

COLONIALISM AND IMPERIALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of European imperialism and colonialism was to expand economic and power base of European nations to many countries across the globe and assert superiority over them. Later, colonisation gave rise to a language hierarchy in which the languages of the colonisers, the British in particular, were imposed as the most prestigious languages and came to dominate the administrative and mercantile structure of each colony.

INTRODUCTION

Colonial language practices also brought about the demise of many languages and the expansion of their languages. For example, the influence of British colonialism has been affecting the status of English language even today in the then colonized parts of the world and also other parts of the world. With the expansion of British Empire, English was spread to every nook and corner of the world and now it is used throughout the world.

Today, English is considered a global language. The imperialism of English language is clearly seen in modern world as a result of the British colonialism which began five centuries ago. Moreover, the dominance of America at present also carries the status of English language forward. The imperialism of English language, because of Britain in the past and America at present, has influenced the world remarkably.

This paper explores the impact of the European colonialism, in terms of societal transformation, education, economy, culture, language and science etc, particularly British colonialism on English language and how English language was spread every nook and corner of the world and how English has become a dominant and international language today with the roots of British colonialism and also the dominance of America in the modern world.

When we turn the pages of history, we find colonialism in every sphere of this world in the past. Colonialism is the establishment, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. It means the expansion of a nation's sovereignty over foreign territories through forcible occupation. As a result, the social structure, government and economy of the colony are changed by the colonizers. The colonisers exploit the resources of

colonies and impose their culture and language on these colonies.

European colonialism began in the fifteenth century and reached its culmination point in the late nineteenth century. At the height of European colonialism, more than three quarters of the earth belonged to the European countries—Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany. These colonial powers were interested in increasing their own political power and exploited the colonies' resources. Most of the indigenous people of colonial territory were oppressed and enslaved by the occupying power. At the same time, they were forced to give up their cultural heritage and assimilate to the colonizers' culture. This strategy is known as culture colonization which means manipulating the colonized peoples' minds. The colonial powers believed that a colonized nation which adopted and admired western culture would no longer resist the colonizers' occupation. In British colonies, for example, the colonized population had to convert to Christianity, learn the English language and read English literature in schools. Consequently, they adopted western values and the colonizers were able to rule by consent rather than violence. Colonial powers always argued that third world countries were inferior and needed western help and assistance in order to gain moral integrity and economic wealth. They treated indigenous people as uncivilized barbarians and these racist stereotypes of colonial discourse can still be found in science and technology, literature and mass media.

When we look at the list of former European colonies, it is a rather long one. There are the so-called settler countries such as Australia and Canada, the non-settler countries such as India, Jamaica, Nigeria, Senegal and Sri Lanka and the countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe, which were partially settled by colonial populations. These countries were influenced by European colonialism in terms of language, literature, culture and science particularly British colonialism. That is the reason for the development of these countries and also they adopted English language which was a boon in disguise for these countries to communicate with America and Europe and also to have trade and business relations with them.

In the sixteenth century, European powers began to occupy the Indian sub-continent mainly Portugal, the Netherlands, France and England. In 1756, The British East India Company was founded and later they expanded their supremacy over India. English language was introduced in Indian sub-continent for administration, trade, business etc. Concerning the integration of western values in Indian culture, it is conspicuous that the British influence is still omnipresent in the Asian sub-continent. The reason for this can also be found in the persistence of the English language. Many Indians are conversant with the English language because the British colonialists intended to export their values and culture by teaching the Indian population their language. The British colonialism had impact on Indian literature and education. Indian writers began to write poetry, short stories and novels in English. Great writers, Rabindranath Tagore, R. K. Narayan, Salman Rushdie etc, wrote poetry and novels in English and won the hearts of people at international level. English was introduced in schools and colleges as a second language but now it has become a medium of instruction. Undoubtedly, the British colonialism had its impact on Indian sub-continent.

From seventeenth century to twentieth century, the African continent was with different pieces representing the colonial possessions of various European kingdoms including France, England,

Germany and Belgium. During this period, until World War I, European powers scrambled to divide Africa amongst themselves, in a historical colonial movement that left lasting impressions and far-reaching consequences for Africa. Three major impacts of colonialism in Africa are native ethnic tension and violence, long lasting racial oppression and wide spread poverty. Native ethnic tension and violence due to colonialism exists because of poorly drawn international boundaries. When the Europeans arbitrarily divided Africa, it was with no concern that native tribes and language groups were being separated into different colonial settlements which sometimes contained enemy groups. Colonialism also resulted in ethnic violence by introducing the concept of social hierarchy. A current example of these long lasting effects in the present day is the well known conflict between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes in Rwanda which was created and eventually exacerbated by colonialism. A long lasting impact of colonialism in Africa is racial oppression particularly in South Africa where the colonizers followed the system of apartheid, just recently ended. Apartheid was a legal racial segregation system in South Africa based on traditional tribes. They were segregated based on race and native blacks were excluded from citizenship and forced to live on government appropriated lands based on tribe. Whites were given superior education, housing, jobs and medical care. The system was completely illogical, with ten percent of the population controlling the other ninety percent, but the process was purely colonial in its roots (Blundell, 2004). Widespread poverty and unequal distribution of wealth is another long lasting impact of colonialism in Africa. Essentially, colonialism forced the continent into modern agricultural and industrial capitalism. Native Africans had to produce what they don't consume and consume what they don't produce. Of course, the European influence was not entirely without benefit: in fact, colonialism introduced modern education system, medicine and infrastructure. Particularly in the British colonies, English was introduced in the major part of Africa. Later, the countries, followed English language, became powerful countries because they had relations with Britain, America and Indian sub continent and used technology, science, medicine, education system of western people. Now, other countries in Africa, ruled by France, Germany, Spain, are also following English language in education, trade, business, science and technology. In this way, Africa had the impact of European colonialism.

Like Africa and Indian sub continent, Caribbean islands and South American colonies were also influenced by the European colonialism. In British colonies, English language was introduced in education, administration etc. America, Australia and Canada had the same impact of colonialism and finally they adopted English language as their mother tongue. The dominance of English was remarkable during the British colonialism and the imperialism of English language is still evident in the modern world followed by colonialism.

Now, let us have a glance at the impact of English language in the modern world followed by colonialism: Language plays a decisive role in any society and language has strong relationship with society and culture. The concept of the inseparable linkages between language, society and culture, which ensure economic subsistence of society, is important in a consideration of the social and cultural impact of English as international language because it concerns the relationship between the international spread of English across national boundaries and the many groups of people within their own societies, each with distinct traditional languages and ethnic traditions, since the beginning of colonialism around five hundred years ago and to the present

age of globalization. Phillipson (1992, 166) views the spread of English as a global language as repressive since it not only substitutes and displaces other languages but also imposes new mental structures on learners. These mental structures are possibly the ideologies that westerners use to justify their own culture and impose these ideas on others. He sees English learning and culture as inseparable, given that he sees modernization and nation building as being a logical process of English language teaching.

There is a growing realization that English is adopted by people who speak it as a second language and not as something being imposed from the outside anymore. David Crystal (1992) noted that non-native speakers of English represent more than two-thirds of its potential speakers. Swales (1993, 284) emphasized that: internationalism favours no nation nor gives any permanent credit for the length of membership in a global association. Therefore we have to concede that it no longer makes any sense to differentiate between the native speaker and non-native speaker. Similarly Walker (2001,1) reports that: English is currently regarded as the world's principal international language, As a result there are now more exchanges between non-native speakers of English than between non-native speakers and native speakers. Thus, it could be fair to say that English no longer belongs to any particular group of people. Kachru (1982) admitted that 'for the first time a natural language has attained the status of an international language.

In Africa, English has become a highly influential language though some countries in Africa were ruled by France, Italy, Spain etc. In this modern world, African countries are following English language particularly, South Africa, Nigeria and Zimbabwe have adopted English as their own language. In South African context, English has become a prominent language and influenced the country in different ways and to different degrees by processes of adaptation within the country's various communities. Presently, English is established throughout South African society, amongst individuals from a variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Especially, amongst the educated, English functions as a lingua franca and is a primary language of government, business and commerce. Educationally, it is a compulsory subject in all schools and is the preferred medium of instruction in most schools and tertiary institutions. In terms of societal influence, it is clear that English has spread far beyond the domain of those of British origin. Amongst the African majority, English has typically been seen as the language of liberation and black unity. The initial spread of English amongst Africans took place during the colonial era, through mission education which enabled a high standard of English amongst a privileged minority. Subsequently, however, the apartheid policy in general and the discriminatory Bantu education policy in particular, resulted in a poor acquiring context, with restricted access to English and little opportunity to develop appropriate abilities in the language. Consequently, a major educational and societal challenge has been to improve access to English amongst the African majority. Amongst whites as a whole, 89% appear to have a speaking ability in English. For coloureds whose traditional language was Afrikaans, English has become increasingly influential since the early nineteenth century. 51% of coloureds had speaking knowledge of English. For South Africans of Indian origin, there has been considerable language shift towards English which has almost completely replaced the traditional Indian languages as a home language. Census figures (1991) indicate that 99% of South Africa's Asian population know English. English has also had a strong influence on the languages of South Africa and an enormous stock of English words has been adopted into Afrikaans and the African languages.

The mixing of English and another indigenous language is perhaps the strong indication of the impact of English.

Indeed Smith noted that English was the language most frequently used in international trade, diplomacy and tourism. Something more needs to be said about why English continues to maintain its pre-eminent position as the official language of countries like Nigeria, what effect this has on the people's culture, and the role English language in a multicultural context such as Nigeria. Bisong argues that, in Nigeria, English is no longer perceived as the imperial tongue that must be mastered at all costs. Nigerians adopted English as their own language though they had local languages. In Nigeria, the English language gained higher prominence in literary activity, the indigenous languages got consigned to minimal usage and became visible mainly in the informal and immediate culture related domains of writing.

In Asian continent, The British colonialism had deep impact on Indian sub continent. The British changed the economy, administration, trade and business of India and introduced English language but later it became a blessing in disguise for Indians in the development of the country. Indians began to write literature in English and now they are treating English as their second language. There is a great demand for English medium education in India and also India is producing well qualified English teachers not only for domestic teaching but also for teaching in foreign countries. English is replacing Hindi in some aspects and it is used in administration, education, information technology, trade and commerce. No doubt, there is inseparable relationship between India and English. Indians are getting opportunities in teaching, medicine, information technology etc at international level because of English language. Leading up to the country's independence in February of 1948, the high standing afforded English came increasingly under attack as Sri Lankans gained political voice and asserted that the colonial language excluded many native people from social opportunities and advancement. Simultaneously, the globalisation of commerce and culture along with the competing assertions of political rights by the country's ethnic communities increasingly insist English- along with Sinhala and Tamil- play a prominent role in the country. The government of Sri Lanka has recently been promoting English in its standard form as a neutral link language between the island's ethnic groups. Sri Lankans had great incentive to use English. Prior to this colonial period, one's occupation was determined by his caste and changing social position was tremendously difficult. But the economy changed with the opening up of plantations and non-traditional employment became more common with the establishment of a modern bureaucracy together with the expansion of secular education. (Fernando, "English" 190). Along with these changes, English became the language of government administration, law, advanced secular education, and commerce. The study of English, therefore, offered considerable material advantages for Sri Lankans. English was a passport to high paying, privileged careers and soon a localized professional class emerged through the English educational system. English in the Philippines plays a functional role making it possible for the diverse linguistic groups to communicate with each other, but its main appeal could be in improving the social and economic prospects of Filipinos and this could be the main reason why a generally positive attitude towards English prevails. Crystal (1997, 49) points out that: The Philippines became independent in 1946, but the influence of American English remains strong. And as this country has by far the

largest population of the English-speaking states in the region, it makes a significant contribution to world totals. English not only improves employment prospects locally, but also in the Overseas Filipino Worker system. The Philippines has also established a good reputation in the software business, and is also a part of globalisation which is no longer restricted to tangible goods and natural resources, but also increasingly to human capital in which English plays an important role. The countries Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Korean countries are also using English widely in their communication, education etc. China, Russia and Japan are also learning English and using widely keeping in view the great demand for English language at international level.

After independence, countries with predominantly Creole-speaking populations in the Caribbean (Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago), South America (Suriname, Guyana) and Oceania (Vanuatu, Papua Guinea, Solomon Islands) generally adopted English language inherited from their coloniser as the instructional medium in schools. As in Africa, the continuation of colonial practices was due to attitudinal factors- most people believed that their native language (Creole) was a lesser language and thus not a viable means of instruction; its adoption as an official language would obstruct access to modern science, technology and information. In colonies such as Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua in which English emerged as the dominant European language alongside an English-influenced Creole, the use of the Creole language in even as restricted an area as religious instruction was ignored due to lack of awareness of the existence of Creole as a distinct language variety. America and Canada have also adopted English as their own language and English is used widely throughout the world because of the dominance of America in the modern world. Like this, the impact of English language on this contemporary world is obvious because the British colonialism had the roots in the major part of the world and now America, along with Britain, is continuing the legacy of colonialism to make English a global language with its imperialist attitude and dominance in terms of science, information technology, trade and business.

Imperialism means a system in which a country controls other countries. In the same way, linguistic imperialism or language imperialism is a linguistic concept that involves the transfer of a dominant language to other people. The transfer is essentially a demonstration of power and aspects of dominant culture are usually transferred along with the language. The British colonialism spread English across the globe and America is trying to impose English on this world with its modern imperialism today. This is called English linguistic imperialism. Phillipson found denunciations of linguistic imperialism that dated back to Nazi critiques of the British council and to Soviet analyses of English as the language of world capitalism and world domination. He defines English linguistic imperialism (Linguistic Imperialism) as “the dominance asserted and retained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.” Phillipson’s theory critiques the historic spread of English as an international language and that language’s continued dominance, particularly in postcolonial settings such as India, Pakistan, Uganda, Zimbabwe etc but also increasingly in neo-colonial settings such as continental Europe. Indeed, English has become the world’s dominant language. David Crystal in his book “English as a global language” (1997) says, “it has all happened so quickly. In 1950, any notion of English as a true world language was but a dim, shadowy, theoretical possibility ...fifty years on and world English exists as a political and cultural reality. How could such a dramatic linguistic shift have taken place in less

than a life time? And why has English, and not some other language, achieved such a status? These are the questions this book seeks to answer". Robert Phillipson explores, in his book *Linguistic Imperialism*, the contemporary phenomenon of English as a world language and sets out to analyze how the language became so dominant and why...whereas once Britannia ruled the waves, now it is English which rules them. The British Empire has given way to the empire of English and also his book attempts to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which English rules, who makes the rules, and what role the English teaching profession plays in promoting the rules of English and the rule of English. Phillipson, on the other hand, locates power within a larger more expansive concept, that of imperialism. Power which is expressed in the English language and then reinforced by English language teaching professionals around the world, can be more exactly and scientifically identified as linguistic imperialism. Phillipson states (1992, 65): imperialism theory provides a conceptual framework within which English linguistic imperialism, the dominance of English worldwide, and efforts to promote the language can be understood. Scientific imperialism, media imperialism and educational imperialism are all sub-types of cultural imperialism. So is linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism also permeates all the other types of imperialism, since language is the means used to mediate and express them. Each is a theatrical construct forming part of imperialism as a global theory which is concerned with the structural relations between rich and poor countries and the mechanisms by which the inequality between them is maintained. Therefore, argues Phillipson, Global English usage is the evidence of linguistic imperialism and dominance in the modern world (page 35). According to him, those who promote English-organizations such as the British Council, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, and individuals such as operators of English language schools-use three types of argument: Intrinsic arguments describe the English language as providential, rich, noble and interesting. Such arguments tend to assert what English is and what other languages are not. Extrinsic arguments point out that English is well established and it has many speakers, there are trained teachers and a wealth of teaching material. Functional arguments emphasize the usefulness of English as a gateway to the world.

To explain the current dominance of English in the world, Phillipson utilizes ideas, concepts, numbers and theories from a wide range of topics and subjects-professional conduct, ethics, matters of race, philosophy and science, political, economic, linguistic, social and cultural theories, history, educational policy, pedagogy, psychology, international relations and technology. All of which, he argues, are closely related to-and help to elucidate-the world-wide linguistic dominance of English. Language pedagogical practices and language specialists have contributed to the hegemony of English. English language teaching professionals are one of the key factors, one of the forces...which have propelled English forward.

One could say that Phillipson's analysis involves the use of a causal explanatory approach to the topic. That is, the current world-wide dominance of English is caused by the imperialistic impulses of the centre(capitalist) countries. Therefore, the dominance of English is clear evidence of linguistic imperialism. In turn, linguistic imperialism is the offspring of political, economic and cultural expansionism.

David Crystal states that various types of influences or power have caused English to become dominant throughout the world. Crystal's explanation of why English has become a global language is fairly simple and straightforward. The dominance of English is due to power and to perceived success. He looks to history, to the Latin and Roman empires, to explain the present:

Latin became an international language throughout the Roman Empire...not because the Romans were more numerous than the people they subjugated. They were simply powerful...when Roman military power declined, Latin remained for a millennium as the international language of education, thanks to a different sort of power-the ecclesiastical power of Roman Catholicism. There is the closest of links between language dominance and cultural power...without a strong power-base, whether political, military or economic, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication. Language has no independent existence, living in some sort of mystical space apart from the people who speak it. Language only exists in the brains, mouths, ears, hands and eyes of its users. When they succeed on the international stage, their language succeeds. When they fail, their language fails.

Thus, the key to the popularity and the success of a language is simple, as Crystal (1997, 7-8) mentions: "The history of a global language can be traced through the successful expeditions of its soldier/sailor speakers. And English...has been no exception. But international language dominance is not solely the result of military might. It may take a militarily powerful nation to establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful one to maintain and expand it." These quotes from Crystal show the factors leading to the success of a language to become an international language and exist for a long time particularly English language. Another example of English linguistic imperialism was seen in post-independent India. The country's authorities initially sought to make Hindi as national language but due to protests from southern states and West Bengal, the national language policy did not succeed. Both Hindi and English were made the official languages of the Indian Union Government. However, since the economic liberalization in 1991, English has become the lingua franca of business, higher education and research. In urban India, the medium of education even in primary schools is now mainly English.

English is now the dominant or official language in over 60 countries and is represented on every continent. It means English is used in every country, across the globe, more or less. Most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world is expressed in English and over 80% of all the information stored in electronic retrieval systems is in English. In a practical sense, the knowledge of English is essential. In terms of the appreciation of language and literature, knowledge of English is extremely important in understanding some of the best writings offered. Prof. Jacques Melitz in his work "English-Language dominance, Literature and Welfare" says, "the dominance of English in translations has gone up over the last three decades, may be more than 50% and the world literature is dominated by English." By the turn of millennium, English emerged as a global communications phenomenon with a supra-national momentum and as a language perfectly suited to the twenty-first century. The wide spread use of English simply reflects both the historic spread of the British Empire and the current importance of the US in the world economy. The English language is important in the world today because of the dominant position of the United States in an increasingly globalized world and it is important for countries across the globe to do business and for communication with America.

Today, the language and culture of America is influencing the views and actions of people and countries across the world.

Thus, colonialism influenced the world and changed drastically in terms of culture, education, science, communication etc. The British colonialism introduced English language in the countries ruled by the British and now it has become a global language with the roots of the British imperialism in the past and the modern imperialism of America. Moreover, English is a very easy, flexible and adaptable language when compared with other languages such as French, Spanish, German, Chinese and Russian. When the question of the future of English arises, there is no clear answer because the impression of English language is indelible on this world.

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