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CONTENTS

*SYMPOSIUM ON POWER, POLITICS, AND ENGLISH*

Guest Editor: WIMAL DISSANAYAKE

WIMAL DISSANAYAKE: Introduction . . . . .	143
SHEMEEM ABBAS: The power of English in Pakistan. . . . .	147
ELIZABETH de KADT: Language, power, and emancipation in South Africa . . . . .	157
MARC GERARD DENEIRE: Democratizing English as an international language . . . . .	169
JEFFRA FLAITZ: French attitudes toward the ideology of English as an international language . . . . .	179
KEVIN Y. KAWAMOTO: Hegemony and language politics in Hawaii . . . . .	193
DOUGLAS A. KIBBEE: World French takes on World English: competing visions of national and international languages . . . . .	209

*Articles*

SARAN KAUR GILL: Standards and pedagogical norms for teaching English in Malaysia . . . . .	223
THOMAS TINKHAM: Sociocultural variation in Indian English speech acts. . . . .	239

*Short Articles and Notes*

DAISUKE NAGASHIMA: Bilingual lexicography in Japan: the Dutch-Japanese to the English-Japanese dictionary . . . . .	249
YVONNE PRATT-JOHNSON: Curriculum for Jamaican Creole-speaking students in New York City . . . . .	257

*Reviews*

<i>INTERLANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION RESEARCH</i>	
LARRY SELINKER: <i>Rediscovering Interlanguage</i> (Yamuna Kachru) . . . . .	265

*ENGLISH IN FRANCE*

CLAUDE TRUCHOT: <i>L'anglais dans le monde contemporain</i> (Marc Gerard Deneire) . . . . .	268
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*POLITICS AND PEDAGOGY IN TEACHING ENGLISH COMPOSITION*

MARK N. BROCK and LARRY WALTERS (eds): <i>Teaching Composition Around the Pacific Rim: Politics and Pedagogy</i> (Rosa Jinyoung Shim) . . . . .	271
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<i>Professional Notes.</i> . . . . .	275
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<i>Publications Received</i> . . . . .	277
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## The power of English in Pakistan

SHEMEEM ABBAS\*

**ABSTRACT:** Sociopolitical and socio-economic dimensions of control are implemented through language hegemony in countries of the Third World. Edward Said and Antonio Gramsci's models are used to describe the English language situation in Pakistan, especially during the period of the Afghan war (1977-88), when the country was the recipient of massive foreign aid. The role of the 'foreign funding agencies' in the expansion of ELT programs is a significant aspect of 'linguistic imperialism'. A theory of education and materials design is proposed using the indigenous, grassroots literary and oral tradition.

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to discuss the English language and its sociopolitical and socio-economic dimensions of control in the so-called Third World. This is examined in the context of theories of education, pedagogy, teacher-training, and materials development. These theories are generally provided by what Kachru (1986) calls the countries of the Inner Circle; these countries plan the English language policies of the Outer Circle; the policies are filtered down to the native, 'Third World' academies through the 'foreign funding agencies' in the name of 'aid to developing countries'. I use Said (1979) and Gramsci (1971) for models of hegemony. It is the relationship of power, of domination, to varying degrees, based on the continuum of 'a complex Orient suitable . . . for instances of economic and sociological theories of development' (Said, 1979: 7-8). This is further linked to the fact that 'civil society recognizes a gradation of political importance in the various fields of knowledge' (Said, 1979: 10); knowledge here is correlated to language hegemony and sociopolitical and geopolitical dimensions of control. This is additionally translated into economic terms; a node of historical complexity, culture, political tendencies, and the state (Said, 1979: 15) are created, in which the dynamics of domination are expressed through the power of language.

I will use Pakistan as a case study to argue my position; I take this position after being actively involved in language planning with the Federal Government of Pakistan in Islamabad in the period 1980-5, through the Allama Iqbal Open University's Distance Teaching program. I use the following government documents for discussion: *Report Study of the Group on The Teaching of Languages*, University Grants Commission, Islamabad (1982); *The British Council English Teaching Profile: Pakistan* (1986); The Gallup Pakistan Survey by the Pakistan Institute of Public Opinion (Gilani and Rehman, 1986). Additionally, I use my personal collection of facts and observations as a practitioner; with regard to the English language reports, these are the most up-to-date databases available in the country.

The literature has been reviewed from the following perspectives. For non-native varieties of English see Kachru (1982, 1983, 1990). For a 'linguistically tolerant attitude towards the emergent nonnative forms of the language', I refer to Quirk (1962, 1981), Strevens (1977, 1980), Abbot (1981), Close (1981), Firth (1957), and Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens (1964). Fishman (1971) is reviewed for English as a 'minimally ethnicized

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language'. I shall refer to the following for issues of language planning in multilingual societies: Rubin and Jernudd (1971) and Das Gupta (1970). My aim is to present the case for the teaching of English through the indigenous, grassroots literary and oral traditions using Hymes' model of the ethnography of speaking and communicative competence; it is a plea for using the ethnoliterary and ethnopoetic resources of the South Asian speech communities for a theory of education and materials development. I refer to Ahmed's response (1986) to 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', Sherzer (1987), Feld (1982), and Finnegan (1988). I refer to Sridhar (1982) and Freire (1989) for a theoretical perspective on a pedagogy for the 'Third World'. Furthermore, I refer to my own extensive study on the oral Sufi traditions of Indo-Pakistan in which I propose alternative, 'generative', grassroots models (Abbas, 1992).

### SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan is a multilingual society, in which a variety of languages are spoken, including Panjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi, Pushto, Brohi, Siraiki, Hindko, Balti, and Shina among others. These languages have strong literary and oral traditions. In addition Urdu, Persian, and English are used. In a total population of 99.2 million people, the following is the composition of the speech communities in the country:

Panjabi speakers	44%
Pushto	14%
Sindhi	10%
Urdu	9%
Siraiki	8%
Other languages	6%
Hindko	4%
Baluchi	2%
Brohi	2%
English	1%
TOTAL	100%

Pakistan was a part of the British Empire until 1947. As a former colony it inherits, among other features, the non-native varieties of Indo-Pakistani English. The country inherited from the British a massive administrative machinery that used the system, as well as the language, of the empire.

### THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PAKISTAN

The major functions of English in Pakistan are the following.

First, it is used in the Civil Administration and the bureaucracy, which includes both the federal and the four provincial governments, i.e., the Panjab, Sind, the North West Frontier Province, and Baluchistan. In administration, English is the major language of contact. Second, English is used in the legal system of the federal and provincial governments. Whereas the Supreme Court and the four provincial High Courts conduct their proceedings in English, the situation of the provincial sessions courts is bilingual, sometimes even trilingual. The regional dialects are used for oral communication. In these contexts, English and Urdu are used in equal balance; for example, court orders are issued in either Urdu or

English according to the discretion of the individual Sessions Judge. Third, English is used by the Defence Forces. The design and training of all the three components of the Armed Forces (i.e., the Army, Air Force, and Navy) primarily used the British model. In these institutions, English is the language of communication for all office work. Until 1974, officers and field personnel in the Armed Forces were trained in the academies, using the oral context of the English language; field orders were issued in English. However, since 1974, with the institution of a popular government, Urdu is used to train both officers and personnel in the field.

Fourth, English is used in the broadcast media, together with Urdu. The regional languages are used both in print and in oral communication. To quote an example, in Hyderabad city twenty newspapers, including daily and evening newspapers, are published in Sindhi. These print media have a fairly large audience; among them are *Ibrat*, *Hilal-e Pakistan*, *Jago*, and *Sindhi News*, which only recently, because of the script, are typeset on computers. The national news on radio and television is broadcast in both English and Urdu; the regional languages such as Sindhi, Panjabi, Potohari, Pushto, Hindko, Kashmiri, and Siraiki are used only for what the stations call 'the local broadcast', meant for the local audience. The country has four major national newspapers in English: *The Dawn*, *The Frontier Post*, *The Pakistan Times*, and *The Muslim*, with a wide circulation. There are also the evening dailies in English, such as *The Star*, *Morning News*, and *Daily News*, published from Karachi. In addition there is a wide variety of magazines in English, for example, *MAG*, *the Herald*, and *The Cricketeer*. A sizeable number of quality magazines, covering eclectic news ranging from politics, culture, and sports, are published in English from Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar. In Urdu there are several newspapers with a national circulation: *Jang*, *Naw-e-Waqt*, *Hurriyat*, and *Jasarat*, to name just four. Entertainment programs on the television use forceful social themes from the provincial cultures, but the scripts are in Urdu. The English programs or movies that are shown on television are from the 'English mother tongue world' (Kachru 1982: 20); CNN and BBC are available on the local channels.

Fifth, there is the domain of education; by and large, this follows a bilingual or a trilingual pattern. Throughout the country there are institutions which use English as the medium of education and follow the colonial pattern of British public schools. In recent years there has been a rapid growth of private, Euro-American-style schools; the three American schools in Karachi, Islamabad, and Lahore increasingly admit more Pakistani students and the elite of the country educate their children in these institutions. The Urdu medium schools are of varying quality, from the best to the poorest. Substantial teaching materials are available in the country to meet the demands of both the English and the Urdu medium schools (although the quality of these materials is questionable). Higher education and professional colleges such as the universities, medical colleges, engineering colleges, dental schools, and law schools use English.

Whereas the British Council report refers to diasporic creative writers like Salman Rushdie and Hanif Qureshi as representative of the society, there are 'native' writers of English within the country, such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Daood Kemal, Shahid Hussain, Taufiq Rafat, and Omar Kaleem, not to mention the innumerable writers of what I call the grassroots, ethnoliterary traditions of the native speech communities. And last, but not least, in trade and commerce English is used together with Urdu in a bilingual context. The local companies use Urdu, whereas the multinational enterprises use English; in advertising,

the situation is bilingual and both Urdu and English are in use. Telephone salutations are in English; addresses on postal envelopes are generally written in English.

### ENGLISH VS. URDU

Despite political pressure within the country, the periodic efforts of various governments to replace English with Urdu have shown slow results. Although Urdu has made some headway, there is ambivalence between government policy and public opinion. It was expected that by 1989 English would have been phased out of the administration at both the federal and provincial levels: in 1992, English was still the major code in which all official communication is done. Only some government documents such as application forms for passports and identity cards are issued in Urdu.

Since the creation of Pakistan, English has undergone various stages of change in the society; the attitudes toward its usage are linked with the political cycles, affirming my hypothesis on the relationship between language use and sociopolitical dimensions of control. The different phases may be mapped out as follows.

#### *Phase I: 1947-1971*

This phase was a continuation of the Raj period. By and large the British model was used, though the country leaned toward the US model starting with the visit of the first Prime Minister, Liaqat Ali Khan, to the United States. The country's foreign policy was pro-US, and English was associated with elitism. All administration, training of personnel in the key ministries, forces, and education was done in English. Politically, this was the period of Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan, Ayub, and Yahya Khan, and the ultimate fall of East Pakistan that led to the creation of the sovereign state of Bangladesh. The myth that Urdu or Arabic could be a politically unifying force to forge national unity was shattered.

#### *Phase II: 1971-1977*

This was the period of the 'peoplization' of languages, under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. On the political level, the regional languages were exalted; an effort was made to regenerate the linguistic heritage of the diverse speech communities. The Institute of Folk Heritage was established in Islamabad in 1972 to promote the rich oral lore of the regional languages such as Sindhi, Panjabi, Siraiki, Pushto, and Baluchi, and to carry out research in these languages. During this period severe language riots took place in the Sind between the native Sindhi population and the refugees, or *muhajirs*, from North India who had migrated to Pakistan at the time of the 1947 partition and who largely spoke Urdu. As a result of the riots, English became entrenched as a *neutral* language of unification, and of administration. This was a transitional phase when, during 'Awamization' or 'peoplization', English was transformed from the status of a colonial, prestige language to that of a functional one, a link language, sometimes a complementary language to Urdu or the regional languages.

#### *Phase III: 1977-1988*

In this period there was a renewed interest in the teaching of English, and massive teacher-training and materials development projects were undertaken by the federal and provincial governments. The country received substantial monetary aid and assistance from the US government through the Asia Foundation, the United States Information Service (USIS), and the Agency for International Development (AID) on the one hand, and

from the British Council and the Overseas Development Agency of the British Home Office on the other hand. This assistance was given to promote counterpart training in the country for the English language programs. This support for the English language programs was channeled through the University Grants Commission, and the Allama Iqbal Open University's Distance Education program in Islamabad. Politically, this period in the expansion of the English language coincided with the US-backed Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan was the supply line for aid to Afghanistan. It was during this period that we find a manifestation of control by the various foreign funding agencies, and the context is similar to Kachru's observations (1986: 134) on the power and politics of English; there was severe competition to sell a particular model to Pakistan, thus confirming the fact that

Achieving victory in the competition for selling a model has both material and other more abstract advantages. If a country outside the Inner Circle accepts a particular model of English, this naturally results in the creation of a market for pedagogical and technological materials, and equally important, for live human beings as 'experts'

This is confirmed by the 1986 *British Council English Teaching Profile: Pakistan* which states that 'there should be a market for British EAP materials, already introduced in the American-staffed English language units at Quetta and Multan' (p. 14). To this are related other, more complex and subtle dimensions of control; I again refer to Kachru (1986: 122): 'There is, of course, an interplay of politics and conflicts within each circle: that aspect of English merits a detailed study in its own right, as does the study of the politics which the countries in the Inner Circle are playing against the Outer Circle.'

#### *Phase IV: 1988 to date*

As a result of the withdrawal of economic aid to the Afghan guerillas and consequently to Pakistan, the English language programs are no longer receiving the patronage of the foreign funding agencies. The British Council is gradually closing down its ELT unit in the Sind, and the Asia Foundation, backed by US funds, will soon withdraw from its commitment to the EAP program in the country. (The Foundation funds any one program for only eight years.) There are also no more renewals of 'consultancies' at the University Grants Commission and the Allama Iqbal Open University.

As we can see, the input of the foreign funding agencies to English language programs since partition was the strongest in 1980-8; India, which had been an equal competitor with Pakistan for foreign aid, did not receive such input. It was during this period that, in the educational system, teacher-training and materials development in ELT received the strongest boost. *The British Council English Teaching Profile: Pakistan* (1986), written during this period, is the most comprehensive and detailed evaluation of English language use in the educational system. Below, I use this report, together with my own observations, to discuss the teaching of English at various grade levels.

*Pre-primary and primary (ages 3-11)*. English is taught only in private schools, through Montessori and Kindergarten schools.

*Secondary (ages 12-17)*. English is taught as a compulsory subject until the matriculation level. This exam is available in both Urdu and English. At this level, the private schools are increasingly offering the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate exam called the 'Senior

Cambridge' or the London University 'O' levels; these exams are treated by the authorities as the equivalent of the local matric exam. Additionally, there is the 'A' level, or the Higher Senior Cambridge, offered by a few private schools like Aitchison College, Pine Hills College, or the Karachi Grammar School. This exam is the equivalent of the Higher Secondary or the Intermediate certificate that is required for entry into the professional colleges, such as medicine or engineering.

*Intermediate (ages 18-19).* This is a compulsory, two-year, pre-bachelor's certificate conducted by the local, provincial, and federal boards of secondary education, where English is compulsory.

*Tertiary (ages 20+).* At this level, English is compulsory for the B.A. and B.Sc. degrees. All the science subjects are taught in English. Some humanities subjects are optionally offered in English, otherwise students are taught and examined in Urdu. English is additionally taught as an elective subject.

*Post-graduate (ages 22+).* M.A. degrees in English are offered at the following Universities: University of the Panjab and its affiliated colleges; The University of Multan, Multan; The University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur; The University of Sind, Hyderabad; The University of Karachi, Karachi; and The University of Baluchistan, Quetta. The Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, is the only institution in the country that offers a full-fledged TESL course.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs were instituted in the 1980s at the following state-supported universities: The University of Baluchistan, Quetta; and Bahau-din Zakaria University at Multan. These programs received strong financial and academic support in terms of materials and US training personnel through the Asia Foundation. The Agha Khan School of Nursing in Karachi also established an EAP program with assistance from the Agha Khan Foundation and the British Overseas Development Agency. The Institute of Business Administration in Karachi in the state-supported sector runs its own advanced management course in English without the aid of foreign funding agencies.

EAP programs in the state-run sector have been produced by the Allama Iqbal Open University's Distance Teaching system. The courses that are produced are: the Intermediate Level Functional English course, B.A. Functional English Course, and the B.A. Business English Course. The National Institute of Modern Languages, another state-sponsored institution, offers training in English and other languages to government employees. In addition, there are the Government Colleges of Education for secondary school teachers. Some of these teachers undertake a partial specialization in the teaching of English.

Teacher-training in English for university and college teachers was undertaken by the Allama Iqbal Open University's Distance Teaching Program in 1980. A similar, intensive, teacher-training program for university teachers was instituted in the Academy for Higher Education, The University Grants Commission in Islamabad. It received strong support in materials and consultants from the Asia Foundation and the British Council.

To complete the ELT profile for Pakistan, up to the Bachelor's level teaching materials are produced locally by the Provincial Textbook Boards under the supervision of the Provincial Education Departments. In the Center it is the Federal Ministry of Education that produces the syllabus and arranges for materials development. The Open University's

Matric, Intermediate, and Bachelors courses in functional English are models of the newer kinds of ELT materials produced by the local agencies and institutions.

#### ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In the private sector, the Agha Khan University and the Lahore University of Management Sciences have developed efficient English Language Programs. The Pakistan American Cultural Society in Karachi trains close to 6,000 individuals; the same centers in Quetta, Hyderabad, and Peshawar train approximately 1,000 students (*British Council English Teaching Profile: Pakistan*, 1986: 9). Increasingly, students enroll in the program in order to develop competence for the TOEFL test. Therefore, one notices that since 1980 the trend in the country is more toward the American model of English, for students to gain acceptance into American universities.

Language policy and planning in the country is administered by the Federal Ministry of Education, the Provincial Ministries of Education, and the Universities which have autonomous syndicates. Since the country's involvement in the Afghan war there has been a renewed interest in the teaching of English at all levels.

#### CURRENT LINGUISTIC PROFILE

The current linguistic profile of Pakistan needs to be reviewed from the following three perspectives. First, there is the enhanced, privileged status of English, which has received a boost from the 'foreign funding agencies' and the proliferation of 'experts' to the country in the 1980s during the Afghan war. It is a case of what Gramsci (quoted in Said, 1979: 7) calls the relationship between authority and consent, and what Said (1979: 19) refers to as instrumental, persuasive, and something that has status; it establishes the canons of taste and value. In Pakistan, the American model of English education is gradually replacing the somewhat obsolete British colonial model, therefore reinforcing my position on the relationship between language and dimensions of socio-economic and political control.

The second perspective from which the linguistic profile of Pakistan needs to be reviewed is through the status of the regional languages in policy planning. The third perspective is through considering the role of Urdu in language planning. I will examine this in the light of the incongruities, inconsistencies, and ambivalences between government policy and public opinion. Note the following statement in the *Report on the Teaching of Languages* (University Grants Commission, 1982: v):

The recommendations of the Group are based on the assumption of an increasing role for Urdu, the National language, as the primary official language of the country; of English, the language of knowledge, technology, and international communication, as an important second language; and of Arabic, the language important for religious, geopolitical and economic reasons, as a foreign language, with the definition of the role of the regional languages left to the provincial governments.

The role of the regional languages in the report is left to the provinces, 'primarily as a source of informal communication, and as a means for the preservation of culture' (p. 14).

The report further states (p. 14):

English would continue to be used in the foreseeable future as the language of technology and of international communication. English is increasingly becoming the equivalent to a universal lingua franca and is essential for international intercourse. There is no escape for any country in the world

from learning English well and thoroughly and it would be very unwise, in fact, almost suicidal for Pakistan to destroy by neglect all the advantages we already possess in respect of past knowledge of English.

In addition:

The report acknowledges that governments have paid lip service to Urdu when in fact English was the language of power and that the future would not be any different. The report asserts this on the basis of the proliferation of English medium schools in the country, mainly because parents are concerned for their children's future. (p. 13)

However, the dissenting note from one of the key members of the group is a strong indicator of public sentiment (p. 99):

The Seven-Member Study Group did not possess anyone whose mother tongue was Sindhi, Baluchi, Pushto or Gujerati and did not bother to obtain the views of those groups through summoning authentic expert opinion or proceeding on tour and arranging interviews. This arrogant indifference to other people's sentiments and opinions has cost and will continue to cost this country dearly. Patriotism is not the monopoly of those whose mother tongue is Panjabi or Urdu.

The Gallup Survey (Gilani and Rehman, 1986) that was conducted on the language question using approximately 100 villages and 75 towns all over the country reveals the following in terms of public opinion: 'The English medium of instruction is comparatively more popular in the urban areas (20%) than in the rural areas (11%)' (p. 14). The survey further affirms:

The popularity of Urdu medium of instruction is overwhelming in the Panjab and NWFP provinces. Almost 72% of the respondents in these provinces wanted their children to be instructed in Urdu. Comparative figures for Baluchistan and Sind were 60% and 27% respectively. (p. 14)

The survey brought into bold relief the fact that whereas the majority of the people of Pakistan use their local tongues/dialects for informal day-to-day communication, they employ Urdu for correspondence. About 62% exchange letters in Urdu, 16% in Sindhi, and 3% in other languages (p. 15).

The survey confirms that:

Those who are for English medium seem, in many cases, to belong to the Establishment and could have been influenced by the fact that in the present administrative set up, English already plays the dominant role. For them to tread the beaten path is easier. (p. 17)

The research further states:

Another reason for a certain tilting of opinion in favor of English for Higher levels of Education could be that the English Language, in a significant measure, helps to perpetuate the status quo and dominance of the anglicized elite over the less vocal but vastly numerous 'native' people. English language as medium of instruction and lingua franca, puts the powerful and influential in our society in an advantageous position and they are for it more than others. Yet, whenever and wherever any section suffers due to the tyranny of alien English (as for instance in the Competitive Examinations) they do not hesitate from expressing themselves against the system and the language. (p. 18)

The findings of the Gallup Survey are reported to be controversial.

Despite the massive input into the teaching of English, the national results are abysmally poor. At the college levels, the pass percentage in English is barely 18 to 20%. Since English is a compulsory subject, failure in English means a failure in the entire examination. At the

secondary level the ratios are almost the same. My own observations as an examiner for the universities and the Federal Public Commission in Islamabad reinforces the statistics. From the failure rates in English two clear facts emerge: first, that perhaps the teaching of English is not necessary for the entire population; second, the pedagogy and materials design are seriously flawed.

## CONCLUSION

It is precisely to such issues that this paper is addressed. To begin with, countries of the 'Third World' need to resort to emic forms of language planning and research. I propose Hymes' model of the ethnography of speaking and communicative competence that emerged from his work on the Native American languages. True, we do need English to be members of the 'world community', that socio-economic and geopolitical entity that Vico called 'the world of nations' (cited in Said, 1979: 25). We in the 'Third World' cannot afford to ignore the hegemony of English 'as the strength of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often mistaken as merely decorative or "superstructural"' (Said, 1979: 25). We can, given the fact of history and colonialism, accept English as an ethnicized language variety. I quote Gramsci: 'the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory' (cited in Said, 1979: 25). We need to create our own pedagogies and materials to teach the language, using our own native, grassroot oral and literary traditions. Literatures are the creations of speech communities; they are the interface between language, culture, and society. It is for the societies to choose what is beneficial for them and what it is that is politically, economically, socially, and psychologically viable for them. Language ought to be treated as a resource. Here, I refer to Hymes (1964, 1972), Weinrich (1979), Rao (1963), Ahmed (1986), Kachru (1982, 1983, 1986, 1990), Sridhar (1982), Das (1973), and Freire (1989). We as researchers, scholars, and theoreticians need to write our own "Third World" Theory of Literary Orality and Aesthetics' and to absorb the teaching of English within that frame. I refer to my own study, 'Speech Play and Verbal Art in the Indo-Pakistan Oral Sufi Tradition', which I intend to use to evolve a theory of education and materials design in non-native, Indo-Pakistani English. We need to research such possibilities further, and use as models of work similar projects that have been undertaken at the Central Institute of Languages in Hyderabad, India.

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