

Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language

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Paper 12

The discourse of 'English as a language for international development':
Policy assumptions and practical challenges

by Philip Seargeant and Elizabeth J. Erling

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The discourse of ‘English as a language for international development’: Policy assumptions and practical challenges¹

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Introduction: English and international development

With English increasingly being positioned as the pre-eminent language of international communication, this chapter examines the ways in which language education policies in developmental contexts are responding to this trend and promoting English as a vital element in the skill-set necessary for successful participation in 21st century society.¹ The chapter looks at the ways in which English is conceptualised, in terms of its form and function and in policy documents, and analyses the assumptions that are encoded in such policies as they relate to the role and status of English in the world today. Drawing on policies related to the ‘English in Action’ project that is currently active in Bangladesh, the chapter explores the language ideologies that create the concept of ‘English as a language for international development’ and uses this analysis as a means of addressing the question of what sort of contribution English language education can productively make to development agendas.

While educational opportunity and literacy have long been key elements in programmes committed to human development (e.g. Street 2001, UNESCO 2005), the increased status of English within a global economy of languages has meant that English language education has also begun to be promoted as an important factor in international development programmes.² Indeed, Bruthiaux (2002:289) contends that development efforts have now become ‘inextricably linked in governmental and academic circles as well as in the media with English language education’. In recent works exploring the relationship between development and language education, development is defined as the process of reducing poverty while also expanding people’s choices, with its ultimate aim being to increase participants’ control over their own development (see Bruthiaux 2000, Markee 2002, Sen 2001). In this literature, there is a growing recognition of the role that language education can play in helping people gain the resources to lift themselves

out of poverty and increase their ability to participate in world economic systems from which they have previously been excluded. Given the current status of English as the pre-eminent global language, much of this stress on language education becomes, in fact, a stress on English language education.

An example of this trend can be seen in the ‘English Language Teaching Improvement Project’ (ELTIP) funded by the UK government’s Department for International Development (DfID) between 1997 and 2008, which had as its rationale the desire ‘to strengthen the human resource development efforts of the Government of Bangladesh’ (NCTB 2003, Hamid and Baldauf 2008:16) and ‘to develop Bangladeshi human capital’ (Hamid 2009) by introducing communicative language teaching for English in Bangladeshi schools. In 2008, DfID approved GBP50 million (USD81.4 million) for a follow-up programme entitled ‘English in Action’ (EIA), which was designed to ‘significantly increase English language skills for 27 million people in Bangladesh’ (Alexander 2008). Similar ideas lie behind the British Council’s ‘Project English’ in India and Sri Lanka, which was launched in 2007 with the aim of implementing English language development initiatives to train 750,000 English teachers in the two countries. The project rationale reads as follows:

High proficiency in English is seen to be essential for socio-economic development in India and Sri Lanka ... The impact of globalisation and economic development has made English the ‘language of opportunity’ and a vital means of improving prospects for well-paid employment. (Project English 2009)

Initiatives such as EIA and ‘Project English’ are wholly structured around the conviction that English language education can play a valuable role in human development. This rationale is clearly articulated both in the above quote from ‘Project English’, and in EIA’s project goal, which is ‘to contribute to the economic growth of Bangladesh by providing English language as a tool for better access to the world economy’ (EIA 2010). The precise nature of this conviction appears to be that English language education will provide skills which will allow both individuals and institutions to engage actively with the type of contemporary society which is emerging in this current era of globalisation. In other words, English language skills are seen as a resource which will allow for participation in the financial, political and knowledge economies which, today, are increasingly being conducted at a global level, and which therefore rely on modes of international communication. With the impact of globalisation likely to be felt in the organisation of the economy and of employment in almost any context – from the international to the local – having access to the resources which operate as a medium for these forces of globalisation will, it is supposed, prevent local communities from being excluded from the global distribution of wealth and welfare. It is this basic rationale which leads to our contention that there now exists, in programmes such as those cited above, an emergent ideology of ‘English as a language for international development’.

A further contention which operates as a starting point for our discussion in this chapter, however, is that such a conceptualisation of the English language is often presented as a set of uncontroversial and mostly implicit assumptions around which the details of a language education policy are then constructed. That is to say, it

often appears to be taken as self-evident in the broad discourse of English as a global language that English ability is equated in some (often undefined) way with economic or social development, and this axiomatic starting point then becomes a determining factor in the structuring of policy proposals. Language policies which draw upon this discourse then have real-world consequences for social practice, as these initial beliefs about the language are transferred into large-scale educational projects such as 'English in Action'. Furthermore, the influence of the presuppositions about English which structure policy can affect the pedagogical approach adopted in language education projects, as well as the success of their implementation and the processes used for their evaluation. One possible danger resulting from this is that policies which do not attempt to take specific account of the sociolinguistic realities that appertain to English use in the societies in which they apply, and are instead structured predominantly around the broad trends of the overarching discourse of 'English as a language for international development', will be less likely to achieve positive outcomes.

Following from these contentions, the intention of this chapter is to open up a space in which the above issues can be examined. To this end, the chapter will interrogate the fundamental assumptions around which the concept of the language is constructed in policies of this sort, and make explicit what it is that English is being promoted as being able to achieve in developmental contexts. The chapter will draw upon the EIA project in Bangladesh as an exemplar of this discourse in action, and will analyse the proposals and policy documents which have structured the early development and first stages of the operationalisation of this programme, with the aim being to identify the particular characters, natures or functions which are associated with the concept of English in the discourse of English as a language for international development. The chapter will also contextualise this example with a survey of the recent scholarship on language education and international development programmes, which is beginning to build a body of empirical data on many of the issues related to this subject. It is hoped that this discursive examination of the policy assumptions and practical challenges will offer a context from which scholarship in the area can go on to address the question of how language policies can best contribute to successful and sustainable development and thereby help to reduce poverty and to increase people's control over their lives.

Concepts of English

There is now an established discourse, both in the popular imagination and in academic research, of English as a 'global language' – of English being the pre-eminent language for international communication and thus an important, if not vital, element in the skill-set necessary for successful participation in 21st century society (e.g. Crystal 2003). This discourse is reflected in policy statements in various contexts and countries, where it often becomes a determining factor in proposals for the structuring of (second/foreign) language education (Erling and Hilgendorf 2006, Seargeant 2008). In academia, the spread of English, along with the promotion of the virtues of English language skills for participation in globalised society, has been documented and debated for several decades now, and the study of world Englishes has become an established sub-discipline within

applied linguistics (Bolton 2005). Within the broader discourse of English as a global language, several more specific associations have been made, such as those that characterise English as the language of international commerce, of science, of technological advancement, and of human rights (see, for example, Ammon 2001, Toolan 2003, Graddol 2006 for a discussion and critique of some of these characterisations). Our contention is that a similar formulation, that of 'English as a language for international development', is emerging in the thinking and practices of academic, educational and political institutions.

When cited as a rationale for the promotion of the language in education policy, all such formulations are built on a mixture of assumptions and observations about the status and function of the language within the world system, and about the affordances that communication skills in English allow within globalised societies. What is apparent in all these formulations therefore is that it is not English in the abstract that is seen to be of benefit; rather it is English as it actually and notionally operates in contemporary global society. In other words, what is being promoted is a very specific, modern idea of English: an English that is understood to offer access to opportunity and information due to its status and role within the current world system. In a discussion of 'language ideology' theory (which examines the entrenched beliefs that groups have towards language and linguistic behaviour), Woolard (1998:3) notes that beliefs about a particular language are rarely about that language alone, but are about the associations between the language and other social dynamics. She writes: 'ideologies of language ... envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology'. In the case of the English that is advanced as a valuable resource for international development, the associations being made are the perceived benefits to which the language can provide access because of its global status.

The identification, therefore, of a specific trend which we have labelled 'English as a language for international development' (ELfID) does not refer to the emergence of a distinct variety or register of English. Rather, it is the identification of a particular concept of the language which is emergent in language policies and proposals related to development contexts, and which is embedded within the politics of globalisation. In other words, policies and projects such as 'English in Action' both react and contribute to a discourse of ELfID which is born from beliefs about the status and affordances of English within globalised societies, and which has been adapted to the goals of international development.

An analysis of ideologies of English in documents related to a language development project such as 'English in Action' can, therefore, reveal the underlying beliefs about the status and affordances of English – i.e. the beliefs which suggest that such a project is both necessary and possible. By making these beliefs and assumptions explicit, it should then be possible to interrogate the extent to which they correlate with the actuality of educational practice and lived experience.

In practical terms, the examination of these ideologies involves identifying the conceptualisations of language which create a meaningful context for a project such as 'English in Action'. These conceptualisations often operate as the 'taken-for-granted' context against which the details of the policy and its rationale are

articulated. The analysis is thus looking for premises upon which arguments are based, or for associations between the language and other social concepts which need not be expressed in explicit terms because the audience to which they are addressed is already likely to be familiar with the significance of their juxtaposition. By carrying out an interpretive analysis of key policy texts which is committed to identifying the patterning of these assumptions it will therefore be possible to explore the language ideologies that create the concept of ELfID. The claims and assumptions which constitute these ideologies can then be contextualised by means of a review of recent studies which have provided empirical findings related to the individual assumptions found within the discourse; and policy statements and actual practice can be compared for the purposes of drawing together a general picture of the various issues confronting the successful promotion and implementation of programmes structured around the use of English as a language for international development.

‘English in Action’

Before moving to an analysis of the patterns of key assumptions and associations which constitute the discourse of ELfID, it is first worth providing some contextual background for the ‘English in Action’ (EIA) project, and the proposals and policies associated with it, as this will be used as the primary source of examples for the discussion. The context in terms of current educational practices and prior policy initiatives has been a shaping factor on the initiatives undertaken by EIA, and some knowledge of it will help explain aspects of the project’s ambitions.

EIA is a nine-year English language development programme in Bangladesh, funded by the UK government’s Department for International Development. The EIA consortium consists of five partners: BMB Mott MacDonald (the Netherlands), the Open University (UK), BBC WST (UK), the Unprivileged Children’s Educational Programme (Bangladesh) and Friends in Village Development (Bangladesh). The team is composed of national and international teacher trainers, researchers and materials developers. The pilot phase began in 2008, and the programme is scheduled to run until 2017.

The stated purpose of the programme is ‘to significantly increase the number of people able to communicate in English to levels that will enable them to participate fully in economic and social activities and opportunities’ (EIA 2009c).³ In this respect, it is a follow-up to the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) sponsored by DfID and the Government of Bangladesh which ran from 1997 to 2008, and which had as its aim the introduction of a communicative language-teaching approach to English as part of the national curriculum for English. During the period in which it was active, ELTIP succeeded in introducing a textbook series entitled *English for Today*, and in providing participatory-based training to several thousand secondary teachers throughout the country (NCTB 2003). However, Hamid and Baldauf (2008:17) argue that since these teachers continued teaching in the ‘same classrooms, surrounded by the same external socio-economic and political realities, with the same learners, and the same generally inadequate facilities’, this has meant that ‘there is little evidence to suggest that the policy brought about any significant changes in the teaching practice’. There is also no sign that the changes resulted in children being better able to communicate in

English. Baseline studies undertaken during the initial phases of EIA found little evidence of English language progression through primary and secondary school, and concluded that the majority of students remain at the most basic ability levels year after year (EIA 2009a:2). While English continues to play an important gate-keeping role for access to higher education due to the fact that students must pass an exam in the subject to progress to tertiary education, this exam currently has the highest failure rate of all subjects (EIA 2009b:13).

Policy documentation for EIA recognises that the previous ELTIP programmes had 'insufficient impact' and stresses the need to address the problem 'at scale through a project that will have reach and impact and which for this reason warrants significant funding' (EIA 2008). The EIA project therefore intends not only to 'enhance and extend the necessary learning and teaching practices', but also to utilise a range of media technologies to help Bangladeshis 'overcome barriers to the effective use of communicative English' and 'increase motivation and access to appropriate resources' (EIA 2009a:5). This is being done, in part, by continuing to focus on formal English-language learning in both primary and secondary schools.

The history and sociolinguistic profile of Bangladesh, as documented by scholars such as Banu and Sussex (2001a), Hamid (2009), and Imam (2005), can help to explain the persistent low level of competence in English that is found in the country. After Partition in 1947, both Bangla and English were suppressed in favour of Urdu – this despite the fact that Bangla was the majority language in what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The vast majority of the population today are classified as speakers of the national language, Bangla (85 per cent according to Lewis 2009). According to the census of 1991 (cited in Hossain and Tollefson 2007:243), 60 language varieties are spoken in Bangladesh, many of which have a significant number of speakers (e.g. Chittagonian with 14 million and Sylheti with five million). These languages play an important role in society, particularly in rural areas and among Bangladesh's ethnic minorities.

After a long struggle for autonomy, part of which was motivated by the establishment of a Bengali⁴ Language Movement, Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971. During the first phases of the establishment of the nation, as part of an effort both to decolonise and to nation-build, the use of Bangla was extended to most nationally-regulated domains, including the education system, while the use of Urdu (which was rarely spoken by the Bangla-dominant population) and, to a great extent, English were suppressed. As a result, since 1971 there has been said to be a 'serious decline in the standard and status of English in Bangladesh', despite the expansion in the wider world of English linguistic globalisation (Banu and Sussex 2001a:131). Since the 1990s, however, there seems to have been a 'renewed awareness of the importance of English ... owing to globalisation, satellite television, the growth of the IT industry and the Bangladeshi garment industry' (Hamid 2009:31). Because Bangla is of such central importance to the cultural and political identity of the nation, however, there is a concomitant fear that English might function as 'a displacer of national tradition, an instrument of continuing imperialist intervention, [and] a fierce coloniser of every kind of identity' (Imam 2005:474). Imam (2005:482) further notes that '[in] the minds of most people, national identity and learning English are positioned as antagonistic, not complementary'.

It is due to this history of ambivalence to the English language that the EIA project has sought to offer not only formal but also informal means of English education and thus to reduce barriers to people's learning of the language. This is to be achieved by the provision of learning materials delivered via television, mobile telephones, and the internet. The project is also working with the Bangladeshi media to produce television programmes, cartoons and soap operas which will give people the opportunity to hear English in context (BBC 2009). In this way, the project focuses on the learning of English as a technical skill that will allow Bangladeshis to use the language for individual and social development purposes.

English language education and development: key assumptions

Having given the contextual background for the EIA project, we now turn to an examination of the assumptions that structure the discourse of English as a language for international development as it is articulated in this project and in the wider field of development policy. By means of an analysis of the EIA policy documents, as they act as exemplars of the public discourses surrounding the project, we can explore the various ideologies of English that EIA both relies upon and promotes, and, in this way, we can identify the key assumptions that adhere to the concept of the language in a developmental context of this sort. As well as identifying these assumptions, we will then cross-reference them with a survey of relevant research findings from the academic literature which can offer evidence for or against their validity.

Assumption 1: English as a global language

As noted above, the primary and most enduring context for the concept of ELfID – and the one which in many ways functions as a covering concept for all the others – consists of general assumptions about English in the world today, and specifically the perceived benefits to which it can provide access because of its status as a 'global' language. In this context, global language implies a language which is not exclusively associated with a particular country and culture (i.e. the UK, the USA, etc.), but is of value because of its usefulness internationally. And this becomes the immediate meaning-matrix in which the promotion of English as a language for international development makes sense. It is the taken-for-granted within which ELfID then excavates its own particular meaning.

This belief in global English is now mostly accepted as a 'done deal' or a 'mainstream feature of the 21st century' (Graddol 2006:22). Indeed, it is an attitude that is so entrenched in contemporary thinking and has become such a commonsensical notion that it is rarely stated explicitly in language policy documents. Instead, the collocation of 'English' and concepts such as 'world' or 'global' – as for example in the primary rationale given on the EIA website as providing 'English language as a tool for better access to the world economy' (EIA 2010) – relate the two implicitly. The collocation of concepts – of ideas of English and ideas about the era of globalisation – results in a complex sociolinguistic profile for English in the world which recent studies are beginning to survey (e.g. Blommaert 2010, Pennycook 2010). The rather simplistic notion of English being the international language, that is, a 'neutral' code allowing for communication

across linguistic and cultural borders, is being replaced by empirical and theoretical descriptions which survey the actuality of the uses and forms of, and beliefs about, the language in diverse world contexts. The findings from this research show that the emergence of English as the pre-eminent global language is not the end of the story for international communication problems, but in many ways a new beginning. Issues such as the unequal status of diverse varieties and differential access to linguistic resources in different contexts mean that even if global English is now a 'done deal' (i.e. the language is one which is popularly perceived as having a global status), we are still working our way through what, in practice, this entails for its users around the world.

What is of note in this respect in the EIA policy documents is that English is being promoted not predominantly for its affordances as an international *lingua franca*, but as a resource that will be of benefit at a specifically local level. The inaugural statement about the programme from the UK Secretary for International Development (Alexander 2008), for example, makes only one direct reference to the global status of the language, contending that the 'programme will also address a major skills gap in the Bangladesh workforce and will help the country become more competitive in both internal and international labour markets'. Other than this, he stresses the perceived local benefits of the programme and that it will 'make a valuable and lasting contribution to economic and social development in that country'. From this we may infer that the global status of the language is not solely a product of its role as a code for international communication, but that in addition it has functional and symbolic roles at a local level as a consequence of the ways in which the forces of globalisation are restructuring social relations at all levels. So, while some have argued that populations in development contexts require skills in the national or local languages if they wish to participate in the local economy, and that English is needed only for participation in the global economy (e.g. Bruthiaux 2002), this no longer necessarily appears to hold true, and the EIA policy reflects the expansion of the roles that English can now play in the linguistic repertoire of traditionally non-Anglophone countries. Banu and Sussex (2001b:61) argue that Bangladesh is indeed witnessing a wider embracing of English, and that there is a 'revival of English in [the country] as a language of international, and to some extent national, currency in business, education and culture'. The exact details of this expanded and multifaceted role can then be seen in the other assumptions which constitute the discourse.

Assumption 2: English and economic value

The second key context – and the one which is possibly the most salient in terms of the concerns traditionally addressed by development studies – is the association of English with economic development. Examples of the way that English is positioned in relation to economic issues can clearly be seen in the statement from the project's directors which contends that in Bangladesh 'the national bilingual deficit is regarded, both by government and development partners, as a constraint to economic development, and the English in Action project has been designed to address this constraint' (EIA 2008). A similar declaration is articulated in the ministerial statement, which says that 'The "English in Action" programme will contribute to improving economic growth and to increasing the quality of education

provision in Bangladesh' (Alexander 2008). In both these examples there is no actual explanation of why or how English language education should be able to assist with economic development, yet the project appears to be founded primarily on this basic assumption, and thus this operates as the primary presupposition for the policy.

The associations made with the language in these examples do, of course, draw upon an established relationship that exists in the contemporary imagination between language skills and economic value. This relationship has been the focus of theorising for a number of scholars in recent decades, who have gone so far as to adopt metaphors of economic enhancement for their discussions of linguistic social practice. Most salient of these is Bourdieu's notion of 'linguistic capital' (1991), and the suggestion that linguistic resources are differentially distributed among the members of society, and that possession of certain linguistic resources gives access to improved social opportunity which can, ultimately, be transferred into economic capital. Beliefs of this sort are also to be found reflected in the popular imagination. Recent research conducted in Bangladesh as part of the EIA programme, for example, claims that over 80 per cent of Bangladeshis believe that knowledge of English will help them increase their income (BBC 2009).

While primarily English-speaking countries are currently among the nations with the highest GDPs, this does not however necessarily mean that, in development contexts, there will be a direct correlation between the acquisition of English and economic advancement. In fact, Imam (2005:480) goes so far as to argue that it is 'unethical' to allow education to sustain the illusion of English as a tool of economic and social advancement. As she notes, 'by no means everyone who acquires English will join the local or global elite', and for this reason a simplistic formula which equates English competence with economic mobility can be perniciously misleading in terms of the false assumptions it promotes.

Given these concerns it can be instructive to examine the results of research which has attempted to investigate the correlations between English and economic value. Until recently there was little hard evidence linking the language to economic value. However, educational economists have of late been conducting research into this question in response to this widespread ideology. For example, Grin (2001) has found that in the Swiss labour market salary premiums rise along with competence in English, even when education and experience are controlled for. Kobayashi (2007) found that in Japan, while English does appear to provide access to enhanced economic and employment opportunities, it only does so within the pre-existing hierarchical social structure, so that certain groups, particularly women, have less access to such opportunity whatever the level of their English language competence. And in West Bengal, where English was removed from the primary school curriculum, Chakraborty and Kapur (2008:21) found that individuals who were more likely to have training in English earned significantly higher wages and gained better occupational outcomes than those who did not, even when the level of overall education was controlled for. Evidence of this sort is thus beginning to emerge that supports some sort of causal relationship between English and economic reward, yet in each case the pre-existing social environment, as it is composed of other significant variables, works to complexify any simplistic version

of this formula. So for the moment the association between English and economic value which operates at the ideological level in policy and popular belief in Bangladesh is yet to be backed by firm empirical evidence.

Another economic metaphor now used in the field of second language learning is the notion of 'investment', introduced in Norton Peirce (1995) and further developed in Norton (2000). This builds on Bourdieu's (1991) notion of cultural capital, and signals the idea that if learners invest in a second language (i.e. commit emotional, financial and intellectual resources to the learning process) they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Learners expect or hope to have a good return on that investment – a return that will give them access to hitherto unattainable resources (Norton 2000:10).

This aspect of the ideology of a relationship between English education and a long-term economic benefit results in patterns of social behaviour which, according to research in this area, can have ambivalent effects on communities. It is the expectation of a 'good return' on the education investment that leads parents who can afford it to enrol their children in English language classes outside the formal education system, as these tend to be perceived as offering a higher quality of teaching (or at least of exam preparation). This practice has become commonplace in many countries, including Bangladesh, and, as Chakraborty and Kapur (2008) note, it often results in a further widening of the gap between the elite and poor sections of the community. Hamid (2009) notes that it is particularly the rural poor, whose families cannot afford to make an optimal investment in education and who therefore lack access to basic educational resources such as books, who suffer particular disadvantage. Such disadvantage is often used as an argument for implementing English language courses from an early age for all children, sometimes even at the expense of the local language (see, for example, Chakraborty and Kapur 2008), despite research that suggests a correlation between mother tongue literacy and development (e.g. Trudell 2009).

The result of this core ideology about English and its perceived economic value, therefore, is a cycle of actions and counter-measures aimed at harnessing perceived (yet empirically unattested) economic benefits but which can also inadvertently create further inequality and cultural upheaval within communities. For this reason, a caveat needs to be appended to statements such as that from the ministerial announcement which reports that:

A recent Bangladesh Government report identified unemployment and growing income inequality as two major constraints which may prevent the country from achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals. 'English in Action' will be an important contribution in assisting Bangladesh to overcome such constraints and to improve the livelihoods of its people. (Alexander 2008)

The caveat would be that, according to studies of complementary communities, 'growing income inequality' can in fact result from the promotion of English as a tool for economic enhancement, and that, in reproducing this discourse, the programme needs to exhibit an awareness of the dynamics by which linguistic

capital is in actuality converted into economic capital within local social structures and the constraints they produce.

Assumption 3: English as a language for education

As well as assumptions about the economic value of English, further presuppositions about language that are frequently found in development projects relate to what Grin (2003:36) calls the 'non-market value' of English; that is, the social and cultural effects that are associated with the language. One prominent example found in the discourses of EIA is the assumption that an improvement in English language education will be closely tied to an improvement in the country's overall education system. In this vein, the ministerial statement asserts: 'The "English in Action" programme will contribute to improving economic growth and to increasing the quality of education provision in Bangladesh' (Alexander 2008). The suggestion that the project does not focus solely on the learning of English, but also on changing the pedagogy, as well as attitudes towards learning, is further implied in the title of the EIA brochure itself: 'Changing learning, changing lives' (EIA 2009c).

Again, a survey of recent research studies that have examined this relationship in other contexts can be insightful for identifying and evaluating the issues associated with this assumption. Several studies of language education in development contexts have shown that countries often opt for a strong role for English in the national curriculum because of societal attitudes that equate English with education (e.g. Tembe and Norton 2008, Williams and Cooke 2002). Hornberger (2002:38) suggests that, despite evidence that shows that basic education and literacy development is best approached by means of mother tongue instruction (e.g. Benson 2004), language educators and planners are simply not able to ignore the 'popular demand for the language of power'. Programmes like EIA which promote English as a language for international development are clearly responding to the symbolic functions, or 'non-market values', that English has for students, parents, teachers and government officials. However, any discourse that equates English with education in a rudimentary way may unintentionally marginalise the role of national and local languages in education, and perpetuate idealistic notions of English being the only rational choice for education and advancement. This may be especially problematic in contexts such as Bangladesh, where over half the population is illiterate and less than a quarter have completed five years of education (Hossain and Tollefson 2007:242).

Policies supporting the teaching of English as a means of educational enhancement are not solely based on societal beliefs about the power of English to transform people's lives, however, and there is some tangible evidence that knowledge of English can correlate with a better overall education in certain contexts (Grin 2001). Moreover, links between quality education and economic growth have been clearly established in some recent studies (Williams and Cooke 2002, Hanushek and Woessmann 2008, Little and Green 2009). From this evidence, therefore, one could argue that the prominent role assigned to quality English education in the education systems of developing countries is partially justified, though again context-specific factors need to be taken into account for each actual case. As was noted above, the promotion of ELfID is not about the adoption of an abstract and culturally-neutral code, but about the cultural associations and related practices

which adhere to the language in given contexts. Yet instead of drawing on the evidence that is emerging about the complex correlations between the English language, education and development, policies for ELfID tend to articulate a discourse composed of generic societal beliefs and commonsensical assumptions. One particular danger of this is that policy statements which simplistically equate effective education with English while overlooking or ignoring the importance of literacy development in national and local languages then run the risk of perpetuating the idea that people have to decide whether to invest in the national language or English. Indeed, some scholars believe that ‘donor agencies have been so concerned with supporting international languages that they have hampered educational development, destroyed local textbook production in indigenous languages and weakened local cultures’ (e.g. Brock-Utne 2000 cited in Crossley and Watson 2003:87). Other research (e.g. Rogers, Hunter and Uddin 2007) suggests, however, that if English language programmes were to build upon and complement successful literacy initiatives in the national language they would not necessarily present competition for the limited educational resources that exist, nor force people into choosing which of the languages is most likely to offer them the greatest opportunities. Strategies of this sort would therefore be more likely to result in empowering people by adding to their options of language use and supporting them to make their own choices – one of the central goals of development discussed above – instead of limiting these options.

Assumption 4: English as the language of technology

As well as being promoted as a key factor for economic competitiveness and educational advancement, English is also often framed within the discourse as a means of allowing access to technology, which in turn is seen as facilitating learning and supporting educational change. In this sense, the use of technology in such projects is viewed as a way to help reach the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (UN 2000) of universal primary education and of developing global partnerships that make available the benefits of new technologies.

A discourse that simultaneously promotes English and ICT education can be found in policy statements across the globe, and is not restricted to developing countries (see, for example, CJGTC 2000:4). In the case of EIA, however, the programme promotes access to technology as a means both of connecting people to the wider world, but also as a way of securing access to learning, especially in geographically remote areas. To this end the project is making use of mobile ICTs to reach teachers across the country, particularly those in rural areas who may have limited access to training centres, and also to increase these teachers’ opportunities to participate in professional development networks. In addition to this, the EIA project intends to take advantage of new developments in technology to change attitudes to both language learning and the use of ICTs, as the following policy statement records:

‘English in Action’ will make use of rapidly expanding mobile phone technology in Bangladesh. It will use television and radio to stimulate interest and debate, and to reach the maximum number of people with appropriate learning programmes.
(Alexander 2008)

Like many developing nations, the Government of Bangladesh is investing heavily in technological development, with strong arguments being made for the potential of a 'Digital Bangladesh' to transform society by 2021 (see Siddiqi 2009). The provision of ICTs in schools, and training in the use of them, is thus also seen as part of the way to provide people in remote areas with opportunities to access knowledge and education skills. In development contexts, this type of strategy is mostly viewed not as a luxury, but as part of any individual's freedom (Sen 2001). In fact, Castells (1999:4) argues that exclusion from these networks is one of the most damaging forms of exclusion, as he sees access to ICT as an 'essential tool for economic development'. By drawing on this discourse, therefore, projects such as EIA promote the idea that pragmatic competence in English is intimately linked with this access to technology.

Thus within the EIA project architecture, the concepts of English and technology, both of which are fundamental mediators and symbols of globalisation, are thoroughly intertwined, and, along with education, form a triad structuring the notion of successful participation in contemporary globalised society. As Graddol (2006:72) notes, information technology and English have become 'basic skills' in education globally; and along with literacy in the national language (and perhaps the mother tongue) and numeracy, they are now seen as 'generic skills [that are] needed to acquire new knowledge and specialist skills in the future'. Moreover, research suggests that access to technology has a particular appeal in development contexts where it 'holds the allure not only of improving education and economic competitiveness, but also of allowing a nation to leapfrog to modernity' (Warschauer 2004:378). And studies such as Mutonyi and Norton's (2007) investigation into the way that access to ICT has acted as a crucial means of education enhancement in Uganda, and Warschauer's (2004) examination of a USAID (United States Agency for International Development) project carried out in Egypt which sought to effect improvements in education, English language teaching provision and the dissemination of educational technology have shown the benefits of harnessing technology for development projects. In summary, therefore, while within the discourse of ELfID the frequent juxtaposition of technology with English likely results at least in part simply from the symbolic resonance they both have as mediators of globalisation (and thus as emblems of modernity), there does seem to be a relationship of co-occurrence that stems from the separate practical affordances they can both bring in contemporary society, though whether this extends to a causal relationship is again a question which requires more context-specific empirical enquiry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can ask how this analysis can contribute to productive and sustainable development. The purpose of the analysis has not been to suggest that improved education in English is in some sense incapable of supporting a country in its development aims or of achieving the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000; for a summary, see Appendix 3 at the end of this volume). Educational projects that endeavour to enhance the quality of and expand access to English language teaching so as to support economic development can very likely produce many positive results, and some of the research we have

surveyed demonstrates this. But in order to consider how English (and English language education) can contribute to international development through programmes such as EIA, it is necessary to explore the discourse that promotes English as a language for international development, and analyse the expectations and claims that are made about competence in the English language in the context of an increasingly globalised world. We can then investigate how these claims equate with the nuanced evidence that recent studies are providing about the correlations between situated language use, education, and development in contexts where these sort of development programmes are targeted.

The assumptions about English that have been identified in the initial policy documents for EIA point to several motivating factors behind the emergence of the ELfID discourse. Within the broader context of development studies, these assumptions marry well with the general aims of sustainable development which attempt to alleviate poverty and increase people's participation in world economic structures (cf. Sen 2001). Ultimately though, such aims can only be achieved if policy and planning are not structured primarily around a discourse that is influenced by abstract assumptions and received wisdom about the role that English plays in globalised societies, but instead draws on detailed studies of the affordances that actual English language use can achieve in specific contexts. Such studies present a complex range of what is, at times, contradictory evidence; this can be difficult for policy makers to negotiate. These studies often suggest that mother tongue-based instruction is important for educational quality (Benson 2004, Trudell 2009), and that there is a correlation between educational quality and economic development (Hanushek and Woessmann 2008). Correlations have also been discovered between competence in English and economic development (Grin 2001, Chakraborty and Kapur 2008). A further aspect of the overall picture is the long history of failure of English language education in contexts like Bangladesh and of low achievement despite large investment of resources (Wedell 2008, Hamid and Baldauf 2008). Regardless of this, however, the demand for access to English does not appear to have slowed, as English is still perceived as the language of education and power (Hornberger 2002, Tembe and Norton 2011, Chapter 6 this volume). These, plus many other factors, comprise the picture of the role played by English in development contexts as it is pieced together from contemporary applied linguistics scholarship, and it is this that can act as a refining discourse for the presuppositions about English found in many policy proclamations for development projects.

Based on a synthesis of the evidence related to the issues which comprise the key assumptions of the discourse of English as a language for international development, we can propose the following practical recommendations. Ideally, policy statements would acknowledge the complex interconnections between English and economic development, the provision of effective education and technology, and the role of national and local languages in their articulation of distinct objectives. Doing so would assist people in making informed choices about the actualities of language learning and language use, and allow them to realistically imagine themselves functioning in the multiliterate continuum that constitutes most modern societies (Hornberger 2002). In addition, policy

statements would recognise the importance of people's perceptions of the power of English and its associations with economic value, educational opportunity and technology. While simplistic notions of English as a vital tool for personal and national development are best avoided, policies need to carefully negotiate people's hopes and aspirations. Vavrus (2002:373) suggests that economic hardship among the students in her study in Tanzania 'was tempered by their optimism that their knowledge of English would eventually help them find employment or opportunities for further education'. The participants felt that English was valuable as a means of connecting them to the wider world and providing access to better jobs – if not now, then perhaps in the future. Beliefs about the role of ELfID can therefore be part of the envisioned success that is required in order for actual development to occur.

Not only is it important for policies to allow for the complex realities about the role of English and its relations to economic development and education, but it is preferable also that this should be reflected in the pedagogic practices promoted within programmes that aim to teach English as a language for international development. Wedell (2007:628) has remarked that among the possible reasons for the disappointing outcomes of English language development programmes is the fact that the type of English promoted is often unsuitable for the priorities and sociolinguistic realities of the communities at which it is targeted. As such, it is necessary to examine in depth what it means for English to be a language for international development, and based on this, consider what concept of English, what variety of English, and what type of ELT would in practice be productive for such a project.

What is needed for ELT to be transformational, then, is an ongoing dialogue between practitioners (that is learners, teachers, and the surrounding community) and policy makers which will enable a dialectic which can tailor English language education to the local needs of communities attempting to engage fully in a rapidly globalising world. In many ways, the 'English in Action' project is attempting to provide such transformational language education by engaging and collaborating with local partners to provide teaching that is both practical and context-appropriate. Moreover, the project is not focusing solely upon the learning of English (despite its title), but also on changing both pedagogy and attitudes towards learning, and in this way supporting quality imperatives across Bangladesh. If the ICT-supported architecture that is being used in EIA to assist with the implementation of quality education and create interest in learning proves successful, this could have important implications for educational change in other contexts. Yet while technology offers the allure of potential success, at the same time, issues of access can create further societal divides, and this is a paradox that will have to be dealt with in the long term. Moreover, in order to be effective in increasing people's access to resources and skills, projects of this sort need to work hard to support successful literacy development initiatives so that people are able to make appropriate choices about the actual linguistic resources that will facilitate the skills and knowledge that they need for their own particular circumstances. Only by acknowledging the complex range of factors that come into play over language choice and learning – and the role that English plays in

this context – will it be possible to create education policies that increase people’s ‘capacity to accomplish [their] desired functions through language’ (Blommaert 2005:68).

Notes

1. We would like to thank the ‘English in Action’ project team and our funders, the UK Department for International Development, for supporting this research. Versions of this chapter were delivered at the 8th International Language and Development Conference in Dhaka and at the Cardiff Language and Communication Seminar Series at Cardiff University, and we are grateful to the audiences at these events for their feedback. We also thank Marc van der Stouwe, Frank Banks, Obaid Hamid, Fazle Rabbani and Alison Barratt for their feedback on earlier drafts of the chapter.
2. In this chapter we use the term ‘international development’ to refer to internationally planned, funded and/or executed projects (i.e. those involving two or more countries), while we take the term ‘development’ to refer to locally or nationally planned, funded and executed projects.
3. The information about the EIA project and the discourses analysed in this chapter come from a variety of public policy statements, which include: the EIA project brochure (EIA 2009c), the EIA website (EIA 2010), a statement by the project’s directors (EIA 2008) and a written ministerial statement made by Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for International Development, DfID (Alexander 2008). These documents have been chosen because they publicly represent the project and are freely distributed via the internet. Together they represent statements of intent from the architects and sponsors of the project concerning goal-orientated procedures of action. It should be noted, however, that as statements addressed to a public rather than an internal audience, they do not operate as detailed blueprints for the course of action to be taken by the project, but rather as summaries of the rationale and generalities which characterise the project. They are also all from the early stages of the project – either its inception or first years of activity – as this was the documentation available at the time of writing.
4. ‘Bengali’ was the English name given to the Bangla language during the colonial period. After the colonial period, the name of the language as spoken in Bangladesh was officially changed to Bangla (Banu and Sussex 2001a:126). When spoken in India, it is usually still referred to as Bengali.

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