
THE ROLE OF ENGLISH AS AN AUXILIARY INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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In this age of globalization,² people need an international auxiliary language in addition to their mother tongue to improve communication and foster unity among nations. In India, English is the preferred 'global' language³ and it plays an important role as a library language⁴ in higher education. Parents and children perceive English as a 'language of opportunity'⁵ and yearn for an English language medium education. Although English has a recognized role in employability, international mobility, and in accessing information,⁶ its overall role in development⁷ is being questioned. There is evidence that the widespread craze to learn English and adopt a so-called western lifestyle is stifling local cultures and languages.⁸ Furthermore, students face difficulties in their studies because they have to learn the content of a subject using a language that they may not know well. Conversely, countries like China, where English is not used for general everyday communication, have set high standards in all fields of human endeavour while preserving their culture, language and identity. Therefore, it seems that a bilingual⁹ or a multilingual¹⁰ approach might be more effective than the contemporary monolingual ones. This paper presents the results of the study and research undertaken on the issue of global language impact on the undergraduate students in India.

Keywords: English, global language, EFL, India, ELT, bilingualism, teaching, language policy.

Language is the dress of thought
Samuel Johnson

Introduction

Our world today is known as a 'global village' as a result of scientific inventions made since the middle of the nineteenth century. Language played a pivotal role in the evolution of humanity and the diffusion of ideas in the past and will play an even more important role in its future growth and development. Therefore, the study of language(s) is of crucial importance to humanity and due attention must be paid to ensure a smooth transition of humanity to a stage of maturity or universal consciousness.

Importance of Languages

Humanity at present uses 6,809 living languages and about 100 living scripts to facilitate social interactions.¹¹ In the twenty-first century, communications have been

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greatly improved by the widespread adoption of mass media, computers, mobile telephones and access to the internet. The internet is quickly emerging as the preferred information highway to meet our daily communication needs as well as for conducting important business transactions.

It is now almost impossible for us to fully participate in the global village that we live in without 'knowing' a common world language.¹² However, the use of English as a global language is being seen to be in conflict with local languages and cultures. New linguistic insights have made us aware that no human language is superior to any other, and that the development and growth of a language depend upon its use.

The Role of English as a Global Language

It is estimated that about a billion people in the world use English either as their native or foreign language. English is used in over 70 countries as an official or semi-official language and plays a very significant role in 20 others. Over 1,400 million people live in countries where there is a tradition of using English. Some 75 per cent of the world's mail and the world's information is stored in English. Of the estimated 50 million users of the Internet, a majority primarily use English (McArthur 2002: 3).

With the evolution of English to the status of a world language, we have become aware of some features that a world language must possess. Irrespective of its origin, a world language must become a utility language that embraces the needs of everyone. Though English was originally the language of the British, there are now many varieties of English – including American, African, Indian and Australian English. Moreover, English now encompasses the dreams and aspirations of many peoples and the experiences of diverse nations. It is used to transmit a mass of diverse information – whether it be the latest advances in the fields of science and technology, the experiences of an ethnic group, business negotiations; documentation of cultural ethos; or individual experiences. Its vocabulary has been vastly enriched with the inclusion of many new words borrowed from other languages of the world. With the passage of time, it becomes obvious that a global language would change beyond recognition as is happening with English.

Some ten thousand words derived from Hindi and other Indian languages have become a part of Indian English. These include *guru*, *babu*, *charpoy*, *curry*, and *etc.* We are very familiar with the following widely used pidgin words: *lathi-charge*, *rickshaw-walla*, *double-roti*, *etc.* (Crowther and Sengupta 1997: 1429–75).

1. Some major challenges

There are many challenges facing English as an emerging global language. Spoken English varies from region to region in accordance with cultural and native language differences. Similarly, written English also differs greatly in vocabulary, form and structure since language is primarily a vehicle of one's thought and 'schema'. Hence, English, as used by an African, is not the same as that used by an Australian. The impact of electronic messaging services (or SMS) is further affecting English spelling and grammar. The question of 'intelligibility' and 'acceptability'¹³ of the different varieties of English has still not been fully addressed or resolved.

The bigger issue, of overcoming the love-hate relationship that is associated with a foreign tongue is still unresolved. Further, there have been strong reservations against English by particular linguistic communities, such as the French, the Arab, the German and the Dutch. The non-linguistic reasons that often come into play when considering which world language to use include nationalism, ethnicity, ideology, religion, politics and culture, often in a complex and at sometimes explosive mixes.¹⁴

2. *Language death and allied issues*

At present some 2,473 languages in the world are identified as being endangered because of the increasing use of English and other major languages.¹⁵ Some 25 languages are dying annually¹⁶ and about 3,000 languages may die out by the end of the twenty-first century.

With 196 of its languages listed as 'endangered', India tops UNESCO list of countries with dialects on the verge of extinction. It is closely followed by the USA with 192 languages and Indonesia with 147 languages threatened.

Alitet Nemtushkin (1988), an Evenki poet, mourns this loss thus:

*If I forget my native speech,
And the songs that my people sing
What use are my eyes and ears?
What use is my mouth?
If I forget the smell of the earth
And do not serve it well
What use are my hands?
Why am I living in the world?
How can I believe the foolish idea
That my language is weak and poor
If my mother's last words
Were in Evenki?*¹⁷

Many complications have arisen due to a failure to choose an accepted world language, especially in framing the national language policies of the world's nations. Huge sums of money, human resources and teaching-learning materials are being used to teach English at an unprecedented scale in the world. Children are being taught English from their first year in school in countries with huge populations like India. Students are facing many difficulties from the failure to learn, to the loss of their native language, culture and identity. The following are the highlights of the recent debate on the use of English.

The widespread introduction of English in primary schools has been described by Johnstone (2009: 33) as 'possibly the world's biggest policy development in education'.¹⁸ There are a number of reasons for this trend:

1. There is a widespread 'assumption' that it is better to learn languages from the earliest years of schooling.

2. Economic globalization has driven an ever-increasing demand for knowledge of English. International economic forces demand that governments ensure they have an English-speaking workforce.
3. Parents, who want their children to benefit socially and economically from learning English, demand national governments to provide the children with lessons in English.

The growth in teaching English to young learners has not been universally endorsed and the assumed benefits of an early start are controversial. There has also been widespread criticism of policies that are generally imposed in a top-down manner and often without sufficient preparation leading to a gap between policy and implementation both at the macro- and micro-level.¹⁹

Robert Phillipson (1992) quotes two studies from Namibia and Pakistan showing that the reckless promotion of ELT (English Language Training) is causing educational failure. He feels that the demand for English has been orchestrated by western governments and their allies worldwide, and key bodies such as the World Bank. The 'supply' of expertise dovetails with demand, thus making English the preserve of an elite group, condemning the rest of the population to linguistic confusion and educational failure.²⁰ The promoters of English education are generally satisfying commercial interests rather than sound educational objectives. He concludes, 'The research evidence on mother tongue-based multilingual education is unambiguous. In post-colonial contexts, English-medium education that neglects mother tongues and local cultural values is clearly inappropriate and ineffective.'²¹

ELT voices, like Hywel Coleman,²² are calling for a paradigm shift in focus. The attempts to provide better access to English for improved education, work and social mobility prospects should add to a child's linguistic heritage, not replace it, thereby renewing a commitment to the principles of the UNESCO campaign for mother tongue-based multilingual education (UNESCO 2013b).

A growing protest has led John Knagg of the British Council, UK, to comment in defence, 'Most of the 10 million teachers of English around the world are bilingual or multilingual non-native English speakers. Multilingualism gives people great advantages in their lives and their jobs, and we promote it as a value.'²³ This indeed seems to be a sane view.

The Strategy Suggested by UNESCO

Three principles guide UNESCO's approach to languages and education in the twenty-first century:

1. Mother tongue instruction to promote inclusion in education and improve the quality of education by building on the knowledge and experience of both learners and teachers. UNESCO believes and supports findings of studies showing evidence that mother-tongue instruction is a key factor for literacy and learning.
2. Bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels, to promote equality and reflect the diversity of languages in society, including literate environments, media and cyberspace.

3. Promoting language as an essential part of intercultural education, to encourage understanding among peoples and build respect for human rights.²⁴

The third principle is crucial to the involvement of language in development, especially when we understand that economic growth is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for development.

Our Research

A questionnaire was prepared and presented to undergraduate students and graduates living in Punjab and Chandigarh. The purpose of this study was to learn the effects of the widespread use of the English language in education from the first year at school and to investigate various aspects of this phenomenon. Our hypothesis was:

1. English is the language most sought after for jobs and upward social mobility though teaching English from the first year of schooling might be harming the children's perception of their native language, culture and identity.
2. English is falsely associated with the concept of overall economic and social development.
3. The state lacks adequate resources (human and material) to teach English on a wide scale. This affects the overall academic performance of the students.
4. There is a loss of overall creativity and the system is heavily biased in favour of rote learning, leaving inadequate time for traditional games, arts and music.
5. Changing attitudes to food, work and sleep are affecting family life and individual health.

The Questionnaire, Analysis and Findings

Based on the above hypothesis, a questionnaire (see *Appendix 1*) was prepared containing yes/no type questions with room for some explanation.

The following is a summary of the results from the 230 questionnaires received:

1. 67 per cent of respondents did not feel that teaching English from class one was negatively affecting student's perception towards their native language, culture and identity, although 68.69 per cent think that English promotes western values with regard to dress, food, work and sleep; and it is affecting family life and their society. However, 70.86 per cent said that students would learn better if they are given an opportunity to learn sciences and arts in their own language at school. 82.17 per cent feel students would become more creative if they were provided with opportunities to learn and act through their mother tongue.
2. Interestingly, 70.86 per cent were satisfied with the quality of English teaching at the primary level, although 67.82 per cent think the present system of education is heavily dependent on rote learning! One reason could be that most students have never experienced alternative methods of teaching.
3. 96.08 per cent feel that there are areas in which knowledge of English is important. Though it would seem that local media is reporting on all aspects of world affairs, only 33.97 per cent think that the local media (TV, internet, etc.) can assist them to be aware of the latest developments in science, technology and

world events. 95.21 per cent of respondents think knowledge of English is essential for sustainable development in their country. Not surprisingly, 86.95 per cent would prefer English to be taught alongside their mother tongue/regional language. However, 84.37 per cent believe that English is not superior to their mother tongue.

4. 96.52 per cent of respondents feel that there is a need for a universal auxiliary language to help people communicate across the borders, and they (81.73 per cent) feel that a global link language will help in strengthening unity among the peoples and nations of the world. 83.04 per cent of respondents feel that a global language should reflect global cultures, traditions and ethics. 66.95 per cent think a global language should embrace every major culture. 40 per cent would like the world leaders to agree on an official global link language.
5. 68.2 per cent of respondents think that a global language should be governed by simple rules. 33.08 per cent (majority) think it should have a few exceptions, 20 per cent (majority) feel it should be free from gender bias and 23.03 per cent (majority) think it should have no silent letters. In this question, most respondents chose the option 'can't say'. It seems they have not given sufficient thought to what features a global language should have.

A detailed analysis of the questionnaire revealed the students were acutely aware of the necessity of a universal auxiliary language (94.6 per cent average over three questions). The students feel there is a great need for English to be taught to all students since it acts as a global link language and provides individuals with great social and economic opportunities. However, the students clearly indicate that they do not learn other subjects as well if taught using English instead of their own tongues. The creativity of the students is also being hampered due to meagre English teaching resources, very low teacher-student ratios and poor school infrastructure.

Although it represents a tough socio-political linguistic question, the majority of the students want world leaders to officially agree upon a universal auxiliary language that children should be taught alongside their mother tongue. The selected language should be culturally all-inclusive and it should not be treated as being superior to the children's mother tongue. Its grammatical rules should be simple and 72.6 per cent of the students feel it should be one of the world's existing natural languages. 61.73 per cent of the students think the global language should have a neutral script.

Conclusions and Suggestions

It is clear from the above study that in the fast-emerging global civilization, all the children of the world would greatly benefit from learning an auxiliary international language, such as English, along with their mother tongue. This would enable them to readily communicate and undertake various transactions with their fellow humans throughout the world. This should help in strengthening the relationships between the mother tongues and national languages within each nation, and the global link language *vis-à-vis* English so as to preserve cultural diversity.

In this context, we feel listening and speaking skills should gain precedence over reading and writing, although their importance should not be undermined.

The only way that all the people of the world can peacefully co-exist is through the adoption of a universal auxiliary language. This is a subject that merits immediate consideration.

In any decision regarding the adoption of a world language, consideration should be given to:

- ensuring that it is taught to all children.
- its relationship to the mother tongue of each language group.
- the relationships between the various mother tongues and national languages within each nation, and the global link language vis-à-vis each other.
- the question of its adaptability to world media.
- the collection and translation of available scientific and technical knowledge into the selected world language, along with how to handle the on-going updates in the various fields of human endeavour.
- its capacity to reflect the experiences of the diverse cultures and peoples of the world without imposing a 'culture' of its own.

The global language should be governed by simple rules, have few exceptions, be free from gender bias, and not contain silent letters.

NOTES

¹ One of a number of colleges run by the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) Colleges Managing Committee, India.

² Globalization is generally understood to refer to the intensifying integration of the world economy as a result of technology advances. However, the author uses it to denote the growing political and cultural sense that all humanity is globally interdependent.

³ English is being variously described as a 'world language', 'global language', 'lingua franca', 'link language', etc., but I would prefer to use the word 'auxiliary universal language' to define its various present and near future roles.

⁴ A term used for many years in India to emphasize the important role English plays in higher education.

⁵ Knowledge of English is seen to provide many opportunities.

⁶ *Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language*, edited by Hywel Coleman. www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Z413%20EDB%20Section11.pdf.

⁷ *Human Development Report 2011*. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2011>.

⁸ New edition of *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*. http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=28377&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/cultural-diversity/languages-and-multilingualism/>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_language.

¹² www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/frameworks/wrldlang/wlcont2.html.

¹³ Intelligibility and Acceptability in Spoken and Written Communication, *ELT J* (1979) XXXIII (3): 168–175.

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_nationalism.

¹⁵ www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap.

¹⁶ www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11304255.

¹⁷ <http://news.outlookindia.com/items.aspx?artid=654483>.

¹⁸ www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/B094%20FINAL%20Aston%20University%20A4%20report_2column_V3.pdf.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/10/pakistan-language-crisis.

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Appendix I

Sr no.	Question	Yes	No	Can't Say
1	Do you think teaching English from class one is negatively affecting children's perception towards their language, culture and identity. Why/Why not? _____ _____			
2	Are you satisfied with the quality of English teaching at the primary level? Why/Why not? _____ _____			
3	Do you feel students would learn better if they are given an opportunity to learn sciences and arts in their own language at school? Why/Why not _____ _____			
4	Do you think the present system of education is heavily dependent on rote learning?			
5	Will the students become more creative if they are provided opportunities to learn and act through their mother tongue? Why/ Why not _____ _____			
6	Do you think knowledge of English is essential for sustainable development in your country? Why/Why not _____ _____			
7	Does English promote western values with regard to dress, food, work and sleep? How is it affecting family life and society? _____ _____			
8	Is English superior to your own mother tongue? Why/ Why not _____ _____			
9	Are there areas in which knowledge of English is important? Why? _____ _____			

Continuation of table.

10	Would you prefer English to be taught alongside your mother tongue/regional language? Why/Why not _____ _____			
11	Can one be aware of the latest developments in science and technology and world events without the knowledge of English through the media (TV, internet, etc.)? Why / Why not _____ _____			
12	Do feel that there is need for a universal auxiliary language to help people communicate across the borders?			
13	Will a global link language help in strengthening unity among the peoples and nations of the world?			
14	Should the global language be • governed by simple rules • have few exceptions • free from gender • with no silent letters			
15	Should a global language reflect global cultures, traditions and ethics? Why/Why not? _____ _____			
16	Should the world leaders decide upon an official global link language? Why/ Why not? _____ _____			
17	Should global language embrace every major culture?			
18	Should there be a neutral script for the global language?			
19	Will it be easier to select one of the existing languages to be function as a global language or a new one should be invented?			

Questionnaire

We are conducting a study on the impact of Mother Tongue and English in a globalised world on the curricular and holistic development of students in education in India and we shall be thankful for your help in this.

Kindly tick (✓) the right choices, and answer the questions briefly (in phrases).