Introduction

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?

Derek Walcott, *A Far Cry from Africa*

The conflict Walcott expresses is an everyday experience for millions of people in post-colonial communities. They find themselves torn between the claims of Western values and their indigenous cultures, between English and the vernacular. Ironically, however, with the passing of time, the possibility of choosing one or the other may no longer be open to them: the English language has become too deeply rooted in their soil, and in their consciousness, to be considered ‘alien’.

In parts of the Third World, what is biologically true for Walcott—that two traditions mingle in his blood, and flow through his veins—is culturally true for entire populations. Some have chosen convenient, self-serving resolutions to this conflict, by understating the complex interconnection between the two linguistic traditions. History is replete with examples of colonized subjects who have ‘betrayed’ the claims of the vernacular for the advantages of English, and who now feel they are in some sense outsiders in both Western and local communities. Others, especially in the period since decolonization, have rejected English lock, stock, and barrel, in order to be faithful to indigenous traditions—a choice which has deprived many of them of enriching interactions with multicultural communities and traditions through the English language.

The alternative suggested by Walcott—to ‘give back what they give’ and respond favorably to both languages—can take many different forms. Instead of maintaining both languages separately, one can appropriate the second language, and absorb parts of it into the vernacular. The creative tension between the languages can also bring forth new discourses, as Walcott, who has referred to himself as ‘the mulatto of style’, so eloquently exemplifies in his own writing. The fact that such productive interactions are possible
demonstrates that our consciousness is able to accommodate more than one language or culture, just as our languages can accommodate alien grammars and discourses. So it would appear that there are ways of transcending this painful linguistic conflict, and even of turning it to our advantage.

Achieving this transcendence, however, is not easy. It cannot be achieved by desiring a universal, race-less, culture-free identity. Such an ideal is only possible in our dreams—never in social reality, where we are fated to occupy one identity or the other, however much we might wish otherwise. The very fact that we are for ever rooted in the primary community of socialization is what enables us to negotiate or appropriate other languages (and cultures) more effectively. Research in language acquisition and cognitive development confirms that a thorough grounding in one’s first language and culture enhances the ability to acquire other languages, literacies, and knowledge. The achievement of new identities and discourses none the less involves a painful process of conflicting ideologies and interests. If we are to appropriate the language for our purposes, the oppressive history and hegemonic values associated with English have to be kept very much in mind, and engaged judiciously.

The negative or positive responses to the vernacular and English—leading either to the ‘betrayal’ of one language, or to the ‘giving back’ of both—are largely influenced by underlying differences in perspectives on power. A decision to reject English in order to be true to the vernacular (or vice versa) constitutes a specific ideological orientation. The assumptions made by proponents of this position are that subjects are passive, and lack agency to manage linguistic and ideological conflicts to their best advantage; languages are seen as monolithic, abstract structures that come with a homogeneous set of ideologies, and function to spread and sustain the interests of dominant groups. I will term such a deterministic perspective on power—which has had considerable influence in linguistics, discourse analysis, social sciences, and education—the reproduction orientation. The alternative response, of engaging favorably with both languages, calls for a different set of assumptions, in which subjects have the agency to think critically and work out ideological alternatives that favor their own empowerment. It recognizes that while language may have a repressive effect, it also has the liberatory potential of facilitating critical thinking, and enabling subjects to rise above domination: each language is sufficiently heterogeneous for marginalized groups to make it serve their own purposes. This is the resistance perspective alluded to in the title of this book. It provides for the possibility that, in everyday life, the powerless in post-colonial communities may find ways to negotiate, alter, and oppose political structures, and reconstruct their languages, cultures, and identities to their advantage. The intention is not to reject English, but to reconstitute it in more inclusive, ethical, and democratic terms, and so bring about the creative resolutions to their linguistic conflicts sought by Walcott and others in the periphery.
This book takes the discussion on the post-colonial status of English beyond the stereotypical positions (for or against English; for or against the vernacular) adopted thus far. I want to reflect on the diverse interests and motivations of individuals while investigating the strategies they employ, with varying levels of success, in order to negotiate their linguistic conflicts in community and classroom contexts. I consider these issues as they relate to the activity of English language teaching (ELT). Applied linguistics and ELT have hitherto been influenced (perhaps unwittingly) by the dichotomizing perspectives referred to above. A debilitating monolingual/monocultural bias has revealed itself in the insistence on ‘standard’ English as the norm, the refusal to grant an active role to the students’ first language in the learning and acquisition of English, the marginalization of ‘non-native’ English teachers, and the insensitive negativity shown by the pedagogies and discourses towards the indigenous cultural traditions. All such assumptions ignore the creative processes of linguistic mediation, interaction, and fusion that take place in social life.

To pursue these concerns is to adopt a socially-situated orientation to pedagogy, in which learning is considered as a value-free, pragmatic, egalitarian enterprise, and where the acquisition of a new language or discourse should not give rise to undue inner conflict among students. But, in the post-modern world, education has lost its innocence. The realization that education may involve the propagation of knowledges and ideologies held by dominant social groups has inspired a critical orientation to pedagogical paradigms. This book is informed by such a critical orientation to pedagogy and schooling, and explores the ideological and discursive conflicts experienced by learners of English in post-colonial communities.

Although teaching English worldwide has become a controversial activity, few ELT professionals have considered the political complexity of their enterprise. Does English offer Third World countries a resource that will help them in their development, as Western governments and development agencies would claim? Or is it a Trojan horse, whose effect is to perpetuate their dependence? In his major study of the politics of ELT, Phillipson (1992) conducts a scathing attack on English for functioning as a tool for imperialist relations and values. However, his reproductionist orientation is responsible for some of the limitations as well as the strengths of his book. There is inadequate sensitivity to the conflicting demands and desires experienced by Walcott and others like him. The overly global approach to the subject is not conducive to exploring the day-by-day struggles and negotiations with the language that take place in Third World communities. More importantly, the subtle forms of resistance to English and the productive processes of appropriation inspired by local needs, are not sufficiently represented. It is time, therefore, to take the exploration of this subject further.
The framework

This book explores the challenges and possibilities facing ELT in the context of the relationships between the center and the periphery. ‘Center’ refers to the technologically advanced communities of the West which, at least in part, sustain their material dominance by keeping less developed communities in periphery status. Significant among the center nations are the traditionally ‘native English’ communities of North America, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, and for the purposes of analyzing ELT in this book I will use ‘center’ in a restricted sense to refer to these communities (overlooking non-English-speaking center communities such as France and Germany). Because many less developed communities are former colonies of Britain, I will use the term ‘periphery’ here for such communities where English is of post-colonial currency, such as Barbados, India, Malaysia, and Nigeria. Also included under this label are many communities which formerly belonged to other imperial powers, such as Belgium, France, or Spain, but have now come under the neo-imperialist thrusts of English-speaking center communities. They include Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, Tunisia, and Vietnam. The latter group of communities, in which English has acquired a somewhat limited and recent currency, is called the ‘expanding circle’ by Kachru (1986) to distinguish it from the British colonies listed earlier, which he calls the ‘outer circle’. However, in this book I am using the label ‘periphery’ to accommodate both sets of communities. Although post-colonial is another label that can be employed to refer to these communities, I am primarily reserving this term to describe perspectives generated by periphery communities themselves.

The center/periphery terminology also helps us to represent another distinction crucial for this book: that of native English communities and non-native communities. Considerable rethinking is taking place on this linguistic categorization (Y. Kachru 1994, Sridhar 1994). Note that many speakers in the periphery use English as the first or dominant language; others may use it as a language that was simultaneously acquired with one or more local languages, and may display equal or native proficiency in them all. Add to this the argument that many of the periphery communities have developed their own localized forms of English, and might consider themselves to be native speakers of these new ‘Englishes’ (Kachru 1986). Since the native/non-native distinction loses its force in this context, I will stretch the center/periphery terminology to accommodate the linguistic distinction between the traditionally English-speaking center communities (which claim ownership over the language) and those periphery communities which have recently appropriated the language. The variants of these two communities will be referred to as center Englishes and periphery Englishes, respectively.
The organization

This book is primarily an investigation of classrooms from a critical pedagogical perspective. In the first chapter I argue that traditional understanding of education needs to be reconceived along the lines of a more critical pedagogy, and outline the philosophical changes that motivate the development of liberatory pedagogies. I then discuss the manner in which the life and thinking of periphery subjects relate to some of the Western academic discourses that influence both traditional and critical pedagogies as they are currently understood in the center. This is in tune with the aim of the book to develop grounded theory, in other words, a thinking on language, culture, and pedagogy that is motivated by the lived reality and everyday experience of periphery subjects.

A methodological approach suitable for this purpose is afforded by ethnography, which in attempting to understand the values and assumptions that motivate the behavior of people in their everyday contexts, provides a useful challenge to theories and pedagogies that are produced from the ivory towers of academia. Using an ethnographic perspective to understand the attitudes of teachers and students in the periphery, I will develop constructs that better reflect the challenges they face in ELT. However, it is important for an ethnographic orientation to be clearly defined and contextually circumscribed. This book focuses therefore on the Tamil community in the northern peninsula of Sri Lanka to illustrate some of the challenges facing post-colonial communities today. Choosing a small community in an already small island-state obviously limits the generalizations that can be made, but the interpretive depth deriving from careful observation of the everyday life of a community provides ethnographic validity.

A perspective generated from the periphery community by an insider to that community is badly needed in applied linguistic circles today. At a time when multiculturalism and diversity are fashionable movements in the center, knowledge construction in ELT, as in other academic fields, is still dominated by Western scholars. Realities of periphery communities and center influences are often discussed by center scholars, which accounts for some of their limitations (Phillipson 1992, Holliday 1994, Pennycook 1994a). The location of these scholars prevents their well-intentioned books from representing adequately the interests and aspirations of periphery communities. On the other hand, the fact that periphery scholars enjoy membership of these communities does not automatically make them authorities on the cultures and conditions they describe. Their intimacy also brings with it certain methodological and perspectival problems, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

The observations emerging from the Sri Lankan Tamil community will be compared to findings of scholars in other periphery communities. This will help us to theorize the pedagogical challenges for post-colonial communities. Since this book is not limited to periphery concerns, I will relate the
pedagogical observations developed here to the dominant constructs in applied linguistics and ELT. It is the argument of many post-colonial thinkers that their insights challenge the legitimized knowledge of the center and its governing assumptions (hooks 1990, Said 1993).

The focus of this book is on the classroom life of periphery teachers and students. Many of the publications on center/periphery relations in ELT have approached the subject from a macroscopic theoretical perspective (Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994a), paying less attention to the micro-social level of linguistic and cultural life. For this reason, much of this book is given over to the narration of everyday life, and to the interactions of periphery communities. Whatever theoretical constructs are developed here will emerge through the narratives. But first, if we are to understand how reproduction and resistance are played out at the micro-social level, it is important to situate the classrooms in the larger historical and social contexts of the community. For this reason, in Chapter 3, before discussing classrooms, I will provide a bird’s-eye view of the linguistic and other cultural developments in the Tamil community, seen in the light of post-colonial experiences elsewhere.

While the three introductory chapters contextualize the relevant theoretical, methodological, and historical background, the next four chapters analyze several specific areas in the ELT enterprise. The main questions we will ask are:

- What discourses do local students and teachers confront in teaching materials produced by center agencies? What effects do such discourses have on the language acquisition process? How do the agendas of the center textbooks conflict with the personal agendas local students bring to the classroom? How do students cope with the tensions that characterize their encounter with center-based teaching materials and hidden curricula?

- Which discourses inform the teaching methods promoted by the mainstream professional circles? How do these methods relate to the pedagogical traditions of periphery communities familiar to local teachers and students? What effects do center-based methods have on the language acquisition process in periphery communities? What are the challenges for periphery teachers in implementing these methods?

- How do teachers and students negotiate the challenges posed to their identity, community membership, and values, by the vernacular and English? How do they negotiate these tensions in their classroom discourse and interactions? What implications does such classroom discourse have for the development of communicative competence?

- What assumptions motivate the dominant pedagogical approaches for developing literacy skills in English? How do they relate to the traditions of literacy in periphery communities? What strategies do periphery students employ to deal with the discursive challenges they confront in practicing academic reading and writing in English?
This description of periphery classrooms and communities will prepare the ground, for proposals in the final chapter on how marginalized communities can acquire and use English language for their empowerment.

Notes

1 For a review of the relevant research in this area, see Hamers and Blanc 1989: 187–212.

2 Although there is a significant tradition of work in developing the center/periphery perspective, dating from economist Frank (1964), the model that enjoys special currency these days is the *world systems perspective* outlined by social theorist Wallerstein (1974, 1991). While Wallerstein develops his model primarily in terms of economic relations, Giddens’s (1990) multifaceted model includes the nation-state system (i.e. a political dimension), world military order (a military dimension), and the international division of labor (a production dimension), in addition to economy. But even this analysis fails to do justice to the diverse domains that participate in constructing the world system. Galtung develops a multidimensional model that posits equal influence for multiple channels of center influence (Galtung 1971, 1980). In an interlocking, cyclical process, politico-economic dominance sustains mass media, technology, popular culture, education, transport, and other domains of center superiority. But Appadurai (1994) has recently argued that the geopolitical relationship is ‘messy’, with many ironies and paradoxes. For example, the periphery today displays a drive for technology and industrial production that surpasses the center. Appadurai therefore constructs a dynamic model which assumes disjuncture as a constitutive principle, and adopts a ‘radically context-dependent’ approach.