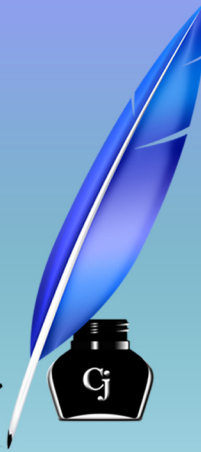


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Changing Face of English Language in India (from 1947 to 2013)

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Language is that identity of a nation which shapes its destiny. In the context of Indian subcontinent English language has proved to be a touchstone to judge its potential and adaptability. India has changed as a nation state and as a society due to the incursion of English language; at the same time India has changed English language as well. Applied linguistics has bowed to the notion of social context, to the importance of culture, to the supremacy of discourse, to recognition of the importance of learner's culture. Journey of English language in India records all these notions.

English became the medium of Administration and Education throughout the Indian subcontinent when Lord William Bentinck accepted a Minute written by Thomas Macaulay in 1835. Macaulay proposed the introduction of an Educational system in English medium in India. He wanted well educated clerks to become well oiled cogs in the wheels of English Government in India. Emphasis was laid upon the introduction of basis grammar and sentence structure so that government official works under British rule were properly done. Macaulay was joined by missionaries in their zeal to 'civilize' the natives. Missionary schools cropped up everywhere and the Anglicization of Indians started. When the Universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were established in 1857, English became the primary medium of instruction.

Political expediency also made Indians accept English as medium of conversation. For a country where dialect changes every 30 kms and language changes every 100 kms; the introduction of a *lingua franca* (common language) became a necessity. English bridged the gap between Hindi and various regional languages. Nationalists, revolutionaries and political activists, who wanted freedom from British rule, were able to spread their thoughts among all the like-minded people with the help of English language. For the first time, English language brought a kind of unity, hitherto missing among diverse linguistic groups of India.

Post 1947, the language riots of 1960's led to a 'three language formula', in which English was introduced as the chief alternative to any regional language. It was accepted as an 'associate' official language, with Hindi as official language. It also got the status of the official language of four states (Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura) and of eight Union Territories.

English has a distinct standing within Indian society. It is used within the legal system, government administration, secondary and higher education, the armed forces, the media, business and tourism. It is a strong unifying force..

Early teachers of ESL were English themselves. Students under them gained the knowledge of “an English” which was unaffected by mother tongue influence. These early students were taught “an English” which was used by English themselves. But for these first students of English teachers, English was their second language; so when they themselves started using or teaching English—mother tongue influences started showing.

Convent and Public schools cultivated an elite English speaking class that was complacent and dismissive in their attitude towards other Indian languages. Since English was at their disposal, they were able to think better and work quickly in it; and to manipulate it to their advantage. Vernacular school products, on the other hand, deeply conscious of their inability to converse fluently in English, lacked confidence to assert their individual talent or intelligence against the onslaught of this elite English speaking class. Deep in their heart they nurtured a burning desire to master English as language. This gave birth to the so called middle class obsession with spoken English.

English medium schools became a new lucrative business opportunity. These schools mushroomed everywhere, including very small towns and villages. Without any vigilant authority or adequately qualified staff, these schools offered nothing either in Education as a whole or in the learning of English as a language. To be professionally competent, teachers must be professionally qualified. Teachers of English had earned their degrees, but had not garnered the enthusiasm or competence to teach a foreign language to the students. Their approach towards the language remained exam-centric. The result was a crop of students who, although were able to comprehend spoken and written English, but were highly incompetent in writing or speaking correct English.

Wolfram says, “Language itself provides seeds of change, and social circumstances provide fertile ground for their growth and spread.”

The population of India has doubled since 1960. It is estimated that there are around fifty million people in India who are competent in English. If the current trend continues, within ten years there will be more speakers of English in India than there will be in Britain. The Indian author Raja Rao writes, “The English language in India has evolved over time. In the last one and a half decades (starting from the economic reforms in 1993) Indian society has changed. As members of a society grow and develop, so too must the tools they use to communicate with each other. As, Colmus points out, “languages are often said to reflect the social realities of their speech communities”. Indians are not only learning the language, they are changing it. The new English speakers aren’t just passively absorbing the language, they are shaping it.”

One big phenomenon attached with spoken English in India is the kind of prestige it brings to the speaker. General notion associated with one proficient in English is—that that person is well-educated, bright, intelligent , from a good family, has high financial status, is cultured and has a shining future ahead. One talent of good spoken English makes that person good in every aspect of life. Such is the craze for English that everyone wants to speak it. But very few have the ability or desire to speak chaste English. Being status conscious they are not

ready to let go of English. Still, one can hold over the medium of conversation, so Hindi words are added to be a little bit comfortable or intelligible to others. Hence, Khichari language comes into existence.

Knowledge of both the languages but proficiency in none has made Khichari language popular among the masses. Hinglish is being used as an attractive device in various popular advertisements; in Bollywood film dialogues and songs; in T.V serials; and in cartoon programmes for children. As a society, we are getting really comfortable with the usage of this Khichari language. Purists warn of the deterioration which might come in the language concerned; but the dynamics of language are very different. Language is ever changing. It adapts itself to new words to strengthen its comprehension among new speakers. This is crucial for its survival as well.

After Industrial revolution, most of the major inventions, discoveries, research and development have taken place in English speaking countries. Western world is eons ahead from the rest of the world in terms of technological advancement. To emulate their ideals both in science and technology, a certain degree of proficiency in English is a must. Numerous reports suggest the upper hand of Indians as compared to Chinese or people of other nationalities when it comes to their knowledge of English. China has recently woken up to the advantages of knowing good and correct English and has rectified Her school curriculum accordingly

Everything said and done about English being the most important language to acquire and learn, one fact does not change. English is not the mother tongue of Indians. For 95% of Indians, their mother tongue is either Hindi or any other regional language. It is through the skills achieved in mother tongue that the child expresses all his feelings and desires; and understands others'. Mother tongue, being the first language which a child learns, helps the child in all kinds of thinking, as he grows. With his growth, the spirit of enquiry, reasoning, analyzing, elaborating, discussing and discerning grows. Linguists accept that a child who is proficient in reading, writing, speaking and comprehending his or her mother tongue; would easily learn the concepts and sentence formation of a foreign tongue. In their blind race to learn and impart the knowledge of English language both students and the schools have discarded the notion of being well versed first in the mother tongue. They have ignored the learning of the mother tongue. Naturally an imperfect knowledge of mother tongue made them quite an imperfect in the knowledge of English language as well.

In India, English as second language is mostly preoccupied with the meaning, so as to assist the pupils in coping with communication. It necessarily requires the conditions which simulate the 'natural' environment for talk. Two other problems are there. First, since not all social occasions of talk can be simulated in the classroom, which ones should be selected and why? Clearly the ESL learner's place in the wider social context will be relevant in arriving at an answer to these questions. Second the simulation of meaning exchange cannot be dissociated from encouraging the pupils to talk English the way "people normally talk English." This raises the question of who the people are and what is meant by 'normal'. The answers cannot be the same for all wider social contexts. Colums writes, "Speaking meaningfully is not simply producing a structure or a set of words; it is using wording for meaning within a social context for the living of life. Applied linguistics has bowed to the notion of social context, to the importance of culture, to the supremacy of discourse, to recognition of the importance of learner's culture."

No object could be beset with difficulties more numerous than the correction of pronunciation. The initial question as to the extent to which interference with the natural speech of people is justified or desirable, is itself most difficult to answer. The philologist will tell us that language is an ever-changing thing; that changes whether local or universal are in the direction of economy of speech; that to attempt to restrain or coerce this natural evolution of language is to fly in the face of Providence. The phonetician will tell us with, much truth that there is no such thing as a vulgar pronunciation; that what appears vulgar is merely through the association of certain kinds of pronunciation with certain kinds of people.

Three major tendencies appear to be on the forefront in coming years as far as the usage of English language in India is concerned. Firstly, use of mixed language (Hindi and English or any regional language and English) will be in vogue. Secondly, in pronunciation American model will be followed and in spelling British model will be followed. Thirdly, in academics, law, business, government sector and private sector chaste English will be used.

Britishers are very sensitive the way other users use or abuse English language. English is one language which is spoken by almost 65% of the total world population. Local factors do contribute to twist and modify the language. Supremacy of a language is decided by the elasticity of its own to adapt to any culture, situation and language. English has proved to be so in Indian context.

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