

The Theme of Universality in the English Literary Text and Criticism

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Abstract

This review paper aims to sensitize teachers and educationists about the theme of universality which is present in the English teaching texts and criticism. The metanarratives of English language and the canonical literary texts carry the universalist theme and can have hegemonic effects on non native learners' identity and subjectivity. The uncentricism and positivism of the universalist theme can be deconstructed to expose the opposite perspective through a critical pedagogy.

Key Words: Universality, subjectivity, postmodernism, postcolonialism, critical language awareness, hegemony

Introduction

In today's globalized world, English has become a major lingua franca, crossing national and geographical boundaries. The knowledge based economy has made English language a prerequisite for progress and development for all groups and nations and its teaching and learning has acquired an importance which cannot be understated. English teaching courses frequently include literary content to incorporate the cultural element into teaching, as culture of the target language forms an important part in any language teaching program. However, the downside of such a program of ELT, in terms of its affects on the individual's world view, subjectivity and identity, is frequently overlooked. This review study aims to bring awareness about the theme of universality which is present in English literature and its effects on subjectivity and identity construction of nonnative learners of English at the periphery.

1. Significance

The study assumes significance in the context of English becoming an important language internationally. ELT has become a priority in education in the non-English speaking world. Literature teaching is an important part of any ELT course (Nunan, 2003; Ur, 1996; Abedi, 1991; Kramsch, 1993). Literatures of languages are carriers of the ideology and culture of their speakers and they reflect the world view of their speakers. Language, ideology and culture are so inextricably intertwined that it becomes impossible to exclude one from the other in ELT.

Interactional routines of communication and written discourse depend on the native speaker's speech norms and conventions and more particularly on the intricate system of face values and speech rights of the speech community. A non native speaker of a language has to abide by the principles and notions of appropriateness of language forms, which are deeply entrenched in the idioms of a target language. Unconsciously he has to imbibe the underlying messages of the language text, particularly if the teaching text and the methodology do not allow a critical approach to it. In such a situation the learners' world view and subjectivity is influenced by the text's universalist theme. The review study attempts to bring awareness about the universalist content of the teaching text and its affect on learners' subjectivity and world view, which is an under researched area in ELT.

2. Review of Literature

The notion of universality is based on the assumption that there are "irreducible features of human life and experience that exist beyond the constitutive effects of local cultural conditions". (Ashcroft: 2000). The concept of a universal human being can be traced to the movement of western humanism. Although itself a contentious term, various movements have been working alongside it and have been named under the umbrella of humanism.

Humanism has been described as a ‘belief that underlying the diversity of human experience it is possible, first, to discern a universal and given human nature, and secondly to find it revealed in the common language of rationality’ (Gandhi: 1998). The downside of humanism is that although it applies the yardstick of universalism to all humanity, yet it insinuates that some humans are more human than others, based upon their knowledge and knowing. This implies that the ‘others’ of that inner group of ‘knowers’, in this case the non-native speakers of that language or those communities belonging to the peripheries of this knowledge system, will be marginalized and excluded from being on the same footing. Park (2009) describes Humanism as a “Eurocentric historical phenomenon and system of thought”, that had no consideration of the ‘other’. Indeed till the 20th century, western humanism did not move “even a step out of European universalism” (ibid). Asserting the primacy and normative nature of this European universalism, functions as a crucial factor in establishing hegemonic control over other communities. Ashcroft et al (2000) say, that “Universalism offers a hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values and expectations of a dominant culture are held to be true for all humanity”. By rejecting and denigrating everything which was not based on reason, including religion, tradition and the ‘others’ of this system, Europe held a hegemonic superiority over the world.

The later Enlightenment held reason, rationalism and science to be the basis of knowledge. It posited knowledge as a closed system with given answers. This positivism, says Canagarajah (1999) suppressed the knowledge systems of the peripheries, “Science was defined as a universally applicable project...The many different forms of knowing and learning represented by minority communities...were suppressed under the universalist claims”.

Following Enlightenment philosophy, Modernism, also characterized by an emphasis on reason, held sway over Europe throughout the 19th century. It rejected all other systems of knowledge which did not conform to its own position. Modernism had its heyday till the early twentieth century but eventually had to give way to postmodernism which advocated pluralism and diversity of positions.

Subsequently, theorists of other social movements such as postmodernism and poststructuralists, challenged the notion of a universal human being as being, “Totalitarian and hostile to the challenges of otherness and difference” (ibid). Sharing many positions with postmodernism, post colonialism has a special interest in the theme of universalism present in the metanarratives of the English canonical texts. Postcolonial theory holds the diversity of humans as the very foundation on which domination and imperialism can be questioned. Understanding and accepting the difference between humans is the basis on which rights of others are recognized. Ashcroft et al (1995) say that, “The concept of universalism is one of particular interest to post-colonial writers because it is this notion of a unitary and homogenous human nature which marginalizes and excludes distinctive characteristics, the difference, of post-colonial societies”. But it is relevant to ask what is the unitary and homogenous human nature? And from whose point of view? Canagarajah (1999) argues that this is decided by those who are in power: “The question as to which community’s knowledge paradigm becomes the operating explanation of things is settled by an exercise of power”. The West’s technological superiority gave it a lead to dominate and colonize Asia, Africa and Latin America, and thus undertaking the ‘white man’s burden’ to monopolize education systems and language, positing its form of knowledge and apprehension of reality to represent all sensibilities. From the postmodern perspective, the basic universality of texts is challenged. Paulston (2002) explains this as follows:

Postmodernism opposes the universalizing of arguments and positions; and rejects meta-narrative or any one privileged discourse and sees disagreements over meaning as integral to its own position and welcomes diversity and variety of analysis, which can only be approached by each observer from his or her opinion.

(in Wright, 2004)

This description of postmodernism amply explains why the claim of universality of English literature is being questioned and rejected as the sole representative of an increasingly varied and disparate readership.

3. Theme of Universality in Literary texts/ Narratives

A look at the historical development of Western literatures can help in an understanding of how western narratives have acquired this unicentric orientation. The 16th Century Renaissance followed by the mercantile and colonizing activities gave Europe a lead in the world’s intellectual, economic and political affairs, which was reflected in its literature.

The Industrial Revolution, the next milestone, was followed by the scientific and technological developments of the 20th century, notably the conquest of space and the strides made in communications and finally the invention of the computer. All these achievements are reflected in Western literature with a sense of superiority and confidence. The intellectual contrast becomes starker when the relative backwardness of the rest of the world is considered. Hegel's words about African as being "no historical part of the world" (in Lamming, 1995), can be seen in this context, criticized as it is for disregarding those areas and sensibilities which lie outside the immediate concern of Europe. This opinion is representative of the general Eurocentric view held by the West. Quddus says that from the time of the Romans, the European nations are accustomed to regard all differences between East and West from the standpoint of a presumed European "norm". From this egocentric attitude, alternate sources of knowledge and perspectives are ignored:

It almost appears as if the world had been created for the sake of Europe and America and for the Western civilization alone, while all other civilizations were meant only to form an appropriate setting for all that Western glory. The only effect such historical training can have upon the minds of young non-European people is a feeling of inferiority in so far as their own culture, their own history and tradition and their own future possibilities are concerned.

(Quddus, 1990)

When the Britain decided to take responsibility of the education of their Indian subjects, it was with the aim to produce a class which could act as intermediaries between the ruler and the ruled. As opposed to religious instruction the teaching of English literature was considered to be the best option as a tool to bring consent and conformity both. Viswanathan (1995) says that English literature provided a perfect combination of religious thought and moral values and had never been associated with radical, liberal thought.

Besides this, the literary text represented the superiority of English literature over all other forms of knowledge. Ashcroft et al (1995) state that the literary texts claimed the "superiority of civilization embodied /encoded through the fetish of the English book". Ali (1993) notes: "The definition of civilization as given by the West is patently one-sided and decidedly Western, taking the state of West alone as a criterion and exemplar, or model or norm of the level of a man's cultural development". Viswanathan (1987) points out the hegemonic function of such a teaching program in which the natives would accept the superiority of the civilization which had produced it. "It proved a particularly effective one because the discourse of English literature was disseminated with its attendant spiritual values, cultural assumptions, social discriminations, racial prejudices and humanistic values more or less intact. The natives, it was thought would benefit intellectually and morally by studying English literary texts, which would function as a "surrogate Englishman in his highest and perfect state"(ibid, 1995). This was confirmed by Macaulay (1835) in his famous *Minute* that studying these texts gave natives the daily opportunity "to converse with the best and wisest Englishmen through the medium of their work". Looma (1998) has pointed out how Shakespeare has been used by the colonists of his time and afterwards as an emblem/proof of the superiority of English Literature in general. Besides the Greek Classics, the English novel writers like Dickens and Hardy and Austin; the Romantics, etc, are staples in the English Literature courses taught all over the world and characters are taken to present Macaulay's "surrogate" gentlemen. Added to this, it would broaden the outlook of the natives by giving them secular education and to help in loosening the hold of rigid religious fanaticism, the dangers inherent in which were obvious, and to ultimately "westernize the people and impress upon them the superiority of western culture and knowledge" (Viswanathan, 1995).

What is more relevant to the present research is that the western values embodied in the texts are propounded as being universal and normative, besides claiming the superiority of the civilization, which had produced them. English literature provided the means to the educators through the theme of universalism for the socio-political control, under the guise of 'advancement' of the natives. Ashcroft et al (2000) point out that it provided means for impressing upon the reader the cultural hegemony of the discourse, not only by postulating that "the subject of English literature is the universal human subject, but the reader is the universal 'cultured' reader, removed from any consideration of the material conditions of the local and present experience of colonization and exploitation".

Foucault's description of the term discourse places it at the center of knowledge and power, as a 'complex of signs and practices which organizes social existence and social reproduction'. It rests on the notion of a strongly bonded area of social knowledge in which the interlocutors come to an understanding of themselves vis-à-vis the world around. In other words, the construction of subjectivity is achieved through the discourse of those who wield power.

Coulby et al (2005) link the discourse of superior western civilizations with globalization and cultural homogenization. They point out the influence of classical Greece. 5th Century Athens is taken as the pinnacle of human civilization in arts, culture and knowledge, in most elite education in Europe and North America. Although not taught as a language, but as an element of classics, classical history, European civilization or straight history courses, Greece remains a current and important theme. Greek civilization borrowed a lot from Asia and Africa, but later narratives were systematically rewritten to exclude these influences which, “created a Greece that created itself without external assistance and which...was thus satisfactorily white” (Young, 1994). Notably this was not done by Greece itself, but the later systems. He says that teaching of Classical Greece in schools and universities tends to reproduce Eurocentricism and xenophobia. There is a need for educational institutions to challenge this narrative and to accept that other civilizations aided the Greek civilization and have contributed their own share in human civilization. The importance of cultural relativism in curricular production/formation cannot be over emphasized in the context of globalization which tends to produce homogenization and monopolar polities.

4. The Universal Theme in Literary Criticism

Just as the western texts imbibe universalist vocabulary, western literary criticism also takes the same criteria to establish literary worth. The Eurocentric element implicit in western texts has led to a positivist orientation in literary criticism. Western criticism holds that all humanity should be able to relate to the universality of experience as impounded in the Western literary text. The myth of universality is so embedded in European literary criticism, that literary works from Second and Third World countries are excluded from considerations of merit for being too nationalistic or regional.

The theme of universality is regarded as the hallmark of great literature. Literary works are judged on the extent to which they depict the ‘universal human condition’. Students of literature are told that to be located in a particular time, place and person and yet be able to represent millions, for all times, places and ages is what makes a literary work valuable. What makes Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe great writers is because they represent the ‘universal human condition’, by combining the universal with the particular. It appeals to the sensibility of all readers as they can relate to their writings on the personal level and find a just depiction of his/her own feelings and emotions. Shakespeare’s work derives its popularity from the very fact that it seems to represent all humanity, from the highest to the meanest, from the *Lears*, *Hamlets* and *Ariels* to the *Shylocks*, *Othellos* and *Calibans*. To represent the voice and sensibility of the Prince and the King as well as of the lowly, the excluded and the marginalized, as Greenblatt (1995) points out, in a time and age when it was the norm to talk about and represent only the privileged, is indeed a feat that could be only a visionary humanist like Shakespeare could accomplish.

In the same vein Park (2009) argues that Dante’s much celebrated universalism tried to separate itself from the Eurocentric universalism of humanism and tried to present the literary representation of human reality in the universal dimension, the “really *universally* universal man”, rather than just what Husserl has called the “the European man in crisis” (177). Although this may be true of Shakespeare and Dante, however it has been argued that in the majority of the metanarratives of western literary tradition, those which are included in the teaching curriculums, the voice of the ‘other’ is silenced affectively.

The postmodern theory of deconstruction provides a theoretical framework for this debate by postulating that any text can be deconstructed to reveal an opposite meaning or perspective. As opposed to Saussure’s structuralist definition of language as a tight over arching structure in which meanings are frozen in time and space, disallowing the free interplay of meaning, Derrida holds that language cannot be confined to a single meaning and in the hands of diverse speakers it assumes disparate shades of meaning. Powell (1998) argues that the western system of thought is based on the notion of centers. He says: “According to Derrida, all Western thought is based on the idea of a centre - an Origin, a Truth, an Ideal Form, a Fixed Point, an Immovable Mover, an Essence, a God, a Presence, which is usually capitalized, and which guarantees all meaning”. The centre would imply the location of authority, the provider of all meaning and apprehensions of reality. But Powell contends that the problem with centers is that they “spawn binary opposites, with one term of the opposition central, and the other marginal” (ibid). Derrida, who himself grew up in a dispossessed culture, holds that the emphasis on fixing centers results in excluding, ignoring, marginalizing, and repressing others which could be other languages, societies, cultures, religions or genders. Based on these notions the western literary text came to signify logocentric assumptions of superiority, in which other voices and points of view get submerged. In fact the theory of deconstruction is based on a subversive reading of texts, which allow “a free play of non-hierarchical, non-stable meanings” (ibid).

Jean Whys' novel *Wild Sargasso Sea* (1996) which acts as a prequel to Charlotte Bronte's famous 1847 novel, *Jane Eyre*, depicts the voice of the dispossessed and the excluded, in this case the story of Antoinette Cosway replicating that of Bertha Mason in the original Bronte novel. By deconstructing the narrative, Whys shows the themes of racial inequality and the harshness of displacement and assimilation, which can actually underlie the original story. The anguish and deprivation of the dispossessed, silenced in the original work are revealed by changing the point of view, and the narrator in the sequel. The novel thereby dismantles the canon of western fiction that it alone represents the voice of all humanity. The language class located in the periphery of the English center is a true example of the two poles of a binary opposition in which the literary content of the language through the universalist language become a source for imposing fixed, unitary meanings on learners.

Brahms (1995) has a similar view about the standards of literary criticism, which have been set up by American and British literary traditions. Although the ideal of this tradition recognizes and praises works that bring new ideas and fresh experiences, yet it insists on amalgamating only the particular and the universal in order to achieve a truly aesthetic standard. Brahms cites Atwood as pointing out this basic dichotomy or 'blind spot': "to emphasize the personal and the universal but to skip (the national and the cultural) is like trying to teach human anatomy by looking only at the head and the feet", and this for her and for Achebe amounts to an absolutist cultural hegemony. Achebe (1995) writes about how his works which point to an African sensibility and experience, have been chastised by western critics as being the works of "bright Negro barristers", who are ungrateful for the improvement which has been brought about by Western contact in Africa's "inglorious past". This sort of criticism has been caused by the prevalent literary insistence of judging texts on Western norms of universality, which denigrates all those texts which cannot conform to their standard. Even the African novel has been dismissed on the grounds that the novel is peculiarly a Western genre. Achebe calls for an assimilation of Western and African norms of criticism, which would make the human experience richer, just as jazz, which is the product of western musical instruments, played by Africans. To judge all creative literature from the Western standards of universality is something, which Achebe feels, has been caused by Africans' own neglect in the field of representation of their works. He says: "I should like to see the word 'universal' banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include all the world" (1995).

The problems with this approach to literary criticism have been pointed out by Charles Larson (1995) in his essay *Heroic Ethnocentrism: The Idea of Universality in Literature*. Based on his experience of teaching literature to African students, he realizes that responses to literature are basically cultural, so the criteria of universality cannot be applied to all works with uniformity. All humanity faces the same conditions, for example, death and life, but the way people react to them are conditioned by their culture. Responses to these universal experiences vary significantly across cultures, and these reactions in turn, shape their interpretation of literature. He finds that, "the term universal has been grossly misused when it has been applied to non-western literature, because it has so often been used in a way that ignores the multiplicity of cultural experience". When we try to apply the western methods of critiquing on a non-western text, we are implying that this text falls below the standard of what constitutes good literature. He says the idea of universality cannot be applied indiscriminately to all texts, because texts are based on lived experiences, which might be radically different for various people, and "What we really mean when we talk of universal experiences in literature are cultural responses that have been shaped by our own western traditions". He takes up African literature as an example and says that the themes of love, death and the idea of hero are very different from the way they are interpreted in the western culture. In traditional African novels there is no description of nature and no representation of females. This might seem as meaningless to western readers as the western novel's depiction of kisses and natural descriptions does to African readers. Larson states:

After all, people love and die in every culture. Their reactions to these events in their lives, however, may be, significantly different from our own. And these reactions, in turn, shape their interpretation of literature... The time has come when we avoid the use of the pejorative term universal. What we really mean when we talk about universal experiences in literature are cultural responses that have been shaped by our own western tradition.

(1995)

Far from seeing the varied responses to this as a limitation of the range of experience it offers, it should be seen as a reader's individual response to it, which perhaps even the writer had not intended to arouse.

It is impractical to apply fixed standards of finding meanings from literary works in which the concept of hero, of descriptions, of gender representation are culturally bound. Larson finds the terms ‘universal’ both pejorative and “limiting”, for the real value of literature, “is to show us something we were previously unaware of. Just as literature is a bridge connecting a life lived with a life not lived, so, too, all literature that is effective is a voyage into a previously untraveled world” (1995).

Because of this emphasis on seeing the universal theme of literary works, Mukherjee feels that issues of more vital significance get overlooked, and “instead of facing up to the realities of ‘power, class, culture, social order and disorder’, literary critics and editors of literature anthologies hide behind the universalist vocabulary that only mystifies the true nature of reality” (1995). In the teaching of literature, students are only trained to use the standard methods of criticizing texts, with the result that they cannot see the “ambiguities and the unpleasant truths that lie in the crevices.” Quoting Ohmann, Mukherjee states that this prophylactic view of literature empties the most provocative literature of its subversive content:

After such treatment as Ohmann puts it, “It will not cause any trouble for the people who run schools and colleges, for the military industrial complex, for anyone who holds power. It can only perpetuate the misery of those who don’t”. (ibid)

This mainstream method of critiquing literary texts allows only stereotyped judgments to emerge. Besides, it very effectively silences divergent and radical views. Not only in literature and English language are the Eurocentric assumptions of judgments and merit expounded, but it is apparent in all areas of knowledge and learning. Western sources of knowledge are taken to be the only authentic means of arriving at truth. Bano (2004) says: “Not all theories advocated by western philosophers are in accordance with alternate perspectives, but the hegemony of the west is seriously undermining the many other sources and perspectives of knowledge”. This is the position which Bishop (1995) takes. He sees mathematics, which is generally thought to be universal, neutral and culture-free, as having a “cultural history”. For him mathematical ideas, like any other ideas are humanly constructed, for example, geometrical conceptions of space, counting systems, forms of classification, etc. He finds that: “It is now possible to put forward the thesis that all cultures have generated mathematical ideas just as all cultures have generated language, religion, morals, customs and kinship systems” (1995). Western mathematical ideas were imposed on indigenous cultures through trade, administration and education “just as significantly as were those linguistic symbolization and structure of English, French, Dutch or whichever was the European language of the particular dominant colonial power in the country” (1995). He further reinforces his point:

At worst, the mathematical curriculum was abstract, irrelevant, selective and elitist – as indeed it was in Europe – governed by structures like the Cambridge Overseas Certificate, and culturally laden to a very high degree. It was part of a deliberate strategy of acculturation – international in its efforts to instruct in “the best of the West”, and convinced of its superiority to any indigenous mathematical systems and culture. As it was essentially a university-preparatory education, the aspirations of the students were towards attending western universities. They were educated away from their culture and away from their society. (ibid)

So the “cultural neutrality” myth of western mathematics is questioned, but it continues to have powerful implications related “to education, to national developments and to continuation of cultural imperialism” (ibid). Focusing on the hegemonic effects of universalist theme in western narratives, Ashcroft et al (2000) say that the value and greatness of the literary work is linked to the extent in which it propounds ‘the universal human condition’. Thus ‘the link between the universal and the Eurocentric, and in particular the link between universality and the canon of texts that represent the English subject as both attractive and universal that rendered it an effective tool of socio-political control in the periphery.

5. Implications for Language Teaching

In the context of globalization, the issue of uniculturalism assumes significance in English language teaching. Homogenization and monopolarity, the main concerns of a globalized society, have directly affected educational systems and curricula. Language teaching has assumed significance as never before. English is becoming a part of the compulsory curricula of educational institutions the world over. As Coulby (2000) points out this is not just a linguistic activity but an acculturation process. In educational systems where English is the dominant language, as well as the language in education, it becomes the main source through which Eurocentric assumptions of knowledge are expounded through encouraging unicultural interpretations.

The universalist meta-language literally becomes what McLuhan (1965) has called, “The medium is the message.” Most of the material and pedagogies used for ELT has been developed in the western centers of knowledge. Though language teaching is regarded as a value free, innocent activity, yet it does imbibe values and world views of the center. The typical notion of knowledge holds it to be preconstructed and universal - a given, and modes of teaching and learning to be common for all people. Differentiating between typically held notions of knowledge - the pedagogy of the mainstream (MP) and Critical Pedagogy (CP) Canagarajah (1999) says: “MP believes that what is learned is factual, impartial and, therefore, correct for everyone. Knowledge is supposed to provide the one universally true view of reality”, whereas CP holds that what is true might be different for different communities. MP does not take into account the fact that different learners might have their own values cultures and contexts of reality which might not coincide with that of the teaching text.

This positivism of the MP position is opposed by resistance constructs which hold that knowledge can be modified and is changing all the time. In the same vein, Larson talks about the futility of teaching about the British locales as backgrounds in literary works to learners, for whom it would be incomprehensible to imagine the concept of snow and weather without actually experiencing it, sitting in Africa. Even mathematical knowledge, as Bishop argues, is not culture-free, though it is generally thought that mathematical truths, “are abstractions from the real world, they are necessarily context free and universal”, but actually like any other ideas, mathematical ideas are humanly constructed and have a cultural history (1995). Ashcroft et al (1995) equate the teaching of a language as one of the most powerful discourses to achieve subject construction and this is achieved through the teaching of English literary texts:

It establishes the locally English or British as normative through critical claims to ‘universality’ of the values embodied in English literary texts, and it represents the colonized to themselves as inherently inferior beings — ‘wild’, ‘barbarous’, ‘uncivilized’.

They go on to prove how texts actually enter the body and colonial education system work on interpellating colonial subjectivity not only through course content and libraries, but also through the internalization of the English text by the learners. Homi Bhabha says in this regard:

Universalism does not merely end with a view of immanent ‘spiritual’ meaning produced in the text. It also interpellates, for its reading, a subject positioned at the point where conflict and difference resolves and all ideology ends. It is not that the Transcendental subject cannot *see* historical conflict or colonial difference as mimetic structures or themes in the text. What it cannot conceive, is how it is *itself* structured ideologically and discursively in relation to those processes of signification which do not then allow for the possibility of whole or universal meanings.

(Bhabha: 1984a:104)

This echoes Althusser’s theory of how the state apparatuses of education, church and police interpellate subjects to concede and collude in their own subjectivity (1992). Gramsci (1971) calls the resulting consensual position ‘control through “consent”’. The subject has been interpellated into accepting this position, because he/she is the product of the very system of knowledge which produced him.

The western literary texts usually used in the English language courses in the periphery are drawn from the classical works of English literature and have been taught from the time when English was first introduced in the Indian Subcontinent (Viswanathan, 1995). Written at a time when imperial England wielded a lot of power by virtue of its sprawling colonial empire and scientific advancements, these texts impound assumptions of British linguistic and cultural superiority, and denigration of other cultures and sensibilities. On grounds of this superiority, English critical theorists have long disallowed other voices and points of views to contribute to their mainstream works. The English literary text is held to be the representative of all types of realities and experiences. These meta-narratives were challenged by post-modern thinkers who held that human learning and experience is too wide, varied and disparate to be represented by any one privileged discourse. These texts when used for teaching invite identification with the represented models and subscribing to the texts assumption of universality. Waseem (2009) finds through her research on ELT practices in private elite schools and state-run schools that a significant majority of elite school students if placed in similar situations as the texts character, will act in the same way, exhibiting their empathy with them. These students had been taught in an English saturated environment where English texts were the metanarratives of English literature and pedagogies did not encourage critical thinking.

They have subscribed to the universalistic assumptions of superiority impounded in text and this unitary orientation rejects their replication or existence in real life. Most of the teachers and educationists in this research advocated the inclusion of writings by Pakistani writers in English courses so that students are offered opportunities to alternative world views and perspectives.

6. Critical Language Awareness

Critical Discourse Analyses aims to raise awareness about the ideological content of literary texts. Since language teaching is social practice, (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258) it is important to see its implications in social formulations. Fairclough *et al* see language as, “constituting as well as conditioning language they may have major ideological effects. Discursive practices ... can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people”. (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258) Critical theorists have advocated the use of critical methods to be used in language pedagogy. (Fairclough, 2000; Foley, J. & L. Thompson, 2003; Baker, C. & Sylvia P. J., 1998; Rahman, 2002).

7. Conclusion

This review article high lights the Euro-centric drift in English literature and points how the theme of universality in the English literary text acts in a hegemonic way to stifle the diversity of human experience by postulating itself as the only representation of all humanity. Its normative message affects the subjectivity of non native English learners who are constantly being faced with opposing views and conflicting philosophies. The Euro-centric orientation in teaching texts and literary criticism which has traditionally been seen as presenting the reality of marginalized, peripheral sensibilities, actually offers a hegemonic view of life by asserting that all humanity has universal characteristics. This disadvantages the nonnative learner by placing him in a consensual position in which he/she has to concede to that position. The theme of universality works on the assumption that all cultural and social differences can be ignored by highlighting universal features of humanity, which are describable and reductable. It amounts to ‘constructing’ an ‘other’ which is far removed from the actual human being out there. In the context of globalization, trying to fit the yardstick of Western universalism on students at the periphery can bring about their assimilation, marginalization and denigration. This position is challenged by post modernistic perspectives which see human nature to be too varied; and experience too multifaceted to be reduced to single representations.

Given the intricate relationship between language, ideology and power, it is important to use critical approaches in teaching methodology. Content should include alternate perspectives and diverse cultural representations to face the uncentric orientation of English texts. Keeping in view the fact of the possibility of flexible language users and that increasingly English is being used by nonnative writers in the periphery presenting their own socio-cultural reality, it is possible to include representation of varied and disparate voices in the English teaching course. Critical approaches to teaching languages can help teachers and educationists to modify their pedagogy to guide learners to evaluate and interpret texts by keeping varying perspectives in mind. Critical Discourse Analyses aims to raise awareness about this. It helps teachers to recognize their role in developing students’ deep understanding of texts and their interpretations.

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