

Progression Of English Language In India: An Overview

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Abstract

English has not been a native language for the oriental countries especially like India. It is a byproduct of colonialism. English entered into Indian system of education with the initiatives of Lord Macaulay's efforts purposed for creating a suitable work force and ease of work. In the post-Independence period, it secured a safe place through the three language formula. It was used in the administrative, educational and literary fields. Now in the present scenario, it has become a widely used language of communicative in various spheres for people ranging from commoner, bourgeois to the elite class. English has become most significant and ubiquitous language. English has been so absorbed in Indian lifestyle that it does not seem a foreign language in the strictest sense of the term. Every Indian language is contaminated with the use of English so much so that the vernacular languages have lost their purity and originality. The present paper attempts to outline the progression of English language in India from the historical period, post-independence era up to present scenario in Indian context.

Keywords: English language, second language, colonialism, English in India

Introduction

English, though a non-native language of India has become one of the significant languages in Indian subcontinent. It is widely used in administration, media, technical and scientific education, person interaction among the educated, public information, broadcasting, cinema and government and therefore it has become a common means of communication. It has bridged the gap between the east and the west in the sense of communication. But this progression of English in India has witnessed a long journey from the historic period to the present period.

English in India : Historical Background

Development of English in India is the impact of British colonialism. The British came to India with an objective of trade and commerce. Later, they expanded their original objectives and settled here with a purpose to rule. Britishers forced rule over India gave rise to many conflicts and battles between the Indians and the Britishers. The Battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1765) established British political supremacy in India. But English was not introduced in India at once. All the attempts leading to the commencement of education of English in India begin with Charles Grant; a Christian Missionary who spent thirteen years in India from 1767 to 1780 and wrote his experiences in his book 'Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain'. He noted in his book that the Indians err because they are ignorant. Despite opposition he preached on the deplorable state of Indians. His proposition became the starting point of British education in India. Meanwhile, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and other Indian leaders were professing for the introduction of English language in order to gain access to European literature, philosophy and sciences for the benefit of others. The collective efforts of Wiberforce and the attempts of the Missionaries outside the parliament and Minto's Minute (1811) helped to create congenial atmosphere in the British Parliament in 1813. Grant's labor yielded positive results. The parliament revised the Educational Policy in India and issued Charter. Charles Grant goes down in the History as the "Father of British Education in India"

(Panel of Experts, 1996). According to one clause of this Charter of 1813, the then Governor-General-Council had to spend “a sum of not less than one lakh rupees in each year on revival and improvement of literature for the introduction and promotion of knowledge of the science among the British territories of India.”

However this charter was not implemented since it raged controversy over some issues due to ambiguity in certain terms in the charter. When Lord Macaulay “the torchbearer of Modern Education in India” appeared on the stage as Law Member and clarified how the sum of one lakh rupees was to be spent, it was only then that the foreign plant of ‘English’ was sown in Indian soil. He resolved all the controversial issues in the Charter and clearly defined the terms like literature, medium of instructions and agency of education. Thus Macaulay’s ‘Minute’ proved an unobstructed path for the development of English in India by making its study compulsory.

He remarked “English stands pre-eminent among the languages of the West. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created?” The letters of Macaulay’s brother-in-law Charles Travelleyn reveals that literature emerged a less abrasive means of controlling the colony (Sharma, 2011). Macaulay’s objective towards English education in India is clarified in his Minutes. He remarks:

“We must at present do our best 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, opinions, in morals and in intellect. To that class we may leave to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with the terms of science borrowed from western nomenclature” (Macaulay 1979:116).

Macaulay believed that English would enrich the vernacular languages and literatures then existing in India by which they could serve as vehicles for European scientific, historical and literary expression.

Lord Benting, the then Governor General, accepted Macaulay’s suggestions in total and gave his official sanction. Thus English became the official language of the state, language of education, advancement and a symbol of imperial rule and of self improvement. English proved to be a

great integrating force for uniting the Indians with their diversified culture, religions and languages. Subsequently, English became the medium of instruction. Meanwhile, the national leaders of India working for the cause of Indian freedom opposed English owing to the fear of extinction of indigenous languages. But the British government didn't make any changes in the Education Policy of India and the existing facilities for oriental and vernacular instruction were retained. India adopted a three language formula and English secured a safe and unavoidable place in the formula. As a result, English continued to dominate the curriculum of Indian schools, colleges and universities.

English in India: Post Independence Scenario

Retention of English in India after independence was a debatable issue. Before independence, all the major nationalist parties had unanimously agreed on the removal of English after independence. When India became free from the shackles of the British on 15th August, 1947, there were divided opinions regarding the removal of English from India. But by this time, English was so grounded that it had become the language of the elite though not a language of the masses. Considering the limitations of Hindi in some parts of the country and growing popularity of English, the constitution provided that Hindi would be the official language of India but also allowed to use English as the official language of India for the period of next fifteen years i.e. by 1965. Some people were of the opinion that English being a foreign language needs to be banished from the country look, stock and barrel whereas others opposed it. There was no consensus over the suitable substitute that would take the place of English decently. India, being a multistate and multilingual country, each state had its own regional language. There was no such provincial language that could be commonly used by all. Hindi, being a widely spoken language in most of the states in northern India, was the only choice left. But Hindi also was not an acceptable language in Southern India especially in Tamilnadu that had staged violent protests against imposition of Hindi as a national language in 1963. Consequently, the parliament passed in 1963 a bill declaring English as Associate Language of India for the official purposes till an indefinite period of time. This is the position till today.

The Kothari Education Commission (1966) in India, which examined thoroughly the whole field of education, assigned a compulsory place to the study of English. It said, “As English will, for a long time continue to be needed as a library language in the field of higher education, a strong foundation in the language will have to be laid at the school stage.”

Even in the post-independence period the status of English is still a link language among the educated people and the few elites. In spite of the introduction of Hindi as the official language, English still played the important role. But in this way, it did not bring about any significant change in the status of English on the contrary, it resulted in the creation of a class of vernacular—educated native to occupy lower position both in education and administration. (Agrawal, 1985: 467)

English in India: Present Scenario

Globalization has considerably impacted on the use of English throughout the world (Crystal, 2003) and India has no exceptions to it. English plays a very significant role in India today. The influence of English in various fields in the contemporary India is constantly increasing. It is used in corporate offices, High Courts, State Legislatives Assemblies and the Parliament. English has served and has been serving as a link language in India at two levels. First, persons of two different states are able to interact through a common medium i.e. English. Secondly, India can converse with rest of world with the help of English. It is also the language of trade and industry in the country. Commercial correspondence from one state to another is conducted in English. It is widely used in Indian communication media: television, radio, magazine, cinema, newspapers and internet based websites. There are many channels telecasting various programs in English. Many people are seen casually using English in such programs. Many radio channels broadcast news in English. The number of books published in English is far more than those published in any other Indian language. Enormous newspapers are published in English language. According to annual report of the office of the registrar for newspapers in India in the year 2011-2012, total circulation of newspapers in India is 37,38,39,764 and total number of registered publication as on 31st March, 2012 was 86754. English holds the second

position regarding number of publication and newspapers registered in the country with the figure 11938 since Hindi occupies the first position with 34651 publications and newspapers.

In social life, English is widely used by youngsters, businessmen, politicians, film stars. In metro cities school children, college students use the language in and out academic campus. English medium schools are constantly mushrooming not only in metro cities but also in small towns. Educating the children in such schools is supposed to be a sign of being little bit affluent. The craze for English medium schools is so high that regional medium or mother tongue medium schools are on the verge of disappearance due to lack of admissions and even many government schools imparting education through mother tongue and which were beginning schools in the concerned area are closed off forever. At the moment, there are about 300 universities, excluding deemed universities in our country and over 20000 colleges and more than 3 lakh high schools where English is being taught either in the form of English medium or English as a major component where language or literature are taught. (Sharma, 2011)

Though Hindi is the most read and written language in India, English has become most significant and ubiquitous language. English has been so absorbed in Indian lifestyle that it does not seem a foreign language. There are 22 major state languages in India but no Indian language seems to be spoken in pure form without use of some English words. Every Indian language is contaminated with the use of English so much so that it has lost its purity and originality. For instance, Marathi is the mother tongue of Maharashtra but the English words like TV (television), railway crossing, bus-stand, shirt, radio, brush, toothpaste, cooler, refrigerator, car, mobile and many more are so frequently used that Marathi users have forgotten their Marathi equivalent words and if any Marathi speaker tries to use such equivalent words instead of English one, it sounds artificial, awkward, a case of affectation. Same is the case with other Indian languages also. This affinity with English has resulted into code-mixing and code-switching by the India speakers especially youngsters in urban areas. The use of English in India is not restricted to English knower only. Ironically speaking, the shopkeepers who do not know much English get their boards of shops painted in English. They do not mind incorrectly spelt words on such boards. Thus English has become an all-pervasive language in India. Books in

English are abundantly published and sold in Indian market. India ranks as the world's third largest producer of books in English and are second number only to those in Hindi (Sarvepalli Gopal, 1988)

Each state in India has its own regional language. Hindi along with its little variation is spoken in many states. Other main languages are Telugu, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarathi, Punjabi, Marathi and Oriya. But English is still more powerful because of its linking nature between two different state speakers. English bridges the gap between north and south of India.

In 1997, an India Today survey suggested that a third of population had the ability to carry on a conversation in English. This was an amazing increase over the estimates of 1980s, when only about four to five percent of population were thought to use the language. And given the steady increase in English learning since 1997, in secondary schools and among the upwardly mobile, it is estimated that there are 350 million English speaking Indians today. This is more than the combined English speaking populations of Britain and the US (Crystal, 2004).

The influence of English in the field of education is highly noticeable. At present, English is taught and learnt in all the schools and colleges in all the states across India as a second compulsory language, the first being regional language of the concerned state i.e. mother tongue. It has become an absolute medium of instruction in the educational programs of medical science, technology, business administration and engineering.

There are around 6, 41,695 primary / junior basic schools, 1, 98,094 middle /senior basic schools, 1, 16,820 high schools/higher secondary/pre-degree junior colleges, 244 universities/deemed universities and institutions of national importance and 7782 colleges for general education in India. Previously, English was taught as a compulsory language from class five in India. But now English has become a part of primary education curriculum in for past few years. 'English has been introduced at the primary level in 27 states, it is a subject in class I in 18 states and the medium of instruction in Nagaland, Jammu and Kashmir and government model schools of Chandigarh and Maharashtra (Vishnoi,2013).

Though English has been taught as a compulsory language at primary, secondary, higher secondary and degree level, it hasn't brought desired results. The school and college learners especially in rural areas present abysmal picture in their acquisition of pedagogical skills of language. Prof. V.K.Gokak sums up very aptly the deplorable condition of teaching English in India when he says, "The teaching of English in our schools is in a chaotic state today. Pupils are taught English for about six periods a week for six years. But it has been estimated that they hardly know 150 words by the time they join a university. This means that they have hardly been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period. They do not know how to use the commonest structures of English" (Edgar et. al., 2004).

Conclusion:

Though English language entered into India as an impact of colonialism, it has now become second most important official language of the country after Hindi. It is widely used by speakers of various age groups in common spheres of life. The most significant use of English is as a link language between speakers of two states having mutually unintelligible regional languages. In educational system, it has been taught as a second language. In urban areas it has become a means of communication but in rural part of the country, it has become a killer subject in vernacular medium schools/colleges and it is rarely used for public communication. For rural learners, the competence in English is still a Herculean task. Though in general its use and usage is increasing day by day, still India has to go long way to make English a common language of communication for people of all strata in both urban and rural area.

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