



Colloquium: From Doon Schools to Doom Schools: Rethinking English in a Multilingual Education Framework

Speaker:
Ajith K. Mohanthy

Date / Time:
October 24, 2013 - 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Venue:
10th Floor, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

Abstract:

The role of English in India is examined in the framework of the Double Divide and the vicious cycle of disadvantage in the hierarchical positioning of languages in Indian multilingualism. The societal linguistic hierarchy — the elitist and privileged position of English, the relative advantages of the vernaculars and the dominated and disadvantaged status of the indigenous tribal minority (ITM) languages — is directly related to the manner in which public and private schools are socially situated. Increasing demand for English medium schooling and mushrooming growth of private schools catering to such demands have resulted in a new form of caste system in India in which the national system of school education, with diverse modes of placement of English in the school programmes across different socio-economic strata, accords special privileged status and power to some and discriminates against many. Our research on English language teaching (ELT) practices in schools and classroom teaching of English in different types of schools in India in diverse contexts are discussed to reflect on the strategies for negotiation of the sociolinguistic Double Divide and to show some implications. It is suggested that the role of English and ELT in India need to be grounded in its multilingual reality. Rationale for a multilingual education (MLE) framework for teaching of English and the research evidence for later placement of English in the school programme are discussed. It is argued that while quality teaching of English is necessary in Indian schools, it needs to be founded on a strong development of mother tongue for additive multilingual proficiency. Theoretical and empirical supports for grounding ELT in the MLE framework and some recent experiments on MLE for the tribal mother tongue children in India are discussed to demonstrate some benefits of this approach.

A Note on the Speaker:

Ajit Mohanty, Ph. D. (Alberta), retired in 2011 as Professor of Psychology (and former Chairperson) in Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi after serving in different Universities as a Professor of Psychology for 28 years. He

became a Professor in the year 1983 when he was 37. He has over 140 publications, including 7 books, in the areas of psycholinguistics, multilingualism and multilingual education focusing on education, poverty and disadvantage among linguistic minorities. He was a Professor and Chairperson at the Centre of Advanced Study in Psychology, Utkal University and President of the National Academy of Psychology, India (1997). During 2007-2008 he was a Fulbright Visiting Professor in Columbia University, New York. Earlier he was a Fulbright Senior Scholar (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Killam Scholar (University of Alberta), and Senior Fellow (Central Institute of Indian Languages). Besides, he has been a Visiting Scholar in the Universities of Geneva, Chicago, Toronto, Malaysia, Hamburg, South Australia, Long Beach, California, Western Ontario, Georgia, Michigan and several other international institutions. His recent book *Multilingual Education for Social Justice* (Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas: editors) is published by Orient Blackswan with a special international edition by *Multilingual Matters*, UK and also a Turkish translation. His other books include *Bilingualism in a Multilingual Society*, *Psychology of Poverty and Disadvantage* and *Perspectives on Indigenous Psychology*. He has written the chapters on *Language Acquisition and Bilingualism in the Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (second edition) and on *Multilingual Education in India* in the *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* and also in the *Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. He is a writer, an essayist in Odia and now, writes a weekly column for an Odia daily, *Pameya*. The latest volume of the *Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, 2013 published by Blackwell carries a Biographical entry on Professor Ajit Mohanty for his eminent contributions to the field of Applied Educational Linguistics. He is in the Editorial Boards of several international Journals including *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *Language Policy* and *Psychological Studies*. Professor Mohanty has been an Invited Keynote Speaker in a number of National and International Conferences including *International Congress of Applied Psychology*, *International Congress of Psychology*, *Latin American International Congress of Bilingualism*, *International Association of Multilingualism and Third Language Acquisition*, *South African Applied Linguistics Association*, *International Conference on Multilingualism* and *Cornell Conference on Language and Poverty*. He was invited by the British Council to address its *International Language and Development Conference* in South Africa in October this year.. He has been an International Consultant to Governments of Finland and Nepal for *Developing Multilingual Education Policy and Strategy for Nepal*. Professor Mohanty headed a team to draft the recent *Policy for Mother Tongue based education of the tribal children in Odisha*. He has been conferred honorary Fellowship of the National Academy of Psychology, India and Association of Psychological Science, USA “in recognition of (his) sustained outstanding contributions to advancement of psychological science”. He has just completed his tenure as an ICSSR National Fellow and is the founder Director and now the Chief Adviser of two International Projects *From Mother Tongue to Other Tongue (MLE+)* and the *National Multilingual Education Resource Consortium* (www.nmrc-jnu.org) at JNU.