

Issues of English Language in India

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ABSTRACT

English has been in the public domain in India for fewer than 300 years. It has occupied a predominant position in Asia and especially in the Indian subcontinent. The English language is deeply rooted in India. The introduction of English in India has been slow and difficult, but its spread has been rapid. India is known for cultural as well as linguistic diversity, which resulted in the disintegrated national identity of the English language. English is the only world language in today's world and it has gained the focus on linguistic studies. The present article seeks to analyze the issues pertaining to the English language and its status in Indian society.

Key words: Multilingualism, Indian English, Colonisation, Nativization.

English in India: The English language spoken in India is one of the most distinct varieties of World Englishes. In 1498, Vasco-Da Gama came ashore at Calicut, and restored a link between Europe and the East. The introduction of English to India came primarily with British colonization in 1757. The British East India Company first initiated English-medium instruction in private schools in the year 1823. Since the early 1600s, the English language has had a toehold on the Indian subcontinent, when the East India Company established settlements in Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai. The document establishing the British contact with the Indian subcontinent was the Charter of December 31, 1600, granted by Queen Elizabeth I. It granted a monopoly on trade with India and the East to some merchants of London - the East India Company (EIC) was formed' (Kachru 1982:353). It was through the Charter Act of 1813 that a state system of education was officially introduced in Indian history. The EIC opened many schools and colleges under their control, which laid the foundation of the English system of education in India. William Nicholls, William Hawkins, Thomas Roe, Robert Clive, Warren Hasting, Henry Frankland, Col W H Sleeman, and H T

Colebrook etc learn native languages in India and encourage Indians to read and write in native languages and English.

According to Kachru, there have been three phases in the introduction of bilingualism in English in India. The first one them is the missionary phase, the second phase is the demand for English from local people and the third phase is the government policy by EIC. The EIC established Calcutta Madrassa (1781), the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784), the Banaras Sanskrit College (1791), and the Calcutta Sanskrit College (1824). In 1823, Raja Rammohan Roy wrote his famous letter to Governor General Amherst opposing the creation of a Sanskrit college in Calcutta. He instead demanded a college for education in European sciences in the medium of the English language. Chaudhary wrote, 'After Bentinck's orders in 1835 committing all the funds for instruction in European sciences and English literature through the medium of the English language, education in the Indian languages languished (Chaudhary 2009:359). The English Christian missionaries came to India and they built schools at the primary level for Indians in which the language of instruction was local language. Later on, the missionaries built high schools with English

as the language of instruction which obliged the Indians who wanted to study to have a good knowledge of English. The British rulers began building their universities in India in 1857. English became the first language in Indian education.

A blueprint for India's educational policy was laid down in Lord Macaulay's Minute (Feb. 2, 1835). In 1818, the British Empire became the British Empire of India, instead of the British Empire in India. The diplomatic settlement remained in force until 1947. The British Colonial government played a role in indigenizing Indian English as well by limiting the amount of English education in order to maintain a linguistic distance between the rulers and those being ruled. A letter from Raja Rammohan Roy addressed to Lord Amherst (1773-1857) from the year 1823 is often presented as evidence of local demand for English. Roy embraced European learning, and in his opinion, English provided Indians with "the key to all knowledge all the really useful knowledge which the world contains" (quoted in Bailey 1991: 136). English in India is a legacy of the British who colonized the country and their language permeated through some of the most important parts of society. Gradually English spread and by 1928 was the language of administration and the pan-Indian press. English then became the language of the elite. 'Although official British rule ended in India in 1947, the English language has remained deeply ingrained in the elite class' (Kachru, 1983: 94).

Charles Grant in 1798 had said that "...the propagation of English education is desirable because it would eradicate the superstitions and falsehoods inherent in the religious thought and philosophy of the Indian people and consequently impress upon them the superiority of Western culture and religion." He is believed to be the first person to formulate a scheme of English education in India. English usage in India ranges from more or less uniform national varieties to mutually unintelligible varieties. For Indians, English is prestige language and this kind of attitude is very different from Japanese people. The Indian variety of English is

significantly different from the native English varieties in choices of words, imagery, and in the nuances of meaning. English is independent of other languages and also it is sometimes as a substitute for the Indian languages. English is a compulsory language in most of the all-India level employment opportunities. It is the sole medium of instruction in Technical education and a majority offer it as a medium for higher education. Thus the new English varieties have evolved into varieties that serve a wide range of purposes, and at the same time, developed their character. Officially it was given the status of an assistant language and was supposed to terminate officially after 15 years of India's independence, but it remains the important language of India. English has become an integral part of the Indian linguistic mosaic. Crystal's opinion truly shows the Indian language scenario, Language, sooner or later, proves to be a thorn in the flesh of all who govern, whether at national or local level" (Crystal, 1987: 364). English had been installed as an Associate Official Language till 26 January, 1965. But language policymakers and their attitude made all the difference. The debates of the Constituent Assembly held in 1949 highlighted the fact that English was not going to be easily displaced. Hindi, as the Official Language, was seen as a threat by the south Indians. It meant for them the supremacy of the north. English was also favored by the elite section of the society in the north. Jawaharlal Nehru stated, "English is important because it is the major window for us into the modern world. And we dare not close that window. If we close it, we imperil our future. It is quite inevitable, apart from the assurances I may have given, that English has to continue as an associate language or an additional language. As a matter of fact, it is the circumstances prevailing in the country that will compel us to use it. If we try to suppress its use, undoubtedly we will not only create a hiatus but stop our progress in many directions which cannot be achieved at the present moment entirely through Hindi" (Nehru, 1957-63: p-55-57). Kachru (1986c:132-133)

mentions four basic areas in which the power of English manifests itself: linguistic, literary, attitudinal, and pedagogical. Linguistic control is reflected, for example, in the codification of a language, the attitudes toward linguistic innovation, and lexicographical research. The literary aspect refers to the ethnocentric attitude toward literary creativity in the Outer Circle. The attitudinal aspect is involved in issues concerning the identities of individuals and special communities". The Indians and the Indian English language press use many words derived from Indian languages, especially from Hindi. Other than that, the Indian accent is sometimes difficult for non-Indians to understand.

The Minute of Macaulay: Macaulay wrote a minute on 2nd February 1835, which is widely blamed or acclaimed as the foundation of the future education policies of India. On March 7, 1835, Lord William Bentinck also accepted Macaulay's recommendations and sanctioned it officially. Macaulay had written it, as a Member of the Council of India, in reaction to the policy of education being followed in India at his time. In 1837 English was made the court language and a Government Resolution of 1844 threw high posts open to Indians. English was and is a definitely and distinctively powerful language used by those in power. It is the surest, the best and the fastest way to achieve the most coveted social mobility in India. The Minute had not a single idea that was "invented". The Minute only presents a set of ideas, not essentially and exclusively related to either the content or the medium of education.

According to Bailey, in Macaulay's thinking Indian languages would be enriched by English, so that they could become vehicles for European scientific, historical, and literary expression. The purpose of Macaulay is to create "a class of persons, Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and intellect" (Bailey 1991: 138). His claim was neither unique nor uncharacteristic of his times. Macaulay asserted that the British must try to create a class of Indians who would act as interpreters

between their countrymen and their white masters. Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 emphasized that "In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government...We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue". According to Kachru, the far-reaching Minute was highly controversial because of disagreement about whether it was correct to impose an alien language on Indians. The Orientalists expressed their disagreement in a note dated 15 February 1835, but they could not stop it from passing and had to give way" (Kachru 1983: 68-69).

"The controversy between Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani made the case for Hindi even worse. Support for Hindustani almost ended with independence; Hindi supporters' enthusiasm was not, also, channeled in a constructive direction. As a result, English continues to be a language of both power and prestige" (Kachru 1986a: 8). English was used in India and elsewhere in the colonies as a tool of power to cultivate a group of people who identify with the cultural and other norms of the political elite. "Macaulay justified the imposition of British power on the country by simply arguing that although this policy in India might seem controversial and strange. Sometimes, it can be so, for the Empire is itself the strangest of all political anomalies...that we should govern a territory ten thousand miles from us, a territory larger and more populous than France, Spain, Italy, and Germany put together...a territory inhabited by men differing from us in race, color, language, manners, morals, religion; these are prodigies to which the world has seen nothing similar. The reason is confounded. General rules are useless where the whole is one vast exception. The Company is an anomaly, but it is part of a system where everything is an anomaly. It is strangest of all governments; but it is designed for the strangest of all Empires". (Bailey 1991: 137).

Macaulay's aim of creating an intermediary class was fulfilled. Today his prophecy comes

true, especially regarding the future of the English language in the world. English functions in the Indian socio-cultural context to perform roles relevant and appropriate to the social, educational, and administrative network of India. Kachru quotes E. M. Forster in *A Passage to India* (Kachru 1986: 5) India likes gods. And Englishmen like posing as gods'. The English language was part of the pose and power. Indians accepted it, too.

Issues of English after Independence: Even after India gained its independence from Britain, English continued to be widely used, and, in fact, the new constitution makers deliberated and wrote the Indian Constitution in the English language. In Indian Constitution Article 343 designated Hindi as the official language of the Union. India, after becoming independent in 1947, was left with a colonial language, in this case, English. as the language of government. "1 was thought that the end of the British Raj would mean the slow but sure demise of the English language in South Asia. This, of course, hasn't happened. The penetration of English in these societies is greater than it has ever been" (Kachru 1994: 542).

According to Article 343(2) of the Indian constitution, the English language has to be used for all official purposes of the Union until 26 January 1965. The Constitution Article 343(1) specified that after this date Hindi will be the official language. However due to the language controversy in various parts of the country and especially in Tamil Nadu, parliament passed the Official Language Act. It is assumed that the role of English in India is more relevant than any other Indian language. English has always been the focus of arguments and controversy. Apart from this controversy English is considered as the standard and its use continuously increasing in post post-independence era too. In February 1960, the University Grant Commission appointed a committee of experts under the chairmanship of G.C. Banerjee to examine the issues involved in the teaching of English. Kachru quoted the Report of the English Review Committee:

1) To define the objectives of teaching and learning English at the various levels of university education.

2) To examine the standard of teaching in English language and literature both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

3) To recommend the steps that may be taken to strengthen the teaching of English in the context of the medium of instruction in the universities. (Kachru, 1983: 92).

Apart from the debate on the English language it has always been a part of India's language policy before independence and even after too. English now plays the role of a second language and is used to express the Indian way of life.

English has replaced Hindi as the 'lingua franca' of India. It is the language of government, higher education, and commerce. Thus, there are more speakers of English in urban areas than there are in rural areas. In educated Indian society. English is the dominant language. This dominance can be seen in the relatively large number of books published in English. Hindi, one of the five most widely spoken languages in the world, is far less published in India than English is. Indian English, a sub-category of South Asian English, is considered a variety of English. Kachru (1986) refers to Indian English as nativized because the language has been highly influenced by the many indigenous languages spoken in the country at the same time as its use was limited. Today there is a spectrum of English spoken in India which is determined by the speaker's caste and occupation. The spectrum goes from pidgin on one end to Standard English at the other end. In the middle is standard Indian English, the most commonly spoken variety.

Domains of English: How the language is used differently in various situations defines the domains of language. People have used different languages and different language varieties with different members of the Indian literary tradition for many years. Indian English has been used widely by several writers who have been able to successfully use the language to create rich and invigorating literature. India is rich with tastes, sounds, and sights that are any

writer's dream and stylistic influence from local languages is a particular feature of Indian literature in English. It is Indian writers in English who have truly showcased India to the world not only in terms of understanding the country better but also by establishing that the language no longer represents the western concepts of literary creativity as its ranges have expanded. Sanyal claims that Indian writing represents a new form of Indian culture. It has become assimilated and is today a dynamic element of the culture" (Sanyal 1987: 7). Stylistic influence from the local languages seems to be a particular feature of much Indian literature English. Kachru points out that "English has functioned as the main agent for releasing the South Asian languages from the rigorous constraints of the classical literary traditions. English has created new experimentation in the field of Indian writing" (Kachru 1994: 535-536). Indian English literature has steadily grown in various literary forms, like fiction, poetry, essays, journalism, and political writing. It is studied and discussed in the entire English-speaking world. Literature transcends the boundaries of language, region, nationality and religion that it asserts the brotherhood of man. Rabindranath Tagore won Nobel Prize for Gitanjali collection of poetry. Many Booker Prize-winning Indian texts shows the growth and depth of Indian writing in English.

It can be concluded that the importance of the ability to speak or write English has recently increased significantly because English has become the de facto standard. English is used among Indians as a 'link language and it is the first language for many well-educated Indians. It is also the second language for many who speak more than one language in India. The English language is a tie that helps

bind the many segments of our society together. It is realistic to assume that the syntactical variations of Indian English may be caused by a combination of first language transfer and over-generalization of grammar. The various Englishes along with the Indian English spectrum could be considered various inter-languages. There is no accurate survey of the number of speakers of English in India.

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