Transformations in ELT: Contexts, Agents and Opportunities

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1. Transformations in the wider world: The spread of English

'It may be that English, in some shape or form, will find itself in the service of the world community for ever'.

(Crystal 1997)

'The very concept of an international, or world, language was an invention of Western imperialism'.

(Ndebele 1987)

'Language spread may be defined as an increase, over time, in the proportion of a communication network that adopts a given language or language variety for a given [type of] communication'.

(Cooper 1982)

English as 'world language'

International use of English –

as the current major language of business, media, technology, diplomacy, etc.

English is no longer 'owned' by its native speakers

What could happen in the future?

David Graddol – *English Next* (2006)

- Growth in English learning at primary level

The 6 'Education for All' Goals

- <u>Goal 1</u> – Expand early childhood care and education
- <u>Goal 2</u> – Provide free and compulsory primary education for all
- <u>Goal 3</u> – Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults
- <u>Goal 4</u> – Increase adult literary by 50%
- <u>Goal 5</u> – Achieve gender parity in education by 2005, gender equality by 2015
- <u>Goal 6</u> – Improve the quality of education

What will happen in the future?

David Graddol – *English Next* (2006)

- Growth in English learning at primary level
- Changes to English learning at secondary level

'Up the English escalator'

1. Primary -- start teaching English at least by Grade 3.

2. Secondary -- begin teaching at least part of the curriculum through English.

3. Tertiary -- require students to be proficient at entry; reduce English as subject; increase English-medium.

Graddol's predicted numbers (millions) of English language learners
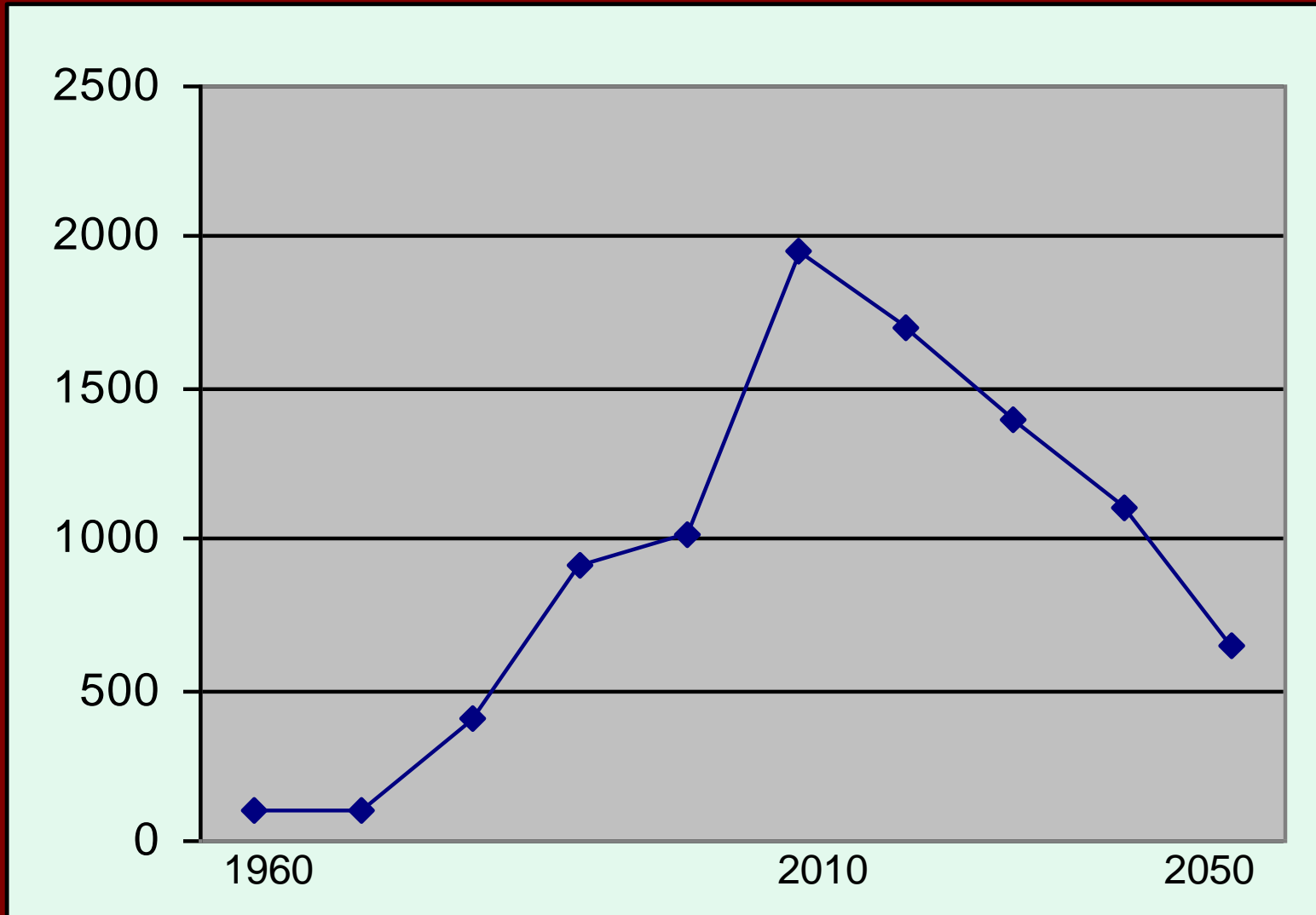
Why is the spread of English not 'neutral'?

Association with:

- political issues
- linguistic human rights
- cultural imperialism / cultural change / cultural threat
- linguistic change
- educational access / patterns of provision

Multilingualism:
another perspective

- "The more languages you know, the more of a person you are." Recent European Commission slogan

2. Challenges / opportunities for ELT in this wider context

- Needs for more EYL teachers
- 'Reskilling' secondary teachers, e.g. to support CLIL

Large scale needs for developing teachers' English proficiency as well as new kinds of teaching ability

Potential weaknesses of top-down, 'numbers-driven' solutions, e.g.:

- ICT / mobile phone mediated training
- cascade or one-off training
- global products

… they may ignore context and fail to engage teacher agency

3. Transformations in ELT itself

A new (largely post-1990) understanding that methodologies, reforms etc. should:

- be bottom-up;
- engage with and develop teachers' agency;
- be context-appropriate.

How has this come about?

A very, very brief history of ELT (UK):

- A.S. Hornby, ELT and the British Council
- Situational language teaching; CLT; TBLT
- Critiques by Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994), Holliday (1994); ELTeCS; *ELTJ*

'The centre cannot hold'!

Signs of a shift in paradigm ('the centre cannot hold'):

- Increasing value placed on NNSTs;
- Developing research into ELF;
- Increasing value placed on use of L1;
- Reducing focus on UK / US culture in coursebooks

Becoming-)appropriate methodology'
  (Holliday 1994) is recommended, then ...

[BANA vs. TESEP vs.   TiDC]

   but ...

How can appropriate methodology be developed?

By teachers themselves, with necessary support, sharing insights collaboratively;

Building on successes as well as addressing problems in their context, as seen by teachers themselves, not from 'deficit viewpoints';

Through research and teacher education practices which counter dominant deficit viewpoints and support bottom-up development

4. Teachers as the major agents of change in their own contexts

Madhav's story (from Prem Phyak's research)

(a rural Nepalese secondary school)

[source: see handout]

- Now, I am a teacher and I have been teaching different subjects for more than a decade. I am facing similar problem as my teachers faced. I have to teach more than sixty students in the same class and I know that some of my friends are teaching more than a hundred.

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- Issues of multicultural education, quality education, sustainable education etc. are in the debate and World-class education has been a felt need but we have crowded classes with lack of resources. Although I am not satisfied with what I have done to solve my problem; the steps I have taken in the class have at least reduced dropout and repetition to some degree.

- Nearly four different ethnic communities are available in the catchment area of my school. Students from Newari community speak Newari language as their first language and Paharis, Tamangs and Magars have their own language (except Paharis) and culture. Using some aspects of their language and talking about their feasts and festival in the class, I address

- their linguistic as well as cultural identity. As a result, they all feel welcome in the class even if it is crowded. They never feel that teachers do not care about them. It helps me make my students feel supported during my class. I find students working vigorously when I make groups mixing all ethnic identities. …

- A few talented students generally dominate the large size classes. They can help the teacher to teach effectively. My way of mobilizing them helps me. I place them in different benches and assign them to help other weak students. Another way that I use is to administer Proficiency test before I start the course. According to the score they obtain, they are placed

  in such a way that the weak students will get helping hands.

It is, of course, a troublesome job for the teacher to have individual care in a large size class. A student hardly get half a minute within 40-45 minutes' class. After the presentation of the lesson, the students are supposed to do some class work. It is not possible to reach to each

- individual

To solve this problem, I just go through the answers of one student per bench and ask him to help his friends. I have found peer correction and self- correction techniques useful in such classes.

Large size class is not only a problem or burden of teachers but also an opportunity to explore new techniques and tools.

Positive examples of practice (1): Stories of transformation

Harry's story [click here to hear it in full and see associated images]

(a Cameroonian primary school)

Maria's story (from Paula Rebolledo's research)

(a Chilean secondary school)

[source: see handout]

- *The headmaster of the school told me to play classical music in all my classes while students were doing a task. I did it and I noticed no difference so I stopped. I was told the school's decision was based on research which indicated it aided concentration and learning and therefore, I had to do it no matter my observations. I was not convinced at all and my colleagues and I decided to play classical*

music but other kinds of music as well.

Then, I learned about classroom research and the idea of conducting research in my classroom seemed the perfect solution to prove my headmaster he was wrong, so I prepared a series of tasks and different kinds of music to play while my students were working. I took notes of everything that happened while my students worked: their attitudes, their behaviour, etc. I later

- *collected their different pieces of work and started to notice certain differences in their work according to the music I played. I also gave them a survey, a simple kind of questionnaire for them to give me their opinions. Still, I wasn't convinced they understood my questions. Finally I decided to interview them, so after each activity we did with background music, I asked them about how they felt, if they had trouble*

- *concentrating, if they felt the music helped them complete the task and so on. After collecting all the evidence and analysing it in detail, I gave up. It was true, my students learned better and concentrated more while listening to classical music. They told me they felt relaxed and it helped them think, even more than if working in silence. On the contrary, popular music made them agitated. They*

- *said they felt like dancing and singing so they could not concentrate on the task. I informed the results to my colleagues and I had to admit the headmaster was right. I did not feel I had lost the argument at all! I was proud of myself … I didn't do what I was told just because. 'I' researched it and found answers of my own!!*

Positive examples of practice (2): Research about 'good teachers'

Mais Ajjan's research in Syrian university classes (400+ students)

Identifying.............

Understanding......

Sharing................. Good Practice

Some findings

Students did not mind being in a large class as long as they were taught by **good** lecturers.

They highly valued teachers who:

- were strict but tolerant and considerate;
- treated students with respect;
- knew their subject very well.

Students favoured **lessons** that

- were well-structured

  (clear lesson stages, well-structured and easy to follow style of presentation)

- kept them active verbally and mentally

  (generated discussions and stimulated **thinking** inside/outside the classroom)

Harry Kuchah Kuchah's research in Cameroonian primary schools

Identifying…………

Understanding…..

Sharing…………… Good Practice

Conclusion

- A transformation in the world – There are new challenges for ELT which seem to demand top-down solutions (and which offer political and financial opportunities for government, academic and commercial agencies).

  ('The centre taking hold ')

- A (critical) transformation in ELT theory – Top-down, universalist, context-free solutions have tended to fail, and have become objectionable.

  ('The centre cannot hold!')

  But what, then, can be recommended instead?

Teachers as the major ELT *agents*, in their their own *contexts*

Transformations which begin there – Teachers engaging in change that they initiate and being supported to do so. Many *opportunities* lie there, as scaffolding (and research) in support of such development is rare.

Transformations in ELT – Contexts, Agents and Opportunities

How can *you* bring about appropriate **transformations in** your **ELT** practice, in your own **context**, as an **agent** – at least partially -- of your own destiny, and what **opportunities** do *you* see for supporting your students' as well as your own development?