

## Conference Theme

As India, or *Bharat*, celebrates 75 years of its independence from colonial rule, the emphasis on decolonizing its systems and thought processes has gained focus again. In the context of education in India, the language with the widest reach (in terms of being a language taught at some level, and in some form, at all schools and its pervasive use in tertiary education), English, is still increasingly gaining ground as a medium of instruction at the school level in most parts of India.

While English is given the status of ‘Associate Official Language’ in the Indian constitution, it is a language of aspiration that is arguably one of India’s own languages today. Its spread in India and across the world is unavoidable owing to a slew of reasons beyond our powers, but the way in which it is taught and learnt in India is still deeply problematic. While the materials (textbooks etc.) used in the teaching and learning of English have become more inclusive of Indian contexts, the same is not true of the methods of teaching used in the classroom and even of the ways of assessing learners, because these are heavily borrowed from British and American models. While borrowing successful methods or modes of assessment from Western contexts is not problematic by itself, the problem arises since the language contexts in the West are vastly different from our own. While the societies in Britain or the USA are institutionally, largely monolingual, India is societally and individually plurilingual. In other words, it is rare to find, in India, either an individual who is conversant only in one language or a geographical area where only one language is used. In this context, it is therefore unfair and extremely limiting to exclusively use the methods of teaching or learning languages from any context that is not multi/plurilingual.

Not only has India possessed, for long, a plurilingual nature of its society, but its individuals have also always shown a flair for many languages without having to identify themselves as speakers of one or other specific language(s). What this means is that to fight the colonial hangover of viewing languages as distinct entities in geographical areas or in individual brains, we need to reorient ourselves to include or incorporate traditional Indian knowledge(s) of how languages are learnt or taught in formal settings. We may also need to stop viewing the ability to use various languages with equal proficiency as the ideal goal and start viewing as THE preferred objective of language education in India the celebration of multiple levels of ‘proficiency’ or ‘competences’ or ‘capabilities’ in different languages that are creatively used to perform the various functions of life successfully.

To do this, the teacher of English (and other languages) must tap into the existing wealth of linguistic knowledge that the learner brings to the classroom, even in the earliest years of school education. How to use this knowledge as a resource in the teaching and learning of English has been touched upon by scholars earlier. At the conference, we need to be able to deliberate much more on how to do this in different ways in order to maintain the rich linguistic diversity of Indian society and promote the richness of the linguistic repertoire of individual Indians. We must also ensure that no more languages are lost due to the imposition of the monolingual view of language learning where the knowledge of an additional language is seen as tolerable at best, and detrimental to the learning of the target language, at worst.

The conference, being conducted collaboratively by Shiv Nadar University Chennai and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore aims to bring together ideas related to, but not limited to:

- how languages are viewed conceptually
- how languages interact in society in South Asia
- how to preserve the rich linguistic diversity of South Asia
- how to promote the best existing practices of teaching and learning languages today
- how to use the knowledge of languages or language learning in the learning of new languages
- policy decisions on the choice of languages to learn in primary, secondary and tertiary education

The indicative sub-themes of the conference are:

#### Language Track

- Language as a natural system for human communication
- Cultural transmission of language
- Linguistic competence
- Language as a rule-bound system
- Innateness
- Multilingualism/plurilingualism
- The issue of Standards and 'purity' of language
- Linguistic diversity, linguistic ecology
- Language preservation and issues of linguistic
- Using L1 as a resource in the L2 classroom
- Common Underlying Proficiency
- Materials, methods and assessment in language teaching
- Language policy and planning

#### Literature Track

- South Asian writing in English
- Translations of texts in English into South Asian languages
- Translations of texts in South Asian languages to English
- Indianisms and nativization in texts