

English in India: A Socio-Psychological Paradox

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Abstract: *The present study attempts to discuss the problematic of English in India. We aim to look at the socio-psychological factors motivating the extensive use of English among the Indian speakers. English language has become a part of the politics of ever expanding English empire in India. The interpretation and the basic structure of English may be same but is always used in different manner. The Indians who use English in the academic or professional discourse do not pray or cry in English. Slowly English is becoming the de facto national language; especially for the elite. Though English a non native variety, can be legitimately called 'Indians' English' is undoubtedly a link language in India, but at the same time it does not connect and link rural India with rest of the country. At present English in India is divided in two – English knowing class who governs and the non English knowing class who are governed. This facilitates in the germination of linguistic imperialism and cultural colonialism. English is not the intimate language but its demand among the masses is gaining ground.*

Keywords: *English, Indian English, Problematic, Social Psychology, linguistic imperialism, cultural colonialism*

I. Introduction

The development and the process of globalisation of English continue to have major social, psychological and economic effects. There are varied linguistic consequences very closely interconnected with these social, psychological and the economic developments. In India, the role and the status of English has reached unprecedented height despite the political and the cultural tension. The effect of globalisation has changed the social mindset of the Indian community which is quite evident these days among the masses. This phenomenon has set a new trend in every domain of India especially in the Indian education sector. People of India want to educate their children in the best way possible. For that they are now of the opinion that education in English medium, and knowledge and dominance in English language can brand them as smart, suave and modern.

Our colonial masters left long ago, but the eagerness to learn and communicate in English is transferred on to us and is still an ongoing process. Furthermore, absence of a national language in India has added an extra block in the popularity of English in India. Although Hindi is the official language in India but the abomination and the unpopularity of Hindi in the southern and eastern parts of India also contributes a great deal in the presence, popularity and the dominance of English in India.

II. Linguistic Overview Of India

The language issue in India gives an interesting overview of political and social aspects of language planning and promotion. After independence from the British in 1947, the leaders of the new Indian nation recognized the opportunity to unite many regions of India with a common, universal language, 'Hindi', but it did not assured dominance over the other languages in India. Initially, English, despite its prominence and distribution throughout the nation, was unacceptable for several reasons. According to Ralph Fasold (1988, p. 182), "the former colonial language (English) is an absolutely atrocious choice as a national language." Even though Hindi was perhaps the most natural choice, there were many blocks to its achieving success as the national language. So, although English was not an indigenous language, it became an 'Associate official Language', along with Hindi, according to article 343 of the Official Language Act, 1963, the 'Official Language of the Union of India' with eighteen 'National Languages', such as Bengali, Gujarati and Urdu, etc., that have a special status in certain individual states.

The solution to this problem was 'The Three Language Formula' (TFL) which emerged as a political consensus on languages in school education. This was a strategy (not a policy) to accommodate at least three languages within the ten years of schooling (Pattanayak 1986). The All India Council for Education recommended the adoption of the Three Language Formula in Sept. 1956 (Mallikarjun, 2002). According to this formula, every child has to learn the following:

1. The mother tongue or the regional language;
2. The official language of the union or the associate official language of the Union so long as it exists (official language of the union is Hindi and its associate official language is English);
3. Modern Indian language or a foreign language, not covered under (1) & (2) above and other than that used as the medium of instruction.

The formula was formulated in response to demands from non-Hindi speaking states, such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and mainly Tamil Nadu. But with the passage of time 'English' has taken over as the instrumental language, to the detriment of all other languages.

III. The Presence Of English In India

The earliest English language policy for education in India was enshrined in Macaulay's famous Minute on 2 Feb.1835 (Young 1935).

"We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population."

Throughout the world there was a significant development in English, giving rise to various 'Englishes', due to the effect of Linguistic imperialism and cultural colonialism of English. In India too, this phenomenon gave rise to 'Indian Englishes' (various localised variety of English throughout India). Phillipson (1992) defines English linguistic imperialism as the dominance asserted and retained by the establishment of continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages. Cultural colonialism refers to two related policies: the extension of colonial power through cultural activities and institutions especially education and media or the asymmetrical influence of one culture over the other.

By the early twentieth century, English had become an official and academic language of India. English language has been increasingly accepted as the language of government, of the social elite, and of the national press. Despite the continued pressure from nationalists, English remains at the heart of Indian society. It is widely used in the media, in Higher Education and government and therefore remains a common means of communication, both among the ruling classes, and between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages. English plays a Role of a neutral language of wider communication. Despite being a three percent minority, the English speaking population in India is quite large: that three percent puts India among the top four countries in the world with the highest number of English speakers. Still, English in India is domain specific and register based- for bureaucratic, administrative, academic, legal, technical and scientific purposes, for creative writing and journalism, and for some limited social purposes. In modern times English is perceived as a language which helps to communicate between the diverse populations in a country with approximate 6,500 languages and various dialects.

The words colonialism and imperialism underline suppression of the other. The shifting patterns of trade and new working practices around the globe started affecting the use of English in complex ways. English imperialism was significant throughout the world. The progress of English language in India fluctuated with the political situation of the British colonies. The people who started learning and speaking English language as the second language because of colonialism and imperialism was considered as non Standard English. In other words colonialism is thought to be a practice and imperialism is an idea driving the practice. Various social, cultural and personal factors started operating the contexts in which these different varieties of Englishes are used. Imperialism and colonialism has undoubtedly affected our language and culture.

IV. Socio-Psychological Effect Of English

The sub continental languages have now largely been replaced with English as the language of upper and middle classes. The traditional languages have been dumped for poor working and all English speakers have been made superior. English language is now regarded as the means of personal achievement and the language of necessity. The non Hindi states are free to correspond with the central government in English. It has become a part of our national habit, the use of English acts as a binding factor throughout the nation but at large it is dividing the masses widely. There are many intellectuals and writers in India who are loyal to Indian languages and criticise Indian writing in English but their criticism is voiced in English, and moreover, they themselves write in English because of the market potential of English language.

The social, psychological and the cultural enigma associated with the local language are on constant decline. The presence and the dominance of English in India, is slowly overpowering the relevance of Indian language medium schools among the general public. Indian languages too are losing relevance among the general masses because of the impact of English. There is a huge disinterest in vernacular languages among Indians. The present generation does not get acknowledged with the language of their forefathers instead they

want to be known by English language. For example; if a school going child or any student from Hindi medium goes for higher education and does not understand or communicate in English then he/she is considered to be inferior, compared to those who have better understanding and communication skill in English. This gives a negative image about their mother tongue and they feel that the cultural heritage they possess is just a stigma. This feeling in children and youngsters makes them reject their legacy, culture, history, and identity associated with their mother tongue. As a point of fact, most of the rural class and the less educated people have always been ashamed of aspects of their identity and their language especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This is why when people get good education and achieve some wealth, power and status in a society they leave behind their community and adopt the higher and socially respectable communities. This behaviour for modernization and westernisation is very closely associated with language shame. This embarrassment of people about their own language slowly brings that language to death.

V. Methodology

Hypothesis is that, English and vernacular languages are used differently for different purposes in various domains. The use and the status of English are very eminent in the urban areas and especially among the higher class people. English language is used mainly in the formal domains, in the informal domains the mother tongue prevails. Still, English language has undoubtedly become the medium of creativity and self expression among India speakers.

For the purpose of this study, 30 informants divided into three groups; Group 1 (15-25), Group 2 (26-45) and group 3 (46-60) were selected randomly who had some kind of knowledge of English. The data for this study was collected by the means of a questionnaire, followed up by passive observation. The informants were asked to report their awareness of the frequency and the purpose of using English in their daily life. The questionnaire consists of 4 questions with various subsections. Other than the demographic details, informants were asked to state their language choice, language use, medium of instruction in school/college, exposure to English from different sources and use of their mother tongue with English in different settings with different people. The questionnaire also consisted of a question that how far they consider their mother tongue and English useful for their progress and developments in modern times. The subjects were both from rural and urban areas.

VI. Discussion

The power and the prestige of the language are defined by the domains in which language is used. But the importance of English language is exaggerated in Indian linguistic situation. The role of English in India is not replacive; instead it overlaps with local languages in various domains (Sridhar 1985, Sridhar and Sridhar 1986). Domain analysis and the study of language attitude are interlinked. The attitude of the speaker helps define the domain in which a particular language is used. This defines a place which language holds in the society. The domain analysis helps find out the language choice of the speaker in different contexts because English has invaded personal and professional domains in both pure and mixed form. There are several factors responsible for their choice.

As discussed above, that India is a multilingual nation and English acts as a communicating language connecting especially the northern and the southern region, we can say that people use English as a strategy in order to be better understood. The craziness of running after English is seen mostly among the young generation. The youth feel that if they will speak English they can show that they are modern, and civilized. The more youngsters are exposed to English (educational institution), the more they use English even while speaking their mother tongue.

Use of any language is extrinsically related to area of residence, medium of instruction, amount of exposure to the language, prestige of the language, and frequency of the language use. The result of the study seems to reveal certain facts: (1) use of English language happen because of the prestige associated with it, (2) English is gaining more recognition because of public demand and high level of exposure of English through various sources, (3) people find English as a door to knowledge, jobs, education etc., (3) they find their mother tongue useful just for the purpose of spreading cultural and social values and a sense of unity in their own speech community, (4) people also think that they can maintain a separate identity while accepting and adopting elements from other community, i.e. 'English'.

VII. Conclusion

Language is both culture and voice, it cannot be used properly 'if one does not make it one's own, give it one's voice in one's own unique way' (Kramsch 2010). If we only focus on native-English as spoken in the UK and US then we are turning English into a controlled commodity that other countries and cultures cannot truly make their own. At the same time English seems to be a possible danger to local languages if it starts too early for a child. English language should be an addition to a child's repertoire of languages not a substitution

for their L1/ home language (Prahbu 2009). English should be taught in schools and colleges but not at the expense of the native tongue. Life in the 21st century, in an interconnected, globalized world, requires critical-thinking skills and a sense of international-mindedness; Using English could be the route to create this interconnected, global/international understanding to learn empathy, tolerance and conflict resolution. But the other side of the coin looks very different. The fact today is that, English language is used only by a few, typically in the urban areas of every region. It is used only in certain domains, and hardly ever as the language of intimacy.

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