



The Expedition of Indian English from Pre-Independence and Its Existing Quandary with Special Reference to West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Now-a-days English is one of the most widely used languages in the world. The ultimate purpose of learning English is for communication. Therefore in the process of English language teaching, it is particularly important for teacher to develop students listening and speaking skills. Taking everything on account, it can be said that learning English is the practical need of the student when globalization and economic flourish are making so many opportunities for the Indian youths. With the air of English Teaching the school education will enable the pupils to learn English with comprehension and speak it correctly so as to make them understood and express single ideas and give easy description in writing English Language. According to Mudalier Commission, the pupil must read and speak, each other through English. The students must not depend on the prescribed books only. The present paper will focus on the journey of English and its present plight in India in general and West Bengal in particular.

Key words : English, Teaching, Classroom, Communication.

Literature Review

Many books, journals, research – articles have been written by scholars on the journey of English in India with special reference to West Bengal. One such great book is Aspects of English Language Teaching in India by A. K. Sharma. In the book the writer beautifully explains the teaching of English in country like India. Another book of same kind is Indonization of English by Braj Kachru.

Objectives

The objectives of this present paper are –

- It is essential to give Indian English its legitimate position.
- To make English learning easier in different educational institutions.
- To give a crystal clear picture regarding the plight of English Teaching in the current situations of West Bengal and India.
- To train teachers of English to produce teaching materials and to improve the English Teaching in India.
- To make English teaching need based and socially relevant.

English, a foreign language in our country has a very significant role. In the present day English is found everywhere from text books to films to religion. We can see these high boards these days saying slokas from veda taught here special classes in English is too provided. The same is evident to show how much English has prospered in our country. It has travelled a long way and managed to grab every single person attention. This language which was considered as a foreign language just a few decades away has today become one of the most important things in our lives. In-fact it has become a part of our daily life. We have nativised English and have created recognition for it in the world.

English Language has come into India along with colonization. The British as they set their empire in our country brought in their language too. They realized the necessity for this for their own selfish needs. But it did lots of good. It also performed some roles in spreading English Education. There were lots of debates to eradicate English language in the Post Colonial Scenario. All these were more on a nationalistic sentiment basis. But these arguments came to an end and English was decided to be made the official language until further decisions were taken. During the British reign, the need of instruction in the Government Institutions was English. This continued now too. English was also helpful in sobering the crisis of languages in India. A poor country like India has many languages and the states were divided on linguistic majority basis. So when time came to decide about a national language there were lots of issues. Though Hindi is our national language today, there were lots of issues then. English acted as a link or bridge language and called across all regional linguistic barriers. It became our language of communication. One example for this is the judiciary system in the country. Almost every action from the dressing to the presentation of cases happens in the way it happened during the times of the British.

India has a very important place in the global arena today. There are many factors for this. To start with culture, science and technology, music, books, architecture, medicine etc, we can trace to roots of these, that most of these wonders reached the eyes of the world through the usage of English Language at some point of time. We reach high in the world economy now and without English, we would not have entered the world market. English is also the language we use for foreign relations. Whatever we have any issue to discuss with other countries in the world, it is mostly done in English. It is sometimes though done in any other language with the help of an interpreter, English has helped to develop into a stronger and a fast developing nation. English is a must to sail smooth. The field of science and technology is developing everyday and inventions are being made everyday. All this is learnt and understood in English. English hence helps us to stay along with the current world.

It is also a language of communication today. We communicate among ourselves and win the rest of the world in English. And even education takes place in English today. Though there are a large number of schools which still teach in their respective regional languages, this is done with the aim of educating everyone. But comparatively education in English has become easier. In-fact, we use many English words in our own mother tongue these days. We have borrowed words from English and are profusely using examples. It is very common to use words like bus, auto, switch, fan etc. these days. We fail to remember that each of these words have expressions in our mother tongue. But we never use them. English has in this way made our lives easier. We can in a way say that English runs in our blood these days. The language has managed to culture and traditions. It can therefore be called a flexible language in our context. It meets all our cultural demands and has won all our hearts. Present context of India is obvious. This is reflected in the fact that those who do not have sufficient competency in English may have a feeling of being excluded from position which may lead to power. At this point, it may be appropriate to quote Michael Halliday an eminent British linguist. "English has become a world language in both senses international and globally international as a medium of literary and other former of cultural life in (mainly) countries of former British empire ; global as the co-generator of new technological age, the age of information. So those who are able to exploit it, whether to sell goods services or to sell ideas, wield a very considerable power." Many people would like to resist this dominance of England. The strategic response would seem to be ; do away with English. Don't teach it or do anything to perpetuate its standing in the community. But most serious thinkers believe that they won't work now : English is too deeply entrenched and it people are deprived of the chance of learning it, they are the ones who suffer. That is not the case 50 years ago, when English was just one international language among many and it may well not be the case 50 years from now ; but for the movement that is how it is. It seems that if you want to resist the exploitative power of English, you have to new English to do it. (Halliday 2006 : 362).

Problems experienced in Teaching English

The becoming of English has caused the country a number problems which can be presented below –

Firstly, there is a disproportionate supply with a population of over 135 crore, of when a sizeable proportion has a strong desire to learn English language teaching for outstrips the supply of native speakers and competent non-native speakers.

Secondly, textbook writing and teacher retraining are the two important aspects to implement its curriculum. Text book writing may be completed but to do massive and long term retraining of teachers in English competence would derailed non-power and logistic resources beyond the capacity of the system at present. This problem will be compounded when India starts to carry out the New 10 year National plan to introduce English nationally.

Thirdly, despite the importance of English in the new context of integration and globalization, English language teaching in India due to its low quality had not met the demand for competent English speaking people. The main reasons are that (i) most of the English teachers particularly those who are teaching at tertiary level have not had a chance to study in an English speaking country (ii) most of the teachers particularly those who teach at primary and lower secondary level are disqualified and that (iii) many of them do not normally communicate in English and cannot sustain teaching that mainly depends on communicative interactions.

Fourthly, there are classroom constraints ; schools are often located in remote area of villages. Several school do not have proper infrastructural facility also. Naturally they are with poor ventilation, over-crowded with more than 70 students with poor libraries, and poorly paid staff. Better teacher often go to the cities to seek employment in non-teaching field or leave the profession for other jobs in the country. There are the material constraints too. Tape recorders, electronics equipments and language lab do not exist in most of the schools. The only aids are the blackboard and sometimes a cassette player and the frequent voice heard is the teacher based on what slope makes of the day's textbook lesson. To make matters worse, class contact hours are few.

Fifthly, although the Indian ministry of education and training stressed the development of practical communication skills, this is rarely reflected at the classroom level, where the emphasis is on the development of reading comprehension vocabulary and structural patterns for the purpose of passing the end of school and university entrance examinations into college or universities. Now teaching – training programmes both pre-service and in-service have been designed and delivered with a focus on training communicative teachers in a bid to address the faults of teaching methodology. Unfortunately, not much improvement in lessons of teaching method has been noticed in English classes. During the training course, Indian teachers show great interest in new methodologies but after they return from those courses, they continue teaching in the old method.

Sixthly, there is a mismatch between testing and teaching in English language teaching in India while teaching follows the communicative approach testing seems to focus on meaning, students' lexical grammatical knowledge. To make matters more complex, at tertiary level, what the Indian institutions do is to adopt either To EFL or TOEIC as the main yardstick to measure the students' knowledge and skill in English. These instruments, as is known, are the skills of those students who are going to study either in Britain or in an English speaking country.

English outside the Formal Educational System

As with the English inside the formal education system, English outside the formal educational system in India has also been developing rapidly. Various English centres, public and private have been established. A huge number of established and a large number of foreign and joint venture language schools, language centres of Universities, Professional Associations, Government agencies, socio-economic organizations and private enterprises which teach English and use it as the medium of communication have been set up throughout India. In this non-formal education system, one can see the presence of the British Councils the Cambridge International Examinations and the American TOEFL and To EIC. These English courses and different level of English to meet different need of different types of medium schools have been established chiefly in big cities in India attracting a considerable number of children from the rich families. Thanks to the efforts made by them, English in India has been developing faster and the quality of English teaching and learning has been increasingly improved.

English at the general Educational level in India

Indian general education primary level for children aged 6 to 11, aged 11 to 15, secondary level for children aged 15 to 16 and finally higher secondary level too children aged 17 to 18. From 1982 onwards, English was introduced nationally as a compulsory subject. It two sets of English text books are concurrently used in Indian schools. Both sets of text books, although differing in orientation are mainly grammar-based, taking the view that grammar can be taught systematically as a set of rules to be mastered and transferred by the learner into proficient language use. While they take cognizance of the significant place of reading comprehension and oral skills, the grammar sections in each unit tend to dominate.

Since early 1990s, due to the impact of English as a global language, the teaching of English in India has slanted towards the view that places the learner at a focal point with the teacher seen in the role of a facilitator who provides creative context for language learning with this new philosophy of foreign language teaching, the two sets of textbooks which had been in use in Indian Education for nearly two decades had proved to be inadequate. In fact of this situation, the Indian government issued decree on the renovation of Indian general education curriculum. This national project finished in early 2008 when the new textbooks of all school subjects were put into use. The aims of Indian English Language Teaching (ELT) at general education level expressed in the new curriculum are as follows –

- To use English as a means of communication at a certain level of proficiency in four macro-skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing and to be able to read materials at the same level of their textbooks using a dictionary.
- To have mastered basic English phonetics and grammar to have acquired items of English.
- To be able to write small sentence and to be able gradually to compare short paragraphs or essay or something of that sort.

The medium of instruction in Bengal Government run and government aided schools has been a vexed subject since the early 1980s, when the Left Front Government introduced the Bengali only Policy in Primary classes. Experts and teachers have blamed this for Bengali's gradually diminishing representation in all India competitive examinations and market facing jobs that require engineering and other graduates to communicate in English.

The left front require started changing this policy in its last years in office and there accelerated the process, “We cannot ignore that there is a huge demand for English medium schools and it is an important medium for higher studies. It is our responsibility to equip our students so that they can pursue higher education. Most students cannot study in private English medium schools because of financial reasons government schools will offer quality education at a low cost”, said a senior education department official, exploring the rationale behind this move.

Ninety two percent of students in the state pass from the Bengal medium schools where the Government language runs. But they have been steadily edged but most of all Indian competitive examinations are excelled by students who have done the ICSE or the CBSE courses. The disastrous switch over in school curriculum in the 1980s stressing on Functional and communicative aspects of English but with few competent teachers and ignoring literature and grammar has spawned a generation of youngsters who cannot follow technical text books written in English. Naturally in the IIT, joint entrance examination success rate of Bengali medium students is miserably low. Tackling Physics and Chemistry papers in English becomes a big challenge to the students. At IIT Kharagpur, the destination point for most Bengali students, of the 500 first semester students, just 15 are from Bengal medium schools while Bengalis from English medium schools are disproportionately large.

Even in the less competitive areas like computer applications and hotel management, the Bengali medium students are beating retreat – “In this rates says educationist Sunanda Sanyal, ‘An overwhelming majority of students may be disqualified from the job market’.

Sanyal who dissented with a 1992 commission headed by ‘Ashok Mitra’ that recommended continuation of the Left Front’s English teaching policy blames the **functional and communicative system of teaching**. It is a highly teacher-dependent method that calls for an army of teachers who can help students to use English for communication purpose. But where are the teachers he asks. The malice is spreading. A sizable and increasingly influential section of education experts is of the view that along with a decline in the quality of communicative English what described as spoken English there is a fall in the proficiency level in Bengal too. In summing up, it can be said that English got introduced. In India with the intrusion of the British, English in India at that juncture had been treated as a foreign language but in recent times it has acquired a prestigious position. Now-a-days there has been a prominent change in the culture of both Indian and Western people toward Indian English as the world is growing globalized, there has also been a sense of English language, not just a language of the U.S.A or the U.K prior to 1947, it was the language politically imposed on Indian minds. After independence, however it was realized that English had much deeper roots in India than in the British Raj.

Today the anti English spirit or English hatred is see diminished as the language is perceived as language of hope and better life. Indians in different contexts are more likely to have witnessed or experienced benefits of having more competence in English than before.

Table summarizing the proportion of primary and upper primary schools teaching through the mother-tongue in India (Percentage)

Table – 1

Policies	Primary		Upper Primary	
	1993	2002	1993	2002
Rural School				
Urban School	91.70	92.39	89.49	92.71
All School	91.65	92.07	88.64	91.34

Source – NCERT – 2007 cited in Hymel coleman (2011), p 75.

Table – 1.1

Table showing schools with Hindi and English medium of instructions in India (percentage)

Policies	Primary		Upper Primary		Secondary	
	1993	2002	1993	2002	1993	2002
Hindi as medium	42.26	46.79	40.93	47.41	33.94	41.32
English as medium of instruction	4.99	12.98	15.91	18.25	18.37	25.84

Source – NCERT – 2007 cited in Hymel coleman (2011), p 75.

Conclusion

Thus the topic has been observed from three different perspectives the pre-independence period, the post-independence period and the present period starting from the British rule to the present. Considering the present scenario in West Bengals it can be concluded that the status of English as second language in Government schools the students are suffering from having a good grip over the language because the subject is neglected when its position comes in the second place and in the present world where English is an officially accepted language it should be treated with more consciousness and dignity.

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