

Changing Scenario of English

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Abstract

If we talk about the role and use of English in Indian context, it is the historical fact that English is going to stay with us forever not only as means of communication and a link language but as a neo-colonial means of hegemony also. The nature of speakers of English, though hardly a little over 5% of India's population, remains dominant in culture, literature and economy, and prompts their counterparts to learn this most coveted language.

Key words: English, globalisation, communication, language, economy.

Introduction

In the present global scenario, English has become not only a lingua franca (i.e., global English) but also a gateway of global success and recognition. Besides being a potent vehicle of communication and a global linguistic mediator, it plays an integral role of a link language as well as linguistic and literary creativity in the developing multilingual nations like India. As an international link language and global means of communication, English plays a significant role in promoting interaction, global harmony and human solidarity, and fellowship despite the presence of cultural variants and diversities in the world. It is the language of international trade, political affairs, research, library, sports, popular music, and internet and so on. Realizing the utility and urgency of global use of English for a variety of purposes, people all over the world are desperate to equip themselves with communication skills in English in order to ensure their mobility, job, prosperity, status and even their sheer survival in the competitive global market.

If we talk about the role and use of English in Indian context, it is the historical fact that English is going to stay with us forever not only as means of communication, and a link language but as a neo-colonial means of hegemony also. The nature of speakers of English, though hardly a little over 5% of India's population, remains dominant in culture, literature and economy, and prompts their counterparts to learn this most coveted language. In our country, where 18 languages and hundreds of dialects are spoken, the language of commerce, industry, parliament and the better universities continues to be English. In this respect, English has maintained its indispensable status as a 'Language of wider communication' (LWC), a link language, or a second language. Needless to say, English is the most favoured foreign language today across the world.

English, after its origin in the 5th century, has prospered with migration and re/settlement of its speakers in different parts of the world. Its forays outside Europe began with the foundation of the American colonies and later in the 17th century with the establishment and expansion of the British Empire. In the 19th century 'with its sun never setting', its language i.e. English emerged as a world language or lingua franca with its subtle mix of power, politics, trade, and cultural hegemony. It came to India as a part of the colonial encounter between India and England in the second half of the 18th century. Before Macaulay's advocacy of the use of English in administration and education, especially higher education, as a medium of instruction, India had begun to clamor for the master's language (i.e. English) as a means of reforming the Indian society and its modernization. Thus, English was

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sought and introduced in India as the means of reformation, refinement and modernization of overall Indian setup. Even our illustrious reformers and eminent scholars like Raja Ram Mohan Ray strongly pleaded for replacement of Sanskrit and Arabic with English so that India not only can make progress in the fields of science, engineering and technology but also can compete at the world level in all the spheres of knowledge and entrepreneurship.

It is a well-known fact that liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) have had its considerable and diverse impact on the linguistic sphere in the world. Now English is neither British hegemony nor King's and Queen's English; it has become world English or universal language. It is being owned by many other countries, as we have American English, Australian English, Indian English, and Russian English and so on. As we know that English has been with us for more than two hundred years, and Indian English as a variant of English and Indian English Writing as a means of creativity have carved a niche for themselves. However, an important question that arises here is about the ethicality of the presence of English in India. Is the presence of English ethical in democratic India? Or should our pragmatics dissuade us from asking these questions just because English language is a global language of commerce, communication and reservoir of intellectual resources. The present unprecedented ascendancy of English in globalized world is due to some specific solid political and economic backups, as the famous linguist D.P. Pattnayak pointed out in his research paper titled "Change Language and the Developing World" in *Change and Language* (1996) edited by H. Coleman and L. Cameron:

English is backed by international groups, which treat English as an instrument of colonization and as a commodity for trade... It interprets skill migration as brightening life-chances and it accentuates the divide between (1) rural and urban, (2) the developing and the developed and (3) elites and masses. It permits better education for a miniscule minority. At the same time, it inhibits interaction between science and society and inhibits the creation of appropriate technology.

Thinking over the role and use of English language in India, Prof. Avidness Kumar Singh puts his views very adequately in his article entitled "Re/Thinking English in India" published in *English in India: Issues and Approaches* (2006) that English is not only used today as a magical tool of success in all the fields of life and as a remedy of all ills but also as the panacea of all diseases. It is prescribed and used as a universal and infallible antibiotic, whatever the disease it might be i.e. fever or infection. Mr. Singh has also illustrated the use of English for various purposes giving adequate examples such as English as a coat, English as a street tongue and English as the bathroom slippers. Really in the globalized world, English is worn (used) at the office, for formal, official and social occasions to present oneself (himself/herself) update, smart, and civilized but taken off at home. Thus, English has become the language of show off, presentation, display, exhibition, impression-making and guarantee of success now everywhere in the world.

English is Changing (English as a Progressive Language)

It is an undeniable fact that English has witnessed considerable changes in both its vocabulary and grammar. Since Shakespeare's day some words have disappeared from use, while others have changed their meanings. New words have come into the language. It would be a mistake to assume that this process has come to an end, but a mistake that is commonly made. As long as people have discussed language usage, there have been those who deplore the ways in which it is changing, just as there have been people who want to be in the forefront ('on the cusp', 'at the cutting edge', to use two relatively recent expressions) of that change.

Where you place yourself in relation to this process of change is a personal choice, made—as many

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other choices are—after a consideration both of how you feel about the ways in which the language is changing and of how other people will regard you. If, for example, you are a barrister arguing a detailed and complex civil case, then the use of a lot of 'fashionable' expressions may well not be appreciated. On the other hand, if you are an advertising executive you would probably not speak to your clients in language 'suitable for the barrister. Language choice and expression are matters of awareness and sensitivity to the situation you are in.

Just as English vocabulary continues to change, so does English grammar, although at a slower pace. In the past, for example, it would have been frowned on to begin a sentence; *If I was you . . .* Now this is increasingly heard, even from the mouths of educated speakers. Some will argue that there is an important difference between

If I were captaining the team, I'd ... and
If I was captaining the team, I'd ...

The first, they say, means that the speaker believes that there is not the remotest possibility of the situation arising, while the second regards it as unlikely, but possible. If language is developing towards the abandonment of *If I were*, however, it means that more and more people will simply not pick up this difference—so we shall have to find other ways of communicating the same meaning.

How Many 'Englishes'?

In the era of globalization, English is being rapidly globalised for a variety of purposes. Today, in the boundaries and free-flow world, English is no longer a British hegemony but it has been owned and used globally. In this process of spread and global use of English, it has got several changes and versions with passing of time. Now English has several varieties and forms—such as British English, American English, Indian English, Russian English, Australian English, Standard English, informal English, regional dialect, taboo slang and so on.

Most of us think that people in the United States and people in Britain speak the same language but with important differences of vocabulary and grammar. But an English reader would probably pick up that following message was written by an American:

"I would be happy to meet with you while I am in Oxford. Mornings are best because I will be teaching in the M.B.A. program in the afternoon..."

In above message we come to the conclusion that the British would write *meet* for 'meet with' and *course* for 'program'.

American English has a powerful influence ('impacts heavily') on British usage. Many people are fairly relaxed about this, but some purists resent this Americanization of English. It tends to be new words, especially technical and social ones that transfer most readily. Despite the close contacts between the two countries, a number of common words remain steadfastly different. Britons still speak of *taps*, *cupboards*, and *lifts* rather than *faucets*, *closets* and *elevators*, for example.

Many other English-speaking countries, such as Australia and India, also have distinctive versions of the language and even within Britain and the other countries there are important variations of dialect. To the academic linguist, a particular dialect is no better than any other dialect; they are simply different. For the user, social attitudes are important and if you ignore them, you risk alienating those who hold different attitudes from yourself. Ever since the invention of printing there has been, pressure to standardize English. When Caxton set up his printing press in the fifteenth century, he was aware of the problems caused by the variety of different dialects spoken in England.

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He had to choose which dialect and which spellings to adopt when publishing books in English. The period since then has seen the evolution of Standard English, which may be only one more dialect of the language, but which has far more social prestige than the others and which is normally used in writing as well as being used in all formal or semi-formal speech situations.

Peripheral

Languages are used within a given territory by native speakers to each other, such as Welsh spoken in some regions of Wales, or Japanese spoken in the whole of Japan.

Central

Languages are used within a single territory by people who are both native speakers and non-native speakers, for purposes of education and government, say, English in India used by native speakers of many languages.

Super-central

Languages are used across several parts of the world by natives and non-natives, with specialized function, say, Arabic or Latin for religious ceremonies. Often their spread reflects previous colonial empires, French, Spanish, and so on.

Hyper-central

Languages are used chiefly by non-native speakers across the globe for a variety of purposes. Today only one hyper-central language exists, namely English.

To Swaan (2001), languages exist in 'constellations'. India, for example, has Hindi and English as 2 super-central languages, plus 18 central languages, such as Gujarati and Sindhi, nearly all of which have official status within a state; the remaining 780-odd languages are peripheral.

Society as a whole depends on the interlocking of these languages and so is based on multilingual who can plug the gaps between one level and another whether within one territory or internationally. According to de Swaan (2001), the learning of second languages usually goes up the hierarchy rather than down: people learn a language that is the next level up. Speakers of a peripheral language have to learn a central language to function in their own society, such as speakers of Catalan learning Spanish in Spain. Speakers of a central language need to learn a super-central language to function within their region, say speakers of Persian learning Arabic. Speakers of a super-central language need the hyper-central language to function globally; and even a native speaker of English needs to learn English as ELF i.e. English as *lingua franca*.

Various terms have been proposed for this peculiar status of English, whether 'international English', 'global English' or 'world English'. Recent discussion has preferred the term 'English as lingua franca' (ELF) - English as a means of communication between native speakers of other languages. In this context, 'lingua franca' does not have its historic negative meaning of a mixed language, but means a communication language used by speakers of other languages. Pier Paolo admires the global use of English by Arundhati Roy in her prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), by saying that Roy has undoubtedly enriched the English tongue:

In fact, through the creation of a new language, she can meet both her ends. It is a language, which expresses old concepts in a new way, which is moulded according to every new need, which is anarchic fashion does not obey the rules of grammar or syntax any more. It is a new world, within which Arundhati Roy is finally able to regenerate all her sensations. Being so original and personal,

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the fictional discourse sometimes looks like a new journey inside the author's stream of consciousness. Language allows her to break the bonds of distance from the object of her writing without technically evidencing it. It is clear that English, which symbolized the hegemonic function of imperial culture, is undergoing transformation in the hands of post-colonial writers and critics. Bill Ashcroft, a famous critic and linguist opines that English that was invented to convey the cultural weight of empire has been transformed by those very societies to which it was disseminated into a forceful medium of self-expression. Because its inherent function as a cultural study has been appropriated, English will never be the same again. He ascribes this canonical change and the consequent threat to English to the vast array of literatures in English that have emerged as a direct result of cultural colonization, and which is breaking down the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' in cultural context. This revelation leads to the conclusion that the increasing adoption of English as a second language, where it is nativized or localized is leading to fragmentation, diversity and in formalization of the language.

Conclusion

A fairly well-grounded reality can't be overlooked that native speakers of English are already outnumbered by second language and foreign-language speakers, and will be more heavily outnumbered as time goes on. No longer is it the case, if it ever was, that English unifies all who speak it, though the language would continue to enjoy its privileged status in this new millennium, the centre/s from which it operates may change in days to come.

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