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TEACHING ENGLISH TO NON-NATIVE LEARNERS AND ENGLISH VS 'ENGLISHES' IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

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ABSTRACT

English language is no more the monopoly of one nation. It has undisputedly become the global language with the development of varieties of English across the world. This language is widely used for trade, commerce, tourism, media, science and technology. Teaching of English to non-native learners has become a challenge due to the multilingual and multicultural realities of societies. The spread of English first to North America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and then to South Asia, Africa and Latin America established it as a major language in the world. But the real challenge for this began when it came into contact with 'genetically and culturally unrelated languages' of Asia (Indo-Aryan and Dravidian) and Africa (Niger-Congo family). As we know language and culture are always interrelated, therefore it is highly imperative for the teachers to understand the cultural aspect of the society to which the learners belong. In 21st century, English is not considered in many countries as foreign language but it has become an additional language for the non-native learners. The spread of English must always be studied as it has undergone modifications due to the new economic, social, cultural and political conditions of the world during the modern period. Though English at times becomes a threat to a few indigenous languages of some countries, it is a weapon in the hands of dispossessed as it happened during African and Indian liberation struggle. The present paper aims to analyze the challenges of teaching of English to non-native learners and the emergence of varieties of English in a global society.

Key Words: English, Non-native, Global, Language

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Today, English is the most widely spoken language in the World. According to a British council report nearly 375 million people in the world speak English as a second language and 750 million speak it as a foreign language. Statistics show that three quarters of the world's mail are in English and four-fifths of electronic information is stored in English. No wonder countries like Japan and China, who were earlier unwilling to take English, seriously have started encouraging learning it in their countries.

According to a study by Crystal (1997), there are 85% of international organizations in the world make official use of English, at least 85% of the world's film market is in English, and some 90% of published articles in some academic fields, such as linguistics, are written in English. (Warchaucer, 513) Since a major part of scientific and technological studies is done in English, many countries are being forced to learn English to catch up with the developed ones in these fields. Not only that,

English has become the language of international politics, diplomacy, economics and information transfer. Receiving a boost by modern electronic communication modes like smart phones and internet, English is indisputably the fastest spreading language. Hence, learning this language is no more a choice, it is a necessity for students, professionals, businessman, scientists and politicians from countries have started to realize it and there is an unprecedented demand for learning English and teaching English. Of course this rising demand has created certain problems for the language as in course of its spreading new varieties of the language are coming into being posing problems for the linguists and causing perplexity to the native speakers. But, that is a different question. The fact is learning English has become an urgent need for countries where it is not the first language and we cannot ignore it in the globalised world. But then, the idea of teaching and learning English to non-native speakers (i.e whose first language is not English) is more easily said than carried out as the traditional teaching methods do not fit in the changed scenario of today. The process of learning and teaching becomes difficult when the linguistic norms keep changing and that too fast. This is exactly what is happening in case of English. So, those who are involved in this teaching learning process have to consider a few challenges the process throws up:

The mindset that only English which confirms to native British English is ideal.

Many teachers as well as learners still believe that, the English we use, must confirm to the English that Britishers use. They do not know that even in different parts of Britain people speak different varieties of English. But the truth is, even Britishers do not speak what we assume as good or correct English. Then we have other countries like the USA, Australia, Canada, South Africa and West Indies where English is the first language. So, the English spoken in these are also different not only from British English but from one another.

In such a case to insist on learning pure British English will be foolishness. What is required is both the teachers and the learners must come out of the colonial hangover and accept that English

language is no more the property of the Britishers, it belongs to the globalised world and we have to learn it as a global language. Of course for making English a successful global language. Some norms are necessary and the sooner these are evolved the better.

The cultural package English carries with it at times scares the learners and the teachers

There is a wide spread belief in many parts of the globe, especially in those countries which were once upon a time British colonies that one who learns English will have to switch to English way of life style. This is again a colonial legacy. In the colonial days those who learned English had a notion that English language and culture endows upon them superiority over the natives and so they took to English clothes, food, mannerisms in addition to learning English. To some extent the colonial masters also encouraged this. However, such a notion has no justification in a globalised world in which cultural boundaries are fast collapsing due to information explosion and communication facilities.

Inability to accept the changing linguistic trends as well as difficulty in incorporating culture-specific, region-specific and religious-specific words also create difficulty in learning English.

Languages are also changing with the changing world. In fact several languages have become extinct in the process. In some cases some languages have undergone unforeseen transformation. The process is natural and a number of factors contribute to it. English is no exception. It is undergoing transformation under the pressure of the demands of a multicultural, and multi ethnic globalised world. This transformation is growingly becoming evident in the simplification of sentence, shortening of words, dropping of suffixes, addition of words from different cultural, ethnic and religious groups, use of jargons from various fields and even making a compromise in the traditional grammatical/structural norms. The learners and teachers have to note this and act broadmindedly while learning and teaching English.

Lack of comprehensive and timely syllabus also creates problems for non-native English learners and teachers.

Though standard global English is yet to evolve, the syllabus makers for non-native learners will do well to take into consideration the needs of the target group of learners. It has been seen that contents in syllabi often lose meaning for the learners simply because things unfamiliar to are told and shown to them. It is always wise to take local situation, local problems and culture specific situations while preparing a syllabus. In many non-native countries a considerable number of students fail to master English because the syllabus makers ignore local needs and prepare a syllabus. Even the teachers do not improve upon it and try to teach them in a mechanical way. This should be avoided at all costs.

Several people oppose learning English because they fear a loss of linguistic and ethnic identity.

Quite a good number of people, many of them educated argue that learning English will weaken their vernacular and hamper the latter's progress. Such an argument appears uncalled for because the non-natives are not going to learn English for their day to day communication; they are learning for their profession, livelihood and business. If they love their vernacular, they can still use it at their home and wherever it is possible. On the other hand learning English will be beneficial to both vernacular as well as English. We have to view the matter with a broader mind. English is necessary for today's world and it is just a tool for communication.

Learning English may pose a few challenges for the non-native speakers but the challenges can be overcome if sincere efforts are made. To begin with we have to accept that in this globalised world we cannot remain isolated in our national, cultural, ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Opportunities are available in multitudes and to avail these we have to address these and to address these we have to learn English. Otherwise, there is a fear that we shall be left behind.

A few years back the Britishers were looked up to prescribe norms for good and correct English. Bodies like BBC and the British council set standards and English speakers all over the world tried their best to conform to these standards. Elders will recall that in their early years they made a lot of efforts to

perfect their spoken English and written English by listening to the BBC broadcasts and by consulting publications by the British council. The Britishers felt proud to be natives of a country whose first language bestowed a sense of superiority to millions of people all over the world. But now by a queer twist of time everything has changed. Now it is the non-native speakers, who are setting the standards for English as a language to the utter consternation of the native speakers. Not only that, non native writers from countries where English is not the first language are bagging prestigious literary awards for their books in English. The number of English speakers in the world is rising fast and to the utter dismay of the native British English speakers, they are openly doing away with age-old vocabulary, structure and pronunciation. The result is that in today's globalised world there is nothing called standard English; on the contrary, there have been varieties of English making English language a widely used lingua franca in the international trade, commerce, diplomacy, science, technology and politics. Hence, variations in written and spoken English have been detected in different parts of the world. Instead of one English we have now 'Englishes' as the language has incorporated a wide range of variations in spelling, structure, pronunciation and even vocabulary. The following statistics in this context may be relevant:

- The total number of English speakers can liberally be put at 2 billion.
- The English speaking population in Asia alone amounts to 350 million, which is almost equivalent to the total populations of the USA, the UK, and Canada combined.
- It is also estimated that the worldwide ratio of non-native speakers of English to native Speakers is somewhere between two and four to one.
- In China, there are many more English using Chinese than the total population of the United Kingdom, if we estimate just five percent of the Chinese using English. (Braj K. Kachru)
- India, if we count only ten percent of the population as English-knowing, is the

largest English-knowing country after the US and the UK. (Braj K Kachru)

The figures clearly show that English no longer belongs to “native speakers” only. It is used by other people in bilingual and multilingual situations with various forms of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and discourse. Hence, it is indisputably true, as Holly O Donnell says in a report titled *Visiting Englishes of the World*, “The number of non-native users of English out number those who were born into it”. He further says, “English is so widely used that it has been called the world language, the world’s official language and/or the international language”. But though we speak of English language as universal, global language, there are a number of Englishes especially in former British overseas possessions. The notable thing about each of these speech communities is they have their own range of lexical and syntactical variations that distinguish one brand from another. Commenting on these varieties (of English) is a colorful potpourri of sounds and expressions, a euphony of all that is the English language”. In this situation it is not astonishing that we have to think in terms of Englishes and not English. Still, a question arises : Do we really need to have Englishes instead of English ? The answer is obvious if we take into consideration the present day globalised world. In fact, the information explosion, liberalization of trade and commerce, internet, e-mail etc. have contributed strongly to the development of Englishes. As the world is growing smaller and time and distance between peoples, communities and nations is shrinking, communication through a common lingua franca is assuming growing importance. English, being an easy and flexible language has presented itself as the best option and people across the world have readily accepted it. As a result English has become a world language, but at the same time it has taken up certain regional, cultural, religious and economic peculiarities which in turn have given rise to Englishes. In the words of Braj K. Kachru, an internationally well-known linguist, “ It (English) is the only natural language that has considerably more non-native users than native users. And it is the non-native users who are now responsible for its spread and teaching and

uses. Interactions involving English in non-western countries are mostly carried on by non-native users with native users “. Hence, we have now various brands of English such as American English, Indian English, West African English and Caribbean English. According to Rakesh M.Bhatt :

In the past three decades, the study of the formal and functional implications of the global spread of English, especially in terms of its range of functions and the degree of penetration in Western and, especially, non-Western societies, has received considerable attention among scholars of English language, linguistics, and literature; creative writers; language pedagogues; and literary critics.....There is now a growing consensus among scholars that there is not one English language any more : rather there are many (McArthur,1998), most of which are disengaged from the language’s early Judeo-Christian tradition. The different English languages, studied within the conceptual framework of world Englishes, represent diverse linguistic, cultural and ideological voices.....The pluralisation of Englishes symbolizes the formal and functional variations, the divergent socio-linguistic contexts, the linguistic, socio-linguistic and literary creativity, and the various identities English has accrued as a result of its acculturation in new sociolinguistic ecologies (Kachru,1965. Stevrens 1992).

What are the benefits of having Englishes instead of having one English? This is a question being raised in many parts of the globe. The simple answer to this question is spreading of English in its various incarnations will make communications in the globalised world easier. True, absence of a standard global English may create a few problems. Still, it will keep people living in different parts of the globe connected. In this world where everyone is only a “click away” from others, Englishes will be able to establish a manageable contact thereby resulting in cultural exchanges. As we see, it has already started and it will gather momentum in the coming times. Englishes will also open now vistas of opportunities

for professionals in all fields. Today lakhs of Asians are in the US and Europe due to spread of English. Trade and commerce is also slated to be easier due to evolution of Englishes. Moreover English as a language is getting richer due to inflow of culture specific, region specific words and syntax. A trend for simplification of syntax is also very much expected as more and more communities adopt English for their professional needs.

But at the same time we cannot ignore the problems that stare us in the face. Evolution of Englishes will need a Standard English to make it intelligible across the globe which the linguists are finding difficult to give. Besides, there is also the fear of linguistic imperialism under which native languages may suffer. Again, the classics in English may not find a place of honour in a world of Englishes where different language groups will be speaking their own brand of English. The earlier writers who were considered very much important from literary point of view may be neglected. Speaking on this aspect of spread of English Ryuko Kukoto and Lori Ward writes. "English definitely was in international economy, politics and education serving as a gatekeeper in various ways. No doubt proficiency in English allows people around the world to gain access to knowledge and resources. However, the flip side of this is that non-English-speaking people in the world have to spend a tremendous amount of time, money and effort to acquire this language of power, and those with limited English language proficiency are disadvantaged. As a result, languages other than English become restricted in their functions and deemed less important. English is indeed 'Invading' other languages at a rapid pace."(82)

Whatever it may be, there is no denying that the process of evolution of Englishes is unstoppable and we have to live with it. In the words of Mack Warschauer of Cairo, Egypt "...in the 21st century there will be a growing basis for learners around the world to view English as their own language of additional communication rather than as a foreign language controlled by the "Other." Teachers would do well to exploit this situation by creating opportunities for communication based on the values, cultural norms,

and needs of learners rather than on the syllabi and texts developed in England and the United States.". (515) He further says that "...English is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral. To declare that English is unequivocally harmful or beneficial is to deny the human agency that shapes how English is used in different circumstances..... The spread of English can also be one of the many factors contributing to the tragic loss of indigenous languages around the world. (Phillipson, 1992) But it can also be deployed as a weapon of the dispossessed, as occurred in South African freedom struggle".(515-16) In the introduction to an article titled *The Changing Global Economy and the Future of English Teaching*, he takes the whole problem of English Vs. Englishes as consequence of new stage of global capitalism. In his view global capitalism will have its influence on teaching of English teaching and learning. He focuses the influences on three issues.

First, globalization will result in the further spread of English as an international language and a shift of authority to non-native speakers and dialects. This change will call into question basic notions of language, culture, context and the relationship between English as a Second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Second, economic and employment trends will change the way English is used. Increasingly, non-native speakers will need to use the language daily for presentation of complex ideas, international collaborations, negotiations, location and critical interpretation of rapidly changing information. Finally, new information technologies will transform notions of literacy, making online navigation and research, interpretation and authoring of hypermedia, and synchronous and asynchronous online communication critical skills for learners of English.

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