

Attitudinal Identification: An Essential Paradigm for the Growth of Non-native Varieties

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Abstract

The significance of English as a 'Link language' and as a 'Global Language' has increased in the past few decades. English is seen as 'a language of career' and 'a passport for success' in different walks of life. Active steps have been taken to impart knowledge of English in the 'Outer Circle'. In the outer circle, English is used as a Second language and it includes countries like India, Singapore, Pakistan and Africa. While some research has been conducted on these varieties, much exhaustive work still needs to be done from the perspective of Standardizing these varieties. The present study sheds light on the attitudes of teachers, learners, curriculum designers, the corporate world and the decision makers in India towards the language variety they use. Though Indian English is considered to have achieved recognition and prestige in the past few years, it is observed that most of the Indian speakers of English still do not take 'pride' in asserting the fact that the variety of English that they speak is 'Indian English', and also quite often label the variety that they speak as either 'British English' or 'American English'. It is felt that 'Attitudes' play a significant role in the growth or decay of a particular language variety. The study argues that the Attitudinal Identification with the variety that we speak is an essential paradigm for the growth of a language variety. The study cites some examples from different non-native varieties and it suggests some strategies that could be adopted so as to bring a shift in the people's attitude.

Keywords: attitudinal identification, non-native varieties, prestige, standardization

1. Introduction

English enjoys a special position and privilege in the World today. Crystal (2003) and Graddol (2006) depict how the twenty first century has witnessed a phenomenal rise in the users of English. English operates as a Link language today not only at the global level, but also in intra-national contexts. It has become a passport for success in different walks of life. Kachru (1985) represented the spread of English across the world using three concentric circles, namely the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. Countries like UK, USA, Canada and Australia belong to the Inner circle and English is used as the first language in these countries. In this context, English is 'acquired' by the native speakers. Countries like India, Singapore, Pakistan and Africa belong to the Outer circle and in these contexts, English is used as a Second language. Countries like Japan, France, Germany, Thailand and Korea belong to the Expanding circle and English is used as a foreign language in these countries. In both the Outer and the Expanding Circles, English is 'learnt', and not 'acquired'. It means that in these circles, English does not function as the native language of the speakers. English is taught formally in schools and colleges, and thereby it is learnt. In the outer circle, English is widely used as a means of communication. So, we find the use of English extensively made in business and administrative sectors in this circle. In countries where English is used as a second language, we observe that English has reached the grass root level and it is looked upon as 'the language of career' and 'the language of opportunities'.

1. The Problem Faced by the Non-native Users

Though some work has been carried out on describing different features of the non-native varieties, a lot of exhaustive work needs to be carried out in this direction. Researchers such as Parasher, Schneider and Hosali have made valuable contributions to the growth and development of non-native varieties of English by describing some of their phonological, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features. However, it is felt that active steps need to be taken in the direction of 'Standardizing' these varieties as Standardization will certainly add to the prestige of these varieties. It will not only lend 'status' to the varieties spoken in the Outer circle, but it would also have a lot of positive pedagogical implications, in the sense that the learners will be able to use the variety that they speak and are comfortable with in different contexts, and the teachers would not have to carry any burden of teaching the 'native' variety, that they themselves cannot master, however hard they try. Thus, the process of 'standardization' of the non-native varieties would help the non-native users of English to free themselves of 'the linguistic schizophrenia'. One of the problems of many non-native speakers of English at the global level at the moment is that they know that the 'variety they speak certainly exists, and it is not a myth', but at the same time they have to depend on the native usage as far as

the notions of 'correctness', 'appropriateness' and 'acceptability' are concerned.

2. The Question of the Teaching model

The question of the teaching model is an important one. The Exonormative approach endorses the view that the native variety essentially enjoys a greater prestige and so that variety should be used as the teaching model, on the other hand, the Endonormative approach supports the view that the model should essentially be developed from within the country itself, as it would be a pragmatically realistic and desirable model in many different ways for the users of that country. Systematic work needs to be carried out to adopt the Endonormative approach in various non-native contexts.

2. Method

In order to study the attitudinal identification of different non-native speakers, the researchers designed a questionnaire and the responses of around two hundred non-native speakers were studied. These participants were from India, Singapore, Africa and Pakistan. All the participants selected for the present study had obtained the post-graduate degree. The following questions were asked to the participants:

- 1) Label the variety of English that you speak.
- 2) Do you think that the native varieties of English, British and American English are superior to the variety that you speak?
- 3) Would you consider the variety of English that you speak as 'prestigious'?
- 4) How was the variety of English that you use looked upon in the past?
- 5) Do you make an attempt to imitate British or American speakers when you use English?
- 6) Do you use only English at home or do you also communicate in regional language too?
- 7) Do you think it is important for the present generation to know both the regional language and English?
- 8) What do you think is the attitude of the native speakers of English towards the variety that you speak?
- 9) Do you think we must start teaching the variety of English that is widely used by the people in your country?
- 10) What do you think would be the future of the variety that you speak?

Apart from preparing the questionnaire, observation method has also been used for the present study. The researchers have closely observed the attitude of the educationists, working professionals, educated people, teachers and learners towards the variety of English they use. Interviewing technique has also been employed as a part of data collection. Around twenty people from different non-native contexts were also interviewed and their responses have been analyzed. Some broad observations on the attitude of different non-native varieties of English were made first, and then the researchers studied attitudes of Indian speakers of English in detail.

3. Results & Discussion

3.1 Observations Made on Different Non-Native Users of English

Most of the non-native speakers of English labeled the variety of English that they speak as 'British' or 'American', and felt that the native varieties of English carry a greater prestige over the variety of English that they speak. Most of them agreed that they consciously imitate British or American speakers. Some of them also have an opinion that it is important today to master English as that is the need of an hour in terms of career, and it is fine if one does not know regional language so well. In conclusion, it can be said that the non-native speakers of English generally hold a negative attitude towards the variety they speak.

3.2 The Significance of Having the Right Attitude

Kachru (1983) comments, 'Attitudes are of crucial importance in language growth or decay. The users must demonstrate a solidarity, identity and loyalty towards a language variety'. (p. 50). It is felt that the sense of belongingness that one possesses is extremely important in the expansion, proliferation and the bright future of any variety. The present study analyses the attitudes of Indian speakers of English in detail. It puts forth the Indian speakers' attitude towards Indian English on the basis of interviewing them, providing a questionnaire to them, observing them and analyzing some of the statements that are being made by them on Indian English. Defining Indian English is a problem in the Indian context, as different states in India have different regional languages. There are twenty-eight states and eight Union territories in India, and it has around 122 major languages and several dialects. Thus, India is one of the brilliant examples of linguistic diversity. However, one needs to make a distinction between 'regionally restricted features' and 'Pan Indian features'. For example, if a particular feature is noticed only in a particular state of India, it would not be considered as a Pan Indian feature. Though in India, regional varieties such as 'Marathi English', 'Tamil English' and 'Bengali English' exist, it is possible to argue that all these regional sub-varieties share something in common, which could be labeled as 'a common core'. Thus, the term 'Indian English' does not mean 'English as spoken by every Indian user', but it refers to those features that are shared by educated Indians from different regions of India. The present study has taken into consideration only the views of Educated Indians, and the views of Indians who speak 'the lower variety' of English are not taken into consideration. It is important at the moment to comprehend the views of educated Indians, as this would certainly contribute to the notion of standardization.

English in the Pre-independence Era:

English came to India with the establishment of the East Indian company. In the colonial times certain derogatory terms like ‘Babu English’, ‘Butler English’, ‘Cheechee English’, ‘Boxwallah English’ and ‘Pidgin English’ were used to refer to Indian English. These terms make it explicit that the colonizers considered Indian English to be a sub-standard variety of English and looked down upon this variety. Indians did not like this attitude and naturally once the Britishers left, there was one school of thought that believed that India should not have any contact with English anymore; but thanks to the visionaries and the role of national leaders, that English not just prevailed on this land, but evolved and made a mark with the changing times.

English in the Post-independence Era:

India is one of the best examples of linguistic diversity. In the past, the dictum that was widely endorsed in the Indian context was ‘One nation, one Language’ one Flag’, however today multilingualism has been highly encouraged. Every language is considered to be a window to different culture, and attempts are now widely made to provide exposure to different languages right from the school days. India became independent on 15th August, 1947. The Three Language Formula that came up in the Indian context in 1960’s clearly stated that the child’s mother tongue, the regional language Hindi and English should be taught in schools. There was some opposition from one of the states in India to the use of Hindi as a national language, as the people felt that the language used in that particular state should get the recognition of a national language. There were some linguistic riots too with respect to this issue. However, the three languages formula was finally accepted, and since then the use of English has expanded a lot. Today English is taught in India in all regional medium schools since first standard at school level. The mushrooming of different Spoken English institutes speak volumes for the desire of people to learn English. Mastering English has also become a necessity today in the corporate world. Business process outsourcing industries, Knowledge process outsourcing industries and legal process outsourcing industries have opened up several opportunities for youngsters, and one of the eligibility criteria to enter this domain is the knowledge of English. Proficiency tests in English carry a relatively greater significance today compared to the past, as these examinations have become the stepping stones to make a mark in different fields. Since the need for being communicatively competent is understood by working professionals, a number of English for Special Purpose courses are designed, and special trainings are given to working professionals. Overall, there is a lot of demand for people who can create ESP courses and also offer training. Thus, to put it in a nutshell, the use of English has expanded considerably in the post-independence period than the pre-independence times.

A. The Teachers’ Attitude

The researchers designed a questionnaire and asked fifty practicing teachers of English from schools and colleges to label the variety that they speak. 30 teachers labeled the variety that they speak as ‘British English’, 8 of them labeled it as ‘American English’, 7 of them labeled it as ‘a blend of British and American English’ and only 4 of them said that what they use is ‘Indian English’. It is felt that it is extremely important on the part of Indian teachers to realize this fact that the variety that they speak is ‘Indian English’, and that they must first of all acknowledge, accept and respect the variety of English that they speak. Teachers are considered to be the pillars of the nation, and if they themselves detest the variety of English that they speak, or do not take pride in asserting that what they use is ‘Indian’ English, how will this variety grow? How will this variety make a journey from ‘norm developing’ variety to the ‘norm developed’ variety? It is felt that right from the foundational stage till advanced classes, teachers must take efforts to teach the learners that a variety called ‘Indian English’ certainly exists, and we all use it. Active knowledge of the variety that they use as a teaching model, and the passive knowledge of Indian English on the part of every teacher is imperative for the growth of this variety. The advantage of possessing passive knowledge of Indian English though it is not standardized at the moment would be that when teachers have to correct different types of learners’ errors, the teacher can postpone the correction of those structures or patterns which are a common aspect of Educated Indians’ linguistic behavior. For example, the use of the present perfect tense with the past adverbials is a common pattern in Indian English, and a teacher who knows that Indian English exists, would not label this as a ‘serious error’ and immediately correct it. It is felt that the attitudinal acceptance and recognition imparted to the non-native varieties would help the teachers to expand their perspective on ‘correction’, in the sense that what is considered to be correct in the native context, will always be correct in the non-native context too, but additionally it would consider the patterns used in the non-native environment also as correct.

B. The Learners’ Attitude

Today it is observed that for some reason, the learners give a greater recognition to the Native varieties of English. There is a lot of intrinsic motivation among the youngsters to learn American English, which could be because of the impact of media as well. Many of them try to pick up the American accent, as they feel that it is in ‘fashion’ to do so, and also because they consider the native varieties to be more prestigious. However, in the pursuit of picking up this accent, eventually what they speak is neither General or Educated Indian English nor American English. It sounds artificial to the ears too. It is felt that there is no need to imitate the Britishers or the Americans, but speak the variety that spontaneously comes to us. It is interesting to note that during this research, when the native speakers of English were asked as to what variety of English did, they think the Indians should communicate in, they were perfectly fine with Indian English as a variety and said that they would not really expect the non-native users to essentially pick up the native varieties. It is important that at the earliest learners come out of this perspective that the ‘native’ English is ‘superior’ and Indian English is something ‘inferior’ or ‘sub-standard’. After all, the learners are the future of our country. It is predicted that by the year 2025, India would be the youngest nation in the world. So, if this value is instilled among our learners that ‘the variety that I communicate in is Indian English, it is a prestigious variety and that unnecessarily I don’t have to imitate British or American users of English’, it will certainly be an important step in the direction of standardization, recognition and development of Indian English as a variety.

C. Attitude in the Corporate World

In the corporate world too, there seems to be a massive drive for teaching British or American English. It is felt that we at the global level need to create openness in terms of attitude. In the Indian context, in the corporate world, the new staff is quite often provided training in 'British English' or 'American English' usually for a period between forty-five days and three months. It is observed that some of them pick up the 'other' accent to a certain extent and some of them don't pick it up well. Quite often after the training, the employee has to listen to a comment like 'There is quite a lot of Indian touch to your speech and so we cannot take you in'. For example, most of the youngsters during the interview process do not use 'aspiration' in their speech, in which the sounds, /p/, /t/ and /k/ are aspirated at the beginning of the accented syllable. There is a tendency among the Indian speakers of English to use the Present Perfect Tense, where Britishers use the Simple Past Tense. For example, a candidate at the interview quite often says, 'I have completed my graduation five years ago' instead of 'I completed my graduation five years ago'. The question is 'Isn't this Indian touch bound to be there?' 'Can it really go away?' and more importantly 'Should it go away?'. It is felt that this attitude too needs to see some transformation. The day the industry accepts and welcomes Indian English for different purposes and tasks to be carried out in the Indian context, would certainly be one of the best days for 'Indian English' as a variety.

D. Attitude among the Decision Makers

The story is not so different when it comes to the attitude displayed by the decision makers or policy makers. Most of the owners of different 'Spoken English Academies' claim that they teach people excellent British or American English. The researchers have even come across an advertisement written outside one of the Spoken English Academies which said, 'We teach British English, Pure English'. It is felt that these misconceptions need to be changed at the earliest. What Spoken English Classes or Academies should aim or actually can aim at imparting is good knowledge of Educated Indian English in the Indian context, as the teachers teaching English in these academies are Indian teachers. Most of the students and people need to master General Indian English, and developing British or American accent is not really their requirement or need. For day to day communication what Indians need is a mastery of Indian English as a variety and therefore the decision makers must emphasize on the teaching of the non-native varieties and establishing an awareness among the learners.

E. Attitude of the People in General

There has to be some change in the people's attitude in general. It has been observed that parents in some families purposefully do not provide any exposure to the Indian languages to their children, as they feel that in future their children would need 'English' for their career and only this language is a very significant one. It is observed that in the pursuit of providing maximum exposure to English, parents wrongly curtail the child's ability to pick up different languages simultaneously. It is important to remember that creating a conducive environment for picking up different languages is a linguistically rewarding activity and this should be encouraged. Some studies reveal that children who get an opportunity to use different languages, are able to think in a better way, get exposure to different cultures, and this contributes to the overall enrichment of the child. Though we admit the fact that English is a crucial language today for career, it is felt that parents must nurture the value of learning Indian languages also along with English. The wide spectrum of languages that operate simultaneously in India is truly the strength of the country and one of the unique features of the country, and so the motivation to preserve this plurality of languages is a need of the hour. The researchers have observed during their travel and also through interactions with the people residing in various non-native countries, that in different non-native countries where English is spoken as a second language, unfortunately similar problems exist.

4. Conclusion

Since attitudes play a very significant role in language growth or decay, it is hoped that the non-native varieties of English would accept 'the ecological validity' of their nativized Englishes. Ironically, opposition to non-native varieties seems to stem from the non-native users themselves, and it is necessary to abandon this attitude at the earliest. This way of thinking should be replaced with a high degree of linguistic tolerance. It is hoped that educationists, teachers, learners, curriculum designers, material producers, policy makers, parents and employees in the corporate world will work in unison towards the development of the non-native variety of English that they use, and develop a positive attitude towards their own variety, as the attitudinal identification with the variety that we speak is certainly an essential paradigm for the growth of that variety.

5. Implications of the Present Study

This study reveals that we need to bring in a change in the people's attitude. It is felt that on different platforms, educationists need to emphasise the point that Indian English exists, and we must take pride in stating that the variety that we speak is 'Indian English', 'Singapore English' or 'African English'. Teachers must create a positive attitude towards different languages and varieties among learners, and make them understand the fact that all varieties are equal, and there is nothing like 'inferior' or 'superior'. It is essential to respect the variety that we speak, and at the same time have a positive attitude towards the other language varieties. Teachers can discuss the similarities and differences between different varieties while dealing with the literary texts. In language and literature classes it is important that teachers make students realize the fact that non-native varieties of English exist. Lowenberg (1986) demonstrates how certain nativized features are becoming new norms for English usage in many countries and Parasher (1991) states several examples of Indian English. Teachers of English language need to discuss such observations in the classroom.

Schneider's dynamic model of Postcolonial Englishes adopts an evolutionary perspective, emphasizing language ecologies. He discusses five steps in this model namely Foundation, Exonormative Stabilization, Structural Nativization, Endonormative Stabilization and Differentiation. It is felt that in order to move towards Endonormative stabilization, attitudinal identification with the variety of English that we speak is an essential step. It is felt that a particular variety gains higher recognition when it is standardized. So, from this perspective, there is a lot of scope for researchers to work on different non-native varieties of English. The researchers need to get involved in data collection and describe the phonological, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features of different non-native varieties. For a variety to grow, grammar books and lexicons need to be written. This will eventually contribute a lot towards the process of standardization. It is felt that India needs to develop certain strategies for standardizing Indian English at the earliest. Researchers need to carry out in-depth analysis of different phonological, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic features of Indian English in different regions of India, the 'Common Core' needs to be identified and a committee of scholars need to be appointed so as to compile different linguistic features in the form of Grammar books and lexicons. This would significantly contribute to the process of Standardization. It would also be an interesting task to see similarities and differences among different non-native varieties of English. It is hypothesized by some linguists that in the near future, we may not have different native and non-native varieties of English, but there would be just one English, which might be labeled as 'International English'. So, from this perspective as well, it is essential to possess the right kind of attitude towards the variety of English that we use. Once research on non-native varieties of English like Indian English, Singapore English, African English and Pakistani English is carried out, the researchers can identify the common core among these non-native varieties and this will prove to be a significant step in arriving at the notion of 'International English'.

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