

General Discussion

- Position of English in India—English in independent India
- Biligualism and Multilingualism ● The value of attaining a working knowledge of English—A. English as a library language—B. English as a link language—C. English as a language for communication in a globalised economy—D. English as a world language for fostering international brotherhood.

1. Position of English in India :

The 'position of a language' in a country means its place in the national life, specially in relation to the other languages used there. So the position of a language is determined by its status in the life of the people, its importance in the different spheres of their life —i.e., administrative, commercial, educational, social or personal life. In fact, the position of a language cannot be anything static. With the change in the social and political life of a nation, the position of a language changes. For example, in the countries, like India, which were formerly the British Colonies, there is a marked shift in the position of English after independence.

English in India during the colonial period—India was a British Colony for quite a long time. It was nearly 200 years. During that period English was the language of the rulers and it enjoyed a very important and prestigious place in the life of the Indians. The Britishers used English for all their administrative activities. Not only that, they also introduced rules and laws for efficient administration in India. So during the British rule English was not only the official language, but also the court language. In addition, as we all know, they took initiative in spreading education in India, even though it was for their own need—for producing English-knowing Indians to help them in administrative and commercial activities. Naturally in the education system introduced and controlled by the English, English was given much importance—it was the medium of instruction and the aim of teaching English was to help the students to attain a mastery over the language so that they could use the language as an Englishman. Not only for administrative and educational purposes, but also for social and personal purposes English was a necessity for the Indians. Those who were well versed in the language had

the chance of holding important positions in the Government offices or commercial establishments and were highly esteemed by the common people. Thus English enjoyed a very important and prestigious position in our country during the British rule.

English in Independent India—With our freedom in 1947, the picture totally changed. Many Indians, out of their disdain for the English, demanded that English should be totally banished from our life. They were of the view that the retention of English would dampen our national spirit and perpetuate our slave mentality. It would stand in the way of the development of our own regional languages and also our development in other subjects as the study of English would demand much of the time and energy of the Indian students. However, most of the eminent Educationists were in favour of retaining English, as its total abolition would tell upon the standard of our education. In fact, still now, even after more than half a century of our independence, we are not in a position to abandon English. On the contrary, the demand for the knowledge of English is increasing day by day in India. The reason behind such a social demand for English will be clear if we consider the role English plays in our life, for which it rightly enjoys the position of the 2nd language in our country at present.

First of all, English serves as the link language within our country. It is the language that links Indian people living in different parts of the country and speaking in different languages often not known to one another. As an associate official language it also serves as a link between the Union Government and the different State Governments or among the state Governments. Secondly, as an international language English helps us to maintain contact with the world outside India. It is true that there are other international languages (French, Chinese, German, Russian etc.) too. But the question is—keeping aside English which we are so much associated with for such a long time, and which has been given the status of official language by the U.N.O., why should we think of any other language for maintaining political, cultural, commercial or educational contact with the other countries of the world? Thirdly, English is a must for higher studies in India. Our regional languages are not yet rich enough to produce books in all streams of knowledge. Specially in higher medical, engineering, law, technical, agricultural studies our languages are absolutely handicapped. So to widen our intellectual horizon, for keeping ourselves in touch with the ever growing and ever flowing stream of knowledge in all the fields of education, we need English. Fourthly, English is the basis for Computer

computer. No advancing country can, today, ignore the use of computer. It helps us in establishing a quick contact with any organisation or person anywhere in the world. At the same time it opens up a wide job-market for the Indians. Knowledge of English only can enable one to avail oneself of these opportunities. Last of all, we must admit that English with its rich literature may give us pleasure and relieve us from the tension of the fast-moving world.

All these reasons, stated above, make English a very useful and coveted language in India. We need to know the language for our own sake. In fact, in a multi lingual country like ours, we can not go successfully without English in our administrative, academic, professional (for some), commercial or personal life. So at present, with due respect to our regional languages, English is given the status of the 2nd language in India.

2. Bilingualism and Multilingualism :

(a) Bilingualism :

Bilingualism means fluent command or ability in two languages. It is the ability to use one's native language and another with approximately equal facility. To learn two languages is not at all any problem for the children, as they are more apt at mastering languages than the adults. Yet bilingualism often gives rise to some practical problems in teaching English. Often the different objectives of teaching the two languages are confused. It is forgotten that more emphasis should be given on the students' attainment of a mastery of the 1st language and that the 2nd language is to be learnt only for acquiring a working knowledge of it. Often the reverse happens. English, the 2nd language, is also a foreign language in India. So the learning of it demands much of the students' time and energy and as a result the development of their 1st language is often neglected. We forget the experts' view that proficiency in mother tongue is "not a rival but a necessary preliminary to their proficiency in English....." (Kothari Commission). So to maintain a proper balance between the two languages is often a great problem for the teachers of English.

Another problem in learning English for the bilinguals is that the other language often interferes with their learning of English. For example, the sound 'f' is bilabial in Bengali, whereas it is labio-dental in English. The Bengalee students often find it difficult to pronounce English 'f' properly because of their habit of making the bilabial sound of 'f'. The sounds 'Z' (as in 'pleasure') and 'z' (as in 'please') create the same problem in pronunciation for many as in the Indian languages there is only the 'dz' (as in 'just') sound. In the same way sentence structures in mother tongue may also interfere with their learning of English structures.

Solution :

A few suggestions to overcome these problems are given below.

- The students should be given some time (preferably in years) to gain proficiency in mother tongue, before English is introduced as proficiency in mother tongue is the basis of their proficiency in English.
- English should be taught to the students by comparing and contracting its pronunciation, intonation, structures or grammatical rules with those in their mother tongue.
- The standard of the students' achievement in English should not be pitched too high.

(b) Multilingualism :

Multilingualism means the ability to use more than two languages with approximately equal facility. India is a multilingual country. People of different regions of the country use different languages. In metropolitan cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore, children acquire more than one language and sometimes even more than two or three simultaneously. It creates a problem in learning English, greater than that created by bilingualism. Often a child (living outside his/her home state) who listens to his/her mother tongue at home, has to learn the local /regional language as the 1st language in school and also for social mixing. He/she often learns other languages, too, for social mixing (living in a metropolitan City). At the same time he/she learns English as the 2nd language in school. All these languages interfere with one another and create a confusion in the students in very aspect of language development—vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation.

Multilingualism is again a problem for those, both students and teachers, who migrate from one state to another. Pronunciation and intonation of the same English differ in people living in different parts of the country. So the pronunciation of the teacher may sound peculiar to those students who migrate from one state to another. The teachers, too, may find it difficult to make himself/herself intelligible to the students.

Solution :

- As a solution to the problems of multilingualism, emphasis should be given on the development of the 1st language.
- The study of the 2nd language should begin only after the students acquire some proficiency in the 1st language.
- Only the attainment of a working knowledge, not the mastery, of the 2nd language should be aimed at.

So far as the mother tongue is concerned (in case of students living outside home state) the learning of it should be allowed to take its own courses as per the home environment of the students.

- (e) The Standard English pronunciation provided by International Phonetic Association (I.P.A.) should be followed to do away with differences in pronunciation.

3. The Value of attaining a working knowledge of English :

Ever since the British rule in India English has been one of the most preferred languages in India. India is multilingual in nature. People in different regions of the country use different language and the language of one region is not often understood by others living in other regions. The tragedy is that with so many regional languages (some quite rich) the people of India could not unanimously accept any one of these languages as a common language of communication. So English, though foreign in origin, takes up this place of the common language of communication as it is used and understood all over India. So every Indian needs to learn the language. But the question is—what should be the level of his/her achievement or proficiency in English?

During the British rule the aim of teaching and learning English was pitched too high. The students were expected to attain a mastery over the language and to use the language as an Englishman. Today mastery of the language is no longer the aim of teaching or learning English in India. Now it is taught as a utility language and not for literary purposes in general. Today we use English not for satisfying our English bosses, but for our own purposes. Because of the quick advancement in communication science and the quick spread of international trade and commerce, the world is getting smaller and smaller day by day. To keep pace with this advancement we need to attain a functional or working knowledge of the language. Working knowledge of English means a knowledge of the language enough for helping us to function successfully in the modern world by using the language correctly and efficiently wherever required for comprehension or self-expression.

For a proper understanding of the importance of attaining a working knowledge of English, the following points need to be discussed in details—

- A. English as a library language.
- B. English as a link language.

- C. English as a language for communication in a globalised economy.
- D. English as a world language to foster international brotherhood.

A. English as a library language :

'Library language' means a language that is very much useful to someone using a library. That means it is a language in which books in different streams of knowledge are easily available. Students and scholars, specially in higher studies, frequently need to consult reference books in the libraries. English is a great help to them, as it is a very rich library language.

Our regional languages are not yet rich enough to produce books in all subjects of knowledge, specially the science subjects, medicine, engineering, agriculture, law, space research etc. So the Indian students have to depend upon English literature/books—humanistic, scientific and technical.

In addition, it is very rich in translation literature too. Books written in other languages are also available in English translations. So if we want to keep ourselves abreast with the latest developments in the various fields of knowledge we need to know English of that standard so as to enable us to comprehend books written in English. According to the Radhakrishnan University Education Commission, "If under sentimental urges, we should give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of evergrowing knowledge".

The Kothari Commission has also argued in favour of English as a Library language—no student should be considered eligible for a degree, in particular a Master's degree, unless he has acquired a reasonable proficiency in English (or in some other library language). According to the commission, "the implications of this (English as a library language) are two fold: All teachers in higher education should be essentially bilingual. They should be able to teach in the regional language and in English, and all students (and particularly post-graduate students) should be able to follow lectures and use reading materials in the regional language as well as English". It does not, however, mean that English should be taught for the development of reading skill only. It only implies that greater emphasis should be given on the skill of reading than the other skills (speaking and writing). The fact is that even if English is learnt for reading only, its learning should start with speech. It is because without mastering a language orally, the process of reading is only reduced to translation that cannot enable one to grasp the thought and spirit of the language. In fact, all

our skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) should be practised while learning English for the purpose of taking its help in the library.

B. English as a link language :

English serves as a link language within India. India is a multilingual country. People living in different parts of the country use different languages. These are as many as twenty one recognised regional languages in India. This gives rise to a great problem. It is not possible for anyone to tackle all these languages. So it often happens that people living in one part of the country cannot reach the thoughts and feelings of the people living at some other part, because language stands in the way. In such a situation we need a language common to all. To solve this language problem an attempt was made to make Hindi the common language for communication, but people living in the southern states of the country opposed to it and till now we could not accept unanimously any one of our regional languages as the common language for communication.

In this regard, English with its foreign origin is in an advantageous position. It is a language used and understood all over the country. Through it we can reach all Indians living in different parts of the country—we can understand their feelings, desires, needs and problems and also make them understand ours own. As it is a foreign language, it does not prick the ego or sentiment of the Indians of different regions regarding the superiority of their own language over the other regional languages. Because of this ego clash among the Indians leading to a refusal of any Indian language as a common language for communication, English enjoys the position of a link language within the country. It links all the people of India. It also serves as an associate official language to maintain link between the Union Government and the different State Government or among the State Governments. Thus English removes the language barriers from among the Indians living in different parts of the country and make them move not as separated units, but as a united whole.

C. English as a language for communication in a globalised economy :

The concept of globalisation is spreading fast. The world is no longer a combination of isolated countries. It is now considered a global village. People of no country in the world want to restrict themselves within their own territory. So far as education and trade and commerce are concerned the physical boundaries of the countries are disappearing very fast. It is quite evident in the fact that in the U.S. Universities Indian, Chinese, South Korean

and Japanese students enrol themselves in huge numbers. [According to S. Rajagopalan, Washington, the number of foreign students enrolled in the U. S. Universities during the 2004-05 academic year, is as follows—India : 80,466; China: 62,523; S. Korea : 53,358; Japan : 42,215 and Canada : 28,140.] Nowadays Indian institutes (I.I.T. / I.I.M.) also are planning to open their doors to international students. As foreign universities are setting up their branches in developing countries, so the Indian institutes (I.I.M.) are also taking steps to open their branches in other countries. Moreover with the helps of the different servers we can, through internet, get all available information on all topics as we wish.

In the field of trade and commerce, too, different countries are coming close to each other. India, like many other countries in the world, is now very much inclined to foreign investment in the country. In addition the rich countries are opening up a wide job market for the people of the poor countries like India through on-line trading.

This recent development in the world scenario makes us honour English as a language for communication with the people of other nations, who are our partners in education and trade and commerce. English is a language 'that is wide spread globally and in this age which has experienced a revolutionary development in telecommunication, use of computers, internet etc., a knowledge of English is a must. So the rapid spread of the concept of globalisation in every sphere of our life (education, trade and commerce, science and technology) is making English more important as a global language.

D. English as a world language for fostering international brotherhood :

There is no denying the fact that the world is shrinking fast and all the people of the world are coming very close to each other because of the rapid development of communication science and technology and because of close international relations in every sphere of life—art and culture, education, trade and commerce, politics and what not. Yet we are mentally far away from one another. The world is now threatened with wars and terrorist activities, as we have forgotten our fraternity. The more we are coming close outwardly, the greater becomes the necessity of a unifying force. English can serve as that unifying force, a force to foster international brotherhood.

According to F. G. French, "one person out of every four on earth can be reached through English". Besides the countries

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(the U. K., the U.S.A., Canada and Australia) where English is used as the 1st language, there are many countries like India, Pakistan, Burma, Ceylon etc. (which were the British colonies formerly) where English is widely used. Moreover, millions of Europeans, Africans, Chinese, Japanese, South Americans use it as their 2nd language. Not only the number of people using it, but also its wide geographical distribution for use, not to speak of its use for computers and internet, make English one of the major world languages. The U.N.O., too, has given it the status of official language. F. G. French says, "if we look at the media we find that over 50% of world's newspapers, over 50% of the world's scientific and technical periodicals and more than 60% of world's radio stations use English as the medium of communication". It implies that majority of the world's population may be communicated through this language. So it may be a great help in fostering international brotherhood to make people of the world stand by each other in need and thus reduce the sufferings of the world.

Exercise

1. Discuss the position of English in India at present as compared to its position in India during the British rule.
2. What is the meaning of working knowledge of English? Why should we acquire a working knowledge of English?
3. Discuss the importance of English as a world Language.
4. Write in brief, the importance of English as a library language.
5. Why is English enjoying the status of a link language within India?
6. Discuss the concept of bilingualism and the problems of teaching English related to it.
7. What is meant by multilingualism? Discuss the problems it gives rise to in the teaching of English.