. The Learner may not even comprehend a text on discotheques, pubs, shopping malls, multiplexes etc. In simpler terms the learner would be alienated from the process of second language acquisition.

Deductive Teaching Methodology

Monotonous information on the rules of L2 and imposition of the ‘gate keeping functions of English’ makes the teaching method mechanical and lifeless. Moreover, the Deductive Teaching Methodology is prone to finding fault with the L2 learners’ use of L2 which would retard their fluency of the language at an early stage. The teacher centric method of instructing the learners and the transition from General to Specific in the exposition of grammatical rules could relegate the learner from the process of learning English as a second language. It would further create a sense of fear and anxiety in the minds of the L2 learner.

Traditional Methods of Testing

The traditional syllabus centric method of testing would further intimidate the performance of the first generation L2 learners. The monotonous Paper and Pencil Test may fail to measure the skills and abilities of the disadvantaged learners from an alternate point of view. The L2 learners may be trapped by the ‘test items’ and the ‘rubrics’ of the test which would only galvanize the performance of the proficient learners. The latent language learning abilities of the marginalized ‘test taker’ may not be completely measured in a ‘Paper and Pencil’ test. Moreover the ‘Paper and Pencil’ test creates room for detention which would further demotivate the marginalized L2 learner.

Technological Impediments

Marginalized ESL learners experience issues with technology in terms of culture shock, non-availability of gadgets, connectivity issues etc. Learners from deprived socio-economic backgrounds may not be in a position to afford smart phones, Tablets and lap tops. Moreover remotest rural areas also experience connectivity issues which serves as a series impediment towards language learning at online classes during the pandemic.

Conclusion

Linguistic Imperialism in an ESL class room has a negative effect on the language learning process of the first generation L2 learner. The first generation L2 learner is ‘at risk’ in an ESL classroom. The culture and the methodology of Second Language Acquisition upsets the L2 learner and restricts the process of language learning. The initial disgruntlement with the learning process equally smothers the intrinsic motivation of the L2 learners. The functioning of the ‘Language Acquisition Device’ is also incapacitated due to the centrifugalizing of the marginalized L2 learner.

The effects of the linguistic imperialism at the early stages also denies room for any form of Extrinsic motivation and blocks the Zone of Proximal Development. The study concludes in interest of the marginalized L2 learners that there is a need for:

Re Formulation of the ESL Class Room Culture

The ESL Class room should be made suggestible in the context of the marginalized L2 learner. The atmosphere could be friendlier for the marginalized L2 learner by housing some paintings of the rural villages and sceneries. Further the L2 learners could be given opportunities to discuss and speak about their rural cultural and ethnic practices. The learning materials could be localized to suit the interest of the marginalized learners. Prescribing learning materials like ‘Lotus’ by Toru Dutt or ‘The Village School Master’ by Oliver Goldsmith would enable the rural learner to identify with the learning materials and connect with the process of English Language Learning.

Dialogue With the Dominant Peer Group

The dominant peer group defined by the proficient and affluent learners hailing from the cream of the society and upper middle class could be educated on the sociolinguistic conditions of the marginalized L2 learner. There can be mutual interactions between the affluent learners and learners from marginalized sections of the society to remove the pre-existing mind blocks and facilitate understand between the two diametrically opposite factions of learners in the heterogeneous ESL Classroom. It is quite essential for the superlative learners to realize that the marginalized learners are not to be sympathized but need that extra assistance to become effective users of English.

Learner Centric Syllabus

Nunan (2013) had viewed that “Reflecting on these incidents forced me to confront the disconnect between what learners were able to do in the controlled environment of the class room and their ability to use the language they had learned to communicate outside of the classroom.” (p.6). There has to be a shift from a monotonous, mechanical syllabus to a learner

centric syllabus. The marginalized L2 learner should be involved in the process of learning. The learning process should be enabled from the process of teaching. The syllabus should be communicative in nature. It should focus on meaning rather than form. The syllabus should contain objectives that could be relinquished during the teaching and learning process. The study suggests that the marginalized L2 learners should be involved in the process of syllabus framing and material preparation. Successful senior learners of the kind could be utilized for the purpose. The syllabus should further contain communicative activities which would involve the learner in the act of meaningful communication.

Innovative Teaching, Learning and Testing Methods

In the words of Bachman (1990), “Language testing almost never takes place in isolation. It is done for a particular purpose and in a specific context.” (p.22). Innovative Teaching, Learning and Testing Methods need to be employed instead of traditional methods of teaching, learning and testing. Innovative methods of testing in the form of Portfolio Assessment, projects, communication activities could be employed instead of a written examination. Alternate testing methods would measure the holistic skills of the ‘test taker’ as opposed to the atomistic testing of the ‘writing’ skills in a ‘Paper and Pencil’ test. Moreover alternative method of testing would measure the proficiency of the learner in the act of communication. The learners are involved in the process of Second Language use through their peers in terms of ‘peer performance’ and ‘group activities.’ The marginalized L2 learner is liberated from the monotony of the written examination.

Technological Enhancement

In the words of Ken (2010):

Given the breadth of what may go on in Computer- Assisted Language Learning(CALL), a definition of CALL that accommodates its changing nature is any process which a learner uses a computer and, as a result improves his or her language. (p.1)

Marginalized L2 learners should be given gadgets to enhance their online learning of ESL through various government schemes and projects. The connectivity in remote areas should be strengthened to warrant uninterrupted learning in the online sessions.

Recommendations and Suggestions

Sagor and Cox had suggested that:

The daunting task before us as teachers is to try and construct schools and classrooms that will provide the same quantity and quality of need fulfilment for the defeated/discouraged learner that are currently being provided for the successful student. While that may seem like a tall order, it is clearly possible. (p.3)

The study’s recommendations for the elimination of linguistic imperialism would include:

- The employment of a learner friendly and eclectic teaching methodology.
- Peer networking and periodic counselling for the marginalized L2 learners.
- An analysis of the L2 learner’s needs in terms of learning and emotional aspects by the facilitator.

- The use of focussed learning objectives which would augment the acquisition of the major skills of English and its related sub skills of the marginalized L2 learner.
- Inclusion of suggestible, learner centric teaching, learning environment.
- Inductive Teaching of grammar.
- Employing activities and tasks to propel the process of SLA.
- Localisation of a portion of the teaching materials to suit the psychology of the marginalised L2 learner.
- Elimination of prominent Affective Filters and learning impediments.
- The use of Innovative Testing Methods as opposed to Traditional Methods of Testing.

Scope for Further Study

1. The study could be undertaken at the Primary level.
2. A gender based approach to Linguistic Imperialism in the class room pertaining to marginalized L2 learners could be studied in detail.
3. The role of the facilitator in eliminating Linguistic Imperialism could be studied.

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