

‘English on Sale’ in India and China Some Comments on Linguistic Colonialism and Consumerism

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ABSTRACT

Owing to the globalization, technological expansion and economic upsurge, a great importance has been attached to English as a global language. A mighty step towards learning English by China is set to bring a change in the linguistic dynamics and a trend of learning English which is bringing forth the death of languages and changing the dynamics of job opportunities. This acutely deserves the attention of the people across the globe to find out the ways to establish a balance between the linguistic unity and the social, educational and economic equity and equality in the developing country like that of India.

This paper debates with reference to some established theories, existing hypothesis and the stark trends of using English by non-English speaking countries majorly China and India. This also further delves deeper into the limitations, reasons and benefits of using English as a common language. The paper also investigates the educational policies “why, how and what English (both as a language and identity) is on the ‘sale’ for Chinese students to bring ‘New Concepts’ brought by ‘Crazy English’ that ‘Sparks’ the educational objectives of China, both as a country and a nation state”^{*1}. There are some excerpts which compare the situations pertaining to English learning in China and India in the current scenario.

Keywords

China, India, and English

1) INTRODUCTION

The definitions given in oxford online dictionary about language could be

*1. Crazy English, Sparks and New Concept are popular English teaching centers and refresher books in China.

interpreted as a form of expression which involves majorly sounds (phonemes) and the words (morphemes) encoded by the ‘expresser’ and structured in a specific pattern so that it could be de-coded and could be analyzed by the listener(s) of the same system of the language in a social community.

Mechanical languages, machine languages or protocols are based on this concept but all of us must have convicted that a human language accounts for far more than the above explanation. Unlike India, China does not have the language diversity of that complex scale and has an indigenous lingua-franca which script wise has innate similarity among the dialects spoken across China. Europe is linguistically different but this politically permeable continent enjoys the co-existence of varied languages spoken and written across the continent. Ever changing America is the melting pot for many cultures and hence the languages of ‘Diasporas’ have undoubtedly registered their different degrees of predominance there; including English, Spanish, French, Chinese and German respectively. There is a constant and wide-spread myth associated with a maneuver in the academia that to prove English as a Lingua Franca. This has been regarded by Philipson as a form of linguistic imperialism (Philipson, 1996, 1999).

Has China & India become a ‘consumer of English’, the educational commodity, in the market of education?

2) BACKGROUND

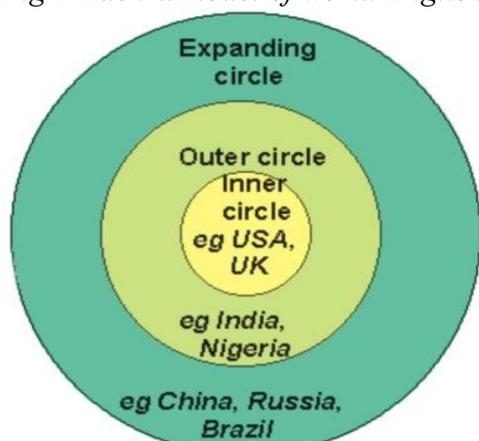
A many (培训中心) training centers and (民办学校) privately owned schools are increasingly becoming famous as an industry and gaining repute as state owned

university in China today. After entering WTO in 2001, China understood the importance of English and the country invoked the English learning spirit. Contributed by a many English websites, channels, private institutions for English teaching, English translation agencies, availability of books on varied subjects in English in the library and native English teacher jobs in the country have pushed the trend in an irreversible manner. The quality of English in China has already reached a new high. These students do pass English test to go abroad especially America and Canada. One would certainly snicker while listening to a Chinese friend with a typically USA English accent blended with the Chinese tones on the words they utter.

2) DISCUSSION

Ever since India has got independence (due to its colonial past, linguistic diversity, and its political complicacy on languages) has declared English as its second official language. It is considered almost as an English speaking country in the world. India falls in the second ring of Kachru Model of English learning countries, developed by Kachru in 1992.

Fig 1 Kachru model of world English



Source: Wikipedia

The quality of this English is considerably low in India and a many meritorious Indian students are not able to succeed in going abroad especially to the UK and the USA due to their English incompetency. There is a big lot in India who communicates in their own respective native languages or

dialects i.e. Tamil, Telgu, Marathi, Hindi, Assami and Bengoli etc. Now there is another parade going on in India for making English very much of native form, 'English in India of Indian standard'. Some other countries are on the same track including Nigerian English, Kenyan English, Pakistani English, Malaysian English, Indonesian English and Singaporean English etc.etc. And now more importantly there is China English also in the queue!

What are the educational and hence the social consequences of learning English? China is having a vast land where population varies demographically and each nationality enjoys typical culture, language and concept of life.

There is a plethora of articles and pieces of research from different scholars in the academia, and each of them trying to prove English as a lingua-franca (Phillipson, 1996; Tom. 2003; David, 2009). It could be easily perceived that China is undergoing an irreversible but forced process of accepting and inheriting English as a lingua Franca, a language of interface with other countries on the globe.

Chinese Government Policies and its Implications

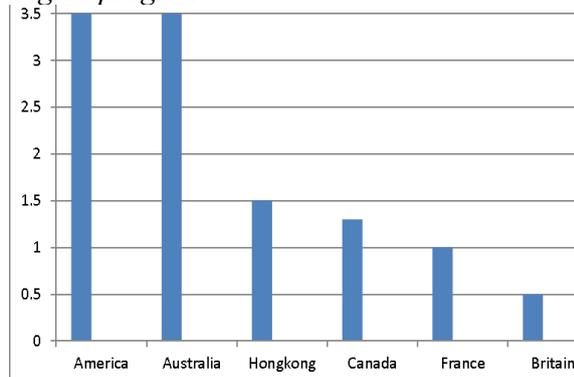
The history of foreign students coming to Modern China for studies dates back to 1950s when 33 students from east European countries went to study in China. This number has been increasing exponentially in next and coming decades. In the year 2000, the number of foreign students studying in China increased to 407,000, coming from 160 different countries from the globe (Xu and Mei, 2009). Except the neighboring countries like South Korea, Japan, Vietnam and Indonesia the majority of foreign students registered in China were mainly from the USA which was second only to South Korea in the foreign student suppliers to China in the list (People's Daily, 2009).

As per the figures produced by the ministry of Education and many media Channels in

China, English speaking countries like USA, UK Australia and Canada are the most favored destination for the Chinese students studying abroad. The exchange of talents from these countries and the trend of choosing the destination abroad especially to the English speaking countries from China tell a different story about the second language opted by the Chinese people for global outlook in the last few decades.

Since the opening up in 1978, China has been in true pursuit of the USA centric educational reforms and trends. China brought a many changes in its educational framework, including that of pedagogical and curricular, at all levels of education system. In 1980s, Fudan University, Tianjin University and Nanjing University initiated programs viz. China-America Economic law, MBA and most importantly the Sino-American cultural research centre for United States were introduced respectively with the collaboration of American universities in China. On 26 Jan, 1995 the national educational commission of China issued the policy and regulations to opening up of foreign educational institution which was further protected by law, when in 1996 the Academic Degrees Committee of State Council issued notice to help manage the Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in running Schools. Till 2003, France was the only non-native English speaking Country as the source of the Chinese foreign cooperation in running schools degree programs.

Fig 2: Top six source countries of CFCES degree program



Source: Educational Policies and Legislation in China (2009).

In 1990s, China took a series of great steps in higher education. Two major projects in this regard namely are project '211' and project '985'. The '211' project was initiated to achieve the quantitative quality of education by selecting 100 institutions from the country through opening the new disciplines to meet the new demands of the economically transformed China and cope-up with the qualitative demands of education on the international stage. The '985' project aims at achieving the goal of establishing world class universities in China. Some of the universities i.e. Peking University, Qinghua University, and Beijing Normal University have already scored the world class level in recent years. In December 2001, China joins WTO with a combined sense of fear and admiration. But to enjoy this opportunity as a success, which after the open door policy could be considered as another major breakthrough in the history of Chinese economic development policies, have been influencing China in bringing over all substantial changes in the Chinese society, and that also in the long run (HengYu, 2004). This resulted in a higher number of registrations of foreigners and hence launched new programs from the western countries in the streams of economics, commerce, finance, science and technology etc.

The chronology of these big episodes in Chinese educational policies illustrated here are the quintessential to show how English has become a big player in Chinese Education system. Nevertheless the basic education curriculum of the government directs to opt for a foreign language, and it does not specify a particular language but if quoted, most possibly reads in this order e.g. English Japanese and Russian etc.

Heng Yu (2004) has clearly detailed that after entering WTO China has been very careful about the use and abuse of its presence and constantly has attached importance to communicate with the leading nations of these international

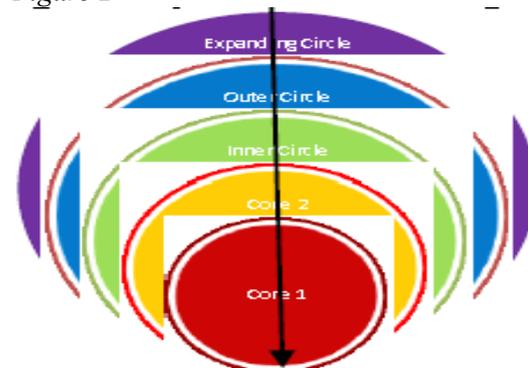
agencies. United States is undoubtedly the most dominant and influential force in the world as most of the largest companies worldwide are Americans, whereas the wealthiest few countries entirely dominate international agencies, such as the G8, World Bank, IMF, and UN. Nevertheless, globalization cannot be inimitably geared towards American interests, or just towards the interests of other wealthy nations. Although the USA is the driving force of the world economy and affecting almost every other economy on the planet yet it is also true that neither the USA, nor the West more generally, can control global economy today. China, Russia, Brazil, India, South Africa and other emerging 'Asian Tigers' are becoming influential players in the world economy. This interdependency of economy and trade should be mutually understood by the English speaking countries and they should put effort in learning the languages of different countries to better understand their markets, customers and the labor forces.

From American English to Chinese English

The 'Kachru' model divides the world into three different English speaking zones. With some modifications I have modified Kachru Model as shown below. Core 1 represents the scholars who define the purity of the language and they might come from any country, but have acquired an ideal standard of English. The merging circles at the head of the arrow shows the most ideal standard of English spoken in the world and the speakers might come from any reason and any section on the globe, particularly they come from academics. The arrow measures the degree from ideal to non-ideal level of English spoken. The direction of the arrow shows the pursuit of English level that non-native English speaking countries are willing to achieve. Each circle seems to be falling in the larger ones but are not necessarily the subset of the larger ones and are

independent set of numbers of people who fall in each section.

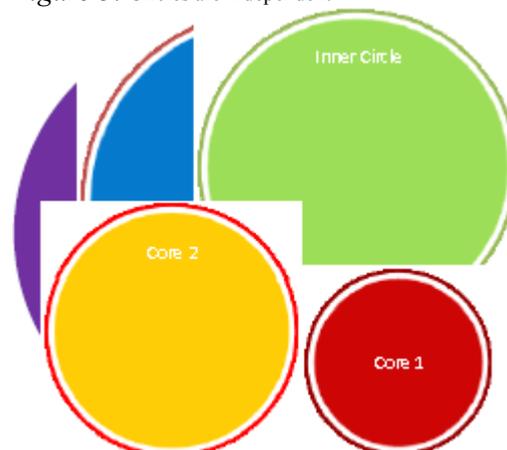
Figure 2



Redefined Kachru-model of English speakers on the globe

Which English we should choose when a many 'Englishes' are on sale? It seems funny but is a fact that a well educated Indian English graduate would find it difficult to communicate with a Chinese English graduate. In the matter of fact to some extent they would both know the words, how to write and how to read but for the 'RIGHT' Pronunciation.

Figure 3: Circles are independent



Explanations of the circles in the Model

The last but not the least, is there any choice left that can facilitate the survival of all existing languages on the globe? Should we make our ears sensitive to one type of English, per say American or British English?

The English Readiness

A big portion of Indian economy relies on BPO, KPO and other kinds of outsourced projects. These executives do work all-

round the clock and perhaps often do overtime to achieve the company targets. Chinese English could be taken as a threat to the Indian outsourcing companies. China has already brought certain changes in its visa policies and is inviting technical people who could communicate in English rather in Chinese. I have found in my research thesis that most of the Indians do find it very hard to find internship or jobs as compared to students from the other countries studying in China. As a tendency Chinese students are growing the taste of American English. Might it be business conference, university debates or the government office the Chinese have a challenging tone while talking to Indians in English all over.

The eulogizer of rudimentary imperialism especially the author's like D. Crystal (1997) and R. Phillipson's (1992) have projected the phenomenon of spread of English as a world language; who have always been glorifying the colonial attempts. "The power which is expressed in the English language and is then reinforced by English language teaching professionals around the world can be more exactly and scientifically identified as linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 1997). In response to the Alan Davies's review article 'Ironising the myth of linguisticism' (1996), Phillipson responds, "scarcely any attention has been paid to what I believe is the privileged role of culture in the modern imperial experience, and little notice taken of the fact that the extraordinary reach of classical nineteenth and early twentieth-century European imperialism still casts a considerable shadow over our own times, ¼ direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices". I differ from Crystal because he counts countries and I do count the individual, might it be nation, country or the cultures. Well, if ones everyone speaks English on the globe

we can award English as a global language and again not like pidgins!

Among American English, for example, Asian's tend to be Chinese and Koreans; among the British English however, they tend to be Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshis. It is necessary to give the vision to the policy makers that the solution to keep in pace with the developed countries through their language has very negative and far reaching consequences. Discussion on this topic is absolutely beyond the scope this essay. On the eve of hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Beijing University on May 4th, 1998 then president Jiang Zeming proclaimed and set the national goal to have world class universities. In 2006, Chinese government has also outlined major strategic tasks to turn China into innovation oriented country by the end of year 2015 (Xu and Mei, 2009).

On the eve of international mother language day the director general of UNESCO addressed this way, "Nelson Mandela once said that "if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language then that goes to his heart". The language of our thoughts and our emotions is our most valuable asset. Multilingualism is our ally in ensuring quality education for all, in promoting inclusion and in combating discrimination. Each representation of a better life, each development goal is expressed in a language, with specific words to bring it to life and communicate it. Languages are who we are; by protecting them, we protect ourselves". (Irina Bokova, 21Feb, 2012). The importance and influence of mother language cannot be underestimated in the milieu of its social, psychological and therefore educational contexts.

A research conducted by ministry of education in Ethiopia distinguishes the importance of mother language, and cites, "However, classroom observation and assessment data demonstrate that English MOI does not necessarily result in better

English learning; in fact, those regions with stronger mother tongue schooling have higher student achievement levels at Grade 8 in all subjects, including English. Students who learn in their mother tongue can interact with the teacher, with each other and with the curricular content in ways that promote effective and efficient learning. These findings are fully supported by international literature on language learning and cognitive development, which show clearly that investment in learning through the mother tongue has short, medium and especially long term benefits for overall school performance and for the learning of additional languages” (Final Report Study on medium of instruction in primary schools in Ethiopia,2006) .

Mandarin in India

In the spate of economic development, when India and China are the two among the fastest growing countries, yet are the most populated countries of the world. Business is making both the countries constantly closer. A very visionary and exceedingly profitable step for the coming generation initiated by the government of India in 2010 was implementing policies for introducing Chinese language in the Central Board of Secondary Education. "China is our powerful neighbor and emerging as a biggest consumer of global resources. We cannot wish it away, “The best way to introduce China in India is to introduce its language at primary level so that our kids develop interest and knowledge about China”, (Saibal. The Times of India. Sep 15, 2010.). After two years of robust practice, CBSE teachers failed in learning Chinese and therefore launching Chinese language in the secondary school course in India is in the air now. The Chinese Education system and management bodies should take it as a serious failure and should help Indian education system and management bodies to formulate the Chinese teaching programs. "But the resource person, who

had tried his level best, discontinued mid-way as the teachers were either not interested or failed to pick up the language. The resource person expressed his dissatisfaction at the progress of the teachers and after three-odd weeks, the training had to be discontinued," said a senior CBSE official on the condition of anonymity” (Manash, The Times of India. 2012). Two main reasons why Indians failed to learn Chinese are: (1) Chinese is linguistically different from Indian languages. (2) The Chinese does not know Hindi. The second reason is a part of solution but this is a stronger reason why Chinese language experts from China are not invited on big numbers to India to teach Chinese. Even if invited, owing to the language barrier, the teachers from China would not be able to teach in the class. Two universities in China has introduced Hindi language as a course, includes Beijing University and Nanjing University. These steps are positive but we have miles to go.

An Observation

Population: The International students audit classes taught in the Monsoon and winter semesters at BNU, 2011-2013.

Sample: It was 33 students class which included (fresher only) 14 students from foreign countries and 19 from China.

Site: Room no 217, teaching building number 02, Beijing Normal University, Beijing

Students were explained about Tai Chi. At the end of the class students were asked to answer the questions instantly in the class Q) what comes to your mind the instance you hear the word Tai Chi? Later the students were asked to categorize the words into three groups. The categorization of the words came in conflict with Chinese students who politely opposed for putting ‘Zhang San Feng’ (the founder of Tai Chi) and ‘Old’ in one category.

It should be noted that the cultural words are potential vectors---having both mass

and direction. Since it is having mass therefore it must be associated with energy as stated in the uncertainty principle in Quantum mechanics.

Chinese English and ‘邯郸学步’

There are a many foreign English teachers in China and there are a many foreign returned, especially from America. It is a fact that the Chinese students give utmost importance to the American pronunciation of each word. Since Chinese and English are linguistically polar apart the English language learning and acquisition takes a lot of time for the English learners in China. The funny, fact is that even the highly learned professor would keep rectifying their pronunciation in the class, provided if any native English speaker is sitting there. In their extremely rigorous persuasion of perfect pronunciation, Chinese English language learners in fact become deaf to other English accents of the world. This might be the cause why Chinese English is awarded as one of the worst in the world (James T .The Wall Street Journal, 2011).

China should make English indigenous and should avoid giving too much importance to the USA brand English pronunciation but the listening ability of the English language learners. This would save the students to remain creative in their educational goal.

Language learning must not be mechanical. To avoid the consequence of 邯郸学步 (Han Dan Xue Bu) , story that teaches us to avoid aping! Speaking in American tone cannot make ones English perfect but the clarity of the sound, especially keeping in mind the larger and varied audiences. The educational policies should calculate the number of Chinese students learning English and the number of Foreigners learning Chinese. Owing to the tradition of calligraphy, Chinese English language teachers also teach English calligraphy to their taught and consequently most of the Chinese students are having very good handwriting. Another special characteristic

that counts for the good writing skill by Chinese students is that reading ability in Chinese language depends on writing ability, and therefore any Chinese who is learning English do always have very good writing skills (Desimone. 2005).

Fig 5 ‘Crazy English Teacher’, Li Yang



Source: Amber R. (2008)

3) CONCLUSION

The English is on ‘whole sale’ throughout the world; let it be Korea, Thailand, China, Nigeria or India, the craze of English is widespread. Private institutions are delivering English, especially the English for business and trade. Nevertheless, countries like Japan, Korea, Germany, Britain and France are the best set examples that are both developed and have kept their linguistic identity intact. If economic development determines the spread of language then America should start learning Asian languages today, because like any other country in the world America too could not escape economic recession.

Presently when China has already joined the race in notarizing and making English indigenous, i.e. China English, as the epithet is given by the scholars, it is also deliberately posing threat some way or other for one of the most peculiar and special language of the world, which survived a many odds in the due course of time. Perhaps now is struggling with English in its own nation-state China---The Chinese language.

Learning is the noblest action and the teachers and taught both should avoid being ‘crazy’ in learning English or any subject, but concept is the key. English is already well spread in the world but it has

spread like cloud which has superficially floated in the people and has never gone deep in the masses. How many Indians could speak English? India is awarded as English speaking country in the world. The fact is, India is a country of villages and the majority of the population from the villages could not communicate in English and this scene is no different from China. The research in the academia never counts the rural population and the developing countries like India, China Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil and Bangladesh factually are both the victims and the culprits of English language imperialism. In this regard could English be truly considered as a world language?

In this globalized world where everyone has to communicate with each other and everyone would encourage for having a common language to interact with, to trade with and to exchange ideas with every person in this world. We need a common stage of interface. But in a bigger perspective we must understand that language is not only for communication but being an integral part of a culture is a kind of identity of an individual. Due to the shift of the global economy from goods and services economy to the information based economy more specifically due to e-based economy, and era when people even need to talk across the paradigms, the English always gains the name. Countries of the world are competing with each other at many fronts, and there is a burgeoning demand of a language of interface between linguistically diversified worlds. This demand does not come very forcefully but comes unconsciously or consciously pushing from the academia to prove English as a Lingua Franca.

It should be noted that the real concept of technology or culture is better and deeply understood if it is taught in the mother language of the student. Since research shows that native language sustains creativity, if English is continuously forced in the education system then it would take China and India relatively more time to

become a research oriented country and a knowledge based economy.

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