



A New Direction in ELT: Applied ELT

Farida Yasmeen Panhwar*

fareeda.panhwar@usindh.edu.pk

Abstract: *Recently an Iranian scholar Dr. Reza Pishghadam (2011) from Ferdowsi University, Mashhad, introduced a new theory known as applied ELT. He claims that English language teaching (ELT) has found a firm theoretical foundation which goes beyond the teaching of language. Now it is ready to be applicable to other disciplines of knowledge. Applied ELT is opening the new vistas of research therefore ELT teachers and scholars should pay their attention towards this new theory. Pishghadam's claim has generated a new debate in ELT circles. This paper aims to critically evaluate Pishghadam's theory of applied ELT and simultaneously enhance further argument on it as a new paradigm in ELT.*

Keywords: *Applied ELT, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, life syllabus, linguistics imperialism*

* Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature,
University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan

Introduction

In recent years the realm of ELT is flooded with innovative theoretical notions and teaching approaches and methods to advance ELT in a more progressive direction. One of such notions is presented by Iranian scholar Reza Pishghadam. He introduces the theory of *applied ELT*. The theory has freed itself from the confines of linguistic and earned an independent status. It is emerging with a new vision and identity. Pishghadam (2011) argues that now ELT is well equipped and ready to be applied to other disciplines of knowledge.

Applied Linguistics and ELT

In 1950s the concept of ELT emerged as daughter discipline of applied linguistics. ELT is related to English as second language teaching therefore it refers second language learning theories. Hence, it profoundly derived its theoretical foundations from the discipline of applied linguistics. The initial ELT approaches and syllabi e.g. grammar translation, audiolingualism and situational language teaching methods were dependent on applied linguistics theories that provided ELT its base. It means that linguistic teaching methodology itself is based on linguistic knowledge (Corder, 1981). This dependency confined ELT to the linguistics theories.

At initial stage the other disciplines of applied linguistics like sociolinguistics, neuroinguistics and psycholinguistics enormously facilitated ELT to extend knowledge and explore firm foundation. They enabled ELT practitioners to analyse the internal and external factors responsible for L2 learning and teaching. For instance, the understanding of internal factors e.g. neurolinguistics provides a scientific vision in the understanding of L2 in human brain. Similarly, the understanding of human aptitude, attitude and behaviour on language learning was highlighted by psycholinguistics. Sociolinguistics contributed in the understanding the role of social community, its costumes and members in the enrichment of L2 learning and its usage. In fact, all these disciplines enabled ELT to explore, develop and enrich the learning and teaching approaches and techniques. One can say that ELT was the consumer of the findings of other disciplines (Schmitt, 2002).

Chomskian linguistics theories played a vital role to confine ELT as branch of applied linguistics. English language teachers and ELT were highly revolutionized by Chomsky' (1957) *modularity hypothesis*. It states that language occupies an independent section in the human mind. Therefore, there is no need to study whole neurology, rather focus on that particular part of mind to understand the language acquisition and learning. Chomsky (1957) also challenged the psycholinguistic theories on human behaviourism and emphasized on the role of mind in language learning. Thus, he tried to minimise the role of psycholinguistics in ELT in order to encourage the role of linguistic scholars. ELT teachers and scholars were relying on these latest linguistic theories and findings of Chomsky (Pishghadam, 2011). As the result ELT teachers were exceedingly dependent on the linguistics knowledge, thus "Chomsky made ELT more linguistic-based" (Pishghadam, 2011: 12).

Applied linguistics

Theory of *Applied linguistics* genesis: When Widdowson (1979) said that ELT has its own identity when he distinguishes between *Applied linguistics* and *Linguistics applied*. He suggested that ELT teachers should not remain consumers of findings of linguistics but strengthen their own theories and approaches and empower themselves. To gain autonomy in language teaching is proposed by Pennycook (1989), Long (1989), Nunan (1989) and Bailey & Allwright (1992).

Such calls for independency were responded gradually by ELT practitioners and they introduced new methods and approaches e.g. *action research* and *reflective teacher notions*. Action research is purely based on teaching theories and introduces the new techniques of teaching. The concept of reflective teachers allows teachers autonomy and more responsible and independent of their teaching actions (Nunan, 1989). It minimized the subjectivity of teacher. Both approaches made ELT a scientific discipline.

Further step towards independency of ELT was taken when they were customizing and acclimatizing themselves directly from theories and approaches of other fields of study e.g. psychology, sociology, neurology and technology. For instance, to remove the linguistics base, ELT scholars renamed psycholinguistic theories as *psychology of language learner* or *sociology of language* (Dornyei, 2009 & Pishghadam, 2011). ELT higher ideas from other discipline of knowledge like socio-cultural issues from sociology, teachers and learners' language learning theories and mechanism

from neurology, bilingual learners' behaviour from psychology and scientific methods of teaching from technology. The direct study of various disciplines helped ELT scholars to build direct link among various disciplines (Dornyei, 2009). In this way, they do not only combine and enrich ELT but open new vistas for second language teaching.

ELT gained autonomy when scholars were taking scientific help from modern technology in order to improve teaching techniques (e.g. computer-assisted language learning [CALL]). The fusion of diversified scientific theories and notions is empowering ELT teachers more objectives and accountable for their teaching (Williams & Burden, 1997). These efforts were pacing ELT practitioners and scholars towards autonomy and first time they started to experience freedom from theoretical domain of applied linguistics and day by day ELT is broadening its horizon.

Pishghadam (2011) is the fore runner to release ELT from the confines of applied linguistics. He claims that now ELT is no more a branch of applied linguistics but it is enriched with firm theoretical foundation, innovative approaches, and modern teaching methods. His claim is based on various research findings which he conducted along with his team. He claims that ELT is now an independent and scientific branch of knowledge and it is ready to apply to other fields of knowledge. For example, Pishghadam (2011) introduces the concept of Life Syllabus (LS) in which ELT material focuses real life issues. The purpose of LS is to enhance life-skills via teach English i.e. "language should be epiphenomenal to life" (Pishghadam, 2011: 15). ELT does not mean to teach only English language but it equips learners to know how to live life. Thus, ELT is not a mechanical learning process, e.g. drill or memorization, but learners are involved in real their life issues. The content of LS is authentic that provides scope for critical thinking, communication and discussion in L2. Therefore, it is a progressive approach in language learning and teaching (Pishghadam, 2011). Hence learners focus on content which make them conscious to understand and use correct grammatical structure and appropriate vocabulary. One can say that indirectly they are conscious to use correct form of L2. In this way learners show rapid progress which make them more confident to enhance their identity (Pishghadam, 2011).

Apart from that it is ONLY ELT classes where all subjects of life including romance, emotional complexities, music, culture, politics, literature, society, science business, computer etc can be discussed (Pishghadam, & Naji, 2012). This unique quality distincts ELT from other discipline of

knowledge including linguistic and applied linguistic. For example, linguistic only explains the phenomenon of language acquisition and learning but ELT envisage the discussing on almost all personal, local, global social, scientific, and political topics, comparing and contrast of two or more cultures acquainted with the words and grammar of another language. I can rightly say that LS enhances broaden canvas of life and learners show the dramatic progress to face life issues. Thus, LS is “*only-language classes to language-and life classes*” and proposes *life-and language classes*” (Pishghadam, & Naji, 2012: 43).

Previously, as explained earlier, ELT exported theories and concepts from sociology and psychology but now it is in reverse direction because ELT is playing a contributory role in the other disciplines. The aim is to make other disciplines to take fresh look at ELT. Other disciplines are importing the concepts and notions from ELT, employing the findings and enriching their knowledge. It is ready to contribute to the fields e.g. psychology and sociology. For instance, in an ELT class Pishghadam, Khaza`ifar and Ziai finds that learners’ *critical thinking abilities* are augmented when they discussed in a foreign language. Critical thinking is a theory in psychology. The discipline of psychology can also enrich itself by importing findings of the study of Hosseini, Pishghadam and Navari (2010) who study *emotional intelligence competencies* in an ELT class. Their findings suggest that “language learning classes have the ability to help individuals overcome their anxiety, manage their stress, and foster interpersonal competencies” (Hosseini, Pishghadam and Navari, 2010: 12). The work in the field of ELT/SLA successfully confirms that ELT scholars and teachers “manipulated the classroom procedures could reinforce learners’ critical thinking, as well as their emotional and intellectual competencies” (Pishghadam, Zabihi, 2012). The discipline of psychology and neurology can improve their theories by importing findings and methods from ELT for further study that how ELT reading materials endorse and develop *critical thinking abilities* of learners or enhance *emotional intelligence competencies*.

In the ELT class, the pair and group work provides the more platforms for interaction and exchange that “help the dynamicity of the class, enhancing different communicative abilities in students” (Pishghadam, 2011: 12). Simultaneously learner gets more chances to be familiarised with the other languages and cultures (Pishghadam, 2011). Such ideas ELT can export to the study of sociology and socio-cultural study.

Being the English language learners, the students are bi/multilingual and hold command on their own and international language. As English is the lingua franca English learner is more at ease to travel and communicate with ease thus ELT enables the literacy in the lingua franca and provides facilities to the learners of all fields of knowledge and cultures (Pishghadam, 2011). Apart from that the understanding in the various grammars of different languages, culture and social settings enhance learners' understanding and they feel more freedom of expression and successfully establish their own identity (Vygotsky, 1978 & Pishghadam, 2011).

ELT stretched further its wings and formed its independent scientific theoretical foundations (Pishghadam, 2011). In recent years ELT is working on scientific way by getting help from computer and technology. It is another sign of independency that has initiated new theories exporting new angle in scientific technology to invent new software and improve teaching technology in the light of latest ELT concepts. Thus, ELT is ready and exporting new ideas to assist IT discipline for further improvement in its inventions.

The findings of Pishghadam and Navari, (2009) and Pishghadam and Saboori (2011) revealed that positive attitudes of ELT teachers towards other culture can alienate students from their culture. These findings contradict Bakhtinian socio-culture theory in sociology which is stated that it is not necessary that when two cultures come together, both cultures are enriched. The advance research of Pishghadam et al (2011 & 2009) proves that "English language teachers can enrich or derich learners' home culture" (Pishghadam, 2011: 12). Through comparing the different cultures ELT teacher can foster national identity of learners (Pishghadam et al 2011 & 2009). ELT teachers are including materials from local culture to promote home culture as well as acknowledgement for other cultures.

The newly invented theory of Globalization is introducing the multiple dimensions of acceptance of other cultures and languages. The dimension of "globalization identify three broad types: economic, political, and cultural dimensions" (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012: 35). The globalization theory is "a mask of policy aiming to universalize particular interests of the economically and politically dominant powers and to extend to the entire world the economic and cultural model that favors these powers" (Bourdieu (2001: 84). English is playing a main role in the globalization. This is a mode of imposing imperialism through language (i.e. English) (Mesthrie &

Bhatt, 2008, Pennycook, 2007, &, Bourdieu, 2001, Crystal, 1997). There are evidences that English countries America and England are imposing their culture and policies to non-English countries. “A dominant explanation for the global spread of English, especially through ELT practices, is that it is a direct continuation of the imperialist or hegemonic practices and a form of neocolonialism; hence the term English linguistic imperialism has come into being” (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012: 38). Hence as stated by Phillipson (2009: 20 in Pishghadam & Naji, 2012) “English is projected for bringing “success, influence, consumerism and hedonism”.

Applied ELT also presents the solution to linguistic imperialism by recognizing the English spoken in variety of accents in the non-English countries. Kachru (1982) contributed in ELT to play the vital role in breaking the linguistic imperialism by introduced theory of *world English theory*. Kachruvian theory draws attention to other varieties of English languages spoken in non-English and calls it *world English*. This theory legitimizes the role of English language in non-English countries which has amended and developed local structural features, lexis, phonology, and discourse practices in English language (Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008). Thus, ELT theory of *World English* successfully breaks the cultural inequalities between English and other languages and cracked the linguistic imperialism (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012: 36). The concept of national and cultural identity in an ELT class is the example of awareness of linguistic imperialism (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012). ELT teachers can play pivot role if they smell the potential threats of linguistic imperialism. To thwart such attempt, they can choose local material for ELT classes and help learners to have their national identity and culture (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012: 36). This theory is imported in many disciplines for national and cultural identity.

The above examples prove that in past more than half a century, ELT snatched its autonomy from dominance of theoretical linguistics and applied linguistics, sufficiently enrich itself with the help of findings of other fields of study including, psychology, sociology, neurology, computer, etc. It has tremendously innovated and invented new learning and teaching theories and emerging as a scientific study of learning teaching language (Pishghadam, 2011). Now “ELT has grown in maturity over years, establishing an independent identity for itself. It does not play second fiddle to applied linguistics any more” (Pishghadam, 2011: 9). Applied ELT is eligible to introduce new theories and approaches that smooth the second language learning and teaching. “Thus, due to its rich literature and

interdisciplinary nature, it is fair to say that ELT has now gained scientific acceptability, forming its theoretical background, ready to be applied to other fields” (Pishghadam, 2011:9) Following the linguistic knowledge language teaching, ELT is intensified and systematic and organised based on the factual issues to solve the learning problems. Therefore, it has the potential to owe an independent identity as well as ready to be applied to other fields (Pishghadam, 2011).

Conclusion

The above discussion deemed to evaluate and support applied ELT theory. ELT have travelled on a long road along with linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. It has enriched theoretical foundations of ELT and it has gradually achieved an autonomous status and, individual identity. The novel and innovative ELT approach and scientific methods and tasks helped scholars to introduce new theories. This struggle paced ELT towards independency and it has found firm theoretical foundations and it is now ready to contribute to other disciplines (Pishghadam, 2011). ELT scholars are innovating new theories and simultaneously opening new horizons for advancement in its methods and approaches. Now it is a full-fledged independent discipline of knowledge and ready to export and contribute its theories to other disciplines of knowledge.

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