

Position of English as a link language in India

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A- Introduction-

In the words of Bloch and Trager “A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group operates” In this era of globalization and information technology, English has a special and predominant role in the communicative sphere of the world. The English language entered into our country at the beginning of the 17th century. After the conquest of Bengal by the British East India Company, the administrative charge of the province went from the mughal Emperor Shah Alam in to the hands of the company. This transfer of power led to the establishment of the English language for administrative purposes in Bengal from where it flowed in to the whole country. By 1810, the east India Company established its supremacy in almost all the Indian provinces, with the spread of English language along with the British Empire, strengthens the foreign rule. Prior to the British control over India, these used to be two types of instructional medium in the country. The elementary school taught vernaculars and the schools of higher learning adopted classical languages as their medium .But after the establishment of British rule English also become popular as a medium of instruction through the efforts of Missionaries, no doubt were concentrated on the Vernaculars for the instructional medium. We find that prior to 1833, the elementary school teaching through the modern India languages form the bulk of missionary educational enterprise. But between 1833 and 1853 the missionary effort shifted the emphasis on secondary school’s teaching through English. The change in the emphasis was caused mainly due to the two considerations. Firstly to spread western science and literature among Indians and secondly to attract the Hindu society towards Christianity by exploring and exploiting their utilitarian motives for learning English.

During the first half of 19th century these regard a controversy over the medium of instruction and vernacular medium was ignored amidst the heated Anglicist-orientalist controversy. Macaulay’s minute paved its way in favour of English language by 1854, with the consolidation of British political power, the controversy of medium came into an end and English medium schools became popular throughout the country. Efforts of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy also contributed towards forming a favourable environment in favour of English. All these references indicate that for a variety of reasons, English remained as a medium of Education throughout the Pre-independence era. Thus in this time English language enjoyed a royal place or a place of importance. In present days English act as link language because of the prominence in school as well as university education system in India and also as a medium of expression where people don’t understand Hindi.

B- Present position-

The present position of English as a link language in India should be viewed from two angles:

I: Its place in the present school- curriculum.

II: Its role in present day India.

I: The place of English in The school curriculum :

After the attainment of independence drastic changes in our outlook took place with regards to the place of English in the school curriculum. The Government of India appointed several commissions from time to time, to study the whole structure of education and suggest measures for its movement. The issue of place of English was also considered in the commission's reports. The first important commission after the attainment of freedom was appointed by the Government of India 1948 under the chairmanship of Dr.S.Radhakrishnan. This is known as ‘The University Education Commission’ The report had delved deeper into the problems related to the study of English in our country. The commission while accepting the importance of English was not blind, to harm done by English language in our country. It wrote very clearly ‘English cannot continue to occupy the place of state language as in the past. The use of English as such divides the people into two nations, the few who govern and the many who are governed-this is a denial of democracy’ But at the same time, the commission was not in favour of abolishing English altogether from the curriculum. It gave following reasons in support of its study:

“English however, must be continued to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature, humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges we should give up-English, we would cut our self off from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge.’

From the above it is clear that The University Education Commission did not recommend to English altogether from the curriculum. The report clearly said that “our students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to university or to a vocation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge.”

In 1952, the government of India appointed another commission known as Secondary Education Commission for re-organising the structure of Secondary Education. While dealing with the place of English in the language curriculum, it supported the study of English and expressed ‘It should be recognised that even in regard to many of diversified courses of instruction as matters stand at present , a knowledge of English will be extremely useful for understanding the subject matter and for further study of the same subject.’

The commission also recommended that study of English should be given due position in secondary schools and facilities should be made available at the middle school stage:

1. Mother tongue or regional language.
2. Hindi for Non-Hindi regions and a modern Indian language for Hindi regions.
3. English (Optional)

At the secondary stage, the commission recommended the study of two languages to equalize the language load on pupils of both Hindi and non-Hindi areas.

1. Mother tongue or regional language or a composite course of mother tongue and classical language.
2. The second language to be chosen from among the following-
 - a. Hindi (for those whose mother tongue is not Hindi)
 - b. Elementary English (for those who have not studied in the middle stage)
 - c. Advanced English (Who had studied English in their middle stage)
 - d. A modern Indian Language (other than Hindi)
 - e. A modern foreign language (other than English)
 - f. A classical language.

In this formula the place of English comes after the mother tongue or the regional language. In other words, pupils of both Hindu and Non-Hindu areas were free to study English as a second language if they so desired. Only this formula would result in not having Hindi as a compulsory language in non-Hindi regions thus paving way for making both Hindi and English as permanent official languages of the country .Thus it is clear that the secondary education commission also wanted to give English an importance next after the mother tongue or regional languages.

In 1956n, the Central Advisory Board of Education examined the complex problem of the teaching of languages in relation to the needs of the country. While keeping the importance of English in view, it devised a three language formula which was simplified and approved by the conference of chief ministers in 1961.

(Mother tongue Hindi and English)

In 1964 another important Education Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. D.S.Kothari. It submitted its report in 1966.The Kothari Commission also stressed the need of continuing the of study of English as a foreign language in the following words-

‘As English will , for long time to come continue to be needed as a Library Language in the field of higher education, a strong foundation in the language will have to be laid at the school stage’ It should also be noted that the commission while proposing its modified three language formula had full consideration of the position of English in the country which is a clear form of the criteria, it laid down for preparing its language formula.

English continues and will continue to enjoy a high status so long as it occupies the principal place as the medium of instruction in Universities. Even after the regional languages replace English as the medium of higher education in universities, a working knowledge of English will be necessary for those who proceed to the university.”

Keeping this in view, the commission recommended the following three language formula:

I Language: the mother tongue or regional Language.

II Language: the official language of the union or the official language so long as it exists.

III Language: A modern Indian or foreign language (not covered under I & II and other than the medium of education)

In this formula we find English at the second position after the mother tongue or regional languages because in Hindi areas the first language will be Hindi and hence they will prefer English as their second Language. Similarly in non-Hindi areas, the first language will be the mother tongue or regional language of the area. They will also prefer to study English as their second language, keeping in view its unending importance and also due to the facts that English continues to exist as an associate official language of the country for an indefinite time.

II. Role of English in Present India:

With the inclusion of Bodo, Dongri, Maithili and Santhali (92nd constitutional Amendment Act 2003) in the 8th Schedule our constitution now recognises 22 languages. Though English is not yet included in the constitution, these are special safeguards on the national conviction that all the languages spoken and written in the country have an equal prestige and opportunity for their growth and communication. English is a language which has a very important role in the present day India. let us now examine these role which English play as a link language in our country today.

C-Role of English in inter-state communication:

It goes without saying that inter –state communication is basic to our national unity and language is an important means for it. It shows that there exist an intimate link between nationalism and language. People speaking the same language can easily understand one another and this goes a long way to develop sentiments of solidarity.

After independence, our constitution examined the need of a common language and after prolonged and heated debates, it was declared in article 343 that Hindi written in Devnagri script will be the official language of union and for the first fifteen years, English will continue to be used for all the official purposes of the union. Similarly article 348 provides that English language shall be used in the Supreme Courts and the High Courts and shall be the language of the authoritative texts of Acts, Bills etc of the legislatures.

By making Hindi the official language of the union led to language controversy between Hindi and Non-Hindi regions. The non Hindi people opposed the replacement of English by Hindi. Consequently the parliament had to pass an act in 1963 for making English an “Associate official language” of the union for an indefinite period. This shows that the purpose of inter-state and Union communication, English language continues to hold its position so long as it occupies the place of associate official language of the country.

Secondly, English is the only language which is known to the educated people all over the country. It is the educated class that can create a feeling of brotherhood and unity among people of different regions. This can be done by using a language which is more popular among the educated people of the country. For this angle only English can play a vital role in national life of the country.

D-Role in the study of science and technology:

In this age of science and technology no country especially the under developed ,can remain satisfied by striking to its own language. Time has gone when education was imparted through vernaculars and classical languages. Our first Prime minister, Pt Jawaharlal Nehru had also expressed that English has become an integral part of our educational system and this cannot be changed without injury to the cause of education. Emphasising upon the importance of English in the field of science and technology, the University Education Commission also known as Radhakrishnan Has said “English However must be continued to be studied. It is a language which is reach in Literature, humanistic , scientific , and technical. If under sentimental urges, we should give up we would cut ourselves off from living stream of ever growing knowledge. English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world and we will act unwisely if we allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance. Our students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to university or to a vacation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge. It is true that our constitution, under article 351 provides for the enrichment of our official language Hindi but the fact is that no language in our country can compete with English so far as its terminology in scientific and technological field is concerned. Our constitution laid 15 years as a transitional period to start with for making a switch over from Hindi to English. Educators and scientists were concerned by the replacement English by Hindi. Their concern was quiet justified because we see that even after the expiry of 70 years from the commencement of our commencement, neither Hindi nor any of our regional language could mint suitable vocabulary which could be used in science and technology. Whatever has been done so far is quiet insufficient. Moreover the possibility of having translations of scientific and technological literature is attended by ambiguity and difficulty in understanding the newly coined terms besides the great cost involved in getting them translated.

Translation can serve only as a supplementary device to the original works of the authors. If we look at the books of science and technology that had been written in Hindi or any regional language, we find they are mixture of English and our regional languages. The technical terminology is written in English and the remaining position in the regional language. What is the use of all the mixture? All these have created a new problem resulting in developing bad language habits. The students of today neither become proficient in English nor in the regional language. He speaks a mixture writes a mixture and teaches a mixture if appointed as a teacher. So till the time our language becomes self-dependent and self sufficient, English will continue to play its role and knowledge of this language will be imperative for getting access to modern scientific and technological treasures of knowledge No one can deny the advantages that we are gaining in the field of science and technology by the study of English.

E- Role in International relation:

We are passing through an age where the national frontiers are being crossed at all times in all fields. Our contacts with other countries are getting ever more strengthened as a result of scientific and technological development that have remove barriers nature had once created between one nation and another. In the world where international cooperation and mutual understanding are matters of everyday occurrence no country can afford to remain restricted to its own national language. Restricting one's education through one's native tongue only means closing one's doors to understand each other's problems and refusal to share other's achievements. With shrinking of the globe as manifested by the more abundant penetration of the trade, communication and anxieties of nations into the domain of others and the consequent increase in the impact of any action of any government upon the interest of other nations, it has become necessary that there should be a language that is universally understood and used for establishing international relations among different countries of the world. This language is English which is known to be lingua franka of the world. In establishing diplomatic ties between India and other countries. English is the language, we have to depend upon. It is a language in which joint communiqué on economic, political or cultural relations is issued by representatives of visiting countries. All treaties and alliances are signed and executed through English language .So in the international fields also English is holding its key position. In the UNO, the member countries discuss the world issues and place their view points through English which has become a world language. There is perhaps no other language than English which is being used for promoting international understanding, goodwill, peace and co-operation among different nations of the world up to that extent.

F-Role of English in trade and commerce:

Adequate supply of essential goods is the prime necessity for a well organised social life of a country. Trade, commerce and industry all depends on it. No country is self sufficient in every field. We import from other countries what we need and export to the needy countries what we have in surplus.

Our exports are of mainly raw materials and we depend on foreign countries for most of our machinery, manufactured articles and spare parts. Even in food products we have to depend on foreign supplies. So, trade and commerce are the means through which a government obtains finance for its development plans. All these business terms are executed in English language so far as trade and commerce with foreign countries are related. At times the government has to go to the loan markets for a part of funds it needs. It has to take loans from the World Bank or IMF. All these transactions are done in English language. Thus English continues to be the language of greatest importance in trade and commerce not merely at national level but also at international levels.

Conclusion:

It is true that English can't be the link language of the masses that use either the mother tongue or the regional language for inter- communication purposes. Again it is the- educated class to which the greater opportunities for inter -region communication are possible in comparison to the uneducated masses who have little contribution or role in inter-state communication. In our struggle for freedom English had played an important role in the form of an efficient vehicle of communication of our thoughts that kept the people of India United in their struggle. Even today- English has become so much a part of our national habit that any withdrawal would be attended unusual risks although it is educationally, socially, emotionally and psychologically unsound to keep a foreign language the mean of inter - communication between persons of states.

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Reprt of Radhakrishnan Commission

Report of Kothari Commission