

THE YESTERDAY AND TODAY OF ENGLISH: A JOURNEY

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'If I have to summarize the meaning of the English language in one word then it has to be freedom. Freedom to relate to others, explore new cultures, freedom of information, to do what I want to do for a living and live in a place I love ... English has opened my horizons in every sense of the words and I owe who I am today to the ability to speak the language.'

Francisco Rodriguez-Weil, set and costume designer, Venezuela

English has come of age as a global language. It is spoken by a quarter of the world's population, enabling a true single market in knowledge and ideas. It now belongs to the world and increasingly to non-native speakers who today far outnumber native speakers. Emerging economies and developing countries increasingly recognize the economic value of producing large numbers of skilled graduates able to communicate in English. Jobs, economic opportunity and wealth creation are critical to stability. English is becoming a core criterion in determining employability. Early adopter advantages are gradually fading and are being replaced by economic disadvantage for those who do not speak the language. Those who are not online or cannot speak English are increasingly left behind. English makes a significant contribution to sustainable global development. It eases trade between countries that do not share a common language. It is used as a language of convenience, facilitating dialogue and building trust where an understanding of diverse positions is crucial – notably in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, where security forces and other uniformed services increasingly speak to each other in English. A fairer, more prosperous world is a safer and more secure world, and English is increasingly the lingua franca that holds together the international conversation and debate in areas such as climate change, terrorism and human rights. Countries with a low proficiency in English have uniformly low levels

of exports per capita. A focus on improved language skills, integrating English into the curriculum from the primary or even pre-school year, helps attract foreign investment, further increasing the need for English speakers and a strong export sector in services helps create a middle class, strengthening spending and growing the national economy. In developed and developing countries alike, for the investor, the academic, the civil servant, the teacher, the performer, the politician, the secretary, the diplomat, the activist, the schoolchild, English creates opportunities otherwise impossible. English is the dominant international language of the 21st century. It is spoken at a useful level by some 1.75 billion people – a quarter of the world’s population. As the language of communications, science, information technology, business, entertainment and diplomacy, it has increasingly become the operating system for the global conversation. How did this happen? What does it mean? Two qualities have been pivotal in the evolutionary rise of English: momentum and adaptability. The momentum was originally provided by the political, military, religious and merchant classes. Through colonization, ship-borne trade with the Americas, North Africa, the Indies and China, and the attendant role of Christian missionaries, the English language was exported worldwide. Arabic and Spanish spread similarly through conquest and religious conversion, across the Islamic world and the Americas, in parallel to the rise of English. But they did not adapt and adopt with the pace and flexibility of English.

At an individual level, the discernible relationship between English proficiency and gross national income per capita is a virtuous cycle: ‘Improving English skills (drive) up salaries, which in turn give governments and individuals more money to invest in English training ... improved English skills allow individuals to apply for jobs and raise their standards of living.’ In India, for example, hourly wages are on average 34 per cent higher for men who speak fluent English and 13 per cent higher for men who speak a little English, relative to men who do not speak English.

History

The story of English in India began in 1835. Lord Macaulay, the law member of the Council of Governor General and President of the Board of Education, presented his celebrated minutes in favor of English education. He desired to produce through English education, a class of persons. Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion in morals and intellect was Lord Macaulay’s education policy of the future. Lord William Bentick proclaimed, that “the great

objective of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European Literature and science among the natives of India; and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone". To quote Macaulay,

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be affected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

What then shall that language be? One-half of the committee maintains that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommends the Arabic and Sanscrit. The whole question seems to me to be-- which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongue. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalist themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.

In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia, --communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

To sum up what I have said. I think it clear that we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1813, that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied, that we are free to employ our funds as we choose, that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing, that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic, that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic, that neither as the languages of law nor as the languages of religion have the Sanscrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our encouragement, that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.

Lord Harding too declared in 1844 that for service in the company (East India Company) preference would be given to those who were educated in English schools teaching western literature and science. As said above, the main purpose of teaching English in countries like India should be 'Utilitarian' than 'cultural'. We see that in India, we need English mainly for the 'utilitarian' point of view. As a great language of utility, English served us as the medium through which we can and could establish contact with the intellectual world abroad and thus know what is happening elsewhere.

The introduction of English to the Indian linguistic landscape opened with the dawn of the British colonial era, English began to develop roots in Indian education. English had to change if it had to carry the Indian psyche and socio cultural experience in a meaningful way. The English Studies in India also suffered from a different kind of exclusiveness that had roots in our colonial past. English was introduced to our academic institutions by our political masters and we responded to it passionately. The passion for it was not entirely because of its literary power which was never questioned, even during the period when we were in the grip of the strongest racial bitterness, but because it was the language of power.

Debates on English

There are several responses to this dominance of the imperial language, but two present themselves immediately in the decolonizing process— rejection or subversion. The process of radical decolonization proposed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a good demonstration of the first alternative. Ngugi's program for restoring an ethnic or national identity embedded in the mother tongue involves a rejection of English, a refusal to use it for his writing, a refusal to accede to the kind of world and reality it appears to name, a refusal to submit to the political dominance its use implies.

This stance of rejection rests upon the assumption that an essential Gikuyu identity may be regained, an identity which the language of the colonizer seems to have displaced or dispersed. However, many more writers have felt that this appeal to some essential cultural identity is doomed to failure, indeed, misunderstands the heterogeneous nature of human experience. Ngugi's own essay indicates the divergent reasons fellow African writers had for using the English language, but most involve a confidence that English can be used in the process of resisting imperialism. Braj Kachru shows how in the Indian situation the language has provided a neutral vehicle for communication between contesting language groups, while the Indian novelist Raja Rao voices, in a piece written as long ago as 1938, the challenge of the postcolonial writer to adapt the colonial language to local needs. This determination to use the language as an ethnographic tool has been a more common response of post-colonial writers. The appropriation of the language is essentially a subversive strategy, for the adaptation of the 'standard' language to the demands and requirements of the place and society into which it has been appropriated amounts to a far more subtle rejection of the political power of the standard language. In Chinua Achebe's words this is a process by which the language is made to bear the weight and the texture of a different experience. In doing so it becomes a different language. By adapting the alien language to the exigencies of a mother tongue grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and by giving a shape to the variations of the speaking voice, such writers and speakers construct an 'English' which amounts to a very different linguistic vehicle from the received standard colonial 'English'. As Bill Ashcroft demonstrates, the belief that the English text is unable to communicate a 'non-English' cultural meaning is based on a misconception of the way language 'means'. Meaning is seen to be a constitutive interaction within the 'message event'. The process of language adaptation is linguistically profound because it establishes a medium which fractures the concept of a standard language and installs the 'marginal' variations of language use as the actual network of a particular language. W.H.New demonstrates how language variation produces culturally distinctive writing whether in single language or multiple language societies. The nuances of settler culture writing can produce as finely realized a set of distinctions as the writing issuing from the meeting of two very distinct language groups. E.K.Brathwaite demonstrates the process of language adaptation in the Caribbean, arguably one of the most dynamic linguistic communities in the world. What he calls 'Nation Language' is a language which, rather than attempting to recover lost origins, demonstrates the vigorous success of linguistic variation in this region. One of the most detailed

examinations of this process has focused on the Anglophone and Francophone speaking communities of West Africa. Chantal Zabus employs the very useful notion of a palimpsest to demonstrate how the language practices of a region may be built up through a range of linguistic strategies, one of the most significant of which she calls 'relexification'.

English today

English is a hybrid language. It's a language of cosmopolitans. Its growth is never stagnant and is evergreen. It's born out of the melting pot theory. It has changed its status, from global to local transforming itself into the glocal language. It will be an act of imbecility not to strengthen English language. In fact the acculturation of non-native languages has a long tradition in the Third world. The nativization of English is not a new phenomenon. This new form of English is called Indian English, Pakistani English, South Asian English, African and American English. The English language has been localized to match the needs and experiences of Indian people which are called as Indianization of English (Laskar, 2012). It is a productive process to appropriate English for the use of people (Higgins, 2003). There are different varieties of English language in India totally deviated from the main British Received Pronunciation (BRP). These new varieties adopt several features of pronunciation, grammar and semantics from the native languages of India (Bhaskararao, 2002). These varieties are called 'Indian English' or 'Indian Variants of English' (IVE) same as the intra-lingual varieties of English in Britain with different regional accents, there is a great deal of regional pronunciation variation within Indian English. Different areas in India, such as North-Eastern India, Bengal, Orissa, Andhra and Karnataka, as well as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab and Bihar add different flavors to the pronunciation of English. Also, some words are found in Indian English which are absent in other Englishes around the world as a result of innovations or translations of some native words or phrases. For example, cousin brother (for male cousin), prepone (advance or bring forward in time), and foreign-returned (returned from abroad) (Bhaskararao, 2002). There are also examples of Indianisms in grammar such as breads, foods (pluralization of non-count nouns). The Indian words added to Oxford English Dictionary 2015 are Mela, Jugaad, Kitty Party, Mixie, Videshi, Timepass, Papad, Keema, Bloggable, Bloggy, Retweet, Tweetheart, Brain candy, Flipped classrooms, Followee, Chill pill etc. According to Baldrige (1966), many Indians claim for the ownership of English rather than regarding it as a foreign language. At present, there is no prescribed or defined standard of English

in India. (Gergesh,2006). The majority of Indian people speak one of the localized varieties of English mentioned above. Some scholars such as Kachru have tried to define a “standard” IE as the variety of Indian English. According to him, the standard variety is the one used by educated Indians and the ones who try to institutionalize Indian English through literature, newspapers, journals, radio and TV, and government communications. Kachru (1965) also suggested a scale of different degrees of competence in English in India with three measuring points called a cline of bilingualism: (1) the Zero point at the bottom point of the cline (e.g., Babu English, Butler English); (2) the Central point indicating adequate competence in one or more registers (e.g., English used by civil servants and teachers); and (3) the Ambilingual point, having a native-like competence in English. One needs to realize here that English has to be altered and localized and need not bother about the stylistics and phonetics of it because ultimately there is nothing called as correct and perfect English. It is hoped that all these efforts shed light into future research and considerations of the account of English in India.

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