

**The Rise and Growth of English Language in India and It's
Perceived Relation vis-à-vis the Sense of Identity among Young
Adults**

Pooja Singal, M.A., M.Ed.

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Abstract

In a multilingual country like India, there exists a hierarchy among languages. While major Indian languages compete with each other for the position of power, leaving the minority and tribal languages far behind, at the top of this ladder is English, which has been variously described by educationists and politicians as an 'imposition' of the colonial rule, a 'gift' or the last 'legacy' of the imperial power. In the present context of the country, there is an increasing demand for English education, evident from the growth of small scale Private English Medium schools everywhere in India. On the other hand, all policy documents related to education stress the importance of Indigenous languages as the media of Instruction at least in primary classes. What, then, justifies the continued overwhelming presence of English in our context? This Paper attempts to outline the process of rise and growth of English language in the pre-independence India till the present time. The paper would also attempt to understand the perspective of young adults with respect to English vis-à-vis their sense of social identity through a study conducted with young adults engaged in different professions.

Key Words: English, Multilingual Society, Education, Identity, Media of Instruction

Introduction

Language is not just a medium of communication, it is the medium that helps us to construct our everyday world, grasp the social reality, and acts as a representational tool to our innermost feelings, desires, fears and expectations.ⁱ There is a close connection between Language and cognitive development. Language, according to Piaget helps us to verbalize our

understanding of various concepts, while, Vygotsky views language as developing thought. Both cognitive and language development takes place when a child interacts with his socio-cultural physical space. Vygotsky gives a lot of importance to observation of adult speech by the child. Language for him is a cultural tool. It is a product and medium of cultural transmission.ⁱⁱ

India Is a Multilingual, Multiethnic, Multicultural and Multi Religious Country. According to 1961 census, there are about 1,652 mother tongues, out of which only 33 are used as the medium of instruction in school curriculum. There are about 22 languages listed in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution of India, titled as 'Language', which is a kind of an open list, which means other languages can still be added to this list. India has been characterized by the scholars as a sociolinguistic giant with multilingualism being the soul of the giant. An average Indian can speak two or more languages in various domains of their lives with functional ease. Multilingualism is, therefore, a norm rather than an exception here. The multilingual reality of India gets complicated when a distinction is made between 'language' and its 'dialects', and a standard variety of the dialect is promoted and associated with prestige, intelligence and economic growth. "Giving recognition to a single language variety as standard creates a cadre of people who through various controls gain from the acquisition, processing, storage, transmission, retrieval and other manipulations of the language"ⁱⁱⁱ.

The situation is made more complex, as there exists a colonial past, which complicates the scenario with the presence of English as the Associate Official language of India. English has been variously described by educationists and politicians as an 'imposition' of the colonial rule, a 'gift' or the last 'legacy' of the imperial power. In the present context of the country, there is an increasing demand for English education evident from the growth of small scale Private English Medium schools everywhere in India. On the other hand, all policy documents related to education stress the importance of Indigenous languages as the media of instruction at least in primary classes. What, then, justifies the continued overwhelming presence of English in our context? This Paper attempts to outline the process of rise and growth of English language in the pre-independence India till the present time. The paper would also attempt to understand the perspective of young adults, who are engaged in various political, social, cultural, educational

and economical activities in and outside the country, with respect to English vis a via their sense of social identity by locating them into their socio-economic-cultural and linguistic reality.

The Rise and Growth of English Language in India: An Outline

English has enjoyed the status of a powerful language in India, associated with social, economic and political advancement since colonial times. Britain, usually pursued a policy of indirect rule, preferring to impose forms of government exerted by local hierarchies, who therefore needed to learn English for communication ‘upwards’, while using the local languages in interaction with those they ruled, thus, establishing a stratified diffusion of English, with only those in positions of authority needing to learn and use English with any native or near native competence. English was the language of administration and tertiary education, cementing the empire at a supranational level, and an individual needed to learn English only if he or she strove (opportunity permitting) for social, economic and political advancement. This kind of system, institutionalized in India, for example, in legal and civil service examinations that had to be taken in English, meant that language performed a kind of gate keeping function, leaving huge sections of the population unable to gain access to a model of Standard English that they could acquire. The spread of English during colonial times is often attributed to Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minutes of 1835^{iv},

"...We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern...a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect."

The Minutes came in response to the debate going among the 'orientalists' and 'occidentalists' regarding the expenditure of the Sum of Rupees One lakh (By provision of the Charter Act of 1813) required to be spent by the East India Company for ‘the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories’. Lord Macaulay, in his minutes, very meticulously argued in favour of English language and literature as the only fit knowledge to be pursued.

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"...To sum up what I have said, I think it is 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 Sanskrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanskrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law, nor as the languages of religion, have the Sanskrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our engagement; 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."

As a consequence of Macaulay's enthusiastic championing of the cause of English Language and Literature, Lord William Bentinck issued his resolution on 7th March, 1835 that all funds be utilized only on English education. Despite the Wood's dispatch of 1854, directing the government to promote the use of vernacular languages as medium of instruction in education to cater to the middle and lower strata of the society, the recommendations were not implemented with sincerity for the next seven decades.^v

Gauri Viswanathan in her *Masks of Conquest (1989)*^{vi} examines the colonial agenda of the British Rulers in terms of the moral, (civilizing, character building) and the pragmatic (building an intermediate, loyal 'babu' class) dimensions of the teaching of English literature and language.

It was Lord Curzon's (Viceroy of India 1898-1905) educational policy, coupled with the national movement that brought about some changes in the medium of education in India. As he observes:

"...The main obstacle which primary education has to contend with springs from the people themselves. As they rise in the social scale, they wish their children to learn English. By all means, let English be taught to those who are qualified to learn it, but let it rest upon a solid foundation of the indigenous languages, for no people will ever use another tongue with advantage that cannot first use its own with ease."

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A Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Sadler in 1917 observed that if a young man is unable to speak or write fluently in his own mother tongue, there is something seriously unsound with his educational system. Thus, this resulted in restricting the medium of English only to college and university stage from the 1920s onwards throughout the country. ^{vii}

Post-independence India needed to find a national language. Leaders of the newly independent country believed that a national education was critical for nation building. Languages were viewed as an important tool for developing a national, as opposed to a regional outlook and for communication among a multilingual population. English was called the 'link language'. At the same time, it was seen as an asset in terms of providing access to the rest of the world, and to developments in science, technology and culture'. ^{viii} Proposal to make Hindi as the National Language drew a lot of criticism from the Dravidian states, owing to their fears of being marginalized by Hindi-speaking states. When the Indian Constitution was adopted in 1950, it provides that Hindi should be the Official Language of the country, for the first fifteen years however, English also was to continue as an Official Language. Article 350 A of the constitution reads: "It should be the endeavor of every state and every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother tongue at the Primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority group."

At the end of these 15 years, there were attempts to once again to declare Hindi as the National Language of the nation. However, it took 66 deaths and two self-immolations in the anti-Hindi student agitation of Tamil Nadu for the government to realize that a language could not be imposed on any people against their wishes and that repression of a student movement would automatically involve parents, teachers and the whole community. English was assured the status of the Associate Official language in 1965. Resolving the issue of National Language by having official languages instead was a stroke of striking genius. Still, the myth of a national language (Hindi) dominates the major sections of Indian psyche. ^{ix}

The University education commission Report of 1949 suggested the replacement of English by an Indian Language as the medium of instruction in institutes of higher education. The Education Commission (1964-66) discussed the medium question and proposed that the mother tongue should be used up to the highest level for instruction and examination, English to

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be taught both as a subject and a library language. It suggested a Three Language Formula (TLF) to promote national integration and to provide wider choice in the school curriculum. TLF is an educational strategy for communication between people at the national, regional and local levels.^x The National Policy on Education (1968) laid down the Principles of the TLF for the study of Languages in schools as follows:

"At the secondary stage, the state government should adopt, and vigorously implement, the three language formula which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi speaking states, and of Hindi along with regional language and English in the non-Hindi speaking states. Suitable courses in Hindi and/or English should also be available in Universities and colleges with a view to improving the proficiency of students in these languages up to the prescribed university standards. (The NPE, 1968, XVII).

The National Policy on Education 1986 fully approved and reiterated its 1968 policy about TLF. However, it was felt that the implementation of the 1968 policy had been uneven and the need for more energetic and purposeful implementation of the policy was underlined.^{xi}

English Continues!

Despite the above mentioned policy documents reiterating the need to give more credit and space to regional languages or mother tongues, it would be worth examining as to what has ensured the continued draconian presence of English in India. The data from commonwealth university yearbook 1987 reveals English to be the medium of instruction of higher education in around 120 universities out of 154, data is not available for 33 universities.

Madhu Kishwar records, "By retaining English as the medium of elite education, professions and government functioning, even after being formally freed from colonial rule, we have ensured that the schism that was deliberately created by our colonial rulers between the English educated elite and the rest of the society has grown even further. Kishwar concludes that the education system has "effectively destroyed.... {students'} intellectual curiosity and undermined their own linguistic and cultural identity..."^{xii}

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Alok Mukherjee in his book, *This Gift of English: English Education and the Formation of Alternative Hegemonies in India*, does a Bourdeauxian analysis of the process of rise and growth of English during colonial times and after, crediting it to the will of higher caste, class people to retain their hegemony by using English as the 'cultural capital'. Mukherjee rejects the claim that the domination of English even after independence simply demonstrates the extent to which the Indian mind has been colonized, because it fails to pay attention to issues of group/caste/class self interest, power and control, while absolving the local elite of any agency.

According to him, English was and remains the locus of a contest for power. “The colonial rulers and their compatriots in the Gramscian civil society, such as the English missionaries and educators, had their own objectives- a reforming mission, cultural domination, formation of an English educated bureaucracy. The colonial civil servants, administrators, scholars, teachers and missionaries were the 'organic intellectual of this hegemonic endeavour. Mukherjee also brings to light the idea of alternative hegemony that has been claimed by Women, Dalits and other people through the knowledge of English. “English is the terrain on which women, Dalits and other people with a transformational agenda are waging their own “wars of position’ in the name of broadening the English curricula, changing them, making them inclusive and/or applying different critical frameworks”.^{xiii}

English in Present Context

In the post-colonial context now, the spread of English is commonly justified by recourse to a functionalist perspective, which stresses choice and the usefulness of English, and suggests that the global spread of English is natural (although its spread was initiated by colonialism), neutral (unlike other, local languages in a country, English is unconnected to cultural and political issues) and beneficial (people can only benefit by gaining access to English and the world it opens). Kachru^{xiv} describes the way English has spread around the world as a series of three concentric circles, where English primary language speakers (from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand) constitute the inner circle, countries such as India, Singapore, Guam, and Liberia, which use English as an important second language in a multilingual setting, constitute the outer circle, and countries where English is used primarily as an international language (such as Russia, China, Japan) constitute the expanding

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circle. Much of this expansion is due to the centrality of the English language to political, economic and intellectual enterprise on a world scale. This process of emergence of “World Englishes”, “New Englishes” or “Global Englishes” challenges the notion of monolithic Standard English, espoused by the European countries as an ideology of nation state.

Perspectives of Young Adults with Respect to English vis-à-vis Their Sense of Social Identity

Language and Identity

The multilingual reality of India, enables each young adult to be at ease with more than one language to fulfill the functional requirement of communication in various domains without posing any serious threat or conflict to his/her own identity. How then, they see English, with all its colonial connotations and its present status as a world language, with respect to themselves? What importance does it have in their personal and professional lives? How do they understand the phenomena of English as a global language?

In multilingual societies, there is a hierarchy of identities. Each group stresses primary attachment to one identity and, at the same time, stresses differing degrees of attachment for other identities, each in symbiosis with the whole network of identity of the individual and of the group.

In many traditions of the world, language is treated as a ‘house’; Steiner (1971) used the term ‘unhousedness’. When a person uses his own language for expressing himself he is ‘housed’ in that language, when for political or cultural reasons he is forced to choose another language for expressing himself, then he may be said to be ‘unhoused’. Pattanayak (1978a) has extended the meaning of the term by pointing out its different implications. Since rootedness in a language is an important identity marker either opting out or being forced out may create a sense of alienation.^{xv}

In the adolescent and adult years, the development of an identity, a sense of who one is, is an important life task.

“A distinct personal linguistic style is part of one’s special identity^{xvi}. Further psychological goals of early adulthood that call for expanded linguistic skills include both entering the world of work and establishing intimate relations with others^{xvii}.”

In terms of identity, it is probably a truism to point out that people’s language affiliations are a significant part of themselves, and of their images of themselves. Crystal notes: “More than anything else, language shows we ‘belong’; providing the most natural badge, or symbol, of public and private identity. In more specific terms, he says, that “language can become...a source of pleasure, pride, anxiety, offence, anger and even violence”.^{xviii}

Language use and identity are conceptualised rather differently in a sociocultural - perspective on human action. Here, identity is not seen as singular, fixed, and intrinsic to the individual. Rather, it is viewed as socially constituted; a reflexive, dynamic product of the social, historical and political contexts of an individual’s lived experiences. While our social identities and roles are to a great extent shaped by the groups and communities to which we belong, we as individual agents also play a role in shaping them. However, unlike the more traditional ‘linguistics applied’ view, which views **agency** as an inherent motivation of individuals, a sociocultural perspective views it as the ‘socioculturally mediated capacity to act’ (Ahearn, 2001: 112), and thus locates it in the discursive spaces between individual users and the conditions of the moment. In our use of language, we represent a particular identity at the same time that we construct it. The degree of individual effort we can exert in shaping our identities, however, is not always equal. Rather, it is ‘an aspect of the action’ (Altieri, 1994: 4) negotiable in and arising from specific social and cultural circumstances constituting local contexts of action. From this perspective, individual identity is always in production, an outcome of agentive moves, rather than a given.^{xix}

From the above discussion, it is clear that there is a close relationship between language and identity in the lives of individuals. How does this negotiation of identity occur when an individual is involved in different professions which require him/her to use a language which is not free from colonial connotations? As has been suggested by many studies in India, the degree of proficiency in English depends on a lot of social, cultural and economic factors. It also decides

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the extent to which economic opportunities would present themselves to an individual. Hence, an attempt has been made to understand the perspective of young adults, who are engaged in various political, social, cultural, educational and economical activities in and outside the country, with respect to English vis-à-vis their sense of social identity by locating them into their socio-economic-cultural and linguistic reality.

Sample Chosen and Methodology Used

Since I wanted to explore the perspective of young adults engaged in different professions, seven participants in the age group of 25 to 28 were selected from very different professions. The initial decision was to interview only those people who were engaged in global professions and were situated outside the country in the global scenario, however, as the study proceeded, a need was felt to talk to professionals with varied degree of proficiency and exposure to English language to capture the spectrum of experiences young adults from very different socio-economic-cultural and linguistic backgrounds go through. This has allowed me to see the pattern of similarities and dissimilarities in the attitudes and perceptions of participants from diverse linguistic and professional background towards English. However, it should be noted that the participants represent the broader middle class umbrella, coming from lower-middle, middle-middle and higher-middle class backgrounds. The profiles of the participants are given below:

- Vineet

Vineet is a software engineer who has completed his engineering degree from KIET, UPTECH University. Currently, he is pursuing his Masters in Engineering from University of Texas, Dallas. Vineet's first language/mother tongue is Punjabi.

- Paridhi

Paridhi has done her Masters in Art Conservation and Heritage Management from IP University. Currently, she is situated in London, UK, working as a painting conservator with some firm. Paridhi's first language is Hindi. But, to her English came naturally, as she was

brought up in Andhra Pradesh, so it was imperative for her to learn English to communicate with non-Hindi speakers.

- Varun

Varun has done his B.Com (Hons.) from Delhi University. Currently, he is situated in Dubai, working as a Chartered Accountant with a Multinational Company. Varun's first language is Hindi.

- Jagandeep

Jagandeep is also a software engineer who has done his B.Tech from Jaypee Institute of Information Technology, Noida. Currently, he works as a software engineer for R systems International Limited. Jagandeep's first language is Hindi, although his mother tongue happens to be Punjabi. Jagandeep's family is multilingual in the sense that her mother comes from Assam and she speaks Bengali, Assamese, Hindi, Punjabi and English.

- Rajat Pratap

Rajat Pratap has done his B.Sc in Nautical Science from Pune University. He is currently a second officer in Merchant Navy, on board British Councilor. Rajat's first language is Hindi.

- Divya:

Divya is a commerce graduate, who has done her MBA through distance learning. She takes private lectures for MBA students, as well as, works as a consultant for cosmetic company Oriflame. Divya's first language is Hindi.

- Dorpon

Dorpon is a Journalist who works with ICT group. He comes from Commila, a district town in Dhaka. He went to Dhaka for the first time to attend University by virtue of a scholarship. Dorpon has done a course in Media Studies and Journalism. Currently, he is situated in Dhaka. Dorpon's first language is Bengali.

To explore the research questions, semi structured online, as well as, face to face interviews were conducted. Participants were asked questions about their social-economic background, they were asked to describe the linguistic environment at home, their initiation into English Language: time and context, the whole experience of learning to read/write/ speak in English: any remarkable episode that stands out in their experience, their reasons for making an effort to learn English (if they made any), if there were any special incident/event or factor which made them realize the importance of learning English, how do they associate with English now; Personally and Professionally? And also, if they thought it was important to maintain a standard of language. The questions were not asked in any strict order, rather, as and when the participants' responses led the researcher to a particular point of discussion. Their responses have been organized and analyzed along the following major themes which emerged from the conversations:

Relationship of English with the Professional Identity

With English emerging as the global language of communication, all the participants emphasized the importance of English in their professional identity.

As a student in Texas, United States, English is the only language for communication for Vineet. “You think anyone can survive in a country where English is only language? That's the reason that one got to give TOEFL before coming to US”.

For Rajat, it is one of the two languages allowed at sea according to the rules of shipping law. His profession in Merchant Navy requires a lot of travelling around the world. English then, becomes the connecting link. It is also the language used at railways, and airports across the world, because “somewhere somehow people have studied English in their curriculum”, therefore, it has been espoused as the global language for communication. So, for Rajat, it is mandatory to be fully proficient in English if he wants to pursue his career in merchant navy.

For Dorpon, it is “Better English, Better Career”. As an ICT journalist, he is supposed to collect different information from different websites, which are in English. He attends several

press conferences; most of the speeches too are given in English. Technology products' names as well as any information related with them are also in English. 'How would he continue his profession, he asks, without English'?

Working as a Chartered Accountant in Dubai, Varun needs to know good amount of English to negotiate his meaning across. It is today's world requirement, especially, in the big corporate world. Although Varun's vocabulary is not so expansive, yet he manages while writing reports. Without his proficiency in English, he would not have been able to migrate to Dubai to work for a bigger firm.

For Jagandeep, as a software engineer, he often has to deal with 'firangis', so a good working grasp over English is required to avoid any ambiguity due to miscommunication. Also, all his office work is done in English. As English has emerged as the language of communication among professionals, it is easy to interact with people from different backgrounds to carryout the daily business.

Situated in London, for Paridhi, English obviously is the only language of communication. It was her proficiency in English to a great extent which helped her to relocate herself from India to London as an art conservator.

“How do you think I will progress in this big bad world? Well, people who are dumb to understand Hindi especially Britishers can understand what I m saying if I speak English. Not everyone is as smart as Indians to be multi-lingual.”

As a lecturer for a private institution, Divya has to teach senior MBA students who come from very different linguistic backgrounds. It becomes imperative for her, then, to communicate in English to put her knowledge across to students. She also finds it difficult to locate reading material for MBA in Hindi, therefore, it is all the more important for her to work on her English. From the above discussion, it is apparent that proficiency in English has helped all the professionals across middle-lower, middle-middle, and middle-higher class to get firmly established in their respective fields. Satisfaction in one's career is one of the psychological

goals of young adulthood. It helps in the consolidation of one's professional identity. Therefore, it can be seen that English has a very strong influence on the professional identity of the young adults. Emergence of English as a 'universal' or 'global' language, has made it necessary for the professionals to be well versed in it as English is a major language of communication across countries and is seen to open up opportunities.

Relationship of English with the Personal Identity

There was a clear demarcation seen in the attitudes of young adults in assigning the importance of English in their professional and personal lives, while all emphasized the importance of English in their respective careers, irrespective of their profession, their linguistic background and their socio-economic status, in their personal lives most of them reported that it was not 'mandatory' to know English.

At home, most of them interact in either their mother tongues or their preferred first languages. It was observed that, in lower-middle class families, use of English as a medium of communication is considered to be an intrusion. Both Divya and Dorpon reported that they faced some problems while trying to use English in their home environments, as they were being laughed at for using a language not their own. They were directed by their family members to show off their English snobbery elsewhere. Clearly, in their contexts of lower middle class, English was seen as a marker of upper class consciousness, which implied superiority. Dorpon narrated an interesting incident. When he tried to practice English with his brothers in his village, they made fun of him, calling him "Bangla kuttar Engregi kheu" meaning "Bangali Dog speaking in English". Similarly, Divya's attempts to use English at home were discouraged and she was told to use English only in her school with her friends. Rest of the participants reported that they use English sometimes with those family members who are also well exposed and well versed in English, while having discussion on career and other general talks.

Proficiency in English however, plays an important role among the peer groups only if there are other proficient speakers of English in the group. Vineet's friends listen to English music a lot; therefore, he too is inclined towards it. Jagandeep and Dorpon got motivated to speak in English after observing their other friends who had considerable command over the

language. Jagandeep observed that those with good hold on English were also the best informed and knowledgeable, as they were also the good readers. So, he would feel himself “inferior”, if he could not match their level of proficiency and fluency. Dorpon reported that it projects him as being ‘smart’ in front of his friends. It also helps to get a girlfriend and a boyfriend. Paridhi, Rajat, Varun and Divya often use English as the language of communication among friends.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that although English plays an important part to be a member of the in-group, yet, it does not hamper the sense of personal identity of young adults. It is not to imply that they did not struggle to learn English while growing up, in fact, they all reported of making a conscious effort to learn it, but, Young adults by now have a clear understanding of their linguistic identity in their personal lives. It is their own respective mother tongues and/or first language, which lends them a linguistic identity. So, they can clearly differentiate between their personal and professional roles. The concept of 'houseness' can be clearly identified here.

Perceptions of Young Adults on English as a Global Language

Most of the professionals attributed the emergence of English as a global language to its availability as a “Communicative Language” across the countries. Vineet understands the recognition of English as a ‘universal’ language as a factor of it being the primary language in United States. And all other countries, which sort of depend on US for their business, have to learn English. India and China are two examples. However, in India, English is given all the more importance, because in comparison to China, India’s ‘service sector’ is more involved with US.

Rajat understands the phenomena of English emerging as a global language due to its usage for language of communication at airports, railways and in tourism in many countries. He pointed out that the statistics shows that on an average every person has studied it somehow somewhere. Therefore, it is espoused as a medium of communication on airports, railways and in tourism.

For Dorpon, English acts as a “bridge of communication”, as it is the only language recognized worldwide. Dorpon announced very categorically that he wants to become a man of

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“International standards” for which he needs English and without knowing it, would he have been able to talk to Pooja? He relates the emergence of English on the world stage with the process of globalization. And thinks it is English which has ushered in globalization, “English is the media of globalization”.

According to Jagandeep, English is the most common language spoken across the countries to exchange dialogues, it is a language which is evolving fast as compared to other languages, also, the amount of information and knowledge which is accessible through print media and electronic media in English is so vast, that people hardly find it in other languages. So, no doubt, if English is emerging as a global language.

For Divya, English ‘opens up gates for communication’. It is an ‘international language’ through which you can capture the world. Paridhi and Varun take it as a ‘given’ that English is a global language and has existed so, since their growing up years.

From the above discussion it is clear, that Young adults see English and the process of globalization inextricably intertwined with each other. Whether it was globalization which popularized English or it was English ushering in globalization remains an issue, but, now with India, participating in the world economy with one of the largest BPO sector, emergence of English as a global language cannot be ignored.

Perspective of Young Adults on Their Own Languages and English as a Colonial Language

It was very interesting to see that though all the participants recognized the importance of English in their own professions, as well as its importance on the world stage, they did not have any negative attitude towards Hindi or their own first languages. Rajat almost lamented the fact that here in India, proficiency in English is considered to be synonymous with the amount of knowledge that one has. People forget that a beggar from US speaks better English than a University Professor here in India, because it happens to be his mother tongue. So then, what is the point of taking pride in speaking English here in India? He also highlighted that if Hindi had been promoted the way English had been in India, we would have grown stronger as a nation. This strong sense of recognition of the importance of one’s own country’s languages seems to have come from his observation of other countries taking pride in their own local languages

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rather than a foreign language. English was learnt because it happens to be the connecting language of the people across the world. His notion seems to be a well-informed one, as due to his service in merchant navy, he has got an opportunity to travel widely. Rajat also very vehemently rejected the notion of hierarchical nature of languages. For him, the underlining question is of putting your meaning across, and not of establishing which language is important than the other. Although, he understands that English is considered to be a status symbol here in India, he personally would like to see languages from a functionalist point of view, of that of serving the overarching need for communication.

Dorpon also took a stance on English as a colonial language. He suggested that “English people have dominated the subcontinent for many years, although they have done a lot of misjudgment on us, for which they would suffer, but they have made us smart. Their language has made a position in the whole world as a common language. So, he does not care about the nation of this language, he takes it purely as a medium of communication”. Dorpon also shared his concern for English as mediating and facilitating globalization, harming the native local languages and cultures of the countries such as Nepal, India, Srilanka and Bangladesh. He very characteristically mentioned that Indians follow American culture and then Bangladesh follows a mixer of Indian and American cultures. Like this, “are we not losing our cultural Uniqueness? Our entity as a nation?”

Despite her high level of proficiency in English language, Paridhi too wished that Hindi should have been the global language of the world. In India, we have been made to speak in English because it is a global language.

From the above discussion, it is clear that for those young adults who have had an opportunity to travel abroad, although it is necessary to know and to be proficient in English, sense of their own linguistic identity becomes prominent in a linguistically different atmosphere. Their experiences abroad inform them of the growing need to know English to be able to participate in world economy, it also makes them conscious of the importance of their own mother tongues and local languages back home.

Stance of Young Adults on Different Varieties of Englishes

Most of my participants were aware of the existence of different varieties of English such as American, British, New Zealand, Canadian and Indian. However, it was noticed that while Young adults were flexible in using different varieties of English according to the context and situation while speaking, while writing, they all seemed to stick to a standard. This difference in attitudes towards speaking and writing is due to their perception that writing is basically documenting, which would then be referred by others in the future, and would involve some kind of evaluation on the part of the reader. Therefore, for the sake of comprehension, writing should be done formally keeping in mind the norms of standard language. For most of them, Cambridge and Oxford dictionaries remain the reference points of Standard English.

Except for Paridhi and Vineet, for whom it is imperative to stick to British accent owing to their specific locations in academic contexts, rest of the participants use a mixture of British and American English. They all reported of varying their accents and pronunciation according to the person they were speaking to. Comprehension is the key issue, communication the main idea. Therefore, speaking involves constant assessment of the situation to make the dialogue possible.

Conclusion

The purpose of this section is to summarize and bring into focus the important points which have emerged from the study. Young adults from Indian subcontinent today acknowledge the emergence of English as a global language owing to the process of globalization. While all of them feel that knowledge and proficiency in English contribute to their professional identity, enabling them to get a firm grasp in their respective fields, they all feel that their personal identities are defined more by their own mother tongues or first languages. Although English does add to their ‘smartness’ in their peer groups, knowledge of English is not ‘mandatory’ to maintain their personal relationships. In lower middle classes, use of English in home environments is considered to be intrusive. It is the “communicative aspect” of English which is emphasized mostly by the professionals, which enables them to engage in interaction internationally. Some concern is felt by the professionals that owing to its overwhelming presence in India, English may hamper the growth of local languages. Young adults who have

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travelled abroad become conscious of the importance of their own mother tongues and local languages contributing to their linguistic identity. Young adults are conscious of different varieties of English which exist, however, they make a conscious choice of speaking in a particular accent according to the context, purpose and the person they are speaking to, sticking to a standard variety while writing. Thus, the study points towards the idea of identity as a socio-cultural construct, negotiated according to different circumstances.

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Ms. Pooja Singal, M.A., M.Ed.
Assistant Professor
Department of Elementary Education
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
LalaLajpat Rai Rd.
Amar Colony
Lajpat Nagar 4
New Delhi
Delhi 110024
India
poojasingal1985@gmail.com

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Pooja Singal, M.A., M.Ed.

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