

Christian Missions and ELT Missions: Inextricable Intertwinement

*Prakash Chandra Giri**

Abstract

There has been a strong connection and relationship between Christian missionary work and English Language Teaching (ELT) all over the world. Some arguments clearly explain how Christian missions and ELT are interrelated. Evangelical Christians are growing a presence in the field of English language teaching all over the world. A study carried out in the USA that has been done on the links between English language teaching, religious beliefs and missionary work. Similarly, there is a significant community of evangelical Christian educators within the field of TESOL. And this study clearly explains on how English Language Teaching has become a political project which is also connected to evangelism.

Keywords: Christian, community, English Language Teaching (ELT), intertwined, political

ELT is a great key to Evangelism

The study carried out by Manka M. Varghese and Bill Johnston (2007) reports on a qualitative study of ten English language teachers-in-training at two evangelical Christian colleges in the USA. It explored the religious beliefs of the participants and the complex, varied and often still developing how these beliefs relate to their perspectives on missionary work and the relationship between ELT and religious belief. The majority of evangelical Christians are growing in the field of language teaching around the world, particularly in the TESOL organization. There is a good and meaningful connection between English language teaching, religious beliefs and missionary work. A significant number of ESL and EFL teachers are evangelical Christians and for them, their faith and professional work are intertwined at the same time. It is also believed that the use of ELT as a platform for missionary work and the status of ELT in missionary work are important in world politics and of an American foreign and domestic policy driven by imperialist goals and guided by an evangelical Christian agenda. Evangelical Christianity includes a range of different forms of worship and church organizations. Similarly, the community of Christian educators in TESOL has been growing. Within the TESOL organization, for example, there are special interests in TESOL Caucus or Christian Caucus for short. But non-evangelical TESOLers have

* Faculty, Gupteshwor Mahadev Multiple Campus, Pokhara

had little professional interaction with those of the Christian Caucus on specifically religious issues. Moreover, the pure missionary literature that addresses teaching and ELT has tended to be exhortative in its message and tone, aiming to encourage fellow Christians to teach English and proselytize. Well-known scholars have in different forums discussed how their faith and their profession are intertwined.

Historically, Christian missionaries have often worked along with colonizing nation-states in spreading the gospel and in empire building. The promotion of religion, language and national and economic and political interests have often gone hand in hand. The relation between the spread of religion and language in the process of colonization can be seen. It is described how British Protestant missionaries translated the Bible into vernacular and provided indigenous peoples with basic literacy in their languages too. It is seen that how Christian missionaries were instrumental in maintaining local languages or creating lingua franca in countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa, but they claimed that this policy was pursued because they were determined to spread their religion and English language to local populations rather than to support primary language instruction or multilingualism. At the same time, a lot of examples of the so-called civilizing mission mandates have accompanied attempts at conversion into Christianity. These conversions often went along with a shift to the dominant language. It is also seen that the pivotal role of the Christian missionaries in shifting the Maori in New Zealand from Maori to English, while 'civilizing' and 'subordinating' them to western ways and it is argued that there is no more salient case of terrible effects of the civilizing mandate of English-speaking Christian cultural imperialism than that of the indigenous groups of North America.

It is also argued that ELT and Christian missionary works kept on thriving because of the mainly separate activities of the British and U.S. governments and the Christian missionaries who continued their activities long after the institutional colonial presence. A missionary organization Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is also known as the Wycliffe Bible translators, a self-described faith-based group founded in 1934 and still active, which has promoted conversion of indigenous groups in different countries and engaged in the translation of the Bible and native language literacy support, mainly of lesser-known languages. But at the same time, many have been critical of this organization and are accusing it of links with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as well as with other missionary groups. Therefore, the association of ELT and Christian missionary work has further developed with the confluence of the growing power and status of the English language and the growing number of evangelical

Christians. With this evidence it is clear that the more numbers of Christians grow in the particular country, the more number of ELT works occur, but there is a debate in the relationship between Christian missionary work and ELT in the world today. Even though the mission statement of the TESOL organization, for example, includes “respect for diversity and multiculturalism “ as one of the profession’s values, the TESOL field can no longer ignore the significant community of Christianity and their practices and influences(Varghese & Johnston, 2007).

Similarly, there is one of the transparencies in the relationship between TESOL and evangelism. It is seen that if, for some people, religious conversion is their main goal and TESOL is their means. Here the writer believes that these people have a moral duty to make that instrumental goals and means explicit at all stages of their work. Moreover, the US foreign policy and Christianity are playing a great part via the English language. But the writer does not want to be associated with strategies for religion change(Edge, 2003).

According to missionaries’ testimonies, English classes are the most efficient ways to convince and win people. Indeed, for some organizations, using ELT has become an identifiable ‘approach’ to missionary work. Another point of concern is the lack of qualification of missionary English teachers. Despite the continued lack of training, several institutions now provide ELT education for missionary teachers, including William Carey International University, King’s College, Azusa Pacific University (APU), and Wheaton College. A nine-month qualification in ‘English as a Language for Missionaries’ offered by the King’s College The TESOL programme at APU aims specifically to combine English language, teaching and missionary work: APU’s program blends service alongside educational preparation. ‘Our first concern is that we train professional, qualified, bona fide teachers of English’, said Richard Robison, PhD, director of the TESOL Program. The core value of the program’s faculty is mission-oriented. Alongside some of the standard fare of EFL teacher education, programs such as this typically include courses such as using the Bible in EFL teaching’ and intercultural communication, which will help you gain a deeper understanding of what it means to communicate the Gospel in another culture’. On the one hand, then, such programs do at least give missionary English teachers training in more than just missionary work. On the other hand, the evangelical base of the language teaching curriculum offers these prospective teachers little material for reflection on their practice(Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003).

The biblical basis for teaching and Evangelism

While observing the Biblical references regarding teaching history, it seemed that Christian education started with the Old Testament of the Bible saints who provided with an example of how to make a holy and good lifestyle or live in a covenant relationship with God. It is seen that God provided them with clear guidance about how people could develop a relationship with God. Similarly, while tracing the early origins of Hebrew education provides a glimpse into God's original desires for education. His (God) word gives a direction regarding his plans and purposes. As we see that in human history, God was man's first instructor. While observing the story of the Old Testament of the Bible, Adam, Eve, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, and Moses including more others were the students of God's oral teaching (Anthony & Benson, 2011). While observing the verses and stories of the Old Testament like Exod. 20:2-17* Exod. 24:4, Exod. 31:18, Deut. 4:13-14, Deut. 5:32-33, Deut. 6:6-9*, Deut. 8:3, Deut. 11:26-27*, Deut. 17:18-19*, Deut. 27:1-3, Deut. 28:1-2, 15 etc (Gateway). God gave the Jews commands and laws to obey. He required the leaders (kings, priests, and prophets) to know and follow His words. Likewise, the common people were to obey the Word of the Lord. Similarly, the book of Genesis 12:1-2 reveals God's commands for Abraham to leave the land: The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and make kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing." So, these biblical references reveal about the commandments of God for the teachers.

Similarly, when we see the message of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (NT), he commands in the book of Matthew 28:18-20. "18 Jesus came and said to them (his disciples). All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Here, while observing the verses and stories of the New Testament like Matthew 5:18-19, Matthew 7:24-29, Luke 1:1-4, Luke 4:16-20*, John 1:45, John 2:17, etc. (Gateway).

It can be seen that Jesus, Lord and Savior, was literate. He often quoted the Scriptures. Jesus expects to follow His teachings, which are written in the New Testament. Early missionaries like Paul wrote many letters to correct encourage, instruct, and help the early Christians. They, too, expected people to read these writings, obey them, and pass them on to others.

Mission statements for ELT and Evangelism

There are some sayings and lines, based on these statements, many Christian educators and English volunteers are following and practicing all over the world. They are cascading these ideas in the world directly and indirectly that Some of the examples and mission statements are as follows:

- Tutor English as if it were vacation Bible school
- Each One Teach One and Win One to Christ
- Teaching a person the basic skills of English is an enjoyable, satisfying ministry, to which God has called you as his child
- People are destroyed for the lack of knowledge.

They always focus on reading three things which are the tools along with these statements above mentioned. They are prayers, reading the Bible and being a good witness. They believe that while in the class starts with prayers and ends with them and bring the verses and commandments of scripture in classes (Bible) and being a good testimony and witness. These three points, prayers-scripture-witness are great weapons for Christian English teachers all over the world. Wherever they go with the English missions, they use these weapons as ministry and teaching activities. Literacy International and Evangelism is one of the great organizations for literacy and English language ministry. It is an interdenominational inter-mission fellowship. Since 1967, LEI has supported many churches and organizations to start their literacy ministry all over the world. It exists to equip the church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ through the gift of reading and leads the teachers around the world to develop Bible content basic literacy materials and Bible content English as Second Language materials. In addition to developing materials, it provides training in teaching and developing literacy or English language ministry. They have developed literacy primers in almost 200 languages in more than 60 countries around the world. They conduct teacher training workshops in various languages. Its core missions are to help non-reading Christians, support them to read the Bible, helping them to improve their overall quality of life and sharing the Gospel with non-believers through Bible-content materials(International, 2020).

Similarly, conducting an English language ministry and literacy program has become a great tool for church planting all over the world. Most of the missionaries include the Bible content and a witness section in each section because they want their students to know the love Jesus Christ has for them. They want their students to meet Jesus in the Bible and prayers. New believers gained through literacy classes can lead

to a church if a church is not already present in the village or town. Anand Chaudhari is a former Brahman priest and founder of the Rajasthan Bible Institute in Jaipur, India. He reported that by 1995, his students and evangelists started 1,000 adult literacy classes across India. Of those, 500 churches developed out of the literacy classes. LEI primers are now being used in 15 major languages of India. Also, a report from another organization tells of over 8,000 new house churches planted in India over 10 years. These churches were all started through adult literacy classes using LEI primers and the English language ministry (Edic, 2015).

Moreover, remembering as English as if it were vacation Bible school, they are leading some English language ministry (ELM) to have their new international friends interacting with the Bible as a means of discovering the person of Jesus Christ and to have a place where international believers can grow and mature in their Christian faith. The people particularly from the western countries have helped Cambodia, Congo, India, Nepal and other developing countries committing to the fulfilment of the Great Commission and to win the people in Christ by doing different evangelical tasks (Dyson & Lodes, 2009).

Thus, it is believed that teaching English in a foreign context can surely enhance the disciple-making efforts in a mission's objectives. Teaching English has become a natural and purposeful way to gain access, to show mercy and build a relationship with God's diverse creation. English instruction can be a great foundational ministry and impact the tasks of missionaries. English is the third most popular first language in the world and the most spoken language overall. It is the predominant language of the internet, media and technology with most resources produced in English. In short, much of the world desires to know English. Therefore, English language teaching can be a wonderful gateway for discipleship and teaching the Bible and teaching English is such an important ministry (Pettengill, 2017).

An English language as the expression of Christian culture

Language and culture are inextricably intertwined. Language is the expression of culture. As the teachers faithfully tutor their learners, they embark on a journey that will expand their horizons and help them appreciate God's rich gift of his diverse creation. Language and culture mutually shape the forms of social life. Language is viewed as a socio-cultural resource and language can reflect cultural understandings. Language and culture are mutually shaping the forms of social life (Hall, 2013). In this sense, the English language is rooted in the practices of Christianity and its socio-cultural values.

Tutoring English to grateful learners will expose the Christian teachers' other customs and cultures which will broaden their Christian life and worldview. Thus we can say those socio-cultural aspects are the bases and practices extracted from the religious beliefs and practices which were transferred from generation to generation.

Christian missions and ELT missions as forms of colonialism and neocolonialism

The missionaries have made the choices in perusing local or European language as a medium. On the other hand, missionary language projects continue to use and promote European languages and particularly English for Christian purposes. Some missionaries have played an important role not only in supporting the past and current forms of colonialism and neocolonialism, not only in destroying other ways of being but also in terms of language effects. Mission centred linguists have disseminated a specific role in the construction and invention of languages around the world. The tradition which ties Christianity to English has its origins in colonial education, though it's a more recent development is a result of changing global configurations. While the agenda to use missionary creations of local languages to deliver the Christian message to local people was significant, other colonial educators saw a more profound link between Christianity and English (Pennycook, 2005).

The Pros and Cons of these two missions

Taking the Biblical references, many Christian missionaries and teachers who can speak English visit different countries. There are two points to be noted that what Christian missionaries along with ELT missions are doing in the world that they are making the society more progressive and open the door for the English language. Similarly, in terms of networking, citizenship skill, exchanging programs, making some NGOs and INGOs for social development, religious and spiritual awakening and facilitating literacy skills, these two missions have directly and indirectly facilitated the society as socially progressive driven missions. Likewise, these two missions have brought the international dimension and connection all over the world.

On the other hand, some scholars opine that these two missions have advocated the policy in terms of imperialism, attacking and killing the minority languages and religious practices and bringing their dominant power in other society and culture, breaking the society into different groups and beliefs and avoiding the relationship in the community establishing a big stereotype in the respective communities, leaking

the privacy and local and national issues and ethics.

Conclusion

Conclusively, English language teaching (ELT) is a gold mine rich with mission opportunity. Of course, ELT and Christian missionary activity has had a long and strong relationship. Long research and studies revealed a vast interconnected network of mission organizations using English language teaching as a key tool. Similarly, there is a significant community of evangelical Christian educators within the field of TESOL. So, English language teaching is also believed to be both highly political and evangelical project.

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