

The Covid-19 and the Upsurge of English Language

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Article History: Submitted-10/08/2021, Revised-26/08/2021, Accepted-30/08/2021, Published-31/08/2021.

Abstract:

The dramatic and drastic changes that English language has witnessed during the current pandemic is a noticeable feature of its undaunting progress on global platform. However, it should be acknowledged that the communication, being held for public health, globally, has not considered the linguistic minorities to disseminate the basic information. This multi-lingual crisis in communication has provided enough ground to notice the upsurge of English language during pandemic-COVID-19. This shortfall has compelled the large mass of people to come to terms with the new words, nomenclature to the scientific domain pertaining to this fatal disease. Lockdowns call for complete closure of schools, colleges, and educational institutions. The online education, Over-the Top media (OTT) services, global news, discussions, decisions, research and proposed remedies, updates and lots of other factors have found one common tongue to reach globally. The research paper closes by acknowledging the positive and vehicular role of English language, during the miasma-COVID-19.

Keywords: effective deterrence, colossal practice, social language, Seismic Impact, Dexamethasone, effective deterrence, upsurge, or menace.

Introduction

The research paper aims at comprehending the growth of global language that is English, in the face of pandemic-COVID-19 and how it accelerated its usage and revival of its latent vocabulary. It also tries to consider the possible factors causing its sturdy growth within the non-native circles. It is well accepted fact that language creates our world. That too, English language has gained paramount importance and outstanding addition to its vocabulary during

the ambush of COVID-19. English language is spoken all over the world and aptly called *lingua franca* without any second thought. This nomenclature stands valid during this pandemic, considering the incessant coverage and access of this fatal disease across the world through the common tongue. One can notice that the novel nuances, abbreviations, collocations, new coinage, medical terms, or jargons, were conspicuously used and registered as common usage in this unprecedented time. English language became the vehicle of valuable information for the effective deterrence of this disease. Knowledge, discoveries, observations, instructions, give and take of necessary information was only possible through a common language, English, for most of the part of the world. This also calls for effective communication as the *sine quo non* for the successful preclusion of this noxious ailment. Though the crucial need to broadcast the important health related information was fulfilled by *lingua franca*, it has also brought to the notice that the marginalised positions were received by other languages, leaving themselves no other ground but to get overpowered by the colossal practice of English language by non-native speakers.

It is generally observed that the urge to learn language other than mother-tongue is forced upon the learners academically or socially. The formal education of any language demands inner will and self-motivation. Hence, academic education of English language, so to speak specifically, as prescribed and in the form of arid formal delivery, has little credits to yield its desired effect, i.e., communication. On the contrary, an acquisition of second language receives favourable conditions if the learners feel the pressing needs of the hour and no-escape kind of situations to communicate in one's non-academic situations. There is commendable difference in formal and social education one receives in general. We tend to pick words, phrases, if heard or introduced incessantly during social interactions. No other language, except English, has undergone creating change and witnessed rampant usage by the speakers of other tongue.

Impact of COVID-19 on English

Global predicament like COVID-19 has affected/effectuated change in every sphere of life including language competency of common mass. It is generally observed that language is the only medium through which disease related information was passed onto common mass. 'Inflammatory language' and 'war analogies' are being used during this pandemic. *covid-yoddha* (*COVID-fighters*), frontline workers like frontline soldiers, war-like situation, '*viral apocalypse*', *covid*- an invisible enemy, these and many more words augmented the gravity of

the situation (Chopra). Though English used to borrow words from other language, for instance words like pestilence, epidemic, and plague form French language, it has attained predominant place during COVID-19 reiterating the rampant usage of foreign words losing its foreign identity. This has certainly hurled other languages at second place, but it should not be taken as grain of salt that English language has always turned out to be the only avenue for sharing emotions and information for two non-native speakers.

Researchers at Michigan State University have claimed that wars and natural disasters have impacted language of the masses. They believe that this pandemic will impact our communication and the way we use our language. The second world war turned out to be 'big inflection point' for language change. People from different nations came together could have caused this change (Chopra). This could be the reason that the lexicographers look for the roots of great linguistic changes in the great social changes. Situations like COVID-19 have conspicuously made an impact on the usage of the any language in the context.

Social Language

The cultural divisions of human beings have always been observed in terms of the behavioural patterns and their manifestations. On the bases of these patterns of behaviour and manifestation, we define the human culture and the cultures nationalities in a broader sense. However, this 'coronavirus disease has given some worldwide buzzwords- 'endemic virulent,' 'put off,' 'quarantine,' 'lockdown,' 'bring up,' etc. and at the same time, some ways for controlling or defeating its attack with certain approaches by using related terminology. These trending words have made the learners of English feel how updating of English is important and relevant to updating ourselves according to the changing or prevalent circumstances. The social meanings or functions of these trending words also make us aware of what their precise and pragmatic values are.

Surprisingly, the formal words pertaining to COVID-19 disease are profusely being used in colloquial manner by the language users. English language has received a status of global-social language in its true sense during this pandemic. Pragmatic-function of English language during this lockdown period can be a matter of possible research in near future.

Seismic Impact on English Lexicon

A general agreement can be pursued about the fact that this weird world of current times has evolved its own lexicon. And this could have probably persuaded editors of Oxford English

Dictionary to release monthly special updates breaking the tradition of ‘quarterly updates’ of past twenty years. Some ‘linguistic shifts’ have been documented by them citing the impact of pandemic. Astoundingly, the very word–acronym COVID-19 is a new addition to the English language (Paton). Usually, obscure medical terms soon gained the status of common words in every day’s communal talk. This paradigm shift help gain the medical terms an easy entry into the dictionary, which is otherwise difficult. But this entrance needs to qualify certain criterion. Like the dictionary editors look for the certain ‘degree of currency outside word’s discipline’(Kreuz). Hence, Hydroxychloroquine, the drug used for malaria treatment, found entry in July 2020, albeit, it had appeared in print way back in 1951.

Similarly, ‘Dexamethasone’, though printed as early as 1958, was used for reducing mortality rate in recent times. This too has found its place in dictionary’s second edition, mentioning the widespread usage in the treatment of covid-patients. Hence, it can be understood that this pandemic has revived some of the words like ‘community transmission’ and ‘community spread’ which were first documented in 1959 and 1903 respectively. The latent lexis has witnessed renaissance in this hard time (Kreuz).

Other such common words pertaining to medical sphere like immune, virus, vaccine, infection, symptoms, symptomatic, asymptomatic, sanitizing, droplets, swab etc., have been used massively, not only by medical professionals, but also by the common mass. This could be probably for the first time the language registers have broken the shackles of its sphere. It can also be claimed that, if one proposes a thoughtful review of the words’ usage, words like ‘social distancing’, ‘epidemic’, ‘pandemic’, ‘lockdown’ ‘vaccination’, ‘sanitization’, ‘self-isolation’, ‘quarantined’ etc., are some of the words familiar to any non-school-going child also.

COVID-19 and New Coinage

Coinage of words received a good scope during COVID-19. Words like *pandemic*, *quarantined*, *lockdown* were searched frequently by the masses. But it was ‘*quarantine*’ which was searched the most. It also received deviations by some learners who came up with coinage of words like *quaranteam* (which mean a team of people who into quarantine together), *quaranteen* (which mean a teenager affected by covid), *coronial* (in the time of corona), *lockstolgia* (nostalgia for the time spent during lockdown). Blending has played a crucial role in the coinage of words like “*zommobombing*”, which means a stranger intruding videoconference; “*maskne*”, which mean an acne caused by mask; “*quarantini*”, a cocktail

enjoyed in an isolation. People ignoring public safety are nattered as “*covidiot*”. The public’s panic buying is referred in a German term as “*hamsterkauf*”. It would be interesting to see whether these words would be used after pandemic or not (Chopra).

The close observation reveals that the nomenclature used for describing COVID-19 gained paramount attention. Terms like *coronavirus*, *SARS*, *human-to human*, *flu like*, *Wuhan virus*, *Chinese virus* etc. were used to refer the same (Chopra). People have understood the social impact of virus and expressed their concerns through the extensive usage of words like *self-isolation*, *self-quarantined*, and *social distancing*. Even the meanings of the words like *social distancing* have undergone a change in its context (Paton). A word, which was used in 1957 referring an attitude of aloofness, is interpreted as keeping physical distance with others. High- five, documented in 1981, is rarely used to avoid contact however *elbow bump* is being used to greet in a safe way (Chopra). Unexpectedly, people of different local prefer different terms when it comes to quarantine oneself. The use of ‘self-isolate’ and ‘self-quarantine’ are used, underlining the regional difference, in United Kingdom and The United States of America respectively. ‘Rona’ as the slang word for corona, extensively used in Australia and the U.S., made the dictionary editors to respect its inclusion pertaining to usage (Kreuz).

Pandemic And English Language Learners

The traditional teaching methods replaced by distance learning is gaining ground in the face of pandemic, leaving no option but to opt for online learning/teaching mode. Multifaceted reactions are noticed in the academic life and progress of the students due to this. Mona Ibrahim Kamal, Svetalana Zubanova and et.al surveyed the students of I.M. Sechenov University and Al Ain University to understand the impact of distance learning on the academic performances, cognitive abilities of the students. They found that the distance learning has yielded better results than the traditional face-to-face education (Kamal, et.al). However, it should be noted that the lack of communication with the teachers may hinder the learning process. The pro-active learners were all ears to the daily updates of COVID-19 broadcasted by media across the sea. The common language, English, became the undisputed vehicle for the same adding more inputs and practical situations for language learners to pick the language in real context.

Carrie Parker, an educational researcher at the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Island at EDC, opined that bilingual community relations and teachers’ valuable inputs would fetch outstanding results (Edc). Rahul Rangwala, director, India Program, Michel, and Susan Dell Foundation (MSDF) said that it is critical for the youngsters of low-income

group to have easy access to learn English. *Enguru*, the self-learning spoken English app, has been extensively used by the common mass. It currently boasts of its 1.3 million monthly active users in the face of pandemic (Chaudhary). All these references have underlined that fact that English has certainly got an upliftment in terms of its users in academic or non-academic scenario.

Mohammad Mahyoob conducted research on the challenges and obstacles faced by the English language learners during COVID-19. It was noticed that switching to online EFL learning caused technical, academic and communication challenges. This would have accelerated the need of self-pace learning on the part of the students, resulting into the upsurge of English language if taken as the bright side of the predicament (Pp.351-362).

Upsurge or Menace

Public communication at global platform is generally held only through small number of world's languages. That two, when it comes to pandemic situations, global knowledge dissemination is at the mercy of limited language. In this predicament, the linguistic hierarchy of English and other very few languages are reiterated by the international bodies like World Health Organisation (WHO). Only six official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish) and additional three languages (German, Portuguese, and Hindi) were used by WHO for disseminating the information on COVID-19. English, being the language of press conferences and record, predominates in the practice. For a nation with one or two national languages, it becomes inevitable to face language barriers for the linguistic minorities of the states. This linguistic diversity gives an easy access to the global language to nurture itself once again marginalising other languages (Piller).

Conclusion

The upsurge of English language has various factors to its credit prior to COVID-19; the limitations of linguistic minorities, the employability stature gained in the corporate world by English language, English as the medium of instructions in various educational institutions, as an official language by various government bodies to cite a few. It received a boost in the pandemic only to reiterate its undaunting stand in the face of war like situations for the world. It must be admitted that the English language itself has evolved and witnessed the changes in its own territory of vocabulary and usage for common masses.

The upsurge should not be taken as a threat or menace to the other linguistic minorities. However, an attempt is to be initiated by the language users to make it more comprehensible to other linguistic minorities for rendering any language status-a vehicle of lucid information. Rather some staunch steps should be taken by other local or regional languages to reciprocate the possible solutions, warnings and give and take of information for mutual benefits. The unquestionable fact is English language proved to be a valuable medium of communication for creating awareness, valuable information and augmenting the seriousness of the global threat just to help stop spread the deadly disease.

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