

Journey and Future of English in India

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ABSTRACT

English language was introduced in India in the 19th century by Lord William Bentick, the then Governor General of India, for imparting western education system. Even English played a great role in our freedom movement. It served as a lingua franca among the Indians belonging to different religions and provinces. Again, it was through this language that India became aware of great strides made by the western civilization, science, and culture. English is no longer the language of the British. The journey which started with the Anglo-Saxons gradually spread over the world. Needless to say that use of English in all functional domains has become inevitable. India being a colony of the Britishers is still carrying forward the language legacy. In India, the English language has earned the status of the official language as well. The today's population of India is more inclined towards English language. It is a well-known fact that the advanced knowledge of science, technology, space research, nuclear field, medicine, engineering, etc., is abundantly available in English language. Thus, the future prospect of English in India is really high in the upcoming years.

Keywords—‘English language, education system, freedom movement, lingua franca, western civilization, Anglo-Saxons, ‘language legacy, official language, future prospect

Introduction:

Of all the languages in the world today, English deserves to be regarded as a world language. It is the world's most widely spoken language. It is the common means of communication between the people of different nations. One person out of four on earth can be reached through English. R. Quirk points out.

“There are now something like 250 million people for whom English is the mother-tongue or ‘first language’. If we add to this the number of people who have a working knowledge of English as a second language or foreign language [many Indians, Africans, Frenchmen, Russians, and so on], we raise the total to about 350 million.”¹

A large number of people learn English in India and use it for a variety of functions and purposes and English constantly co-exists and interacts with Indian languages in Indian social-cultural contexts. This fact coupled with the processes of transfer and interference, has had the interesting and inevitable consequence and a new variety of English known now as ‘Indian English’ has come into being. V.K. Gokak says in this regard

“Indian English represents the evolution of a distinct standard—a standard the body of which is correct English usage, but whose soul is Indian in colour, thought imagery and, now and then, even in the evolution of an Indian idiom which is expressive of the unique quality of the Indian mind while conforming to the ‘correctness’ of English usage.”²

A. Historical Overview:

I. The First phase:

Beginning with the establishment in India of the East India Company, the British came to India as traders in the second half of the 18th and stayed on as rulers for nearly two centuries. During this period, the British gradually introduced the English language and western education in order to create a class of Indians who could serve the imperial rulers as officials or functionaries as well as function as a communicative link between the rulers and the masses. The earliest attempts to introduce English in India were made by the missionaries who came primarily for the purpose of religious and moral preaching rather than for spreading English. Though the laudable goal with which the missionaries came

to this sub-continent was “the introduction of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement”, these efforts can be seen as the first exposure that people in India [and South Africa in general] had to the English people and their language. This missionary effort culminated in the setting of Christian institutions in different parts of the Indian sub-continent.

II. The Second Phase:

The second phase of the presence and spread of English in India is identified with two names, R.R. Roy and T.B. Macaulay. Roy led a group of Indians in demanding English education for Indians. This group was convinced that English would be more useful for Indians than Indian languages for academic, socio-economic, scientific, and international purposes. The efforts of this group considerably strengthened the hands of Lord Macaulay whose famous Minute was passed in 1835. The clearly stated aim of the Minute was to form “a class who may be interpreters between us and millions we govern—a class of person, Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect. As a result, English began to take stronger roots in the educational system in India; the whole sub-continent witnessed more and more Indian beings taken in by the lure of English. By the end of the 19th century, five universities had been set up [Madras, Calcutta, Bombay, Allahabad, and Lahore]. By this time, this language came to be established as the official and academic language of India. Acquiring great prestige, it replaced Persian and the Indian languages from several areas of education, administration, trade, and business.

III. The third Phase:

20th century witnessed further strengthening of the roots of English in India as an influential English press grew. To quote Kachru in this context. “After World War I, there was a significant increase in educational, institutions and schools and colleges spread to the interior of India. This naturally helped in spreading bilingualism in India further among the middle and lower classes of Indian society.”³

The period since then has seen tremendous increase in English-knowing Indians and even after the British formally left India in 1947, English has continued to gain ground and has become more and more firmly entrenched in the Indian soil. As a matter of fact, since independence, several committees and commissions on different occasions, have stressed the

need to learn English. The government on its own part, has consistently lent support to English and encouraged the teaching and learning of English. Government policies have also given official recognition to English as an Associate Office Language. To quote Gupta and Kapoor in this concern.

“The situation, as it obtains today, is that English is recognized officially as the Associate Official Language, and as inter-regional link language. Educationally, it is recognized as an essential component of Education and as the preferred medium of learning, with specialized education in Science and Technology available through the medium of English only; socially it is recognized and upheld as a mark of education, culture, and prestige.”⁴ A stage has now been reached where English is considered as an integral part of the socio-cultural, educational, and administrative the domains of Indian life. This spread of education has been accompanied by a general perception that English is the language in of opportunity, social advancement, prestige, and power.

B. Uses and Functions of English:

The spread of English outlined above has been accompanied by its increased functionality and use in different domains and spheres of Indian life. What began in the early days as a foreign language learnt and used by a handful of Indians, has now become a wide-spread and powerful presence education in India. In following domains of Indian life English has come to occupy an important place.

I. Education:

Even a casual glance at the way our education system is organized and structured will show that English plays a crucial and central role in education. Whether a child goes to an English medium school or an Indian language medium school, she/he has to learn English for a period ranging from six to twelve years. The Three Language formula despite its uneven implementation in different parts of India, ensures that no student can pass out of school or go on to vocational or higher education without having learnt English as a subject. The English medium schools not only impart training in English from class I, but also teach all subjects through the medium of English. At the level of higher education, the functional load of English gradually increases with English being the preferred medium of instruction and examination.

Specialized education in pure and applied sciences, technology, medicine, law, business management, etc., is available only through the medium of English. What this means in effect is that education, especially higher and technical education, means knowing English, using English, and being proficient in English.

II. Business and Administration:

Business and administration which provide gainful employment to educated people insist on formal training and proficiency in English. Most of the competitive examinations require the candidates to pass a compulsory or qualifying paper in English; big and middle-level business establishments require aspiring candidates to be fluent in spoken English and proficient in written English; multinational companies insist on qualifications which can only be acquired by those who are proficient in English. This means that, as far as employment opportunities are concerned, most white-collar jobs in the government and industry [both production industry and services industry] are available to those who know English. So, if one wants to become an official in the government of India, a manager in some industry, an officer in the armed forces, a doctor or surgeon, an air-hostess or a sales executive, one has to be proficient in English. This in turn, puts greater pressure on the education system to teach English to more and more pupils.

III. Judiciary:

The way our judiciary is structured, it is possible to use local Indian languages at the lowest level of Panchayats and local courts. However, the moment we move on to the high court and supreme court, we find that English has to be used by the lawyers and the judges. In the high courts and Supreme Court, all legislations are in English, all briefs are in English, representation, and arguments are in English, and the judgments are in English. To this, one must add the fact that most law books and journals are available in English.

IV. Media and Publishing:

The media in India, both print media and electronic, give pride of place to English. Music programmes, interviews, talks, discussions, news bulletins are regularly telecast or broadcast in English. The English press with a large number of dailies and periodicals caters to the needs of the people for news, information, and entertainment. The publishing world devotes considerable resources to the production of

books in English. As a matter of fact, one gets the impression that among the educated English-knowing Indians, there is a marked preference for printed material in English.

V. Inter-regional Communication:

The fact that India is a multilingual country with a large number of mutually unintelligible, prestigious, and developed languages, tends to encourage people to use English in inter-regional communicative contexts. This is true not only of government and business where all inter-regional communication is in English, but also of personal interactions wherein people from different regions prefer to use English; they perceive it as a common link language shared by educated persons all over India. In typical official and informal interactions, people from Bengal and Tamil Nadu, from Mizoram and Punjab, from Karnataka and Bihar, etc., tend to make use of English. This is done not because of animosity or hostility towards any language or region but simply because English has come to be viewed as the common linguistic bond between linguistically-diversified people.

VI. Intra-regional Communication:

The use of English in education, administration, business, media, and in inter-regional contexts as well as the fact that English has come to be associated with education, sophistication, culture, and prestige encourages people to use English even in situations where a common Indian language is available. One Hindi speaker uses English with other Hindi speaker in several formal and informal situations for talking about a variety of topics, one Bangla speaker writes a personal letter to other Bangla speaker in English; children who share a common Indian language, often use English with one another as well as with their parents; neighbours who share a common Indian language often use English with one another. For approaching or negotiating with officials, businessmen, traders, and others, we often use English not because we belong to different linguistic backgrounds but because of other social and psychological reasons. Regarding uses and functions of English in India D.A. Wilkings says--

“It is common to use the term [foreign language] to refer to the status of a language which is not used for any normal day-to-day social interaction in the country where it is being learnt, and, by contracts, to use the latter [second language] where,

without being the native language of any social group in the country, is nonetheless used for such purposes as the conduct of commerce, industry, law, administration, politics and education.” 5

C. Socio-cultural contexts of use of English in India:

The Indian users of English have to live, interact, communicate, and deal with aspects of Indian reality. Thus, a trader has to sell “sarees, shirtings, and suitings,” a garment manufacturer has to market “exquisite Lucknavi Kurta-pajama suits”, a caterer has to set up “shamianas” and “multicoloured pandals” and provide “vegetarian, non-vegetarian, mughalai and tandoori cuisine”; a journalist has to report on what transpires in the “Lok Sabha” or about “dharnas, work-outs, bandhs” and “atrocities on Dalits,” an art critic has to discuss “vigorous jugalbandi” and “thekas” and “thumris” or “styles of gayki” and “gharanas” or renderings of the “mahabharata in Odissi”. The India police has “hawaldars and thanedars” who have to report for duty at the “chowki” or “thana”; the rich English-speaking businessman goes on “Vaishno Devi Yatra” or offer “prasadam”, throws lavish parties on the occasion the “mundan sanskar” of his grandson or advertises for a “very fair, homely convented girl, expert in household affairs” for his “foreign-returned, tall, handsome son earnings six figures annually”. The politicians have to reminisce about the teachings of “bapu” or invoke the principles of “padyatras”. These are only a few instances of English language being used to talk about describe and cope with the Indian reality. Little children refer to the man from the neighbourhood “Sharma uncle” and his wife as “Sumi auntie” or report on the antics of a visiting “cousin sister”. A surgeon has to be addressed as “Doctor Shaheb”, a professor as “Professor Shaheb” and a superior in office as “Saab” or “Shaheb”. The point is that Indian reality, Indian subjects, and Indian contexts and norms of behavior reshape and reform English in India. To quote Nissim Ezekiel in this connection--

Good bye Party for Miss Pushpa T.S.

“Friends,
our dear sister
in departing for foreign
in two three days,
and

we are meeting today
to wish her bon voyage.
You are all knowing, friends
What sweetness is in Miss Pushpa.
I don’t mean only external sweetness
but internal sweetness.
Miss Pushpa is smiling and smiling
even for no reason but simply because
she is feeling.
Miss Pushpa is coming
from very high family.
Her father was a renowned advocate
in Bulsar or Surat,
I am not remembering now which place.” 6

Conclusion:

To sum up quoting from the <https://www.doubt.net.com>-

“The future of English is very bright in India. It may be said to be the link language of the country. It has brought different people belonging to different regions speaking different languages closer.” 7

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