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The Indianization of English

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ABSTRACT:

‘English is a global language’. Taking into consideration the present scenario, the above statement needs no pillars to strengthen its claim. One out of ten persons in the world knows English, 75% of the world’s mail, 50% of the world’s newspapers, over 50% of the world’s radio station and more than 50% of the world’s scientific and technical periodicals use English as a medium of expression. Again it is one of the six official languages of U.N.O. It is also the link language of the commonwealth countries. Thus, as an international language English has created better understanding among the nations of the world and has been responsible for cultural give and take. In a multilingual country like ours English no longer remained a foreign language, rather is no less used than out official national language. The present paper is an attempt to present the impact of India and its culture on English and vice versa.

KEYWORDS: languages, varieties, Indian English, methodology.

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INTRODUCTION

The British rule in India which lasted nearly three centuries, left behind not only a race of Anglo Indians but an Anglo-Indian language too. In the pre-independence era Indian leaders like Raja Rammohan Roy and Rajunath Hari Navalkar made efforts to persuade the officials of the East India company to impart instruction in English, rather than Sanskrit so that young Indians would be exposed to the scientific knowledge of the West. The British established their sovereignty in India (1765-1947) ensuring that the language of administration remained English. English also became the medium of instruction. Lord Bentick accepted a minute written by Thomas Babington Macaulay, a member of the Supreme Council of India in 1835 which proposed to develop:

“... 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”.

In the recent years, English has stretched out beyond Macaulay’s instructions and imagination. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena. Having established itself as a SL in the post-independence India, English performs active roles in the academic, professional and social life of the nation. It is common knowledge that language grows on its own to meet the demands of a community, so has English in India; in the form of several varieties. The varieties have evolved from the demands made on English. The status of English in India can be best described under three classifications:

- * Associate official language (Hindi is the official language)
- * National Language, with Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, etc and State language of Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura
- * Official language of eight union territories.

In the context of English, the Secretary of Industry, Arunachal Pradesh, N. Diwakar, appealed to the public:

“We missed the Industrial Revolution and are a hundred years behind the developed world today. If we again miss the information and the computer revolution we will lag behind by another hundred years. English is absolutely necessary to keep pace with the rapidly changing world”.

The University Education Commission headed by Dr. S. Radha Krishnan recommended:

“English be studied in high school and universities in order that we may keep in touch with the stream of ever growing knowledge. This would prevent our isolation from the world and help us to take advantage of the wider reach of the English Language”.

English in India has always been in the process of Indianization but it has done this so extensively and rapidly only since 1947 when its native speakers left the country. To meet the needs of the society, personal, inter-personal and institutional, it has evolved unusual usages which some refer to as deviants, a pejorative term, and some as variants, a natural occurrence—both respectable and acceptable—and as “arbitrary creations”. It is not inferior or superior to British English (BE) or American English (AE) but is “different” and our very own. Kamla Das, a modern Indian poet, has put across her sentiments about it very honestly and assertively:

“The language I speak

Becomes mine

Its distortions its queerness

All mine, mine alone,

It is half English, half Indian

Funny perhaps, but it is honest

It is human as I am human

Don’t you see?”

(Summer in Calcutta)

English in India has been changing all along but it has not done as much as in the past two or three decades. Having penetrated deeper into the soil since then, it has developed and assimilated new features of lexis and syntax, unusual collocations, different registers and stylistic nuances, which remain unique to other communities of English. So widespread is their growth that it is difficult to pick up a piece of any literature published here and not find an Indian variant in it¹.

Indian English is a cover term for that variety of English, which is used by a large number of educated Indians as a Second Language (SL), meaning it is used in communication at the intra-national level in day to day dealings. As a result of nativization, BE in India has developed a range of varieties. Nativization has occurred due to interference with regional languages (contact varieties),

intentional and unintentional, and due to acquisitional inadequacies (speech continuum). Not yet standardized, it has come to be referred to as IE at international forums of linguistics, in international journals of linguistics and about everywhere in the national scenario. Transplanted in the Indian soil more than 4000 miles away from its native land England, English has absorbed the predominant local culture as well as the sub-cultures in the approximately 300 years of its existence here.

While there has been a widespread use of English in India, there has also been a rapid downfall in its standards. Fifty years ago, one would rarely come across a graduate unable to hold a conversation in English or write an application². In the present times, though English Compulsory courses are aimed at making the millions English-literate, the truth is far from it.

Even after receiving ten years of English education, an Indian graduate, often, cannot produce a single correct sentence, written or spoken. What ails the English language teaching programs in India is no mystery to most of us engaged in the profession of imparting education in schools and colleges. The absence of an indigenous pedagogic model, and appropriately designed materials, shortage of competent teachers, faulty testing system, long spells of absenteeism indulged in by students in institutions, loosely constructed academic sessions with frequent spells of holidays, teacher apathy on account of poor remuneration, etc, are some of the causes behind the falling standards of English. Even after half a century since the British left India, we have failed to standardize the changes that have occurred in English and evolve a pedagogic model to teach English³. The government of India, the state governments, the policy framers and most of the course designers are not even aware of the fact that there exists a variety called IE, which needs to be developed and polished. As Das states:

“There has been no comprehensive study of any of these varieties. Papers have been published and seminars have been organized on Indian English, but the explicitness, systematicness, and objectivity one expects from linguistic description have not been achieved”.

The authorities in India consider English to be a subject as homogeneous as geography or biology. In reality, English is not a homogeneous entity but exists in multiple forms, such as BE, IE, Australian English (AsE), AE, etc. Can we expect our students of English Compulsory courses, who form the majority of undergraduate learners of English, to follow the model given by Shakespeare and Keats and produce contemporary English? Do we not need to evolve a model of our own, contemporary and rooted in our own culture? To teach them to communicate in English in India, we certainly need a pedagogic model of our own.

Most teaching learning operations of language require a point of reference— a ‘model’ which serves as an authority in ascertaining the appropriateness of a usage. A model is a system that defines rules and patterns, governs pronunciation, spelling, grammar, and describes lexical elements and discursal features. Such a model is carried in a set-up in the form of dictionaries, grammar books, manuals, specimens of literature of different genres and subjects in the form of books, audio/ videotapes and other software. Standardization is an artificial process a language variety is put through in order to evolve a model. Since it is considered in the context of teaching/ learning operations, such a model may be called a pedagogic model, Ruth Petzold explains the concept of a pedagogic model⁴:

"A pedagogical model is an idealized or simplified language system that tries to capture the language that is common among educated speakers of the variety ...it is more or less accessible and usable according to whether it has been codified and used in dictionaries, educational materials, and resources and has recognized proficiency measurement instruments".

When it comes to evolving a pedagogic model we need to base it on a higher graded English, used by the metropolitan/cosmopolitan English-educated Indians. Macaulay’s brother-in-law, Charles Tevelyan, once remarked that the elite group, the class of educated Indians, spoke:

"... purer English than we speak ourselves, for they take it from the purest models, they speak the language of the Spectator, such English as is never spoken in England"

BE(British English) models have outlived their utility and validity in India. While many elements and features of BE sound incongruous, IE has sprouted their replacements which serve the needs of the local population. They now expect inclusion in the classroom through a well-formulated model— indigenous in nature. A number of phenomenal changes have occurred in IE. They are more than visible everywhere, on the Internet and other latest electronic media forms, and they abound in borrowings from Indian. There is website called India World, which carries labels such as “Samachar, a Khoj”, “Khel: Indian Cricket”, not to miss the web-sites like www.samachar.com and www.khoi.com and the highly controversial www.tehelka.com. The trends these days favour the attitude of going ethnic, at least while in one’s own country.

At the level of curriculum design, rarely is a comprehensive plan evolved. Most policy framers as well as those implementing them are not even aware of the need to examine the language afresh. The variety IE does not exist for them and even if some ELT experts recommend it, it is brushed aside

and the age-old BE model is given a rerun by the board. Trudgill records this controversy in succinct words:

"Like African English Indian English (Ind Eng.) is beset by the problems of norms. There is no general agreement as to whether the standard should be strictly BE (British English) or whether Ind. Eng forms (especially in grammar) which are used by the majority of educated speakers and can also be found in Newspapers should be accepted in the Indians standard".

Regarding English teaching, objectives are rarely framed, and in certain states, if they do get outlined, they rarely present a realistic picture. A needs analysis, which should be mandatory to every curriculum planning and course design, is seldom conducted. English is treated like any content-oriented subject and taught that way. There is practically no co-relation between the objectives of teaching English, the books, the teaching methodologies and the testing and evaluation system. Finally, there is no practice of feedback from the students and the society, particularly the market which can provide updated insights to the policy framers, curriculum designers, material producers, teachers and paper-setters who can in turn evaluate the entire teaching-learning programme of English.

CONCLUSION

Hardly any formal attempts have been made to standardize the Indian English, which means to codify it in the form of a model. No doubt, IE at present is a mass of slippery usages, but it is not without a system of its own. We need to evolve a model rather than let those involved in teaching English grope blindfolded in the classroom. The teachers, the paper-setters, the examiners and the students/ examinees look for a model—somewhat stable in nature—to minimize ambiguities. Since nothing remains static, we must accept the dynamics of change, the multiplicity of existence and the fluidity of language any variety experiences. We need to evolve dynamic models and also change our materials, a depiction of the model, from time to time. Updating the model and its reconstruction are the incidental phenomena of the changes that take place constantly in a society. The teacher needs a model and needs to have a sound knowledge of the system of any language. It would therefore prove to be a great service to the academic community of English if a model is constructed as the model of Indian English.

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