

Effects of Linguistic Imperialism in Achieving Equity and Inclusion in English Language Teaching as a Second Language in Lesotho

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Abstract

Even after efforts to decolonize education, post-colonial countries such as Lesotho are said to retain vestiges of colonial traditions in English language teaching. This has marginalized learners, cultures, and languages in the educational system. Following SDG 4.5, the study looked into the consequences of linguistic imperialism on English as a Foreign Language in Lesotho, which hinder equity and inclusion in the EFL environment. This study's philosophical lenses were derived from Critical Realism paradigm, which explored themes of power relations, politics, and language use. Furthermore, the study used a qualitative case study approach in six high schools to learn about the experiences of 6 EFL teachers. Data was collected through one-on-one open-ended interviews, then analysed thematically. The findings demonstrated that English's dominance in the language field maintains power dynamics that promote linguistic imperialism and impede complete epistemic access to language education. Strategies for eradicating hegemonic beliefs were examined, and the study recommended using the Grammar of the Decoloniality Framework to address the complexities of linguistic imperialism in an EFL classroom. The study found both harmful and beneficial consequences

of linguistic imperialism. As a result, a paradigm shift away from a monolingual and monoculture approach and towards a more inclusive and multilingual perspective was recommended.

Keywords: Linguistic Imperialism, Hegemony, Colonialism, Decolonisation, English as a Foreign Language

Introduction

1.1 Background to the problem

English language has taken an important position in many educational systems around the world and has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion and exclusion from further education, employment, or social positions (Kubota, 2001). However, the spread and use of English have resulted in what is referred to as linguistic imperialism.

The term linguistic imperialism was introduced by Robert Phillipson in 1992. He defines linguistic imperialism as the dominance of English as a global language and the spread of English Language Teaching as a tool of cultural and economic imperialism. Thus, it appears the use of English has overruled many languages worldwide, and this usually happens at the expense of other local languages in the country. Another term that further clarifies linguistic imperialism is linguistic hegemony.

Pennycook (1994) asserts that it is a concept rooted in sociolinguistics and cultural studies, which examine how certain languages or language varieties gain superiority and control in various social, political, and educational contexts. It therefore may be defined as the dominance of one language over others, both in terms of power and influence. English Language has been made a core subject in many African countries in order to maintain language supremacy- a construct that simplifies linguistic imperialism.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

In Lesotho, the English Language is not only an official language but also a medium of instruction in schools (MOET, 2009). It is also deemed as a key to entry into higher institutions. Only those who have Credit in English language gain access to prestigious institutions, and those with no credit go to low-performing institutions, despite their mastery of other subjects, including their mother tongue. Furthermore, those learners are mostly admitted to institutions that offer non-formal education or those that do not have the best education system. This appears to ignore the abilities of learners in other areas that would fit in the high-esteemed institutions even without having performed well in English.

This education imperialism does not adhere to the needs of the learners and their interests in the learning environment. Phillipson (1992) defines this habit as, a form of linguisticism, “where ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of English Language mastery” (47). Unfortunately, there is paucity of knowledge about the effects of this type of education in the context of Lesotho. While there is no study we are aware of; which unpacks the dynamics of this type of education in Lesotho secondary schools, there was justification to initiate the study intended to investigate the effects of linguistic imperialism in the teaching and learning of the English language as a second language in Lesotho. Hence the present research.

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question underpinning this study was: what are the effects of linguistic imperialism on the teaching of English as a Foreign language in Lesotho?

This question was broken down into the following sub-questions:

1. What are the effects of linguistic imperialism on the teaching of English as a foreign language?

2. How do teachers perceive the impact of linguistic imperialism in the EFL classroom?
3. What strategies can be employed to mitigate the negative effects of linguistic imperialism in the teaching of English as a foreign language?

2.0 Literature Review

This section of the paper highlights the conceptual framework which acted as the key informant to effectively address the problem in question, thus highlighted the interconnection between specific variables of this study. The following section articulates on the effects of linguistic imperialism on ELT.

2.1 Effects Of Linguistic Imperialism On English Language Teaching

In the context of ELT, linguistic imperialism has significant effects on language diversity, pedagogical practices, culture, and identity, as well as the English language curriculum. According to Pennycook (1998), “ELT is a product of colonialism not just because it is colonialism that produced the initial conditions for the global spread of English, but because it was colonialism that produced ways of thinking and behaving that are still part of Western cultures” (p.19). Thus, ELT theories and practices promote Western cultures and ideologies.

In support, Masta (2016) argues that linguistic imperialism is responsible for social inequalities because it is designed to satisfy the interest of the colonisers. In addition, when designing a curriculum, the experiences of the colonised are likely to be neglected because the colonisers do not recognise them as valid sources of educational knowledge. This implies that; the legitimate knowledge, is that of the colonisers. Ngugi (2012) adds that; “imperialists and colonialists have used knowledge to obscure reality and force a certain perception of reality” (p. 30). An instance of this is evident when English language educators may be expected to appropriate their personal and professional lives to those of the native speakers and are likely to be transformed.

In the same vein, linguistic imperialism also marginalises the minor groups by promoting Standard English as the only acceptable form of the language (Canagarajah, 2005). Pirbhai Illich et al. (2017) concur that; Standard English is often associated with the language spoken by native speakers, and its promotion is likely to marginalise other varieties of English spoken by non-native speakers. This marginalisation may lead to a loss of cultural identity and self-esteem among non-native speakers; because they are forced to speak and learn the way it should be.

According to Block (2003), “Standard English is not a fixed and static entity, but rather a social construct that varies across different contexts and communities” (p. 79). This implies that educators should understand the sociocultural aspects of language use, and challenge the notion that there is a single, universally accepted variety of English. Thus, they should teach English to suit their context. Moreover, Branchat (2019) asserts that another effect of linguistic imperialism on ELT is the emphasis on language proficiency tests when leaving secondary school for higher education institutions. These tests are often used as a measure of English proficiency for academic and professional purposes, and their dominance reinforces the belief that standard English is the superior accepted form of English that brings about passage to a successful future. Other languages seem to be neglected and have no place in the academic world. It appears, people who are not proficient in English are considered inferior to those who master English.

2.2 Decolonising English Language Teaching

According to Ngugi (1986), Africa’s current predicaments are often the result of a long history of colonialism and exploitation by external forces. He further adds that the solutions to these problems require a fundamental transformation of the structures of our societies, starting with a break from imperialism (ibid). Thus, there should be a change in how a society operates,

favouring its interests and not being controlled by the former colonisers. In the context of ELT, there seems to be a need to change how it is taught.

A decolonised English language curriculum, as stated by Charles (2019), means “creating spaces and resources for a dialogue among all members of a school on how to imagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum, and with respect to what is being taught and how it frames the world” (p.1). This gives an implication that, a decolonised approach to English language curriculum is to design it in a way that is socially acceptable. The curriculum should empower learners to function in their local communities, not those of the colonisers. Therefore, the content should advocate for minority communities.

While CAP (2009) sends messages to educators to decolonise the teaching and learning of English, it is disappointing to highlight that the English syllabus still has reservations for colonial type of education. This, in our opinion, may maintain the linguistic imperialism-which we aimed to find its effects in the teaching and learning of English Language.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach and Paradigm

Using a case study design, this study followed a qualitative approach and was underpinned by critical realism paradigm (CR). The qualitative approach was suitable for this investigation because the study aimed at exploring multiple perspectives of the participants concerning knowledge and awareness of linguistic imperialism on ELT, and how teachers resist hegemonic ideologies in their teaching. Embedding the critical realism within the qualitative approach was done to investigate the social realities that may encourage or organise the way in which English Language curriculum is enacted.

3.3 Population and Sampling Techniques

The current study used a non-probability sampling technique, and with purposive sampling playing a pivotal role. Within non-probability sampling technique; the sample is not

selected randomly, hence not everyone in the population stands a chance to be part of the sample (Palinka, 2016). A sample of six English language high school teachers from six different schools was purposively selected based on the following criterion: (1) be an English language teacher and (2) have at least three years of teaching experience as an English teacher at secondary school level. The schools were conveniently sampled in order to minimise cost and save time allocated for the completion of this research.

3.4 Data Generation Tools and Analysis Methods

For triangulation purposes, the researchers employed three data generation tools in order to get rich data that addresses the objectives of the study and these were: the Assessment Policy (CAP 2009), English Language Grade 10&11 Syllabus, individual semi-structured interviews, and open ended questionnaires. The following table summarises the dynamics of data generation within this research.

Table 1. Data Generation tools and Types of Analysis Applied

Research tool	Type of Analysis applied on the data generated
Assessment Policy (CAP 2009), and English Language Grade 10&11 Syllabus	Document Analysis
One-on-one/individual semi-structured interviews	Thematic Analysis
Open ended questionnaires	Thematic Analysis

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Since this study dealt with people, certain ethical considerations were followed throughout the phases of this study. Research ethics emphasises participant anonymity and adherence to ethical standards (Dooly et al., 2017; Creswell, 2018). Before the initial interview sessions, formal communication with the school authorities and voluntary participation by the teachers were ensured, with anonymity of both the school and teachers preserved throughout the study.

4. Results and Discussions

This chapter gives an overview of the results obtained from the generated data and subsequently provides the discussion of findings. Themed by the research questions, the findings yielded by this research are as follows:

4.1 Results

Question 1. What are the effects of linguistic imperialism on the teaching of English as a foreign language?

The data to address this question was generated through document analysis: CAP (2009) and LGSCE Grade 10 English syllabus. Content analysis was used to analyse the chosen areas: CAP language Policy, LGSCE English Syllabus Rationale, as well as the syllabus-suggested learning experiences. The analysis of CAP (2009) revealed that the policy may marginalise other local languages. Depicted by Figure 3, the study validates this assertion.

Language Policy

The framework recognizes the pluralism of the Basotho nation and the existence of other languages besides the two official languages of Sesotho and English. In that regard, the framework boldly asserts that mother tongue will be used as a medium of instruction up to class 3(resources permitting), while English will be taught as a subject at this and other levels. It goes further to indicate that sign language shall also form part of the new language policy.

Figure 1. CAP 2009

Through the analysis of Language Policy, as shown in Fig.3 above, CAP (2009) claims to recognise the plurality of Lesotho's languages, yet Sesotho is only used as a medium of instruction until Grade 3. Thus, this suggests that linguistic imperialism imposed within the policy marginalises other languages.

Furthermore, the study found out that even though the syllabus aims at promoting a multilingual learning environment, it still makes reservations as Sesotho is only learnt as a

subject, and not incorporated in other lessons. The following figure is an extract from the syllabus.

RATIONALE AND AIMS

English Language

Language is the most important key to learning. Language literacy and communication are regarded as inherent facets of human development and forms the basis of lifelong learning. The overall aim of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is the development of the learners' communicative skills for meaningful interaction in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. ESL has the same potential as any other language to act as a catalyst for personal growth and to assist in the development of broad general knowledge, positive attitudes, critical thinking abilities, moral values and the aesthetic sensibilities.

Figure 2. LGSCE English rationale 2019

To further clarify the findings from the document analysis, we analysed how teachers are expected to teach learners, especially basic things such construction of sentences. The learning experiences analysed results reveal that though the syllabus suggests an interaction between the learners and teachers, and learners amongst themselves, their interaction does not seem to allow learners to have a lively dialogue in their learning.

Question 2: How do teachers perceive the impact of linguistic imperialism in the EFL classroom?

To address this question, the researchers also used semi-structured interviews to generate data. When asked how linguistic imperialism affects EFL classroom, the participants responded that linguistic imperialism creates cultural and linguistic stereotypes, impact on learners' unique learning, and dictates teaching methods. Figure 3 highlights some of the teachers' responses to this research question:



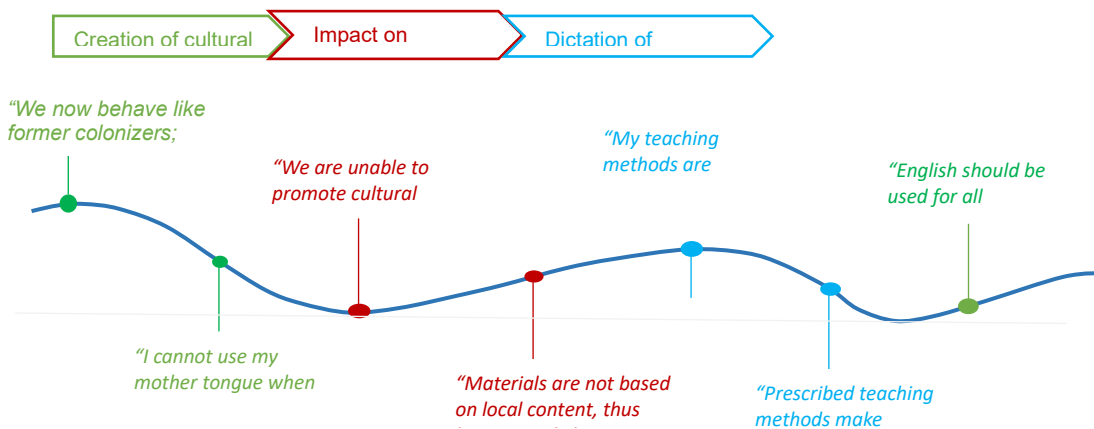


Figure 3: Perspectives on how LI affects EFL

Question 3: What strategies can be employed to mitigate the negative effects of linguistic imperialism in the teaching of English as a foreign language?

This question was addressed through the use of open-ended questionnaires, with the aim of finding out ways in which ELT can be decolonised. The open-ended questionnaires were administered to find the teachers' perspectives concerning the strategies that can be employed to mitigate the identified negative effects of linguistic imperialism in EFL. The key strategies derived from the participants' responses include; code switching, use of daily life examples, change in instructional methods, building communicative competence, promotion of cultural diversity, and use of local teaching resources. Figure 4 shows some of the quotations extracted from teachers' responses:

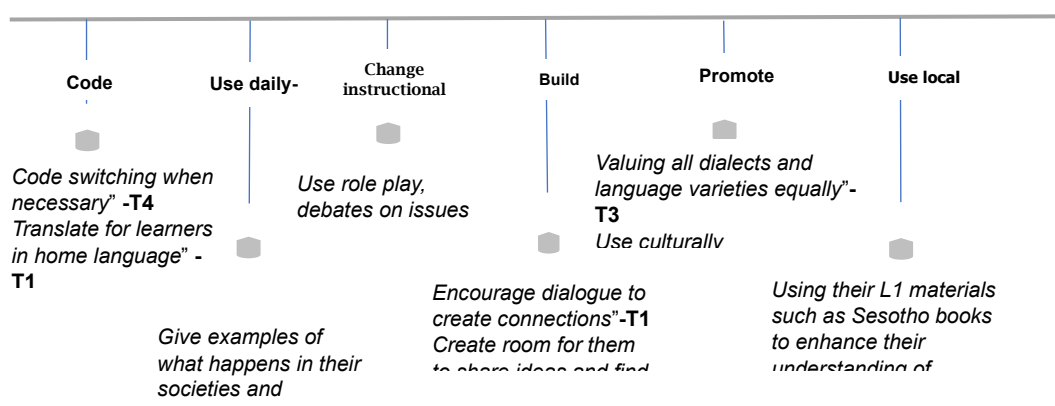


Figure 4. Strategies suggested

4.2 Discussion of Findings

This section is dedicated to the discussion of the findings of this research. The study offers the convergence and divergence between the current study's findings and those highlighted by literature on this topic.

The analysed policies revealed that a colonial language marginalises Sesotho as it dominates throughout the education system. Subsequently, Kachru (2006) argues that; using English as a language of education appears to be a way of erasing the culture of locals, because it may lead to discrimination against the use of Sesotho. Evidently, issues of hegemonic ideologies may be visible in this section because, even though the curriculum claims to be aware of other minority languages in the country, an official mother tongue is only given a spotlight for a short period of time, manipulating the minds of the locals into believing it is considered.

Apart from that, Shonamy (2008) proposed the concept of mother-tongue in foreign language teaching. He argues that, incorporating L1 can provide a bridge between the known to unknown, allowing learners to make connections and transfer skills from L1 to L2. This promotes a deeper understanding of linguistic structures. Therefore, using mother tongue only up to Grade 3 marginalises the approaches in which the teacher will use to teach English. Learners may not be able to make inference from their language.

Based on the results of LGSCE rationale, the syllabus stresses the main aim of ELT is preparing learners to fully function in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. However, it has been highlighted in the CAP (2009) that, Sesotho can only be an instructional method until Grade 3. It appears the LGCSE rationale is in contradiction with CAP (2009), because even though it aims at promoting a multilingual learning environment, Sesotho is only learnt as a subject, and not incorporated in other lessons.

The results also revealed that though the syllabus suggests an interaction between the learners and teachers, and learners amongst themselves, their interaction does not seem to allow learners to have a lively dialogue in their learning. According to Freire (1990), dialogue in education systems helps both teachers and learners challenge the status quo. Thus, if the dialogues in teaching sentences were engaging and experimental, learners would be able to think critically and contextualise their knowledge of sentence construction.

Importantly, the teachers' responses unearthed that teachers teach English in a prescriptive way that only has the Western view of the world, thereby promoting their cultural norms among themselves and the learners. Their perspectives concerning teaching of EFL reflects that notions of linguistic imperialism run deep in the classroom. As stated by Masta (2016), linguistic imperialism is responsible for social inequalities because it is designed to satisfy the interests of colonisers.

Thus, teachers are led to believe that only English holds a high status and no other languages. The colonial ideology that is embedded in the classroom may result in the eradication of Sesotho, hence linguicide. The model of Grammar of Decoloniality of "being" indicates that, it is essential for teachers to critically examine their own assumptions about language, culture, and identity (Canagarajah, 2010). They may do that by reflecting on their own positionality and biases in language use, and also being open to challenging and unlearning these biases. Thus, the mind ought to be decolonised first.

Amongst others, this study has proven that linguistic imperialism in the teaching of EFL goes as far as dictating the methods of teaching enacted by English teachers. Teachers revealed that they find it difficult to include learners' uniqueness in learning because their methods would be questioned. This finding is consistent with Shonamy's (2010) discovery that education policies that determine and emphasise rigid methods have profound effects on learners' academic achievements, cognitive development, and a sense of identity. This could

be a result of social inequalities brought by the dominant language and may hinder opportunities for marginalised groups.

Charles (2019) contends that, decolonising English language curriculum means “creating spaces and resources for a dialogue among all members of a school on how to imagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems in the curriculum, and with respect to what is being taught and how it frames the world” (p.87). This implies that ELT should not be accessible to a certain calibre of people but to everyone, taking into consideration the needs of the learners, teachers, the school, the community, and the country at large.

As shown in the presentation of findings, the respondents believe a decolonised ELT encompasses the inclusion of the mother tongue (through code switching) in the classroom. They indicate that some concepts in English are better understood by comparing them to Sesotho. These findings validate Canagarajah’s (2019) finding that in order to transform ELT, integration of some features of the mother tongue may be appropriate for epistemological access; with learners having an opportunity to effectively comprehend the content.

One of the respondents also pointed out that, using L1 materials may enhance comprehension and integration in both languages in the teaching. In resonance, Pennycook (2007) acknowledges that the epistemic turn in ELT requires teachers, students, and institutions to use their knowledge and culture to decolonise and mobilise discourses and practices from the Western World. This view of decolonising advocates for eliminating use of linguistically inaccessible resource in the class and considering those that learners can easily access in terms of language used (Nunez-Pardo, 2020).

The responses from the teachers, as shown on the findings, attest that to decolonise ELT, teachers should choose learning activities that allow interaction among learners. An approach to improving communicative competence is Reinterpretation, as interpreted by Dharmawardena (2018). This approach involves re-examining the way English language is

taught and used in different contexts, with a focus on promoting inclusivity and diversity. This implies that English should not only be taught for passing examinations but also for creativity and for expressing oneself through competent communication.

5. Conclusions Derived from the Findings

In conclusion, this study on the effects of linguistic imperialism in ELT as a Foreign Language in Lesotho has shed light on the negative impacts of the dominance of English in the field of language teaching. Through the lenses of Critical Realism Paradigm, the study has highlighted the power dynamics at play in ELT and the ways in which they perpetuate linguistic imperialism.

Furthermore, we concluded that linguistic imperialism creates cultural and linguistic stereotypes, impact on learners' unique learning, and dictates teaching methods. Thorough examination of the findings leads to the conclusion that while these challenges caused by linguistic imperialism exist, teachers can employ various strategies to mitigate the identified challenges and these include; code switching, use of daily life examples, change in instructional methods, building communicative competence, promotion of cultural diversity, and use of local teaching resources. As a result, further research can be done to examine the effectiveness of the aforementioned strategies in removing the walls of linguistic imperialism, thereby creating a contextualised teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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