

WOMEN AND ENGLISH IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD

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Abstract:

The sweeping role of media has connected the whole world easily. With the advent of globalization, the world and its people are coming closer and with this emerged the need for one common language for all. Due to the British colonization almost all over the world, the one language that had a global reach was English, so impulsively it became the international language. The globalised world has witnessed the progress of women and English equally. Women were marginalized and were treated as subordinates in various cultures. With globalization and subsequently the propagation of the English language, came awareness to women about their rights. Now, they are not considered subordinates as they know what their constitutional rights are, can express themselves to a larger audience and can fight against injustice with more confidence. The knowledge of English has empowered women in their day to day activities like reading instructions, interacting with people of different nations and move ahead in their respective careers. This paper involves the study of the association between the development of women and English in the globalized world. It will also discuss linguistic genocide and the systematic breeding of the English language all over the planet.

English has undergone a sea of change since its inception. It is said that if a language does not change over time it is considered to be a dead language. In this sense English has proven itself to be a dynamic language. It is very much of a ‘borrowing language’ with an immensely contrasting terminology. Through ages English has constantly enriched itself by borrowing words from different languages. With the passing of time it has evolved from the use of “Old English,” to “Middle English,” to “Early Modern English,” to present day “Modern English”. If we take up Chaucer or Shakespeare, we would find that though the language used is English, it is quite different from the English that is spoken, read and taught today. This shows that the usage has transformed a great deal with the passage of time. It has modified in terms of language elements like spellings, vocabulary, grammar, form and structure.

The English dictionary is continually getting voluminous with every new edition. Either it takes from other languages or it makes some changes in itself. Words like ‘chutney’, ‘guru’, ‘jungle’, ‘karma’, ‘loot’, ‘mantra’, ‘papad’, ‘pundit’, ‘yaar’ and ‘yoga’ have been added to the Oxford English Dictionary and are used frequently in English sentences. Alterations have been made in the usage of the English words as well. The word ‘cheater’ used to be an aberration once, but today it is a part of the English language. Similarly ‘anyways’ is used in place of ‘anyway’ frequently, and it is clear enough that eventually it will be incorporated with the language. In the words of Eddy Peters: “Not only does the English Language borrow words from other languages, it sometimes chases them down dark alleys, hits them over the head, and goes through their pockets.” (Denham 368)

Globalization is one of the reasons of the augmentation of English. Not only has its worldwide use benefitted the world economy, it has also enriched English as a language. Globalization is one reason that this language has reached every nook and corner of the world and has become an international language. It has played an enormous role in taking the language to the masses. It has led to a process of international integration such as the mixing of cultures, ideas and technology. Globalization has brought the whole world together. The sweeping role of media has connected the whole world easily. With the advent of globalization, the world and its people are coming closer and with this arises the need for one common language for all. Due to the British colonization almost all over the world, the one language that had a global reach was English, so it naturally became the global language. This has led to the dissemination of English language throughout the globe. In the present era, competence in English has become one of the basic necessities of life. According to an article by Dorie Clark for the *Forbes*, English is:

moving from “a marker of the elite” in years past to “a basic skill needed for the entire workforce, in the same way that literacy has been transformed in the last two centuries from an elite privilege into a basic requirement for informed citizenship.”

Earlier, Latin and French were the languages of the world, still they could not reach the masses due to the not so far reach of the media. These languages were just meant for the educated or the elite class. It was assumed that Latin would be the language of the world, but eventually it had lost itself in the mist of time.

It is apparent that English is spreading, but we can see that the language changes its use, tone and accent with location. English has attained a distinct position in many countries now. In countries like the USA, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and many of the Caribbean countries, English is used as a first language. In countries like Nigeria, India, Ghana, Singapore it is being used as an official language and has become the second language there. David Crystal in his essay *The Future of Englishes* has stated that there are 400 million people in this world who speak English as a first language, 400 million have learned it as their second language and around 600 million use it as foreign language. Thus a total number of around 1,400 million people are in touch with English, which is a quarter of the whole world population. (Crystal 9)

Having reached the masses, we observe that so many Englishes have been evolved out of the language of England. A variety of Englishes are being taught in various countries. Africans have totally different English with a different grammar than the original Queen’s English. Nicholas Ostler in this connection writes that English as a lingua franca has probably reached the inevitable stage of entropy where it will evolve into multiple, mutually unintelligible ‘dialects’ like Latin had become. With the passing of time English will lose its original form and will be

known as Indian English, African English, Australian English, American English, British English or Kenyan English.

A report by the British Council website states that, “By 2020 ... two billion people will be using [English] – or learning to use it” (Robson 2). The awareness of this language is a must to develop as an individual in the world today. It forms the base of economic activities as it becomes the language of the great business magnates when they deal within multinational companies at an international level. Even if we move to southern states in India, or go abroad, basic knowledge of English is a must. Even to understand the instructions written on a medicine bottle or to know its expiry date, one must be acquainted to the language. It proves that the knowledge of English is a must for survival. With the growing popularity of English, the language has also become accessible to the layman. In this technology centered age where cell phones and computers have become an integral part of the life of all, the comprehension of the English language has become vital. To use a mobile phone and understand its features properly people must be acquainted with the language.

Due to the prevalent use of English and the necessity to know it, learning and teaching English has become a very important part of everyday existence. English Language Teaching, popularly known as ELT (an initiative by the British Council), is working upon training the teachers of English language. The British council website maintains that through its “qualifications, training courses, networking events and resources, [they] support teacher trainers and educators to develop their English teaching and language skills”. We can see the growing reach of this language all over the world. The British Council has formed the ELT which trains the English teachers, and thus is preparing a whole team for the better propagation of the language all over the globe.

Teaching English has become a sort of business today. With the emerging trend to speak and therefore learn English it has become a challenge for the sustenance of the ‘correct’ form of the language. The language is facing various challenges from a generation enthusiastic to talk in English just to flaunt their competence in the language, without bothering to find out whether it is correct or not. The social media is full of such examples of erroneous English. If we look into certain examples we will see that people constantly use the flawed form of the language without being aware of it. If they have to ask each other “How are you?” they will ask “How is you?” or if they have to use the phrase ‘hats off’, many of them call it ‘heads off’. Sentences like “Will you friendship me?” and “Howz u?” are being used unimpeded by people on the social media. The use of words like ‘bestest’ has become rampant by the people fervent to speak in English. With the passage of generations we will notice that this ‘incorrect’ English will eventually become a part of the usage of the language. To worsen the problem there are some ‘Spoken English Institutes’ opening up in small and big towns alike that tend to make money by teaching whatever English they think is ‘correct’. Though globalization has helped a great deal to multiply the reach of this language, but simultaneously it has become a threat for the existence of its precise form. David Graddo in his paper “The Future of English Next - Envisioning the future world of English language learning” reflects that:

Globalisation was affecting both the way business was done and the motives and methods for learning English. FoE identified such trends as outsourcing of call centers in India, the impact of the internet, the emergence of new educational hubs in Asia and came to the conclusion that there was now a new global dynamic in which multiple authorities and standards competed in different markets and territories. Control of the

world language had already slipped from the grasp of native speakers - indeed, it was no longer so clear who the native speakers were, where they lived and worked, and what their interests were.

Anyhow, with this constant evolution of English, the modern world has also witnessed the progress of women in almost every field. The development of English and the development of women went hand in hand. The marginalization of women around the globe through the ages has degraded now. With globalization and subsequently the propagation of the English language, came awareness to women about their rights. This has resulted in their further empowerment as now they know what their constitutional rights are, can express themselves to a larger audience and can fight against injustice with more confidence. They feel more poised and secure with the expertise over the global language. This is the power of the language that merely the skills in its usage make a laywoman more assertive and self-reliant. The spread of education in English among young girls is a superb change in our developing society. It is a common feature in India to see girls scoring higher than boys in secondary and higher secondary exams. Not only for the purpose of education or professional goals, the knowledge of English has empowered women in their commonplace activities as well. Dorie Clark in his article “English - The Language of Global Business?” for *Forbes* discloses a study conducted by the Education First (EF) which reveals that:

Women speak better English than men – in almost every country worldwide. Increasing numbers of women are attending college, and they’re often over-represented in humanities classes compared to men ... Women are speaking better English, and may find themselves well positioned to succeed in the global economy.

Moreover women comprehend and learn any new language at a swift pace as compared to men. An article by Anne Merritt in *The Telegraph* asserts this fact.

According to a 2008 study of young learners at Northwestern University, girls and boys process language differently. The study revealed that, when learning language, girls’ brains show greater activity in the areas used for language encoding. [...] [W]hile girls can process an abstract piece of language more efficiently, boys need some sensory reinforcement to process the data.

Women are able to absorb the language at a better pace than men. They are the active receptors of any new language which makes it easy to teach them English and empower them. They use this language to come out of their restricted zones and become a better individual motivating the people around them. As women are the better talkers they can easily mould the thinking of others. It does not mean that it is only the English language that has empowered them but it is one of the crucial reasons that have made their approach a multi-dimensional one.

With the comprehension of the English language, women developed an understanding of the sexual politics of the world. This awareness has brought a great deal of knowledge to deal with the situation and has urged them to move ahead in their respective fields. Earlier the fact that women could handle business issues and politics was laughed upon by women and men alike. But today if we look around we find that the scenario has changed and a number of women have attained the top position in the corporate world. In India there are a number of women who are the CEOs of top companies and *Business Today* names them the most powerful women in India: Chanda Kochhar (MD and CEO of ICICI bank), Shikha Sharma (CEO of Axis Bank), Vinita Bali (Brittannia Industries), Kiran Mazumdar Shaw (CMD, Biocon Ltd.), Naina Lal

Kidwi (HSBC India), Zia Mody (Managing Partner, AZB & Partners), Renu Sud Karnad (MD, HDFC), Mallika Srinivasan (Chairman & CEO, TAFE Ltd.), Swati Piramal (Vice Chairperson, Piramal Enterprises), Preetha Reddy (Executive vice chairperson, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise), Shobhana Bhartia (Chairperson, HT Media) and the list goes on with such women who have reached the topmost heights of their career. In the world of sports we see players like Sania Mirza, Mary Kom and Saina Nehwal relentlessly achieving the pinnacle of success. Often the competence in English has contributed in a big way and has been crucial to their growth. In the modern globalized situation, where the big business giants or sportswomen have to interact with people all over the world, they definitely do need one common language of communication, and that one language is English. My personal experience is that knowing English provides confidence to women. The women who were earlier not considered befitting for the higher posts in the corporate world bask in the self-reliance provided by this language. Apart from the corporate world, we find women coming out of their homes as well as their shells. They are provided with equal educational opportunities, and are being sent to English medium schools, in particular. Now their vision is broader as they can analyze adverse situations with an extensive point of view. Today, we see women managing both the domestic and professional fronts efficiently. It's not essential only for the women who leave their homes to have the skills over English language. Woman as a home maker also needs to be equipped with English as a language. According to a Bulgarian proverb, "the more languages you know, the more you are a person". English acts as simply an add-on to their native language and national language. Being multi-linguistic simply adds to a person's awareness. Many great women in the world's history have been those who had the grasp over many languages. In her book *Cleopatra: Egypt's Last and Greatest Queen* the author talks about the life of Cleopatra. In the context of her education she writes:

Reports that she knew as many as nine languages fluently and could move from one to another without effort may be exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is true that she was the only Ptolemy ever to learn to speak Egyptian, and she was one of the few members of her family able to converse with neighboring dignitaries in their own tongue. Her language skills made her useful in political discussions. It also earned her the respect and affection of the Egyptian people living outside the Greek influence of Alexandria. (Blackaby 9)

Language became her powerful tool to extend the political relations of her land with the adjacent lands and was the key ingredient in the making of one of the world's most powerful queen. In the present context we see that even as a homemaker the woman has to handle the home front and the kids. She will be able to provide better opportunities and training to her kids if she is cognizant of the English language as she will be connected to the whole world and will be fully conscious of all the recent trends and developments. So even for a home maker it is essential to be aware of this global language. In the words of Mark Amidon, "Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery." The periphery of our brain increases with more and more ideas from all around the world. And to get those ideas from all over the world a language is required that has its reach in all the countries and that language is English. A woman is the nurturer of the future generation as she is closer to her children than any other member of the family. She will have to be empowered and aware of the happenings in the world so that she can shape up the wisdom of her children i.e. the future generation. The English language emboldens her to shape up the next generation. Thus in a subtle way this global

language allows a woman to impart better knowledge. In an article by Sussanna (the author of *Language is Music*) at the website fluentin3months.com says that:

When women speak more than one language, not only do they have more employment opportunities, therefore raising family incomes, but their children (both male and female) are more likely to speak another language. In general, mothers spend more time educating their children than fathers do. Educate a woman and you educate a family or group of people [...] It's not that educating males in foreign languages is not important, it is. The point is that there's a serious multiplier effect when women are educated that doesn't occur in the same degree when men receive the same education.

With the passage of time we have seen women becoming more and more vested and rather I would say they have become better than their male counterparts. Sussanna further puts that bedtime stories in a foreign language is an impactful way for the kids to learn languages. While talking about foreign languages I here give more importance to the English language because this is the language of the world and in India it is the third language the woman learns – Hindi and her native language being the two languages already known to her. This is one step towards the learning of more languages and what is better than learning the language of the globe—a language through which one can connect to the world at a large scale.

With English becoming the lingua franca, we fail to notice the fact that this dissemination of English all over the world is gradually resulting in the waning of other languages. English being the language of the powerful is being preferred by women and men alike. Though it has benefitted the womenfolk to move ahead in their field, but it also has resulted in the systematic killing of other languages. Rather than learning more languages we stop our learning to this one language. Being a multi-linguist means having the knowledge of more than one or two languages. It can be any number of languages and we should never stop the process of learning new languages. A lot of modules are there in India and other countries that allow us to learn more and more languages. Unwittingly, by just speaking the language, we have started to follow the English culture as well. Without our knowledge, we have become the tools of the propagation of the European culture. The task which the Europeans began ages ago by the colonization of the world is still in progress, but in a very subtle way.

Learning of English is no doubt empowering but it is essential that we simultaneously strengthen our native languages. Being a multi-linguist is always beneficial rather than achieving perfection in just one language. We do not know that by speaking English only and giving a blind eye to other languages, we are naively committing linguistic genocide. Systematically, we are killing our very own languages. The younger generations today are not aware of their own culture as much as they are aware of the Western culture. The learning of English should not be indoctrination, rather it should be erudition. This generation should be taught English language with their native languages otherwise a time will come when the only language that they would have learnt will be English. Subsequently the significance of the English language will be lost. As David Graddol states in the Proceedings of the Going Global: The UK International Education Conference:

Fears that the spread of English will threaten local languages may prove to be misplaced. In the next phase of globalization we are likely to see a revival of national languages and local identities - not so much as a backlash against globalization but because each country is finding it needs

to develop its own national brand and ‘unique selling point’ in the global market for tourism, educational services and outsourcing. In other words, the well-recognized tension between global and local is creating a market pressure towards the maintenance of local linguistic identities. The question of the next decade is not ‘Have you got English?’ but rather, ‘Of course, you have English, but what else can you offer?’

We should be wary of the fact that in the coming times English may not hold the same esteem that it holds today. We should be prepared for such times and should have adequate understanding of our own language and culture. Nowadays we see the fervor for the Sanskrit language in the western countries. Many universities in the United States of America, Germany, Australia, France, Italy, Russia and many other countries include the Sanskrit language in their curriculum. Since Jones’s lecture at the Royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta (1786) many western countries have shown keen interest in the study of the language. In the lecture he said that “the Sanskrit language ... is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either; yet bearing to both of them a strong affinity” (Holtzman 39-40). It might be possible that with the passage of time a new language emerges to be the face of the global civilization.

In a nutshell I would like to say that English and women have shown considerable development with the impact of globalization. The English language has become a significant and fundamental means of emancipation of women but we should not forget the fact that we are leaving our native languages and culture far behind in this rat race to learn English only. Rather than the expertise in one language, that is English, it is very much important to be multi-linguist for the overall growth of an individual. Women and men should imbue themselves with the learning of other languages as well. S/he should not be reliant on the usage of a specific language for their development. It is high time we started the study of our own languages with the same enthusiasm as we do for English. For the overall development of an individual and a culture the study of English and the native languages should go hand in hand. In the forthcoming time any language can attain the status that English has achieved today.

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