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Indianisms in English Language - With Special Reference to Malayalam English

K. Muthu Rajan & A. Anitha Raj

Impact of English on Indian Languages

This paper is an attempt at reading the influence of the global language English over an Indian language, Malayalam. The influence is on both the languages as one uses the other whenever there is a need. The speakers of Indian languages have got influenced by English and even an uneducated common man uses English letters and fuses them with those of his native words and sentences.

English, as a global language, is spoken by 750 million people around the world. In India the superiority and prestige of English over other languages of the country remain unquestioned. “India is the third largest English using population of the world, after USA and UK” (210), states

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Aarti Bansal. This language plays an important role in the domains of education, management, commerce and political relations, judiciary, engineering, and is therefore an entry to social mobility, higher education, and better job opportunities. English has also become an effective tool used by Indians to communicate among themselves across their language boundaries. It is however ironical that even though English enjoys a high status in India, its teaching, speaking and learning in the educational institutes in India

Emergence of Dialects of Indian English

The heterogeneity of people with different languages, cultures and traditions is the characteristic of the country. This leads to the development of a number of Indian English dialects which remains completely different from the British English. This dialectal English spoken in India varies depending on the socio-linguistic background of the person. For instance, there are Tamil-English, Malayalam-English, Kannada-English, Bengali-English, Hindi-English and so on among the various regional English dialects used in India.

English Spoken by the People of Kerala

The English spoken by the people of Kerala is the subject of study in this article and this variety has its own characteristics. Kerala has the highest literacy rate and this means that most people of Kerala have some introduction to English in their schools. Spread of literacy has no impact on the style and mode of speaking English in Kerala. Malayalam speakers easily (and excessively, some might say) display an influence of their mother tongue in English they speak. This makes their English utterances unintelligible to the native speakers.

The various peculiarities which are well understood within the country would seem quite different to a foreigner. This paper aims at analyzing the use of English language by speakers of Malayalam and how their use of English language is influenced by their native language.

Reasons for Peculiar Use of English in Kerala

There are many reasons why Malayalam speakers of Kerala particularly use a lot of “Malayalam-English” (version of English influenced by Malayalam) in their speech. The first and foremost reason is the influence of their mother tongue. “It is natural for people to view their first language having intrinsic advantages over languages that are foreign to them” (Baugh 20).

Native speakers of Malayalam are conscious of pronouncing all the sounds of their mother tongue as represented in their script with a correct pronunciation. For example, compared to Tamilians, native speakers of Malayalam correctly pronounce the grooved palatal lateral (one of the three distinct lateral sounds) used in both Tamil and Malayalam. Perhaps this consistent adherence to the standard values of their sounds as represented in their script may be one of the reasons why their Malayalam accent is easily transferred to their English pronunciation. They speak English with direct translation of the Malayalam sentence in their mind. This bilingualism is easily noticed in educated native speakers of Malayalam. In addition, native speakers of Malayalam seem to use English words in their Malayalam conversation more frequently than most other groups of language speakers in India.

Examples of English Use in Kerala

The following are a few examples of sentences spoken by native speakers of Malayalam using bilingual medium even in their colloquial speech:

Exams vaerunu sherikum prepare Chei thilla

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[Exams are approaching but I have not prepared well]

Ninndaue husband evide work ceyuunu?

[Where is your husband working?]

Marriage celebrations completeayyo?

[Have you finished the marriage celebration?]

Traffic athigamayi undo, so one hour late

[There is a heavy traffic, so I'm one hour late]

Similarly native speakers of Malayalam do not keep away from their mother tongue while speaking in English. Some words in the following sentences reveal the influence of their own regional language:

Where has 'ungle' (uncle) gone?

He has gone to 'Oofees'. (Office)

Is 'Anndy' (Aunty) there inside the house?

No, she has gone to buy some 'Ooranges'. (Oranges)

Please come in and have a cup of 'Koofee'. (Coffee)

I hired an 'ooto'. (Auto)

Where did you 'werk' (work) before?

I was there in 'Thubai' (Dubai).

Is there any other 'Gelf' (Gulf) country you have 'werked' (worked)?

Some more examples of words often pronounced with Malayalam effect are given below:

Lorry *Loree*

Octopus *Ooktopus*

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Lodge	<i>Loodge</i>
Logic	<i>Loogic</i>
Honest	<i>Oonest</i>
Hospital	<i>Oospital</i>
Xray	<i>ettsray</i>
Only	<i>wonly</i>
Earn	<i>yearn</i>
Money	<i>meney</i>
Jumped	<i>jembd</i>
World	<i>Werld</i>
Simply	<i>zimbly</i>
College	<i>Koollege</i>
Doctor	<i>Dooktor</i>
Onion	<i>Oonion</i>
Auto	<i>Ooto</i>
Daughter	<i>Dooter</i>
Hotel	<i>Ootel</i>

When the above mentioned words are considered, it is evident that native speakers of Malayalam often have some issue with the vowel “O” being pronounced as “Oo” (the long counterpart of the vowel), the consonant “P” being pronounced as “B” and the consonant “k” pronounced as “G”. This problem is also faced by Tamilians who pronounce “Auto” as “Aato”,

“Onion” as “Aanion”, “College” as “Kalledge”, “Lorry” as “Laarry”, “Zero” as “jeero”, “Office” as “Aafis”, “Doctor” as “Daaktar”, “Lodge” as “Laadge” and “Logic” as “Laagic”.

Intelligibility

Not only South Indians but Indians living in different regions of India seem to commit similar errors. Languages are primarily meant for communication, but one must also note that there is a way to use them to ensure adequate intelligibility of the utterance generated in a conversation. While local forms or variations of the language are often acceptable locally, it may not be the case in the outside world, because such variations make the utterances in a conversation unintelligible.

That is, this does not mean that all utterances in English produced by Indians are correct in relation to generally accepted Standard English around the world. Indians should become aware of the fact that the English we speak in India today is much deviated from the British English. The Indianisms in English result in accent errors, syntax errors, and grammatical errors. In recent days it has become a trend to put the colloquial usages and the errors together as “Indian English”. But one should be aware of the fact that the so-called “Indian English” is not considered correct or accepted even within India.

A Universal Problem – How to Tackle It?

The problems faced by the native speakers of Malayalam are, of course, a universal problem faced by all second language learners. But when it comes to overcoming this problem, one of the ways is to first plainly comprehend and to list down the differences between the two languages, the learner's language and the target language and focus on those aspects.

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Recent research regarding the problem of using English as a second language by learners in India take the position that learners are not wrong in their pronunciations, they are just different. There is nothing wrong in being different. But English learners in India must be conscious of the fact that if they want to communicate with their own people they can do well with their dialectal English. If they want to communicate at the international level, they will have to minimize the differences.

English Language is a prerequisite in global communication. In the midst of the variety of languages around the world, the ranking of English Language is number one in the world. Indians are not native speakers of English and they can never be. But there is nothing wrong in striving for precision and trying to go as close as possible to the generally accepted norms of English. To touch the horizon of success the proficiency in mother tongue alone will not help. One should also respect a foreign language as one treats one's mother tongue. Along with the mother tongue efficiency in English showers the light for a successful career.

Role of Listening and Other Skills

Listening is an important process of learning. Listening to good English lectures, BBC News and watching English movies without subtitles and other TV broadcasts help the learners to improve their standard of pronunciation, speech and content delivery. Learning process does not end with listening. Imitation and repetition of words also help in enhancing the pronunciation. Day to day terms like compliments, appreciation, small conversation, making social contact, expressions of regret and excuse are very much essential in a good communication. Learners of English can memorize these words and can often practice these on suitable occasions. Opportunities must be given for children to acquire English through play

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activities at the kindergarten level itself. English speaking atmosphere must be created for students within and outside the classrooms. Students could make use of basic online reference tools, online dictionaries, encyclopedias and mobile technologies to enhance their language skills. Only in this way will they develop the kind of native speaker's skills that they are going to need in the modern world to deal with the extensive range of varieties and styles of spoken and written English that they will be called upon to handle. English is a language which can uplift one not only within one's own country but throughout the world.

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