

RE-VISIONING, REVOLUTION, REVISIONISM: ENGLISH AND THE AMBIGUITIES OF POST- COLONIAL PRACTICE¹

*Tis well an Old Age is out
And time to begin a New*
John Dryden "The Secular Masque"

*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*
William Butler Yeats "The Second Coming"

*Perhaps
The man-hero is not the exceptional monster.
But he that of repetition is most master.*
Wallace Stevens "Notes towards a Supreme Fiction"

In the second half of 1985, Qadri Ismail published a series of articles in *The Lanka Guardian* in which he launched a furious assault on the Department of English at the University of Peradeniya. His ultimate target, though, was the tradition of English studies that the great English Department of E.F.C.Ludowyk, H.A.Passé and Doric de Souza had brought into being, nurtured into strength and bequeathed to students, to the successors of these teachers and to the nation. It is reasonable, therefore, to see Ismail's action as yet another call for a fundamental re-conceptualisation and revaluation of English within our post-colonial nation. "Yet another", because, it appears, English is predestined to perpetual re-examination and re-negotiation within such nations in terms of issues of coloniality and post-coloniality. The ambiguous insider-outsider status that English increasingly began to assume within these nations from early times, combined with the equally ambiguous positive/negative potential it has always shown therein, has contributed to placing it within what might be called a "multiple dialectic" in such contexts (Kandiah, to appear). This maintains it destabilisingly in a state of near-constant crisis which makes a reassuring comfortability impossible and unremitting vigilance inescapable. The "problem of English", it appears, is something that post-coloniality is destined to live with.

¹ This paper sets down, in a more complete form, the actual argument which was presented by the author at the Ludowyk Memorial lecture he delivered at the University of Peradeniya on 19 October, 1999. It replaces the printed text which was distributed during the lecture and which, hurriedly written to a deadline, does not represent the argument accurately.

My paper, written against the background of that sobering thought, and with the dialectic that lies behind it very much in mind, is an attempt to address this "problem of English". Its main concern is to offer a re-conceptualisation of English in Sri Lanka today. The need for such a re-conceptualisation, and a major one at that is desperate, I feel. Curiously (?), it hardly appears to be perceived, at least not in the way it seems to demand to be. As it happens, Ismail's comments on the tradition initiated by Ludowyk, Passé and de Souza provide a useful springboard to the task. For, they challenge us to a re-examination of that tradition which, when undertaken, calls attention to large matters which, I believe, his account misses. Recognition of such matters will be seen not just to permit more satisfactory understandings of the tradition but also to allow the re-conceptualisation that is the concern of my paper to be more adequately pursued. More significantly, it will, we might reasonably hope, allow understandings of English in colonial and post-colonial contexts to be retrieved out of the specificities of Sri Lanka's unique situation that are more insightful than those that appear to be current in academia in general.

Returning to Ismail, while his reach was long, it was, nevertheless, the Department of English as such that emerged as the immediate object of his attack. This was presumably because he saw it as a near-icon of the entire privileged Lankan world of English, one which, moreover, provided ballast and legitimacy for that world through its embodiment of a certain dominant epistemology derived from the colonial Centre. Ismail's specific complaint against the tradition of English studies built around that epistemology was that it simply reproduced and passed on the literary thought of the Centre in, worse still, a diluted form. In doing so, it evaded the challenge to radically redefine that thought to enable those who adopted it to see the significance of English (literature and language) to the Sri Lankan reality within which they belonged. It thus rendered itself meaningless and irrelevant to the life of the context in which it was now applied. Even more blame-worthily, by alienating its practitioners from this life, it reinforced the role of English as an instrument of the dispossession of the majority of (non-English-using) people who occupied that context. All of which only confirmed the "colonial" nature of English and the tradition of study associated with it in the country.

It would appear that what Ismail was calling for within the field of English studies in Sri Lanka, both from its then-current occupants and from its founders, was a quite radical break with what had gone before. It would be a break that would, presumably, exemplify a revolutionary paradigm shift of the kind which, for instance, Thomas Kuhn talks about in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970). Kuhn argues that scientific paradigms or theoretical systems that prevail at any given time tend, in the face of anomalies that inevitably and increasingly begin to challenge them, not to refashion themselves radically but, rather, to make local adjustments to themselves in an effort to meet these challenges. At some point as they so extend their lives, generally beyond the point when they can in fact accommodate the

anomalies, they are simply replaced by completely new paradigms. These, striking out on entirely new terms, show "no coherent direction of ontological development" from the paradigms they replace (p 206). They take over because they engage more satisfactorily with the various questions and problems that the replaced paradigms had concerned themselves with even while addressing other, new questions and problems which those paradigms had had no particular awareness of.

The anomalies which Ismail argued may be found in the then-prevailing tradition of English studies are characteristically those related to the task of post-colonial recovery and reconstruction. The significance of the task to countries like Sri Lanka cannot be overestimated. Colonialism, intimately responsive to the structuring demands of the developing global capitalism, did not just create the contemporary global order within which all countries and nations cannot but have their being. It simultaneously also rendered the colonies and their people faceless and voiceless (except, if at all, in some devaluing orientalist way), dispossessed them and consigned them to the insignificant margins within that order. It is through the task of recovery and reconstruction that the former colonies are now seeking out their legitimate place within their global home on a footing of equality and dignity, self-empowered in terms of what they distinctively are in their own right.

A major dimension of the task for a country like Sri Lanka was the transformation of the state conferred on it by history into a nation (see Roberts 1979). This very crucially included, among other things, the rediscovery and reconstitution of a national identity which would serve as a kind of base from which the country could viably make its post-colonial claims. The national identity would emerge, considerably, through the recuperation of the indigenous cultural traditions which had lain neglected for so long. Such recuperation had necessarily to be democratic in nature, for it involved the mobilisation of the ordinary people, true subalterns as we need to recognise them to be, whose lives sustained and were sustained by these traditions. And, since the traditions were inextricably bound to their own defining languages and the ordinary people did not in any event know the language of the withdrawing colonial power, it was entirely to be expected that the endeavour would be marked by an intense preoccupation with language. Equally expectedly, English drew a particularly large degree of attention to itself. For, not only was it the symbol and major linguistic means of the colonial imposition, it was also the emblem of a complicit middle class elite who had never shown themselves averse to playing the comprador to the erstwhile rulers. Moreover, even as the latter withdrew, the language emerged as the instrument which maintained that elite in a position of dominance over their compatriots within the polity (see Kandiah 1984). It appears to be in terms of such characteristic post-colonial considerations that we need to contextualise Ismail's claims.

The earlier nationalist remedy for the problem of English that such matters defined, the remedy which in fact anticipated some of what was to emerge later as the post-colonial effort, was as straightforward as it was stridently expressed. This was to reject English and all it stood for outright and to try to revert to a pristine pre-colonial state of language and culture. More reaction than response, the remedy consisted of a simple reversal of the Centre/periphery relation predicated on a straightforward, intransigent opposition between two self-contained, essentialist entities, the native Self and the alien Other. However, the historical realities of post-colonial countries appear to indicate that such binarism as we see here is simplifying, a marker of what may be termed "adolescent nationalism" (Kandiah 1989). Frantz Fanon (1968: pp. 218-227) enlightens us on what that nationalism needs to recognise for growth:

. . . (the native intellectual), when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses. . . the negation of one of these determinations. . . This. . . is due. . . to a begging of the question in his internal behaviour mechanism and his character. . . suddenly the language of the ruling power is felt to burn your lips. . . going back to your people means. . . to go native as much as you can, to become unrecognisable, and to cut off the wings that before you had allowed to grow. . . (all of this) is strangely reminiscent of exoticism. . . (the) intellectual behaves in fact like a foreigner. . . the ideas that he expresses and the preoccupations he is taken up with have no common yardstick to measure the real situation which the men and women of his country know. . . This is why the intellectual often runs the risk of being out of date. . . (he) forgets that the forms of thought and what it feeds on, together with modern techniques of information, language and dress have dialectically reorganised the people's intelligence. . . The truths of a nation are in the first place its realities. . . It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged. . .

Such recognitions point to "the fallacy of the totality" of either Otherness or Selfhood (Suleri 1991: 13). Both have been intimately implicated in each other by the dialectical movements of history, making it impossible to confine either to dichotomised water-tight compartments from which the other has been excised. The kind of experience, thought and sensibility which emerge from that history is something which may be described as symbiotic. That is, they hold within themselves elements of both or all of the different cultural inputs, in varying proportions among different segments of life and society. The elements exist sometimes in harmony, at other times in tension or even overt opposition with each other. But together they define the inescapable realities of being, existence and knowledge in the community (see Kandiah 1981: 1989). All of which, of course, means that the national identity

which post-colonialism was striving to retrieve and the idiom in which it would express itself could hardly assume some presumed pure, pre-colonial nature. Rather, they would manifest the creative transformation of the indigenous traditions and their enduring intrinsic features in dynamic interaction with very many of those other features which had come in from outside during colonial times to become a necessary part of reality they now belonged within.

The most literal, though by no means the only, manifestation of the immediate involvement of the presumed alien Other within the intimacies of the life of the re-emerging post-colonial Self is at the material level. Modernisation, associated originally with what entered the indigenous world from a Centre that was very different from it, is an essential part of the development strategies to which post-colonial nations are strongly committed. These form, alongside the recovery of the indigenous traditions, a second vital component of the post-colonial effort, precisely because they are directed towards the kind of material advancement on which reconstruction may purposively be based. No nationalism which has attained any degree of maturity can possibly dispense with the major linguistic mode through which the necessary apparatus of modernisation may be accessed, namely, in the case of Sri Lanka, English, for the cost will be stagnation and a prolongation of the material backwardness created by colonialism.

At the same time, the historical realities Fanon calls attention to will lead us to recognise that modernisation and development can hardly themselves assume a very separate, alien status. Whatever is associated with them, as it enters the post-colonial context, filters through the consciousness that is already there, one based fundamentally on the original indigenous traditions, and begins to cohabit in various ways with these traditions. It emerges, therefore, in a form that is appropriate to the specificities of that context, altered, adapted, added to from within the context and, often, turned around. That is to say, it may be seen as a modernity that is unique to that context (see Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995).

Given what has been stated here and above, we will be able to recognise that there always has been and will be a reciprocal exchange between the two apparently separate components of the task of post-colonial re-construction. While bringing the two together, it also creatively transforms both in a manner which invests them with the relevance, strength and viability that enable effective praxis, within the immediate context of post-colonial society as well as within the larger global order to which it belongs.

Ismail, we might note from his comments, appears to be quite aware of such complexities and to recognise that they make it necessary both to examine the "problem of English" and to situate that examination firmly within them. Thus, he opts not for the simple-minded solution of eliminating the language but for the far

more difficult one of demanding a fundamental re-conceptualisation of it that would render it meaningful within its contemporary Lankan context. At the same time, it does not seem that he fully realises how complex the complexities are. Some evidence of this is provided by Arjuna Parakrama, in his considered response to Ismail entitled "More or less about English" (*Lanka Guardian*, 9 and 15 May, 1986). Parakrama points out, for instance, that Ismail assigns a "special place" to the Department of English "within the scheme of things", treating it as having "parity of status" with the whole of the rest of "the social system". As a consequence, Ismail's argument reveals "an implicit valorization (of the Department and of the Lankan world of English) which runs counter to much of what is explicitly stated" (see below, however, for a somewhat different take on this).

It remains for H.A. Passé to call attention back to the dimension that escapes recognition here, in a response he made in the *Ceylon Daily News* somewhere in the mid- sixties to a critique by John Halverson of his work on Ceylon English (as it was then known). Passé reminds his detractor, with a graciousness and civilised decency that the 1985 attack could not but have greatly benefited from, that his work was produced "in another place and another time". His words did not just make a courteous plea for understanding. Rather, they robustly affirmed not only how inescapable socio-historical situatedness was for the comprehending evaluation of any work, but also how equally inescapable it was to recognise *all* of the complex dimensions that such situatedness called attention to.

Such an approach to the work of Ludowyk, Passé and de Souza would have led to the recognition that within the socio-historical realities of their own colonial context they carried out the only kind of revolution that those realities made meaningful. This certainly could not be a Kuhnian kind of revolution, which, as critics of Kuhn have pointed out, does not provide for essential continuities of the kind that the realities call attention to. But it was nevertheless a major revolution. For, the tradition of English studies they inherited from the Centre and laboured to establish in their country finally liberated these studies, the world of English in Sri Lanka, and also by extension the larger Lankan context within which they existed, from the doom that Lord T.B.Macaulay had laid on them through his influential minute of 1835 on education in India, if anything a recipe for the permanent calibanisation of the colonial Other.

As we will recall, Macaulay had in that minute urged the promotion of English education with the aim of forming "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect" (Sharp 1920: 116, cited by Kachru 1983: 22). The appointed hegemonic teleology of the strategy, based as it is on an absolute dichotomisation, is transparent. The Centre remains the one, axiomatic certainty, assured, stable, enduring, ineluctable, which defines just by

being what it is the unquestionable norms by which all around it are to be judged as, inevitably, lacking. Out there, in the very broad periphery, are the subaltern masses who, so judged, are to be enlightened into seeing, understanding, appreciating and accepting what the Centre is and does for and to them. Enabling the process are the people in-between, the complicit comprador middle class. They fit themselves to their historic commission by compliantly allowing themselves to be effaced and remedially remade in the image of the Centre, through the adoption of whatever it is that the Centre determines and on terms controlled entirely by it.

Yasmine Gooneratne (1968) and Sarathchandra Wickramasuriya (1976; 1986) trace some of the more significant processes by which the strategy was pursued in the crucial field of education. Homi Bhabha would have us see these processes as involving "mimicry" of the colonising Subject at the Centre by the colonised Other, something which takes place in the "disturbing" "hybrid space" between the two (pp. 45, 58). Through such mimicry the latter endeavours to "normalise" itself, by "repeating" the former's norms, values and behaviour. But, what is thus repeated invariably emerges as something *different* (p.111), which thereby "disavows" what it repeats (p.45). Consequently, it destabilises both imitator and imitated, and becomes, among other things, a "strateg(y) of subversion that turn(s) the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power", unsettling it (p. 112). Given what Wickramasuriya (1976) argues, however, it appears less than easy to endorse Bhabha's claims. It is not the destabilisation but, on the contrary, the consolidation of the hegemony of the Centre that such mimicry appears to have achieved, through the dispossession and inferiorisation of the colonised Other. For, deprived by the historical circumstances of access to the sources of its own indigenous strength, the latter would always be seen as falling short of the standard it was obliged to aspire to. (See also my comments on Bhabha's position in Kandiah and Sankaran To appear.)

What is missing in Bhabha's account, confined as it singularly is to an uncontaminated textual hermeneutics, is an adequate appreciation of the *material* significance of the unequal nature and distribution of the educational weaponry with which the battle of hegemonic imposition and contestation could not but be waged in those circumstances. Within their realities, effective resistance, non-binarily conceived, appeared to demand that the Other, far from just imitating the Centre, wrests the current instrumentalities of hegemony away from its exclusive control, takes them self-empoweringly into its own hands and turns them to its own purposes as the central means of subverting the "eye of power". The magic of Prospero needed, in other words, to be appropriated by the colonial Other. But that by itself could not suffice. The colonial Other, unlike Caliban, had historically been in possession of its own sophisticated magic, and, notwithstanding the realities of the time which rendered that magic less than consequential, its existence could not be disregarded in fashioning the magic appropriated from the Centre into a powerful contemporary instrument of liberation.

That Ludowyk was very sensible of the complex nature of the challenge is evident in the extremely sensitive Introduction he wrote to his *Marginal Comments* (1945). He laments that Lankan students have no knowledge of their own indigenous literature, something “beside which” English literature may be placed, and warns us that “we should, if it (English literature) is to be of any value to us, remember at all times that it is the expression of a culture very different from ours” (pp. iii-iv). And in his Preface to *Understanding Shakespeare* (1962), he declares, “I am conscious, too, of all I learnt from classes in Ceylon in the twenty-five years of trying to understand Shakespeare there” (p. x).

But such recognitions did not lead him to any kind of facile, patronisingly tokenistic concessions to the marginalised indigene. He was clearly only too aware that within what might be termed the protocols of his times, the act of resistance required not such enfeebling gestures but a praxis which ensured, as far as possible, parity in the instrumentalities of the struggle. That could be achieved only by the indigenes grasping the primary linguistico-cultural weapon realistically available at the time firmly in their hands in the plenitude of its powers—which explains his absolute commitment to the rigour of the standards and the power of his discipline of studies, even while he acknowledged the immediate context within which he cultivated them. The weapon that he was enabling his people to appropriate had, after all, to be equal to the large demands that were being made of it.

It is, therefore, somewhat ironic that in later times some of the very people who had so benefited from his legacy of appropriation as to be able to ask the relevant questions with searching force should see the whole process as evidence of “dilution”. Even more curious is the view that his work was lacking in the kind of concern with elements of his environment outside the world of English that would, presumably, guarantee the relevance of his work to the nation. The titles of three of his books, *The Footprint of the Buddha* (1958), *The Story of Ceylon* (1985) and *The Modern History of Ceylon* (1966), published, interestingly, after he had left Sri Lanka, would of themselves serve to dispel any doubts on that count.

The power of the kind of context-sensitive thinking he developed inspired, too, the other members of his team, Passé and de Souza, who helped Ludowyk firmly establish the Lankan tradition of English literary and linguistic studies. Passé’s pioneering work on Ceylon English was among the earliest to demonstrate the systematicity of New Englishes, thus helping found and validate a field of linguistic study which today has assumed considerable significance in the academic retrieval of the post-colonial. It needs also to be observed that his 1948 PhD thesis, *The English Language in Ceylon*, while written within the models of his time, still remains one of the more solid and comprehensive descriptive accounts available of the phonology of any New English. De Souza’s vast academic contribution in applied language study was made less through actual writing (see his classic series of articles, de

Souza 1969, though) than through the highly innovative thinking he developed and communicated on the problems of English in Sri Lanka's specific post-colonial context. But, looking at some of the post-colonially relevant work that is being done in language study across the world today, it may justly be said of the thinking that he passed on to the Lankan world of scholarship that it often moved "in the direction of solutions well before scholars elsewhere, working under far more advantageous conditions, had even begun to see the problems" (Kandiah 1987: 31).

Little wonder then that the tradition of English studies which these people founded had a positive impact that was quite out of proportion to the small size of their Department. The impact was felt not only in the Lankan world of English within which the Department occupied a symbolically significant place, but also, indirectly through this world, even in the wider context. While it is clear that influences of this large kind can never be adequately characterised in terms of the impact made by the work of individuals, one cannot forbear calling attention to the contribution made in a range of arenas of the national context by an outstanding set of personalities who had come out of Ludowyk's English Department. An utterly incomplete list of some of these people would include such exceptional figures as Karan Breckenridge, Kenneth de Lanerolle, Lakshmi de Silva, Mervyn de Silva, Chitra Fernando, Yasmine Gooneratne, Godfrey Gunatilleke, A.J. Gunawardane, Ashley Halpé, G.K. Hatthotuwegama, C.R. and Pauline Hensman, Haig Karunaratne, Gananath and Ranjini Obeyesekere, Regi Siriwardena, Douglas Walatara and Batty Weerakoon, among many others. All of these people have made an irreplaceable positive difference to the quality of thinking, action and life in their different fields, which would be much the poorer without what they put into them.

But, we are forgetting the other strand of the dialectic. The ambiguities generated by the play of historical forces at the time did not allow the tradition to remain unidimensionally positive. For most of the English-using middle class and, particularly, for very large numbers of its powerful elite, it provided a means of re-affirming their separateness from the people among whom they lived and asserting their superiority to them. This, combined with the pre-eminent role that the language played in some of the most significant arenas of the polity, made it the dominant language at Independence and the language of hegemonic imposition and control.

Clearly, therefore, the "problem of English" needed to be confronted anew. And it was, by means of what is generally known as the national bourgeois revolution, which overtly began in the mid-fifties and is still in fact in progress. [I need to observe before I go on that I am more than aware that labels such as "national bourgeois(ie)" are fraught with definitional problems. While recognising the complexities, however, one is not simultaneously obliged to succumb to the kind of positivistic, empiricist thinking which is often used to discredit such terms, generally at the cost of diverting attention from crucial social forces which are

commonsensically known by people to actually be in operation. Therefore, I shall below continue to use the term as a convenient and useful descriptive label to refer with a certain degree of legitimacy to social forces which are widely and familiarly recognised.] As far as the formal status of the language was concerned, the decisive change came with the passage of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956, which made Sinhala the sole official language, thus displacing English from the dominant official position it had occupied for a century and a half. Far more decisive from the point of view of the place of the language within the polity were, however, the other successes of the national bourgeois revolution, which were nothing short of spectacular.

The extraordinary mobility of the population which we see all around us today and which contrasts dramatically with the situation that prevailed in, for instance, the forties, attests to some of the most significant of these successes. The ordinary people or the subalterns, who had earlier remained invisible and unheard in the insignificant margins of society, now acquired faces and voices of their own, and a presence which made them recognisable within its contemporary everyday arenas. Their role within the public sphere (that indispensable "domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed" [Habermas 1989 (1973): 231] and which was established in that form in Sri Lanka under British rule) became, therefore, indisputable. For, under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie who had appropriated that sphere, they began to enter more prominently into the scrutiny and discussion of public affairs than they had done before. Many of them in fact, who in earlier times had been confined to entirely passive recipient roles within the polity, now began to participate actively in proliferating initiatives directed towards their improvement and advancement. Not infrequently, particularly in various localised places, some of them even entered very impressively in dynamic leadership roles into the processes of conceptualisation, decision-making and administration that the initiatives involved.

Together with these changes came the restoration to centre stage of the indigenous cultural traditions which, through the colonial centuries of neglect and devaluation, had still given and received meaning from the lives of these people. The remarkable efflorescence of the arts in the mid-fifties and after, associated particularly with the theatre of Ediriweera Sarachchandra but defined also by the invigorating work done even from earlier times by a host of outstanding personalities in virtually every field of creative endeavour, gave expression to the depth and scale of these developments. A noteworthy feature of the efflorescence was that it anticipated by some years the massive outburst of post-colonial creativity right across the globe which is generally taken to have begun in the sixties.

All of these momentous changes were inseparably associated with the emergence to prominence of the national bourgeoisie. They could not, however, have achieved any of it unless they had been able to successfully mobilise the traditional

indigenous elites and others who had received education in the media of the indigenous languages. These included the monks, the school teachers, the ayurvedic physicians and so on, who had languished in the backwoods during colonial rule and who now recognised the opportunities the emerging new situation was opening out to them for retrieving and securing some of their own accustomed positions within the structures of power. The importance of the traditional elites for the national bourgeoisie was as a means of mobilising, in turn, the ordinary people, the subalterns, with whom these elites had maintained close, mutually sustaining, links. This was vital, for within the democratic kind of political organisation which the vacating colonial rulers had left behind, these ordinary people defined the crucial mass base of power.

An inevitable consequence of such developments was what appeared, at least at an overt level, to be the erosion of the old Britain-oriented middle class and the displacement of its elite representatives from the undisputed positions of pre-eminence they had hitherto occupied within the structures of power in the polity. The national bourgeoisie emerged as the dominant class, and the positions vacated by the old elite came gradually to be filled by its leadership, who thus began to assume the positions of dominance within the developing structures of power in the polity to emerge as the new elite. Concomitantly, there took place what could clearly be seen as a retreat by English and the local world of English it defined. Presumably, then, the revolution had been accomplished, the "common man", as he/she began to be called, came to be rehabilitated, and the "problem of English" finally solved.

The ordinary people, the subalterns, however, refused to acquiesce in this seemingly entirely natural conclusion. They came up with a contumaciously incommoding term *kaduva* in talking about English which, when deconstructed, was seen to name not just the language but a whole underlying complex of disturbing socio-political-ideological issues that seemed to dispel the possibility of complacency. The issues are too well known to require repetition here, but essentially they revolved around the class-based nature of English and its role in maintaining the middle class in the controlling positions of power.

However, as far as mainstream thinking and practice were concerned, the issues appeared to remain below the level of conscious awareness until the problematisation of the term by, ironically, one of Ludowyk's very last Lankan students (see Kandiah 1984). Such overt formulation was necessary in order that the issues might be explicitly and purposefully engaged with in academic, educational and other terms. The fact that it did not come from within the ranks of the now-prominent national bourgeoisie is not, I believe, insignificant. For, it points to what appears to be a strategic blind spot in the self-perceptions of the leadership of this class. It is a blind spot which seems to define a useful starting point in moving towards the major new re-conceptualisation of English that our current realities

appear urgently to be demanding. Certainly, it appears to be more adequate for the purpose than just the now readily repeated issues raised by the term *kaduva* itself, which tend to unchangingly formulate themselves in terms relevant to the operations of the old elite in the somewhat less complex times of about two decades ago.

The point is that a very decisive and effective segment, and a large one at that, of the leadership of the national bourgeois revolution came, particularly at the outset, from among the anglicised metropolitan Lankans. This is not to say that this segment was identical with the old English-oriented bourgeois elite, even though it is true that considerable numbers of the latter did transmogrify themselves into *national* bourgeois people. The reason why one cannot say it is that many of the members of the segment, even while they commanded English, had deep roots in and real concern for the traditional indigenous. Nor is it to say that the role of the traditional indigenous elites in drawing into the national bourgeois revolution long-existent and deep-rooted energies of resistance among the ordinary people (see Parakrama 1990) was anything less than major. The fact remains, though, that within the socio-historically constituted realities of the time, it was not the monolinguals but the people who controlled English effectively who were able to assume decisive leadership in the rehabilitation of the indigenous and the restitution of the subaltern. For, it was they, rather than the others around them, who had the two crucial bits of equipment needed for the struggle at the time. Not only were they able to easily access powerful indigenous resources of strength through, among other things, their command of the indigenous languages, they were also able to draw effortlessly on whatever resources the local and external world of English made available to the polity for effective resistance, contestation and retrieval.

We run here once again into the paradox which the dialectical movements of history mentioned earlier bestowed on post-coloniality. Coloniser and colonised are inextricably implicated in each other and no exclusive oppositionality between them is sustainable. Indeed, if Gayatri Spivak (1988) is correct, it is largely owing to this mutual implication of the two in each other that, often, the Subaltern is able at all to speak. Within the emasculating conditions in which history has placed the Subaltern (Spivak is looking at desperately marginalised rural Indian women subjected to *sati*), he/she generally “has no voice”—except that mediated by the radical, often metropolitanised protestor. Indeed, the very term “mobilisation of the mass base” suggests a kind of leadership role which can be discharged only by those equipped for it. This is why, Spivak points out (p. 271), some of the most radical critics tend to express “an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West”—which in turn will (at least part exoneratingly?) account for the valorisation of English which Parakrama censures Ismail for.

Such considerations also created an opportunity and a space for the remnants of the old, English-oriented bourgeoisie to salvage what they could from the situation

even as they were being displaced from the overt positions of prominence they had earlier occupied as a matter of course. Many of them now sought to ensure that their previously shaky knowledge of the indigenous language and culture was made good, and, often, reconstituted themselves in a more national image. Their now firm control of both the decisive linguistico-cultural instruments of effective action in the polity allowed them to assume significant, even privileged, roles within it, as in fact part of the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. Others remained out of immediate public view, but in the assurance that, by virtue of their command of English, the change that had taken place did not mean that they had to yield their places of privilege entirely. The various responses were implicitly conditional on these people acquiescing in the national bourgeoisie-controlled dispensation, and since the many who did not seek escape from it by emigration had no choice in any case, they readily did so. Moreover, there were many who, recognising the desirability or even inevitability of the changes that had been taking place, or fearful that any effort to stand up for what mattered to them might be misconstrued as a sign of disloyalty or non-Lankanness, concurred, often out of a certain pragmatic timidity. Not all of this was done with cynical opportunism or a total lack of concern with the people and reality around them, though, and the contribution which many of them continued to make very often remained valuable.

Such factors, taken all together and seen under the light of the matters to which Fanon and Spivak call attention, explain, to a considerable extent, what must be seen as the double identity of the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. History does not apparently permit them any other kind of identity. But, there were also strategic reasons for this double identity. The privileged role of leadership and power they claimed was crucially dependent on their possession of both originally indigenous resources as well as English and its accoutrements. However, the very nature of their endeavour made it imprudent to draw too much attention to this latter dimension of their self. This was not just because it might appear to be inconsistent with the nationalist dimension of the task they were pursuing. Even more significantly, it was because they were aware of the importance to their position within the structures of power of the popular mass base on which it rested and of the traditional indigenous elites through whom they could reach out to the ordinary people who made up that base. Since neither of the latter had ready access to English, this second major instrumentality of the struggle for recovery needed to be projected by the leadership not as something that was part of their internal composition but as a symbol of all that they were committed to reversing. As a consequence, it was but politic to deny assiduously part of who they necessarily were and to divert attention from it.

All of the considerations just mentioned explain why insight into the *kaduva* phenomenon could not come from within the ranks of the national bourgeoisie as such. Such insight required too close attention to matters within themselves which

they preferred not to have noticed by too many people. The processes of evasion by the national bourgeoisie were enabled by a further ploy. Rather than deny the existence of the class-based inequalities focussed on by the term *kaduva* they showed great readiness to acknowledge them. But they then quite nonchalantly passed all the responsibility for it to the continued presence of the old, English-oriented elite whom they had brought to heel. Indeed, the utter unselfconsciousness and lack of self-reflexivity with which members of the national bourgeoisie pass the blame for the problems created by the classed nature of English exclusively onto the latter are nothing short of extraordinary.

If they have been able to get away with it, this is partly because of the dramatically conspicuous positive triumphs they *did* achieve in their nationalist roles, which convincingly legitimised the self-images they strove to project. But, even more effective perhaps was their adoption of a hortatory rhetoric and strategy of public action, including the overt projection of a conspicuous nationalist self-image, that gave strong expression to an exclusivist dichotomous thinking embedded in the familiar duality of margin and centre. It was a thinking, it needs to be noted, that was extended beyond simply the relationship between the indigenous languages and English to all spheres of the complex multi-linguistic, multi-cultural polity they occupied. In the democratic context they belonged to, this was a powerful means of mobilising the mass base in support of their position at the expense of their rivals in the polity and persuading it, in Gramscian terms, to consensually assent to their hegemony.

As already indicated, such binarism was out of phase with the historically constituted realities. It was discrepant in at least two prime respects, only one of which, however, is of concern to my paper. The other, which, since I have mentioned it, I am now obliged to briefly characterise before reverting to the one which is the focus of this paper, concerns the definitive multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic nature of the polity. In the face of that reality, the internal logic of unyielding exclusivity has led inevitably to mutually mirroring positions of self-construction and othering among the ethno-linguistically differentiated constituents of the polity. From such positions has arisen the conflictual predicament in which the polity is seemingly inextricably embroiled at present.

But it is English with which we are concerned. The implication of English in the lives of the leadership made the process of othering that the exclusivist rhetoric entailed less easy in its case than in the case of ethno-linguistic identity. In any event, the *kaduva* phenomenon made it very evident that the "problem of English" was still very much around, and that it needed to be resolved if the *status quo* which kept the leadership in their positions of dominance was to be maintained.

Faced with such vexatious challenges, the leadership groped their way over the next few years to what turned out to be, at least on the surface, a very effective response. It was a response which was based on a drawing out of the implications of the second descriptor which the compound name applied to them, *national bourgeoisie*, contained. This descriptor brought them face to face with their true nature as a class and reawakened them to an awareness of their place in relation to the structuring role of capitalism across the present globe. This was something they had somewhat let themselves lose sight of in the earlier days of post-colonial recovery, as they sought to pursue some of the equalising initiatives that the task seemed to make necessary, through a form of socialist planning and welfarist measures. By the late 'seventies it had become evident that such initiatives had not procured either for them as a class or for the country as a whole what they had been designed to procure. Responding to the pressures of the global economic order which were at least partly responsible for the failure, the leadership opted, therefore, for an "open economy", which made to undo, though not entirely, some of the earlier initiatives. This opened up more than the economy. For, it also brought into the open the commitment of the national bourgeoisie to the particular hierarchical distributions of social relations, social control and divisions of labour that global capitalism decreed, and their acceptance of the special role and functions that it assigned to them within its modes of production.

One obvious manifestation of the commitment was the move to restore primacy to the private sector as an engine of economic growth. The justification for the shift was voiced in terms of the need to pursue economic development and modernisation, both of which were crucial elements of the task of post-colonial recovery and both of which few people would be inclined not to assent to. As it happened, development and modernisation had to be pursued within the realities of a contemporary global order in which English has been assigned by history the role of *de facto* first language. This meant that the language needed to be accorded an even more significant place in the scheme of things than before.

But, given particularly the nature of the dichotomising rhetoric they depended so much on, that raised a massive contradiction which carried the potential to seriously undermine the credibility of their claims to be the driving force of the nationalist revival. However, neither commitment, the prominently nationalist one or the English-oriented one, could possibly be dispensed with. Acutely aware of how crucial both were to their positions within the structures of power in the polity, the leadership came up with a resolution which allowed them to hold both non-confrontationally together at the same time. The resolution took the form of what seems to be best described as an extension to English of the *jathika chintanaya* approach which had been proposed by some sections of the national bourgeoisie as a remedy for the ethnic problem. The approach was one which was based on a powerful reaffirmation of the dichotomy of Self and Other within the internal national

arena. As far as the ethnic distribution of power was concerned, it sought to install the majority community as the exclusive and indisputable Subject Self at the Centre. Concomitantly, the position of the minority Others within the polity was reconstituted not as an entitlement but something that was contingent upon the goodwill of the majority.

In the sphere of ethnic relations, the formula, which placed the Others in a position of permanent dependence on the dominant Self, raised immense reservations. When applied to the relation between the indigenous language and English, however, it seemed perfect. The former could be maintained intact and undisputedly supreme at the Centre occupied by the Self. The latter, constituted as the alien Other, could be freely and significantly admitted in on terms which, decided presumably entirely at the Centre, would not destabilise the position of the Self. The constitution of English as the outsider language was already not too difficult by virtue of its foreign provenance. But the process of making it an acceptable, non-threatening outsider was further facilitated by reducing it to almost purely pragmatic, instrumental and utilitarian dimensions, as the language of international commerce, technology, increasingly available foreign and local jobs, international dealings, and suchlike. This view of English received conviction from the ways in which the open economy fuelled developments which created the relevant needs. The fact that this formerly exclusive language of a small powerful coterie was now made far more widely available to ordinary people, who needed to be enlisted to supply some of these needs, helped provide further reassurance. [For the purposes of discussion let us call the approach to English described in this paragraph the (national bourgeoisie's) amended response (to the language)].

This time round the "problem of English" did indeed appear to have been conclusively solved. So much so, in fact, that British Council consultant and Chief Advisor to the Higher Institute of English Education in Sri Lanka, James Drury was able to confidently declare (1989) that the language had "come clean" and that the "hangups" associated with it had been put behind. He was thus able to fully endorse Lakshmi Kumaranatunge's claim (1989) that the language was now seen by everybody, including those who had previously been intimidated by its hegemonic potential, "not as a privilege, but as a utility which could hardly be dispensed with". Presumably, the sword had at last been blunted, and the term *kaduva* might finally be laid to rest.

Developments since the two papers just mentioned were presented seem only to confirm that conclusion. Not even a change of Government which brought back into power the party most immediately associated with the national bourgeois revolution, socialism and welfarism has affected what can only be described as a clamour for English. Not a day passes without several affirmations of the importance of English by various important figures. Pronouncements about the language and the

need to teach and learn it emanate from the most significant official figures and institutions, and are then given real substance in the forms of plans, strategies and so on the implementation of which is seriously pursued. "International schools", which allow those who have the money to pursue their education outside the regular official indigenous language education system, proliferate. Institutions like the British Council and various NGOs offer well-planned English courses for a fee. Students of all backgrounds, ages, income groups and so on flock in large numbers to mushrooming private tutorials. The horrendous quality of many of these led a member of the old elite turned new elite to christen them, with perishing old school saltiness, *takarang academies*. English had, presumably, at last come to terms with the country and earned itself a prominent place within it that generated no insecurities, and everybody assented.

But the perpetual dialectic surfaces again, and we are once more led back into the cycle of critical interrogation, deconstruction and re-formulation. The provocation on this occasion is a set of nagging paradoxes or anomalies which surround the language and its circumstances in the country. These do not appear to rest quite easy within the celebratory matrix. They suggest that in spite of a massive declaration of commitment to English, the language and the effort of learning and teaching it are not taken as seriously as that commitment warrants. Among such anomalies are the following.

Over several years in the universities, a repeated complaint by teachers has been that, generally, except when some kind of compulsion associated with penalties is imposed, attendance at the carefully planned classes which are provided is far from what is expected. The English classes in any case almost invariably come out the loser when they have to compete with rival events, like student meetings or talks or shows. Inexplicably, many of the same students who miss classes, when they come close to the end of their University careers, register for classes with private fee-levying tutorials which often serve them with utterly unsatisfactory materials and instruction. A separate problem is that students who know very little English and, therefore, cannot do essential reading in their specialised subjects which is not available in their own language, are still able to procure exceptionally good results in their examinations in these subjects. Moving on, the English language teaching units are not treated with anything like the respect which the presumed importance of the work demands. No serious effort has been made to build a sound academic tradition of language teaching studies within these units, little encouragement is given or opportunity opened out to the teachers to familiarise themselves with the great deal of the exciting thinking that is going on in their field across the world, and their status as University academics is denied. A comparatively high ranking University administrator gave revealing expression to the low esteem in which the units are held. Responding to a request by the teachers for some academic privilege, he is reported to have said, "If we grant it to them, we might as well grant it to our gardeners too"!

One cannot resist observing that perhaps if the gardeners themselves were not subjected to such classed devaluations, the gardens of some of our Universities might look far better than they actually do!

There are also other kinds of paradoxes and anomalies. In spite of the widespread public and institutional endorsement of English, there is a revealing division of labour in the way English is distributed between public and private sectors. English is associated with the private sector and with desirable jobs in it locally or overseas, the indigenous languages with the government sector and comparatively less desirable jobs within it. Even in the private sector, very many of the jobs do not seem to absolutely require a knowledge of English and in fact a lot of them are not done in English. Nevertheless, the private sector places a special premium on English when it comes to employing people. The jobs that students who depend on classes to learn English generally seem to aspire to are those in the private sector, but the jobs they do eventually get are almost invariably in the government sector. Turning to a further matter, there is a huge demand for spoken English, even in the Universities, where English is most immediately needed for reference work. This relates evidently to their hope of jobs in the private sector, at, clearly, the higher levels which their qualifications seem to warrant. Yet, the chances that these students will learn in the classroom the kind of spoken English that is needed for selection to these jobs are virtually nil. Yet another anomaly relates to the widespread perception that the standards of English usage have declined, evidence for which is seen plentifully all around. Nevertheless, almost all teachers to whom I have spoken are certain about how very successful their classes are.

There are more overtly unsettling anomalies. In the midst of the declarations of enthusiasm for English, we regularly run into expressions of the old resentments that have supposedly been dispelled. Very often, these come from those who are already in employment in any case. Some of them in fact, coming from backgrounds which gave them little opportunity to learn English, have been able to procure this employment precisely by taking control of the language by their own, quite admirable, efforts. Particularly disturbing is the readiness of some of these people to express their resentments in terms of the presumably outdated dichotomies. In the face of the reality that it is now the national bourgeoisie who are calling the shots, they are more than willing to blame the displaced English-oriented elite for whatever it is that is felt to be wrong (for instance, Christians are accused of knowing English).

All of this, one cannot help feeling, must be related to a further anomaly. To frame the issue somewhat provocatively, if we look around and move across the reality we actually occupy, and then ask the question "Do most people really need English at all?", the answer surely must be "No". The point is that, in one sense, the Lankan national bourgeoisie appear to have pursued their restorative nationalist commitments with far greater seriousness of purpose and consistency than, for

instance, their counterparts in the neighbouring sub-continent. So much so, in fact, that as far as the vast majority of people are concerned, almost everything of consequence which they want to do can be satisfactorily done in just the indigenous language. Indeed, in most of everyday activity, English might even prove to be a positive disadvantage, as in most places, the minority language certainly does. Why then English and this fuss about it?

These and many other such matters seem to suggest that perhaps the current optimistic discourse of English which the polity is operating with is based on a notion of the language and its role that is not quite in touch with the realities. The problematisation of the language that this recognition makes necessary is, however, inhibited by the overpowering rhetoric of pragmatic common sense in which virtually all discussions of it are carried out. English is for jobs, it is for utility, it is for practical ends, and any attempt to look beyond and beneath such concerns to qualitative or ideological or suchlike matters which are central to explanation and understanding will fall outside the closures that the discourse has effected and look perverse or weird. However, the anomalies just noted, by suggesting that the "problem of English" is by no means defunct, leave us with no option but to take a closer and deeper look at it in an effort to understand the situation.

One of the first things we will see when we do so is that, under the aegis of the national bourgeoisie's amended response to English, the language began to function as a far more ingenious and subtle selector of the distribution of privilege than it had ever done earlier. The practical material benefits the response was designed to bestow on the ordinary people under the new economic dispensation consisted considerably of access to jobs newly created or made salient within the social system. These were often not jobs that had the highest value in terms of current hierarchical distributions. Prominent among them were jobs as West and Southeast Asian labour and housemaids, local taxi drivers, waiters and other tourist service personnel, fax machine operators, and so on. Social valuation apart, there is no doubt that such opportunities did provide to the beneficiaries a desirable means of entering into the patterns of livelihood and consumption generated by the consolidating capitalist economic regimes. At the same time, we need to recognise that they also helped fit these people into the modes of production that were a defining part of such regimes, as necessary cogs in their machine. (In this respect, it would be instructive to look at the comments made on functional literacy in some of the essays in Graff (ed.) 1981.)

Perhaps even more important, the kind of English which most of these jobs needed represented what Basil Bernstein would call a "restricted code" (1971). This is a code which, to put it over-simplifyingly, is made up from a comparatively restricted range of choices from among the resources of grammar, vocabulary and so on that a language system offers its users for the purposes of making their meanings

and acting in and on their situations. In the real world, such codes, which are typically manifest in, for instance, working class speech, disadvantage their users, by denying them entry into the privileged arenas of decision-making and power. What goes on in these arenas depends crucially on the use of "elaborated codes", which draw on the linguistic potential of the language in far-reaching ways which allow the kind of abstract thought and argumentation without which such activities cannot be carried out. It requires little acumen to see that, within the situation created by the national bourgeoisie's amended response, the ordinary people will be kept firmly out of the arenas of influence. Their consequent disempowerment is even more pernicious than this account of it makes it seem. The restricted codes of the English-using working classes in countries like Britain were at least adapted to the expression of meanings and actions that their actual lives made significant. However, in the case of the ordinary Lankan people we are looking at, the restricted code of English they are equipped/saddled with reflect only what those who orchestrate the system and determine what subordinate role these ordinary people are to play within it deem necessary for them. And that, needless to say, had little to do with goals relating to their own independent growth or their self-advancement and liberation as individual people.

The decisive arenas of influence and power are, under this dispensation, the preserve of the leadership of the national bourgeoisie. But the amended response calls for more careful analytical discriminations to be made than even that recognition might suggest. As a consequence of the various considerations just discussed, the national bourgeoisie themselves emerged as an interesting two-tiered kind of phenomenon. The higher tier represents the levels at which the truest exercise of power takes place. It is the preserve of the bilingual leadership of the national bourgeoisie (this will include previous old elite people turned new) and the remnants of the old elite who have, opportunistically or otherwise, fitted themselves into the new dispensation. Most of the occupants of the higher tier are what have come to be called "co-ordinate bilinguals" (Weinreich 1964). These are people who command both their languages so well that (if I might use the popular, if simplifying, characterisation) they may be said to be able to think in either of their languages, quite independently of the other. As far as English is concerned, they control it in its elaborated form, just as they do the indigenous language. They thus possess exactly the linguistic equipment that is needed for the thinking, decision-making and other major activities which take place at these levels and, it follows, for the secure maintenance of their positions therein.

But that is only part of the picture. Equally essential to the undisputed position and authority of this elite is the weighty ballast of a very large underlying second tier of the national bourgeoisie. The emergence of the second tier may be explained as follows. The maintenance of the hierarchical relations determined by the social-economic-political order was, as always, dependent on the process of self-

reproduction characteristic of all hegemonic classes. Self-reproduction in this case involved to a not inconsiderable extent some knowledge of English, among other things. However, the socio-linguistic conditions generated by the amended response guaranteed that English would not now, in the far wider area over which its net was being cast, be acquired with the same ease as before, or in the same form and with the same control of its wide range of resources. Most of those who might be recognised as making up the second tier, including fresh entrants who had been co-opted from among the traditional elites and other influential segments of the indigenous populace, had previously been (virtually) monolingual. But, the kind of exposure to English that would allow acquisition of it in the earlier versatile manner was now available only to a comparative few.

At best, therefore, the majority of those who did now acquire the kind of control of English that enabled them to move into the second tier emerged as what are known as "subordinate bilinguals" (Weinreich 1964). To resort once again for purposes of explanation to prevailing popular notions, these may be considered to be bilinguals who think in just their own indigenous language even in the course of using their other language, in this instance English. Often, they draw not on the whole wide range of the linguistic potential of the other language, but on just a sub-set of it. In the case of the bilinguals under consideration, this enables them, when using English, to communicate their meanings with adequacy for certain limited purposes, but not to challenge in any effective way those who confidently occupy the first tier. We observe a fairly wide range of linguistic attainment in this respect, with those who have a somewhat fuller command of English occupying the "higher" rungs of the second tier. The many who have at best only a comparatively bare knowledge of the language are then consigned to its "lower" rungs. As it happens, very many occupants of these lower rungs do not even have any kind of command of English. Nevertheless, they are guaranteed their places within the ranks of the dominant national bourgeoisie by their value to the system which maintains the leadership in their pre-eminent position. It is a value that derives often from their economic clout, as well as from the influence they traditionally enjoyed among the populace. At the same time, by virtue of their occupation of even the lower rungs of the dominant class, they are, also, hierarchically separated from the ordinary people.

Special note needs to be taken of the role of the traditional indigenous elites within the scheme of things. As mentioned earlier, the value of these elites to the national bourgeois leadership was immeasurable. Where the nature of such elites made it possible for them to fit into the contemporary social order that the leadership were in the process of helping fashion, they became part of the new dominant class. Thus traditional indigenous language teachers, business people and others were absorbed into its ranks, though only the most powerful of them were actually able to influence the leadership. But, some of these elites, particularly in the specifically cultural, religious and such spheres, had their immense traditional influence defined

considerably in terms of pre-existing, often feudal kinds of arrangements. This prevented direct incorporation of them into the class, though it in no way reduced their value for the socio-political arrangements and distributions of power the leadership were in the process of establishing. With watchful attention to their interests and concerns, therefore, the leadership restored them to prominence and helped maintain them in more or less their traditional manner, thus procuring their vital support for the process even as they kept themselves ultimately in charge of the proceedings.

What we see then in all of the various adaptive measures and strategies pursued by the national bourgeois leadership, including language planning measures such as the amended response, is a play of ideological and political forces acutely responsive not just to issues of national recovery, resistance, liberation, and so on, but also to self-aggrandising motives of power, domination and control. Doubtless, as emphasised earlier, much that was positive has been achieved by the measures. But, the eternal dialectic does not allow us to close our eyes, in the way that the dichotomising rhetoric would induce us to, to the fact that closely worked into the agenda of liberation the leadership were overtly pursuing was a covert, yet unmistakable, act of revisionism. The old familiar battle for power and hegemony repeats itself, in (as it often happens in democratic societies) the areas of language and language planning (Tollefson 1991; see also Kandiah 1994), subordinating most other matters to itself and reducing them to its limited and limiting scale.

Not unexpectedly, the effect of this on the all-important task of post-colonial reconstruction has been less than salutary. As we have already noted, the task had two crucial dimensions, one relating to the recovery and restoration of the indigenous traditions and the other to the pursuit of development and modernisation. Given the dialectically reconstituted realities of contemporary times, the former could hardly be accomplished by an unimaginative and literal-minded transportation of the traditions in rigidly unchanged or unchangeable form. The need, it is worth reiterating, was not simply to carry out what T.S. Eliot would have called a pleasing archaeological reconstruction. Rather, it was to retrieve the fundamental cultural truth and meaning of the traditions, their genius (if you will allow me to resort to such an old-fashioned term) and the strength they had in their own time showed themselves to be possessed of, along with those practices which essentially sustained them; and, beyond retrieval, to transformatively regenerate them in a form and manner which gave them immediacy, viability and power within the realities in which they now had to operate. The great cultural efflorescence of the fifties eloquently illustrates the process.

But, it also reminds us again of the inescapable, historically-determined implications of the traditional indigenous with what had originally come in from outside to become so integral a part of the everyday experience of the lives of the people, and of the perpetual intimate encounters they were on-goingly having with

each other within their modern existence. A great many of these other things, far from being dispensable, were in any event central to the second major concern of post-colonial rehabilitation mentioned above. They included a host of practices, procedures, institutions, objects and so on relating to all of those innumerable facets of modern life—governance, administration, justice, science, technology, engineering, transport and communication, commerce and banking, industry, education, health care, diplomacy, military matters, entertainment, whatever. To these must be added modes of international relations, co-operation and interaction manifested often in the forms of agreements, conventions and so on which required adherence to them by nations across the world. Even as they were accepted, we might usefully remind ourselves again, all of these several things, if they were to be turned into account in ways that served the post-colonial effort, also needed to be subjected to searching scrutiny under the light of the renewed indigenous insights so as to suitably adapt them to their new context.

However, that cannot prevent recognition of the fact that every one of them came along with certain kinds of understandings of material reality, certain disciplines and habits of seeing, thinking, knowing and acting, certain attitudes, without which it could not be properly and gainfully applied, whatever the context. And this is exactly where the rub lies. Three anecdotes from a huge stock I have accumulated from personal experience will speak the problem more effectively than mere exposition. In doing so, they will confirm a recognition that scholars around our world are increasingly awakening to. This is that the stories of people's lives often rehearse more immediately and revealingly the ontological and epistemological narratives of their human condition in their context than positivistic argumentation of the kind so valued by scholarship at one time.

The first involves an attempt by me to start a savings account with a leading government bank which, at that time some years ago was just moving into computerisation. The very courteous indigenous language-dominant bilingual executive officer who dealt with my case, transcribing my surname into the permanent official records of the bank from off the card I had filled, spelled it wrong. When I pointed this out to him, he did not make to correct the error, but very accommodatingly told me, in his primary language, "No, it doesn't matter". The problem was not language or spelling as such, but, rather, the whole understanding of both the demands of accuracy in keeping modern banking records and of the way in which computerisation works. The second anecdote relates to an effort by me to have a photocopy made of an academic article. The machine began to play up as the job was being done, but the indigenous language speaking operator persisted with her efforts and, after a consequently very long delay, delivered pp. 1-3, 7, 12-14 and 22 of the article to me with a bill. As far as she was concerned, she had done whatever part of my job that her defective machine had allowed her to, regardless of whether it was of any use to me, and she was entitled to payment for it. Again, what is at stake

is an issue of understanding, relating to how the institution of photocopying functions relative to the demands, academic or otherwise, made of it in modern times. The third account places me inside the library of one of our leading Universities, which are committed to the increase of knowledge through increased access to it. On the shelves, there was displayed a book by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, the title of which, prominently embossed on its brand new binding, read *Understanding Betny*. In times past, it read *Understanding Poetry*. A few shelves away, some excellent books on theatre and theatre technique and lighting lay cheek by jowl with a series of books on how to be successful at basketball, with the classificatory numbering on all of them indicating that the arrangement was intended. And yet further on, Chaucer and some other English poets had been conferred American citizenship and placed in the company of American writers.

The issue in all three cases did not pertain just to the control of the mechanics of the English language. Innumerable examples of the same kind can be provided out of contexts which entirely involve the indigenous language. The point is that for the success of the nation's essay at modernisation and development in pursuit of its post-colonial goals, it is not enough simply to cart in the paraphernalia of modernity. Even more important is the cultivation and development of certain specific modes of thought and rationality, certain specific kinds and resources of understanding, perception, interpretation, attitude and action, that essentially define the objects of modernity, govern their functionings and enable them to be rendered effective and turned empoweringly to account. It surely is a disturbing insensibility of or unconcern with such matters and the nature of their demands that the above examples display?

The consequences manifest themselves epidemically around us, in the aggravating malfunctionings and breakdowns that afflict so much of what ought to be taken for granted in the everyday workings of our modernising society. Repeated electricity failures, ubiquitous overflowing rubbish dumps, filthy drains, atrocious road surfaces, inefficient and unreliable transport systems, faulty construction, defective plumbing, undependable mail, botched communications, blatant noise and sight pollution, disrespect for public property, disorderly driving and even walking, monstrous administrative hassles, delays, blunders and failures, indifference or worse to service obligations, contractual violations—the list is unending and the complaints about them from people unceasing. There is a too-great readiness in talking about them to shunt all of these phenomena into the public or government sector. But my own experience over the last fifteen months, when I have had close dealings with several private institutions of high repute and also several higher ranking professionals, conclusively demonstrates that the kind of problem they manifest is equally prevalent among these too.

Altogether, they manifest an appalling picture of monumental incompetence, ineptitude and unconcern. In the light of what has been mentioned earlier, what we seem to be seeing here is a profound illiteracy in the reading of the requirements of modern society, a fundamental failure of intelligence and understanding, the kind of intelligence and understanding that the conduct of such a society needs.

If the argument that has been developed above has anything to it, a great deal of the responsibility for this state of affairs must fall on the amended response and, particularly, the dichotomous thinking that lies behind it. The exclusivist reductionism of that thinking and the parochialising closures it effected on a great deal of the actual historically constituted realities within which it was being applied no doubt fitted it perfectly to the opportunistic pursuit of position, power and hegemony. But, they also rendered it utterly inept in the face of the complexities of a reconstructing modern post-colonial society. Worse, it led it to take on a very destructive function within the realities of that society, evidence of which we see all around us today. It did so partly by preventing the two major concerns of post-colonial rehabilitation mentioned above from being pursued in the ways they needed to be. Thus, the recovery of the traditions was too often carried out not in the transformative way mentioned earlier but in backward-looking mono-dimensional ways of the kind that Fanon warned us against. The result was that they were not always brought into immediate dynamic phase with the contemporary realities, so that their intrinsic strength and intelligence could not be turned to sophisticated account in handling these realities and their demands.

Similarly, the other major concern of post-colonial rehabilitation, relating to development and modernisation, was also served badly by this kind of thinking. Partly, this was because of the kind of conceptualisation that it led to of the language most immediately associated with that concern, namely English. The point is that English is the most readily available linguistic instrument through which we may access, appropriate and make our own, the modes of thought and perception, the habits of mind and action, the kinds of rationality, whatever, that make it possible to turn the objects of modernism and development that have been transferred to our context to positive account. Together with the powerful resources provided by the indigenous traditions and in close interaction with them, these define the equipment that enables the effective conduct of life in our modernising post-colonial societies. More than just that, it also enables purposive and effective participation in the global community outside of which the modernising post-colonial nation cannot exist.

None of this is to claim any intrinsic superiority for the language, but merely to recognise historical reality. History has formed the modern global order in certain determinate ways and together with it the kind of thinking and understanding needed for effective action within it. That same history kept our nations out of participation in the processes of their formation, even while selecting English as the *de facto* first

language of that global order. At the same time, it also placed this language in our hands, rather than any of the others which, like it, also grew in tandem with the emergence of the modes of thinking and understanding we are talking about. It now remains for us to take possession of it and fashion it into the kind of instrument we need for our own purposes. As suggested earlier, this would clearly involve subjecting it to the other crucial realities of our historical experience, filtering it through the perspectives derived from what we were and are from our traditional heritage and adapting it to our post-colonial purposes. The resulting instrument would be one which would allow us to self-empoweringly take hold of the resources which it offers us and make them serve us as we need instead of imposing on us.

To fully understand the workings of English within this way of conceptualising its role within the post-colonial endeavour, we need to look more closely at the ways in which a language relates to thought and action. If the language is to function as a means of appropriating the requisite modes of contemporary thinking, understanding, action and so on, it cannot be seen just as a kind of passive receptacle which will carry across to us some kind of pre-formed body of knowledge and thought which exists outside of it, in some essentialist space "out there". This is to misconceive the very nature of language and, for that matter, of thought itself. A language is not just a set of words, grammatical structures and so on, which carry a separate object called thought. Its systematic linguistic resources, grammatical elements, rules, procedures and conventions enter actively and dynamically into the very construction of thought and its processes, and of the ways in which these lead us to see the reality that surrounds us. That is, they play "a vital role in what has been called 'the social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckman 1967)" (Kress and Hodge 1979: 5). Which also means that they have a crucial bearing on the praxis which might be pursued within that reality—the way we see and understand it guides us on how we might act within it. The medium, in other words, is not something that is separate from the message. To take control of the latter with a view to conceptualising our reality and determining how we might act within it is also to take control of the former.

If this is so, then those who want to access that thought and enter into it and make it their own in ways that will allow them to use it empoweringly, will need to have considerable control of the linguistic resources of the language through which they do it. It will be a kind of control that very certainly extends beyond the bare vocabulary and structures that suffice for the comparatively low-level roles assigned by the amended response to most new learners of English coming from disadvantaged indigenous backgrounds. The English that these people will be confined to can only re-affirm their subordinate position within the determined scheme of things.

The kind of empowering control of the resources of language we are talking of, that which will permit effective appropriation of its epistemological potential, is

also well beyond that shown by the majority of the subordinate bilinguals who constitute so large a segment of the dominant national bourgeoisie. The empowerment they seek from English has little to do with the kind of empowerment talked about above. Their contemporary subjectivities evolved partly in relation to a characteristic self-reproductive strategy of power based on a dichotomised thinking that encouraged an inward-looking parochialism. This constituted the language not as an empowering instrument of thought and perception, but as a philistinised, conceptually impoverished commodity, to be seized in the most minimal form that would allow the maintenance of their position in the social hierarchy and little more. Thus they had little sense of what Alton Becker () marvellously terms its "wordscape" (let us add also, with less aesthetic circumspection, "grammarscape"). These would involve the history which anything one says in a language will have, the "aggregate of remembered and half-remembered prior texts" it inevitably carries. Such texts define the richly spun memories, resonances, sensitivities and experiences which fill the language out and give it its life and conviction and personality and strength. The focus here is not on language as a static set of forms and words but as a kind of dynamic process, "linguaging" rather than "language", which is what allows its practitioners to conceptualise, understand and orient themselves to their contexts—past, current, new, developing—as successfully as possible.

But such were exactly the kind of matters that too many of these new learners were not, or were encouraged not to be, concerned about. Little wonder then that in bringing the language in along with the paraphernalia of modernisation, they were quite satisfied not to bring along with it the kind of thinking, perceptions, understandings and attitudes necessary for properly administering and prosecuting these paraphernalia. Nor were they concerned about the need to make these resources available to the people among whom they had deposited the paraphernalia, even in their own language, as an invitation to them to enter and participate self-empoweringly and sophisticatedly in the processes of modernisation and development.

The last sentence reminds us of an observation made by the Halpé Committee of Inquiry into the Teaching of English in Sri Lanka about a couple of decades ago. The point is that within the contemporary realities of the country, many people do not in fact themselves need a command of English to lead satisfying lives. There are going to be very many people who will not learn or want to learn English, while many of those who acquire it cannot realistically be expected to grasp it in the ways here suggested, in the plenitude of its powers, as it has earlier been characterised. In any event, no classroom by itself can explicitly introduce learners to much more than a very small subset of the immense resources of any language. Given that so many people are dependent on the classroom to get their acquaintance with English going, this reminds us of the need to be clear-headed and to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground. It clearly is necessary to work out expectations with regard to the acquisition of English among different groups of people that are reasonably

attainable. Such considerations will indeed affect practical measures of implementation in making the language available to people as well as the pedagogies that are adopted.

At the same time, it appears that only a conceptualisation of the language that moves it well beyond the scales and proportions to which the hegemonising strategy of the national bourgeoisie would reduce it would allow any kind of effective response to the problem of English in our midst. Socio-historical forces will determine those who are selected for indigenous language-English bilingualism. But all of them will need to aim at grasping the resources of English in as full a way as possible in their particular situation, so that it would become to them an instrument of personal growth and empowerment rather than one which keeps them permanently dependent on other people. Through taking control of the dynamic process of languaging mentioned above, they would, finally, in whichever field they are called upon to apply the language or whichever limited purpose or job they are expected to carry out by its means, be able to take charge of it for themselves and do with it things that lie beyond those limits. To put it differently, they would be able in their spheres of operation to, as it were, take on jobs that have not yet been invented, tackle problems that have not yet been defined, and work out ideas and modes of action which have not yet been conceived of. Then and then only can the resources of the language filter through them to the country as a whole, even to the many who might never learn the language, and begin to serve it in the ways that are needed, as these have been implicitly outlined above.

However, as always, the inescapable dialectic calls us back and reminds us also of the great dangers that, equally with the positive possibilities, are inherently woven into the process of taking the language on board in this manner. We have already recognised how, within a post-colonial polity, the language once allowed in can be made to serve within revisionist agendas of the kind the national bourgeoisie are pursuing to keep both themselves and the underpersons in their appointed place. There is, further, the possibility of the exploitation of the language by the remnants of the displaced elite, who may see in the process an opportunity to subvert some of the gains of the national bourgeois revolution. Indeed, there seems to be re-emerging, noticeably among younger people, a tiny group of very affluent English-using people who display a near-total disregard for any of the concerns of post-colonial recovery, and who orient themselves quite single-mindedly to the latest movements of popular culture in Europe and, particularly, North America.

The dangers from outside the polity are less immediately discernible and, therefore, all the more to be watched. For, in adopting the modes of thought which English historically built into its linguistic structures and practices in the process of bringing this thought into being, post-colonials open themselves to being co-opted into ways of conceptualising reality that hegemonically privilege their creators at the

(erstwhile?) Centre. The result could well be the crippling subversion of the whole post-colonial endeavour. Kandiah (To appear) discusses this very real problem and the dilemmas in which they place post-colonials. Since no dialectic allows easy escape from either of its strands, this places a great responsibility on people to work out, however difficultly, responses that address the dangers. The one which is most promising is the development of a Freireian kind of critical awareness. Based on an interrogation of the language which allows conscious recognition of the implication of the concerns and interests of its original "owners" in its empowering resources, this can lead to its transformation, even as one is taking control of it, into an instrument of what Michael Halliday (1990) calls "active defence" against itself. But even this will still require as full an understanding and control of the resources of the language itself as the various people in their different situations will be able to develop. Of course, the assured presence in Sri Lanka's context of elaborated indigenous languages projecting their own sophisticated contemporary modes of thought and experience which can define a significant point of reference will give strength to this process of turning the language against itself.

Unfortunately, those who are most equipped to devise the kind of creative response that the complex challenges demand, namely the co-ordinate bilingual leadership of the national bourgeoisie, seem to be less than inclined to do so. The reason is not difficult to guess. For, their entire revisionist strategy of power rests on the amended response and, especially, the dichotomous thinking which underpins it. These allow them to have it both ways at once. English *will* be brought in, but not in any way that would destabilise anybody. The high profile nationalist image that they project under the strategy is reassuring in this respect. It induces even the ordinary people to consent to their hegemony. This, in spite of the fact that these people benefit comparatively little from the strategy and, worse, even have to pay the heaviest of the social and other prices that it can all around be seen to exact. The availability of English to those who find their way through it to new kinds of jobs which, however lowly they may be, still allow them to enter the order of consumption which capitalism defines, causes them too to consent in this manner.

The way in which the new emphasis on English motivates the all-important second tier of the national bourgeoisie to collaborate in the designs of the leadership is more interesting. The restricted codes of English that the situation allows or encourages them to acquire do not equip them to challenge the leadership. But, they suffice to distinguish them from the mass of the ordinary people, as members of the dominant national bourgeoisie, and that is its own reward. These people in any event find it less than easy to take control of the language in the way that the leadership has done. Yet, they are induced to remain satisfied with the situation through the use of the rhetoric of pragmatism which accompanies the amended response to promote a certain relaxation of standards in the learning and use of the language. "People's reach must exceed their grasp, or what's heaven for?" Oscar Wilde is supposed to

have said somewhere. But heaven is not for these people, who are made to believe that they could get away with just the very least they are able to achieve, if not less. Indeed, efforts to insist on the maintenance of the integrity and rigour of quality, efficiency and standards (this, we need to insist, is a separate matter from the valorisation of *the* standard language—see Parakrama 1995) are often implicitly and explicitly characterised as an attempt to inflict the “cultural baggage” of an alien language on innocent indigenes and dismissed as a pernicious (old style) elitist ploy. What we need, so the argument goes, is as many people as possible with English, never mind what kind of English. This position is cultivated not only by upwardly mobile people who find high standards a hurdle to their aspirations to climb higher within the ranks of the national bourgeoisie, but also by many co-ordinate bilinguals whose command of English is much the same as that of the old elite. Which is not too surprising, given that it helps reinforce the position of these co-ordinate bilinguals as a kind of super-elite who are beyond challenge.

The minimalist, least-effort principle which is here enshrined reflects a populist strategy which extends far beyond the arena of language. We might label it “apé ānduism”. Its effect, as it is generally encountered across the country as a whole, is to persuade people to believe, in the face of all the practical evidence to the contrary, that it is they who make the decisions which are in fact made by a leadership motivated by their own interests. Generally speaking, it achieves this effect by setting itself against any quality, standards and higher aspiration, and installing mediocrity as the principle of action. It is considerably to the resulting philistinisation of society that we must attribute the mishaps of modernisation mentioned above. These are not its only consequences. More significantly, it disables the necessary effort by people to retrieve the best in their own traditions in ways that will allow it to be revamped and applied viably in terms of the current realities, in exciting encounter with the features of modernisation operating at their own best.

There are even more disturbing consequences of the dichotomised thinking we are talking of from the point of view of the re-constructive post-colonial effort. In its philistinising mono-dimensionality, it and its offshoots deprive people of exactly those modes of rationality, thought and action that are integral to meeting the challenges of a modernising post-colonial society. These modes derive from both originally indigenous and outside sources, but they are crucial to existence and action within the complex multi-dimensional realities that history has created in the land. Without them people lack the primary means of rationally resolving the innumerable issues of difference that the realities raise, by seeing such issues as defining a welcome enriching potential rather than something to be opposed and put down. The only option then, and one which is absolutely consistent with the least-effort principle, is violence or meaninglessly disruptive action. This is the inevitable correlate in praxis of what I might term the ingrained epistemological fascism of the dichotomous

thinking and its exclusivity, particularly when these are brought to the service of the reductive strategy of power mentioned above. The consequence is the horrendous culture of violence that is devastating our country. Closely associated with that is the erosion of all values that make human life endurable and the grievous degeneration of morality that is daily lamented by concerned people on all kinds of platforms.

For those who control the structures of power, these consequences of their strategies cannot be of very much consequence, it is only what it brings them that matters. Human nature being what it too often is, there are many who see in the situation only an opportunity they would not otherwise have had to make something out of it. The obvious course of action for them is to cynically avail themselves of it, regardless of the cost to the others around them—which explains the charges of overwhelming selfishness that people frequently make. But there are also large numbers of people who hate the situation in which they are trapped but who, feeling that any resistance will be futile, become mere survivalists, lapsing either into indifference or into a stoical listlessness. Others among them, nursing a sense of their helplessness in the face of the plight that their country has been reduced to, grievously await the day when things might change. For, as always, it is those who care the most who suffer the most. Ludowyk, looking into the future from where he stood, seemed to have seen what these helpless people see, and so he went away. However, we can believe that had he seen also the handful of people who are bravely striving against all odds to maintain and affirm the integrity and rigour of the high standards of intellect and morality they are committed to, as he strove to do in his day through the tradition of English studies that he helped establish, he would have approved.

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