

English Language and the Policy of Linguistic Imperialism in India

Avkash Jadhav

Head, Associate Professor, Department of History, St. Xavier's College Autonomous, Mumbai India.

Abstract

English became the official language in India and it played a significant role in schools and college curricula as well as in daily life. Meanwhile, others also began to think, that the English was a foreign plant transplanted in the Indian soil and were doing immense harm to the growth of our nation. The aim of the education system set up in India by the colonial state under Liberal and Evangelist influence was, in general, twofold. First, and to paraphrase Macaulay, it was designed to create a class of Indians who would be Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect. This class would be politically subordinate and culturally inferior to the Englishman in India. Knowledge of English is considered a successful passport for employment. An English-speaking Indian is invariably preferred to a non-English-speaking Indian in almost all jobs in a government department. English symbolizes in Indians' minds, better education, better culture, and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mingle it with Indian languages in their conversation.

KEYWORDS: English language, imperialism, Indian educational system, colonial history.

Introduction

The word English is derived from the Latin word 'Lingua' which means tongue. Language may be said to be a means of expressing emotional or mental concepts by any living being. Language is one of the most important and characteristic forms of human behaviour. Language is not automatic or instinctive to man, as walking is, Language is an acquired social activity. Language is a combination of three elements, viz, the sounds, words, and structures, (Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax). Like any other system, language is also a system. Language is a means through which we contemplate the past, grasp the present, and approach the future. Language plays an important role in the mental, emotional, and social development of a person. Language may be said as a method by which a person expresses his thoughts and feelings in such a way that they can be understood by others. The concept of learning has been greatly influenced by the psychological study of the learning process, and as a result, it is much more widely interpreted than has been customary in the popular use of the term. The psychological concept of learning goes far beyond learning directly from a teacher or learning through study or practice. It includes the learning of skills or the acquisition of knowledge and it also refers to learning to learn and learning to think; the modification of attitudes the acquisition of interests, social values, and even changes in personality.

The Journey of the English Language in India:

The language of English came to India in the 17th century with the advent of the East India Company from England. It was formed to conduct trade with India and other countries in the east. Initially, the Britishers tried to learn Indian languages to communicate with the Indians. They also started special colleges for this purpose. They also took the help of translators to adapt to the native Indian educational patterns. But when their political powers increased, they created British Indian provinces like Bengal, Madras, and Bombay. So, the English traders gave more importance to English, and by the 1830s the Indian middle classes started emerging and they soon realized that English was the language required for a secure future in a government job. The country was set for the first 'big moment' in the imperial history of English language teaching.

The British policy was to create an Indian class who should think like the British, or as it was said then in Britain 'Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions and morals and intellect'. The British also established in India universities based on the British models and with an emphasis on the English language. Many Indians also got their education at universities in England. The English Christian missionaries also arrived in India around 1813 and they also built schools at the primary level for Indians in which the language of instruction was the local language. Later on, the missionaries built high schools with English as the language of application for the Indians who wanted to study or to have a good knowledge of English. The British rulers began building their universities in India in 1857 and the formation of Bengal Bombay and Madras University was the outcome of this strategy. English became the first language in Indian education.

We also witness the adoption of English as the official language of education in, 1837. The government policy was to establish English schools or Anglo-vernacular schools in each district. Good English schools were given the status of colleges. As a result of this system of education, English became the unifying force in India because it was used for internal communication. Besides, many English-educated Indians could think and express themselves as effectively as the English. Macaulay's role regarding English education in India has been interpreted in various ways. Some people have condemned him as an enemy of India and he has been admired as a great benefactor of India by others.

English became the official language in India and it played a significant role in schools and college curricula as well as in daily life. Meanwhile, others also began to think, that the English language was a foreign plant transplanted in the Indian soil and was doing immense harm to the growth of our nation. As a result, in 1904, a government resolution suggested that the medium of instruction in the middle class should be the mother tongue and that English should not be taught before the age of thirteen. Nevertheless, the Calcutta University Commission (1917) supported Bilingualism. Thus, English continued to dominate the curriculum of Indian schools, colleges, and Universities closer to our independence decade. Dr. Zakir Hussain's Committee of Basic Education (1938) recommended in its report that the proper teaching of the mother tongue is the foundation of all education, without the capacity to speak effectively and to read and write correctly and lucidly, no one can develop precision of thought and clarity of ideas. This committee suggested a seven-year course in Basic education. And this course of Basic education emphasized the

importance of the mother tongue. Finally, the Constituent Assembly of 1949 indicated the significance of English in India. Although English was not listed in Schedule VIII of the constitution, it was given the status of the associate official language for a period of 15 fifteen years in the Constitution of India.

The Debate between the Orient and the Anglican:

Since medieval times an Orientalist in Europe was someone who evinced a special interest in the epistemology of Eastern cultures. These cultures were supposed to begin on the borders of Europe in Turkey and were seen extending up to Japan. In the beginning, an Orientalist was regarded as a person who was a specialist in the study of the East, a specialist who generally appreciated his subject. The Germans often led this field and there is reason to believe that many of the early Orientalists were convinced that the Orient had a lot to teach the Europeans. The tendency to see the Orient as a culture that was different, but worthy of appreciation and academic interest continued in European writing even during the modern period. In Germany the academics of Indology, which glorified an ancient spiritual Vedic Hindu India, probably evolved from an obsessive interest in the Orient found amongst a set of intellectuals who reacted to the spiritually dry industrial materialism of the West. The politics of Indology argued, that the West could learn different things about each other; India could help the West transcend modernity whereas the West could help develop India materially.

Moreover, the academic meaning of Orientalism acquired a new colonial connotation in the twentieth century largely due to the scholarship of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Said. Orientalism was comprehensively deconstructed by Edward Said in his famous book published in 1978. Using the Gramscian concept of hegemony and Foucault's critique of modernity Said claimed that Orientalism was a pretentious discourse of imperialism and colonialism. It was a knowledge produced by modern Western capitalism desirous of exercising total power over the Orient. As a dominant Eurocentric discourse, it was inherently biased against the African and Asian cultures and therefore its submissions had to be viewed critically. According to Said, the late eighteenth century was an important chronological, political, cultural, and racial point of departure in the history of modern colonialism. Since then, Orientalism developed as a corporate institution for dealing with the Orient through the mechanisms of knowledge generation, political control, cultural domination, and state authority.

Factors that led to the Introduction of the English language:

The aim of the education system set up in India by the colonial state under Liberal and Evangelist influence was, in general, twofold.

First, and to paraphrase Macaulay, it was designed to create a class of Indians who would be Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect. This class would be politically subordinate and culturally inferior to the Englishmen in India.

The secondary aim was to assign India, a backward place on the worldwide scale of national and moral progress towards a state of enlightenment.

Although much of this economic backwardness was a product of British colonialism it was convenient for the colonial rulers to define it in terms of the historically inherent backwardness of the Indian civilization. Doing so justified British rule in India as historically progressive and even providential. The intention here was to inculcate a sense of racial, cultural, religious, and historical inferiority among the English-educated Indian elite by making them recreate their past in degrading terms laid down by the foreign rulers. Thus the corruption of the memory of the colonized was made to benefit the colonizer in every possible way. In the long run, and largely due to this institutionally manufactured inferiority, the native elite would remain in awe of the British and at the same time look up to them for guidance from a position of dependence and subordination. Since this inferiority had to be rationalized to hegemonize the Indian middle class, the study of Indian history was yoked to the project of colonialism

As colonialism unfolded in India both opposition to, and support for, colonial rule in Indian society emanated from a shared historical epistemology to which Eurocentric ideas and modern comparative history remained central. The knowledge of history - to which notions of glorious historical periods, subsequent decline, current backwardness, and future resurgence were crucial - played the most important role in the construction of social identities and community politics in colonial India. Colonial knowledge pegged to the various strands of colonial ideology as it was, gave the leaders of Indian castes, communities, and the rising middle class the hegemonic tools for imagining and fashioning communities and nationalisms based on their peculiar understanding of culture and history

Imperial or Colonial Policies for the Promotion of the English Language:

The word 'imperialism' derived from the term imperative, whose original and dominant meaning was one's right to command and coerce. It is interesting to study the impact of the Cornwallis System and Munro System in different parts of India. Cornwallis wanted to create a class of improving landlords in India, whereas Munro claimed a greater familiarity with Indian systemic practices. Nonetheless, both approaches emanated from the impulse to reform India in the interest of British colonialism. A third example was the education system developed in India by British policymakers like Macaulay with all its long-term implications.

The story of English in India goes back to Macaulay's famous Minutes of 1835 it was at this time when the foreign plant of English was sown on Indian soil. He said that English stood pre-eminent among the languages of the West. English soon became the official language of India and it enjoyed a very prominent and privileged position in the Indian educational system and life till the attainment of independence. It was taught as a compulsory subject both at the school and college levels.

The British attempts at cultural as well as political hegemony in India during Victoria's reign rely on historiography, emphasizing the displacement of earlier Orientalist endeavors by arrogant Anglicist insistence on the overwhelming value of English culture. These two poles are conventionally marked by the names of the Orientalist Sir William Jones and the Anglicist Thomas Babington Macaulay. Macaulay's now ritually invoked Minute on Indian Education (1835) was a triumph of a narrow British view of Indian literature, arts, and sciences. Macaulay's claim that a shelf of English literature was more valuable than the collected classical libraries of

India has become, not just an indicative truth, but even a truism in the cultural history of the empire. Explaining the importance of English in his minutes Macaulay says, —English stands preeminent among the languages of the west, whoever knows that language has ready access to all the west intellectual wealth which all the wise nations of the earth have created. He was of the view that the need for English education in India was even greater than that for Sanskrit or Arabic.

In recent years, this historiographical narrative has been significantly modified. Historians of literature have been challenged by new global historiographies that emphasize imperial circuits and trans peripheral exchanges in addition to dyadic relationships, by narratives that trace historical ruptures rather than teleological trajectories. These historiographical debates at the intersections of literary, cultural, and political histories of empire, moreover, are inflected by debates within postcolonial theory and history.

Just a few years before the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885, Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the author of Anandamath, observed that a 'nation with historical reminiscences of its past glory tries to retain its glory, and if this be lost, it tries to regain it'. The point is to understand how these modern reminiscences emerged in colonial India and how was India regained in a new knowledge episteme. The social diffusion of colonial ideology and the influence of the 'superior' culture of the colonizer in British India affected Indians in myriad ways. In the nineteenth century the indigenous colonial elites, Hindu, Muslim, and others, began a serious modernization of their religions due to the influence of history that they learned from their colonial rulers.

The philosophically constructed binary difference between the modern based on reason and science and the traditional based on unreason and superstition was central to communal reform in colonial India. The historical construction of communities, and later nations, was inherent to the assertion that communities had to modernize in keeping with the historical needs of modernity. At the same time colonial policy, for obvious political and academic reasons, encouraged such community-history-based imaginations

Dr. West's New Method:

In the 1920s and 1930s, Dr. Michael West had been in India and worked as the principal of a Training College and Director of Education in Dacca (the present capital of Bangladesh). He thoroughly studied the then-prevailing methods of teaching English in India and concluded that the knowledge of English required in India is of a passive type. He found that the most popular and accepted direct method had certain serious drawbacks in it. To do away with these drawbacks, he laid down a method popularly known as the New Method or Dr. West Method of Teaching English

He first examined and analyzed the utility and aims of teaching English to Indian children.

They were:

1. English being an international language promotes internationalism and a feeling of brotherhood among different people of the world. It provides an easy channel for communication with people all over the world and thus broadens the outlook.
2. In the field of science no Indian language is as rich as English.
3. English enriches the mind of the Indian people. They can get good reading material through English from all over the world.

Keeping these points in view, Dr. West emphasized reading aloud and silent reading more. He was also against teaching formal grammar. To him, grammar is not a code of rules. The ability to read is more important than the ability to write for Indian children who have fewer opportunities to speak that language. According to him, reading vocabulary is different from speaking vocabulary. He was of opinion that a minimum of 1158 words are adequate for expressing one's ideas in day-to-day conversation. The main emphasis in this method is on reading vocabulary which contains the words or structural words and content words.

The response of the Native Indians:

M.K. Gandhi while expressing his thoughts on English and the National languages said, 'I hold its knowledge as a second language to be indispensable for specified Indians who have to represent the country's interest in the international domain. I regard the English language as an open window for peeping into Western thought and science. Jawahar Lal Nehru the first Prime minister of India said, 'The English language is ours by historic necessity'.

English, today, is one of the major languages of the world and it was rightly said by Pandit Nehru that 'we can neglect its study only at the risk of loss to ourselves'. The abolition of English would be a great setback to the cause of education in India. So, the standard of teaching English should be maintained as high as possible.

Recent scholars like G S Amur, K R Srinivasa Iyengar, S K Desai, V K Gokak, and others view colonialism and imperialism as essentially benevolent and inevitable processes of modernization, emancipation, and enlightenment of the non-western world. Further, these processes involving colonial projects have been hailed and celebrated by these critics as necessary agencies of change.

MK Naik describes the date of March 7 1835 as a red-letter day in the history of modern India when Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor-General, unequivocally declared that 'the great object of the British government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for education would be best employed on English education alone'. M K Naik not only uncritically accepts colonial modernity but also draws a map of the Indian Renaissance directly linking it up with the rise of Indian English literature.

The truth is that English has set deep roots in our soil - it is interesting to consider why Sanskrit then, and English now, both languages of the ones in position and power, took root in the Indian soil while Arabic and Persian also languages of (Muslim) rulers and state languages for a longer period than English, did not and even Urdu, their offspring are generally confined to the educationally backward Muslim

community. A language cannot spread or take root unless it has vitality and serves the growing needs of a people.

Contemporary Scenario:

English, though a foreign language, occupies a unique position in the educational system in India. Some people advocated the retention of English for several reasons. English had been the medium of instruction, the language of administration and law, and the main vehicle to communicate with the rulers. Therefore, its abolition would have hurt education and governmental administration. English is the language of international trade and commerce; it is a language spoken by more than four hundred million people around the world. The need for international understanding compels us to widen our reach to include another useful language. There is a growing demand for the study of English through which we can lead a life of better prospects by acquiring scientific and technical knowledge. It can also be considered a vehicle of culture. The learners of English in India realized that English is needed for mobility and social and economic success. English is the language of opportunities because it takes one outside one's community where there are more opportunities. The learners know that to bring modern knowledge into their lives, they need English. English is the language of modernization but not Westernization. English thus, has an interactive role to play and not a literary role in our Indian education.

Knowledge of English is considered a successful passport for employment. An English-speaking Indian is invariably preferred to a non-English-speaking Indian in almost all jobs in a government department.

English symbolizes in Indian minds, better education, better culture, and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mingle it with Indian languages in their conversation. It is also usual for Indians to abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among the Indians who speak different languages.

Conclusion:

English is not only the national language of Englishmen; it is an international language. It may be called the language of civilization, but its richness, elegance, beauty, flexibility, and dignity made it universally popular. English has become a world language because of its wide diffusion outside the British Isles, to all continents of the world, by trade, colonization, and conquest. The worldwide expansion of English means that it is now one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, with well over four hundred million native speakers and roughly the same number who speak it as a second language. English is a national language in 29 countries and an official language in 15 other countries. English is the first language in the U.S.A., Canada, and Australia; the second language in Russia, Japan, Pakistan, France, Africa, etc. People who speak this language are around 400 million. No other language can take its place. Its popularity, based on its utility all over the world, determines its strength and makes it global.

David Crystal in his book *English as a Global Language* (1997) states 'a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country'.

In this way, the English language has become the lingua franca in the age of globalization. A two-thousand years ago, the English language was quite unknown to the world. Today there are perhaps 1.5 billion people worldwide who use the English language. They speak English or write in English.

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