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KNOW THE ROPES: LEARNING THE PRESENT DAY *LINGUA FRANCA*

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ABSTRACT

English language, undoubtedly, holds the maximum number of its speakers as compared to any other language. Relatively it is very young when we consider it with languages like Chinese, Greek or Sanskrit. Also, if we talk about the languages used for trade, exploration or conquest (from 16th century onwards); there were languages like Portuguese, Spanish and Arabic which had good number of speakers. Slowly the use of English as a common language gained better response and surprisingly this age is witnessing an imposing upswing in the number of English language speakers.

Though in general we identify three *Englishes* viz. English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the major concerns for a second language learner including the Indian learner are: is learning English language a necessity, fancy or obsession? Do we learn English just for the sake of learning a language or to have a feeling of superiority to have had learnt a language that is global.....a language spoken by the erudite?

This paper will also discuss the idiosyncrasies that are innate to English language apropos the various *Englishes* spoken now days and the challenging quest of a learner to find out *one best variety of English*.

Keywords: English, *Englishes*, morphosyntax, semantics, lexis

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English is not the language with maximum number of native/first speakers, but it has become the *Lingua Franca*. *Lingua Franca* is a language far and wide used for communication by speakers whose native languages are different from each other's. The *lingua franca* mentioned here is English, but the (majority of) words which are used in English

are borrowed by English from other languages. Examples of few such words are - chocolate, hamburger, taxi, jungle, etc.

Prof. Braj Kachru (Kachru 1985) suggested that 320-380 million people spoke English as first language whereas 250-350 million people spoke English as their second language. On the other hand

David Crystal (Crystal 1995) calculated around 377 million people who are first language speakers and only 98 million who are second language speakers. However, he points out that it would be easy to get a total of around 350 million second language speakers if we are able to calculate how many speakers of English as a second language are there in Canada or Australia or in countries like Pakistan or Nigeria. In 1983, however, Kachru made a prediction which if correct, means that there are now more second language speakers of English than its first language speakers. To quote him, "One might hazard a linguistic guess here. If the speed of English continues at the current rate, by the year 2000 its non-native speakers will outnumber its native speakers".

Prof. Braj Kachru (Kachru 1985) proposed the division of English speaking countries into three concentric circles (Fig.1). This division is functional in developing a better understanding of the use of English round the globe and various reasons of its multiplicity. According to Kachru, (Fig.1 below) 'inner circle' includes countries like Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Britain, and the United States where English is spoken as the 'first language'. The second circle what he calls as the 'outer circle' comprises of countries like Singapore, India, Pakistan, Malaysia etc. where English is spoken as a prominent 'second language'. The third circle which he calls as the 'expanding circle', has countries like China, Sweden, Czech Republic, Japan, Greece, Israel etc. where English has acquired great cultural and commercial importance.

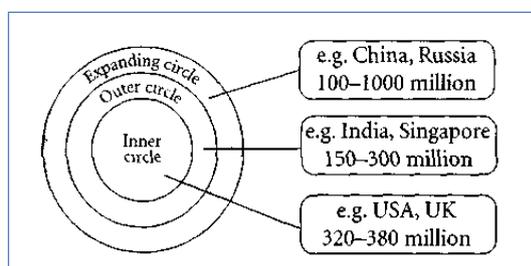


Fig. 1 - Concentric circle model (Adapted from Kachru, B.B.)

The British and the American varieties of English are the most common kinds of *Englishes* used by the native as well as the foreign learners.

They have a special status as the two *principal national varieties* of the languages simply because there is more material available in them than in any other variety.

In some respects, present-day British is closer to the common ancestral form of the present-day varieties than is American or other varieties; but in other respects the reverse is true, and American, for instance, preserves older uses that became obsolete in British use. To mistake present-day British for the ancestor of all other forms of English is a logical and factual error. (Algeo 2006)

If we talk about the most obvious difference between the British and the American English, we will notice that it is in the "tune" of the language, that is, the intonation that accompanies sentences. Other pronunciation differences exist in stress patterns and in consonant and vowel articulation and distribution. Popular writers on grammar are aware that the British and the American English differ in their morphosyntax but tend to be vague about the details. Important here is to mention that despite being a young language (compared to other languages), it has (or may be the speakers have) given rise to varieties of *Englishes*. To a first time learner, it becomes quite difficult to understand the idiosyncrasies of this language, which further multiplies with its growing varieties. For a non-native speaker of English, it is quite puzzling to understand and implement the differences prevailing in various world *Englishes*. Depending on who speaks or writes, one is destined to various confusions right at the outset of one's learning apropos the pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Example in support of this follows:

Have you got the time? (More likely to be spoken by the British Speakers)

Do you have the time? (More likely to be spoken by the American Speakers)

Similarly, difference in the vocabulary is also noticeable:

Lift Vs Elevator, Taxi Vs Cab, Flat Vs Apartment, Flyover Vs Overpass (the first ones are British in use while the second ones are more used by Americans)

Other than the word substitutes, there is difference even in the meaning these Englishes convey. For example- *the ground floor* in British English is *the first floor* in American English. The most prominent difference that could be noticed by a learner without delving deep into the study of these two Englishes is the discrepancy in spelling. To list a few: Colour Vs Color, Fulfil Vs Fulfill, Advertise Vs Advertize. This is not the end of the story; a new learner also encounters problems related to different pronunciation patterns of the two varieties of English.

/ˈjæs.i/ Vs /ˈtʃæs.i/ - Chassis

/ˈprɪv.ə.səl/ Vs /ˈpraɪ.və.səl/ - Privacy

/lɔː/ Vs /lɑː/ - Law

(In both the examples, first being the British while second, the American way of pronunciation)

Now days, there are varieties of English spoken within the same country. The British English is more widely accepted by academicians and academic institutions, but even within the British Isles, diversity is evident: a Londoner may talk about a **take-away** meal to eat at home while a Scottish person will order a **carry-out**. As with British English, the concept of one American English is also difficult to sustain as even a city like Boston contains within it a large number of English varieties viz. Black English, Hispanic English, Chinese English etc. A new learner is thus faced by a problem where English varies between and within the countries where it is spoken widely.

A little but special mention of Semantics is also indispensable as it has always been an area of concern for the non-native speakers of English. The new (Indian) learner tends to translate the encoded thought from his/her mother tongue to English by following the literal meaning of the words. Also, the spoken language is different from the written one and one can have better understanding of a language only when the context is clear as words have independent meaning and can give altogether different meaning in a given context. For example, the Cambridge International Dictionary of English (3rd Ed.) lists three main meanings for *Table* and four main meanings for *Book*. You can eat off a *table*, or you can *table* a motion at a conference. You can summarize information in a *table* too. Then again,

when you have read your book, you can ring up a restaurant and *book* a table but if you drive too fast on the way you might be *booked* for speeding some people have been keeping a *book* on whether you'll ever manage to persuade your boy/girl friend to marry you, since everyone knows you have been cooking the *books* for years – says *J. Harmer* in his book on English Language Teaching (Harmer 2001) – The point is that, same collection of sounds and letters can have different meanings and this ambiguity is resolved only when we see the word in context. It is known that *She kicked the bucket* means *She died* and *He has bitten off more than he can chew* means *he has attempted something that is more difficult for him*. Some metaphors are so common in use that now they have become clichés and some are still unfathomed – talking from a second language speaker's point of view. But the meaning these metaphors offer to a piece of writing cannot be overlooked; if for no other reason than at least for this that without proper interpretation of the text, expression and understanding remain unattainable.

In a country like India where the number of speakers of English as a second language, is growing in leaps and bounds, we are also faced by yet again, varieties of English or Hinglish. English has enjoyed a special status in India because of the country's colonial history and still continues to enjoy this privilege. With the growth of international trade and formation of the United Nations Organization, the world, increasingly felt the need for one language to converse in. English took over this role, and many newly-independent nations had no other choice but to adopt the language. As the scenario in the country changed, we deviated from *Hindi* and this deviation may be accredited to globalization, Internet and various other factors. This holds true not only for tier II cities but also for metropolises where the use of English has become a class-defining factor and it cannot be denied that there is a greater affinity toward English rather than *Hindi*. One of the conspicuous examples is Pepsi's slogan 'Yeh Dil Maange **More!**' (*The heart wants more!*), a Hinglish version of its international "Ask for more!" campaign (Gardner 2009).

Earlier there was uncertainty because of various types of English spoken widely all over the globe. Now it has become more uncertain to identify and teach/learn the appropriate English because of the interference of various other languages giving rise to Englishes which are combination of the countries' language swiftly fused with English language. And, this remains a big challenge before any Indian learner who intends to learn the best English available to him/her.

From the discussion above, we could infer that it is not only perplexing for the learner but also a challenging task for the teacher to deal with the situation and to refer to the *most appropriate English* talked and deliberated upon, every now and then. There are undoubtedly ways, through which an Indian learner can learn English as a second language but that demands immaculate thinking and contemplation. As per the level of the learner, the teacher has to decide the approach including task based teaching along with the language model & structure (to help understand the idiosyncrasies of English language) properly mingled with *Presentation, Practice & Production* approach that would definitely yield much desired results. The teacher needs to inculcate within the learner's mind that lexis is as important as grammar. Elaborating on how words combine together and perform together semantically and grammatically is an important part for any language learner. The learners need to understand that a language should be treated and accepted as a language with all its idiosyncrasies and should not be mixed with any other language & forms just to seek an easy alternative for expression. Also, involving learners in interactive sessions with constructive feedback backed up with continuous motivation is an indispensable part of language teaching. We need to accept that linguistic competence and communicative competence are equally required for any individual to understand the niceties and ways of expression in a language like English: in absence of any of the two, language learning shall remain a myth.

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