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ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The present paper makes a study of the importance of English language in today's world. Due to developments in fields of science, technology, and transportation as well as growth of international business markets, learning English has become a compulsory need. Various statistical records, surveys, and studies have proved that English is the language of books, newspapers, media, advertisements, international travels, international trade, internet, popular music, cinema, and what not. All these surveys also show that slowly and gradually 'English' is heading towards a 'global' status. It's speakers are not only natives but non-natives also, who use it either as a second language or a foreign language. An attempt has been made through this paper to study the various causes that demand a global language and how English is sufficing that demand.

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'Globalisation' signifies the process of integration or the growing interdependence of countries upon one another, due to the rise in international trade and transactions, migration and settlement of people in countries other than their native ones, and the interchange of knowledge, ideas and other aspects of culture. Though the word 'globalisation' seems to be new and modern but the concept and practice is an old one. Trades and transactions, migration from one place to another, and dissemination of cultural values from one country to another were present from the beginning of times. But 'globalisation' in the modern sense began after the World Wars and more specifically after the 1950's. Globalisation was also the result of the development of technology and the invention of computers and internet which created a smaller world for people. Moreover environmental problems like global warming, air-pollution, cross-border water and terrorism have compelled different countries to come together and join hands to fight against these common problems.

When people from diverse cultural backgrounds come together to fight common problems they need a common medium to share their opinions and advices. There arises the need of a lingua franca to express themselves, without which communication wouldn't be possible. 'Lingua franca' is a language used between two people who do not share the same mother tongue. Today this status of the most popular lingua franca is enjoyed by the 'English' language. English has become a 'global language' - a language used among people

from different countries and mother tongues on an international and global stage. However the basic questions that arise on the notion of English as a global language are -

- 1) Why do we need a global language?
- 2) What makes a language 'global'?
- 3) Why is 'English' suitable as a global language?
- 4) What are the reasons for the spread of English?
- 5) How does a global language effect other languages?

This paper would further discuss these basic questions regarding the notion of English as a global language.

Why do we need a global language?

It has been already discussed in the 'introduction' that the era after the 1950s is the era of globalisation where economic, social and technological developments are linking us in unprecedented ways. People need to have an extensive knowledge of the world as well as the skills and dispositions to engage with men from different cultures and countries. But different cultures have different mother tongues and therefore communication would have been impossible. According to David Crystal, in earlier times translation played an important role in such a conglomeration of cultures. Learned scholars and professional translators were hired to make the passage of ideas possible. However the situation changed after the 1950s. The formation of world organizations like the UNO (dates from 1945), UNESCO and UNICEF (both 1946), World Bank (1945), WHO (1948) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have somehow necessitated the need for some common lingua franca which would facilitate communication. Hiring translators and completely depending upon them would be a lot expensive as well as impractical. The reason being, almost all the countries of the world are gradually becoming a part of such organizations. A need to join hands for the development of the nations has arisen and therefore an implicit need for a global language has arisen equally.

The other reason that supports the need for a global language is the 'technology of modern communication' and 'technology of air transportation'. These two transformations in the 20th century have accelerated the need for a common language-

There has been never a time when so many nations were needing to talk to each other so much.

There has never been a time when so many people wished to travel to so many places.... And never has there been a more urgent need for a global language. (Crystal 14)

What makes a language 'global' or how does a language become 'global'?

In simple words, any language that gains wide popularity and is most preferred or most used in communication among people of different origins, on an international level, is said to be a 'global language'. However from Crystal's point of view, a language achieves a global status when it plays a "special role" which is recognized by every country - "To achieve such a [global] status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world" (Crystal 4). This 'special role' is carried out through two main ways.

The first way is by making a language the 'official language' of a country. It means that the official language would be used as the main medium of communication in all sectors of government - be it law courts, media, or educational and academic fields. All the important official works would be carried out in that chosen language. As a result, every citizen of the country would need to master the language as early as possible in order to avoid any inconvenience.

The second method is by giving priority to a certain language as the most important foreign-language being taught in a country. It means that the chosen language would be most taught to children as well as adults as a foreign language. This would enhance their prospects of foreign visits and travels as well as access to all domains of knowledge circulated in that foreign language. Through these two methods a language can slowly and gradually attain a 'global status'.

We also realize that a global language has little to do with native speakers. A 'global language' doesn't imply that its native speakers outnumber other language speakers. If that would have been true then Chinese would have been the global language as it is the country with the highest population. However, as it is mentioned above if a language becomes the 'official language' of more and more countries as well as achieves

a priority as the most learned foreign language, it would achieve that global status. This becomes possible for a language when it outnumbers, accumulatively, in all the three aspects of a language - as a native language, as a second language, and as a foreign language. When a language has sufficient native speakers along with speakers who use it as a 'second language' or learns it as the most preferred 'foreign language', then, naturally such language would become a 'global language'.

Why is 'English' suitable as a global language?

English is considered as a suitable global language because it fulfills most of the criteria which are considered the pre-requisites of a global language. During the last 50 to 60 years the usage of English by native and non-native speakers has, inconsiderably, increased. People from all parts of the world feel its importance in their life and want to excel it as it is the language of science, commerce, arts, knowledge, entertainment, and what not. English no more is the sole possession of native speakers. It is mastered and used by non-natives who use it either as a second language or a foreign language. The two methods of making a language 'global' are very efficiently fulfilled by 'English'. The most common classification of English into three concentric circles, as proposed by Braj Kachru would, here, be very helpful to justify the argument. Kachru divided the English speakers into three types - First is the *Inner Circle* which refers to the native speakers. This circle refers to those countries where English is the main, if not only, official or national language. English is a mother tongue for these countries. Examples are Britain, America, Australia, Canada, etc. This circle stands for the usage of English as a Native language (ENL). Second is the *Outer Circle* which refers to those countries who were once the colonies of the English native countries and where English occupies the position of an official language. That is, English rules all domains of government in such nations. Examples are India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Philippines, etc. This circle signifies the usage of English as a Second language (ESL). The third circle is the *Expanding Circle* which refers to those countries where English used to occupy a marginal position, but in the present scenario is being taught and learnt as the most preferred foreign language. It has become a part of primary syllabuses as well as other institutions to teach adults. Examples are China, Germany, Brazil, Russia, etc. Here the usage of English is as a Foreign language (EFL). These three types of English usage has made English important worldwide and therefore the best possible option as a global language. Moreover, it is the language of books, newspapers, international travels, international business, media, press, advertising, broadcasting, popular music, cinema, as well as seminar and conferences on international safety. According to Crystal (2003), three quarters of the world's mail is written in English, 80% of the information on internet is stored in English. Crystal (1997) also reports that 85% of international organizations make official use of English. About 90% of published articles are written in English. Furthermore five of the largest broadcasts - CBS, NBC, ABC, BBC, and CBC - reach a potential audience of about 300 million people through English broadcast and 85% of the international telephone conversations are conducted in English. From the above given data it can be said that English does not belong 'only' to the ENL speakers rather it "belongs to all people who speak it, whether native or non-native, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or non-standard" (Norton 409-429).

What are the reasons for the spread of English?

David Crystal suggests that a language succeeds on the global stage only when it has a strong power-base - military, political, and economical. A language depends on who its speakers are. If they are powerful and influential men on an international level, their language would also enjoy the same importance. A language dominates when it is spoken by countries with strong economic, technological and cultural bases. According to Crystal:

Without a strong power-base, of whatever kind, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication Language exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users. When they succeed, on the international stage, their language succeeds. When they fail, their language fails. (Crystal 7)

In earlier times of invasions and wars, a language gained supremacy when its speakers gained political and military supremacy. If we consider the spread of English from this aspect, we may notice that after the two World Wars the two major English speaking countries - the United States and Britain - were amongst the most

powerful and influential political powers. However, it "may take a militarily powerful nation to establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful one to maintain and expand it" (Crystal 10). Economic development of the English speaking countries during the last two centuries is also an important reason for the spread of English. At the beginning of the 19th century Britain had world's leading economy. And in the 20th century, this economic supremacy shifted into American hands, which also was an English speaking country. Moreover, most of the new communication technologies like telegraph, telephone, radio and, later on, the internet services - all were invented by English speaking people. Therefore if a person or nation wanted to have access to these new technologies they will have to learn 'English'. All these new transformations were the major reasons behind the spread of English.

How does a global language effect other languages?

In the era of globalisation a 'global language' is inevitable. Moreover, it is often considered that the presence of a global language is important and beneficial. It makes communication easy and life very mobile. It has its d-merits also. The major drawback of a global language as considered by linguistic scholars is the loss of individuality and unique characteristics. A global language plays a homogenizing effect which results in the death of local languages and vernaculars. When a global language is introduced to people they learn and master it. And once they feel compatible with it the usage of local languages on international platforms diminishes. Only the global language would be the sole ruler and only medium of communication. This would gradually result in the death of other languages which carry along with them their history, their ethnicity and their cultures. In other words only the culture of the chosen global language would flourish and considered supreme. This would further result in "linguistic triumphalism - the danger that some people will celebrate one language's success at the expense of others" (Crystal 15). The other supposed fears of a global language are that "Linguistic power" and "Linguistic complacency" would rest in the hands of a few - these mostly being the natives - thereby creating a chasm between the natives and non-natives (Crystal 16-17).

Conclusion:-

However, whatever the drawbacks or d-merits be, it is for obvious that the present scenario demands a global language. And, according to the questions discussed above, it is apparent that 'English' is the best possible option. But that doesn't mean English is the best or easiest language to learn. It's just a matter of chance that English has achieved a global status. It is more the result of natural development rather than deliberate action. Yet some other aspects also need to be discussed. Firstly, English hasn't been officially declared as a global language. There are still many countries which accept only a limited presence of English upon them.

Despite the remarkable growth in the use of English, at least two-thirds of the world population do not use it And in some countries, increased resources are being devoted to maintaining the role of other languages (such as the use of French in several countries of Africa). (Crystal 28)

Secondly, as Crystal mentioned that 'economic supremacy' is an important factor for the dominance of a language, there are other countries, too, which are emerging as new economic powers. One example is China.

With China's long term political stability and sustainable rapid economic development as well as the increasing exchanges in the areas of trade, culture and education between China and international society, the demand for learning to speak Chinese is in dramatic growth in various countries across the world. (Zhang 169)

According to the statistical records of China scholarship Council (2009), about 200 thousand foreign students from more than 180 countries are learning Chinese in China (Zhang). These records compel us to consider Chinese as a future competitor to English as a global language.

Lastly, a concept of "New Englishes" is emerging. When people from all around the world are learning English and speaking it, they, unknowingly make some modifications in the syntax, grammar and pronunciations of the English language. These modified and localized versions of English are known as "New Englishes" - Philippine English, Singapore English, Indian English, Nigerian English to name a few. It might be possible that rather than English in its original form, the "New Englishes" achieve the global status. In that case, even the native speakers would have to put an effort in learning and mastering this modified version.

Moreover, this version of English would have a lack of authority from any nation and will be completely claimless and people from all over the world would, unhesitatingly, accept this version. Such a language would be in the true sense global as it would belong to one and all.

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