

Context behind Implementation of English Language Teaching from the First Standard in Non-English Medium Schools in Karnataka

Dr. Sharanappagouda Patil

Assistant Professor of English

Government First Grade College, Hungund-587118

Dist: Bagalkot State: Karnataka State

English language teaching in India has witnessed different changes in policy decisions, shifts in perspectives, curriculum development, and reforms in testing and assessment to keep abreast of the changing perspectives of the central government and more specifically state government. There is unanimity among the states on teaching English. The level at which it has to be introduced has now become a matter of appealing to the populist ideas and aspirations. This is particularly true of Karnataka.

English language in India is no longer just spoken by elite in the cities, but is used extensively by the masses for educational, business and various other purposes. This has resulted in an extensive public demand for a more rigorous introduction of the teaching of English language within the school education system. As a result, many state Governments like the governments of Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal and Assam have introduced English at the lower primary schools. The Government of Karnataka favoured an early introduction of English language in schools under the pressure from the public, political parties, parents and other stakeholders. It initiated a policy in October-November 2006, announcing the introduction of English from the academic year 2007-08 from classes I to IV at the same time. A six month period was made available to make adequate preparations. After collecting the opinions of majority of the teachers in two years, the State Government revised the first and the second standard resource books in the year 2009-10.

The early introduction of English, while perceived as essential, is also problem ridden. This is because, in many parts of the country the way English is taught or learnt cannot fulfill the variety of demands made on it. In other words, there is a gap between the way English is taught in the classroom and the way it needs to be taught. There is no link between pre-service trainings (D.Ed. and B.Ed.) and in-service trainings. Methodology of teaching language in D.Ed. is different from the present practices in the classroom. The Government of Karnataka has given the in-service trainings for the teachers in the four phases with regard to teaching English from the first standard. Here, my intention is to see the impact of the training in the English classrooms. Behind this policy, there is a social aspiration. This issue has been linked with development, aspirations of castes and communities especially Dalits. The Government argued

that the implementation is essential for the bright future of the downtrodden and rural learners. So, here, I try to examine whether this social aspiration is being fulfilled or not, whether our classroom environment is co-operative or not to fulfill this aspiration. Therefore, an attempt has been made to see how English is being taught in primary schools in Karnataka.

Here, I try to contextualize the implementation of teaching of English from first standard in Karnataka. A major debate was carried out in the Kannada public sphere from the period starting from 2005 till the implementation of the policy of English language teaching from the first standard in 2007 whether the English should be taught from the first standard in Kannada medium schools or not; and this forms the content of the second chapter. Here, I have not covered the debate on the issue of medium of instruction. So many studies have taken up this issue. My consideration here is related only to 'teaching English as a second language in non-English medium schools'.

Our language policy, if there is one, seems to be at the crossroads today. For over 30 years the every government have neither shown the will to resolve the issue nor is there any indication of an understanding of the enormity of the problem. The coalition Ministry (headed by Kumaraswamy) implemented English language teaching from the first standard. At that time the debate in Kannada public sphere was so charged up that it was almost difficult to reach a healthy settlement through negotiation, as one of the educationists says so:

A multilingual country can have more language problems than linguistic theories can cope with. All the same, given the political history of this country, the dual language situation in individual's life, as it has been in the national life- one for emotional use and another for acquiring knowledge- is not a strange phenomenon. Our sociology is such that we were already linguistically oriented to this kind of dual situation. Human mind is multilingual. What is happening in Karnataka is therefore not just Kannada v/s English as it might have been interpreted at certain level in the press, but it is regional languages v/s English. There is a lot of difference between learning English as language and adopting it as medium of instruction. There seems to be an uncanny mix up between the two here. And because of this confusion perhaps a myth has been created which illogically links learning of English with the 'medium of instruction' (Raghunath, 2006: 01-02).

When some people succeeded to link the issue with the social uplift of the downtrodden castes, then, the condition became such that it became difficult for anybody to oppose the policy as there was a danger of treating their stance as anti-Dalit. In this debate also we can see that some intellectuals changed their opinion as the demand from the backward classes became thick. Some of those who changed their opinion were Dr. Chandrashekhara Kambar, Hampana, Patil Puttappa, Vatal Nagaraj, Kannada Development Board President Siddalingayya and even Kannada Organizations like Kannada Rakshana Vedike. Then, the question of learning English language

became the question of political and social justice. In this confused stage, there the people lost their patience in listening to the arguments.

1

In the first section, I examine the reasons that led to the implementation of English language teaching from the first standard in non-English medium schools in Karnataka. There is a growing interest in the teaching of English to young children in the age group of 5-12 years, from the first standard, because more parents have come to perceive the importance of teaching English to their children from an early age. Secondly, there is also a new awareness among the teachers, teacher-educators and syllabus makers that teaching English from the first standard is not just like any other work which foregoes the requirement of special skills, instead, a favourable and appropriate attitude, and aptitude to teach at this level is needed, as learners need special care and treatment. Therefore, the teacher's role at this stage is significant and it is one that is specialized. The above reasons may contribute towards a new thinking with reference to primary school education and the teaching of English which parents feel provides their children with a competitive educational advantage. Parents whether in rural areas or urban areas are keen on their children learning English right from the first standard, if not earlier. This trend is reflected in a large number of private schools that have sprung up offering English education.

2

After explaining the reasons that led to the implementation of the policy of teaching English from the first standard, I sketch the background context in which the policy was implemented. I also discuss how the question of learning English language becomes a question of political and social justice in this section. The Government of Karnataka stood in favour of implementation. After serious deliberations and meetings, the orders were issued on introducing English language from class-I from the academic year 2007-08.

'Gramarajya', an organization of intellectuals, at first submitted the requisition to the Government of Karnataka for implementing English from the first standard as part of uplift of rural and downtrodden children. Then, the Education Minister of Karnataka sent the requisition to the Government and put the proposal before the cabinet. The cabinet gave its approval for implementation of English language teaching from the first standard in Non-English medium schools. Immediately, the intellectuals of Kannada literature opposed the decision. So, the Government withdrew the decision and told that the matter would be considered for a thorough discussion. Then the intellectuals representing the Gramarajya organization got angry and issued a statement that "the most of the children who are learning in government rural schools are from the backward class and are downtrodden. The government had no concern for these people". Then, the question of learning English language became the question of political and social justice. Thus, the issue of teaching a language was thoroughly politicized. At that time, the academic year had begun. So, the Government told that the implementation can happen only

during the next academic year. Then, the government lost its power and the ball was in the court of the coalition government, which was at the helm of affairs at that time. The new government held the meeting on 5th July 2005 to discuss the implementation of English language teaching from the first standard in non-English medium schools. The meeting was attended by the representatives of various communities like litterateurs, intellectuals, farmers etc. They were convinced by the statistics which focused on the importance of English language and the demand of the stakeholders. Then the same statistics was also presented before the next meeting, held on 7th July 2005. In that meeting, the first resolution was passed on implementing English language from the first standard and the second resolution was taken on the expanding compulsory Kannada medium up to 7th standard. The Government pleaded before the press and media that the issues of medium of instruction and learning a language are two different issues. There is no correlation between the teaching English as a language and English as the medium of instruction and that there is no opposition for teaching English as a language (Nagabhushan, 2007).

3

After sketching the background of the implementation of the order to teach English, I would like to discuss the Government's orders and references to this issue in detail. The decision of the Government of Karnataka to introduce English from Class I to IV for the academic session 2007-08, is a result of serious deliberations and studies conducted in this area. The following are some of the reasons that have necessitated such a decision: Research findings in the field have shown that there is a need for developing communication skills in different languages in the context of a global scenario.

- A survey conducted by the Regional Institute of English, South India, Bangalore on the status of English Language Education and on the opinion of parents, teachers, educationists and community members has revealed that there is a clear demand from everyone to introduce English as a language at a very early stage. It captured the attention of the people regarding instruction of English language and the readiness of the teachers to teach English from class I. 98% of the sample population favoured learning English language from class I. All the teachers in the sample population were in favour of English language teaching and were confident of teaching English with the support from the education department. In addition to this, the National Knowledge Commission has also come to a conclusion that an understanding of and a command over English language, is perhaps the most important determinant of access to higher education, and that it increases employment possibilities and is responsible for upward social mobility. The Commission believes that English needs to be taught in schools, for in twelve years of school education, the knowledge of English will provide the school leavers far more equal access to higher education and employment opportunities.

- Linguistic studies have supported the view that learning any language is well accomplished if it is introduced at a very early stage, and that it instills confidence in children and guardians. These studies have also shown that children learn a language naturally and sub-consciously and develop the ability to communicate in the language.
- An early introduction of English will give an additional four years of exposure to the language. This equips the children with higher academic skills besides communication skills (DSERT, 2009: 04).

The Government of Karnataka after taking into consideration the public demand, and on the basis of above reasons had introduced the study of English as a second language from the first standard for non-English medium schools and the study of Kannada language for English and Non-Kannada medium schools compulsory from the academic year 2007-08. Before executing the order, the Government of Karnataka gave four references to its proceedings in Annexure-3. Those are:

1. Govt. Order No: Ed 28 PGC 94, dated 29.04.1994
2. The Main Circuit Bench under section 7 of the Karnataka High Court Act: Order in W.P. No. 14363/1994, dated 19.09.1994
3. Govt. Order .No: Ed:44, PGC 2002, dated 30.05.2002
4. A Report on 'Education and Medium of Instruction' (Shikshana Mattu Madhyama- Neeti Nirupana Varadi) by Kannada Development Board, January 2001

The first reference, Govt. Order No: Ed 28 PGC 94, dated 29.04.1994 has two parts. The first part directs the medium of instruction and the second one focuses on the learning of languages at the primary level. It directs that Kannada language should be made an optional subject for non-Kannada medium students and English should be taught compulsorily as second language for all students irrespective of their medium.

The second reference i.e., The Main Circuit Bench under section 7 of the Karnataka High Court Act: Order in W.P. No. 14363/1994, dated 19.09.1994 focuses on the power of the state to prescribe the mother tongue to be the medium of instruction from standard I to IV, which according to the petitioners, would infringe directly the fundamental rights of the child, citizens and the parental right to choose the mode of education of their children under Article 29(2) of the constitution. The Supreme Court has observed in the case of "Sahyadri Education Trust V/s State of Karnataka"- ILR 1988(3) KAR 2188: "Since education is in the concurrent list we feel that it is appropriate to hear from the Central Government on the questions involved in this case. The Central Government shall be impleaded as a respondent in all these cases". Till now, the Division Bench of the High Court hasn't given its verdict with regard to the above cited case. But, the concern is with the problem of medium of instruction, not with the teaching of languages.

As per the third reference, Government Order No. Ed: 44, PGC 2002, dated 30.05.2002 which distinguishes the educational stages, i.e., lower primary education includes 1 to 5 standards instead of 1 to 4. So, the first and second languages should be introduced from Lower Primary Schools.

According to the fourth reference, that is a report of Kannada Development Board- January, 2001 on *Shikhana mattu Madhyama: Niti Nirupana Varadi (Education and Medium of Instruction)*, known as the 'Report of Baraguru Ramachandrappa'¹, as per the 4th and 5th recommendations (Page No.16 and 18): 1. Second language should be introduced from the third standard; and 2. Introducing Kannada as a second language for the Non-Kannada medium schools should be made compulsory. The report substantiates the recommendations thus:

[it] is based on the verdict of the High Court, dated 25.01.1989. The teaching of English as a second language should be implemented compulsorily from the third standard for Kannada medium schools. But, it should be taught in a flexible way like the teaching of mother tongue of a learner. The learner must receive it in a sub-conscious way. More importance should be given to speaking and other communicative skills (Baraguru, 2001: 16-18).

Apart from these, the Government of Karnataka considered the points which I mention below:

- Representatives of the both legislative houses agreed to teach English as a second language from the first standard
- Department of Public Instruction has also agreed and highlighted the importance and necessity of English language teaching from the Class I, as a second language
- Neighbouring states have already implemented the English language teaching from the class I, as a second language
- On July 7th of 2005, the meeting chaired by the Chief Minister took the decision to implement teaching of English from the Class I, as a second language. The decision was taken after the discussion with the representatives of all communities, farmers, rural parents, educationists, journalists and social reformers.
- NCERT published 'National Curriculum Framework-2005'. The report states the following:

The multilingual character of Indian society should be seen as a resource to promote multilingual proficiency in every child, which includes proficiency in English. In its 3.13 part, Second Language Acquisition- English in India is a

¹ Baraguru Ramachandrappa is a well known Kannada writer. He was the chair person of the Kannada Abhivruddhi Pradhikara during this time, and the report submitted by him to the Government of Karnataka on the issue of language learning in school is known as Baraguru Report.

global language in a multilingual country. A variety and range of English teaching situations prevail here owing to the twin-factors of teacher proficiency in English and pupils' exposure to English outside school. The level of introduction English is now a matter of political response to people's aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue and people's choices about the level of its introduction in the curriculum will have to be respected with the provision that we do not extend downwards the very system that has failed to deliver. The goals for a second language curriculum are two fold: attainment of a basic proficiency, such as, it is acquired in natural language learning and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy. This argues for an across-the-curriculum approach that breaks down the barriers between English and other subjects and English and other Indian languages. At the initial stages, English may be one of the languages for learning activities that create the child's awareness of the world...There must be a creative and concreted effort to maintain the multilingual genius of Indians and implement the tree-language formula. While English may be taught during this period, it must not be at the expense of learning Indian languages (as cited in the order GoK, 2006).

Considering the above cited points, the Government of Karnataka passed an order No: Ed 37 PGC 2003, dated 20.10.2006 about implementation of English language teaching from the first standard from 2007-08 academic year. According to its directions:

- English language should be taught as a second language from the first standard for Kannada and other Minority language medium schools. There is no examination for this language in the first and second standards. Examinations should be conducted from the third standard.
- Kannada language should be taught as a compulsory subject from the first standard in Non-Kannada medium schools like Tamil, Urdu, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi and Urdu medium schools which are following state syllabus.
- Kannada language should be taught as a compulsory subject from the first standard in English medium schools which are following state syllabus

After examining the public demand the Government of Karnataka has introduced teaching of English as a second language from class I from the academic year 2007-08. Consequent to the issue of the Government Order, a Committee of English Language Teaching experts headed by Dr. N.S. Prabhu was constituted. This committee prepared a detailed curriculum and prepared a Resource Book for teachers and Activity Book for pupils.

Thus, the Government of Karnataka favoured an early introduction of English in schools under the pressure from political parties, the public, parents and other stakeholders. It initiated the policy in October-November 2006, announcing the introduction of English from the academic year 2007-08 from classes I to IV simultaneously. A six month period was made available to make adequate preparations. After collecting the opinions of majority of teachers in two years the state government has revised the first and second standard text books in the year 2009-10.

References

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