

LINGUISTIC IMPERIALISM

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Abstract

As the ‘world turns into a global village’ as predicted by Marshall McLuhan in the mid-twentieth century, as a result of technological developments particularly in the Internet technology, English language reaches the status of international language, the language used worldwide. The present paper seeks to provide a short journey of the English language from colonization to penetration into all world languages as a result of developments in Internet technology.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-20th century, Canadian scientist Marshall McLuhan (1962) predicted that the world would become a “global village” in the future. The expression “global village” stands for a world which is unified by electronic system and when something happens in one part of the world, it is heard in other parts and affects people in the other parts of the world simultaneously. For the Internet world, the ‘village’ metaphor is suitable because people who live in a village are assumed to know what is going on locally and are familiar with the dynamics of what is going on. In a nutshell, half a century after McLuhan’s book, this prediction has come true with the technological developments and widespread use of the Internet.

However, the transformation of the world into a global village brings with it some concerns. Particularly the current status of English language as the international language and the language of science and technology has not been reached overnight. In this article, the developments that led to the spread of the English language to the world will be overviewed from a critical angle.

Invention of printing press

Until the invention of the printing press in 1440, literacy was limited to privileged groups such as nobles and clergymen. In particular, mostly clergymen had access to the Bible, one of the few written sources in the West. Being privileged to have access to the Bible and hence valid source of information gave the church a superior position. As all the Bibles were handwritten, the very few Bibles that existed were written by hand by the clergymen. Indeed, it took a clergymen 3 to 5 years to copy the Bible by hand (Crowley and Heyer, 2003).

The story had started to change with the invention of printing press. The printing press was invented in Germany in 1440 by a silver master Johannes Gutenberg, who was a goldsmith,

and was embroidering pictures of religious stories on silver mirrors. Gutenberg put together all the information related to printing and paper-making and developed the first significant printing press of the history. His press had movable characters and he printed 300 Bibles in Latin.

After Guttenberg's invention, the printing press machine spread to Europe. As the printing press spread, written materials proliferated. This started to contribute to the literacy level of people. Initially, the Bible was printed in Latin. Latin was then a dead language that was only used in the Bible and for educational purposes. It was not used actively in the daily lives of people. As the literacy level of people started to improve, the Bible started to be translated into the local languages in different countries and started to be obtained and read more widely. In a nutshell, with the invention of printing press the way of communication in the world had started to change. In other words, invention of printing press was a corner stone for written communication because with the help of printing press machines multiple copies of the written texts could be produced and could be shared with masses. It became easier to reach more people with duplicated texts. This fact ignited an increase in literacy.

Colonization

Consequently, spreading the message using the duplicated written texts was a start of a new era, the Renaissance, rebirth of art, culture and literature. During the Renaissance period questioning and exploring became very important. People started to search for new knowledge and lots of new inventions helped them to move towards modernity. One of these important inventions was the invention of the steam engine which was adopted to the ships and provided the Europeans with opportunities to explore the world.

Discovery of distant lands signaled the beginning of colonization by the European countries such as Portugal, Spain, France and England. One of the most important of these was, undoubtedly, the discovery of America. The colonization that lasted until the beginning of the 20th century and converted Britain to the "Empire upon which the sun never sets".

English Language Teaching across the World

In addition to colonizing the countries they went to and benefiting from their resources, the Europeans who discovered new places brought their religion - mostly Catholic Christianity - and their language - mostly English. While the colonists, who claimed to have brought civilization to the acquired colonies, taught the public to read and write in some geographies, in other geographies the languages of the colonists were added to the school curriculum in order to communicate with the people's ruling colonists. One of the examples given in the study of Mogashoa (2017) who aims to indicate the effect of teaching and learning English language in selected primary schools in South Africa and to determine how learners learn in a language that they do not speak at home. In this study, he explains how children in primary schools learned English which was not a language spoken at their home.

Besides learning the language of colonists was compulsory, it was necessary because in order to work in the state administration, especially having a chance to work, was made possible by speaking the languages of the colonists, even more by reading and writing. In other words,

while English rose to the position of the most spoken language in the world due to the "Empire over which the sun does not set", on the other hand, it gained the status of being the language of civilization.

Over time, in various parts of the world, English teaching age descended to primary schools. As English is seen as the 'international' and 'the most spoken language', parents started to show preference towards sending their children to primary schools where the medium of instruction is English. Without questioning the difficulties their children can face while dealing with a language different from their native language, in order to prepare them for a better future, children are sent to these schools since it is believed that knowing English is the main component of being successful academically. Therefore, before mastering their native language, children began to learn English, and they began to read and write in English before their native language.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there were serious concerns in relation to decreasing English language learning level to primary education. John Rogers, based on his experiences in teaching English in Europe, Asia, Africa and South Pacific (1982:151) wrote his seminal article '*The world for sick proper*' (1982:44-51) where he challenges the extensive teaching of English language at the primary and secondary levels all over the world. He puts his ideas forth as:

Should we continue to teach English to great numbers of children who then believe that they are entitled to a 'better' future? It may be dishonest to do this. Only a small percentage of English learners will ever use English for international communication. Very few school leavers actually need English for tertiary studies overseas. English is not the only means of access to Western development and 'progress'; it may not even be the best means. A lot of English is taught, but not enough is learned. University teachers throughout the world complain about their students' lack of skills in English (Rogers, 1982:144).

In his article, Rogers puts forth the case of the young children who are put in a situation of learning English. These children not only would not use it probably at all but also have more urgent needs in life. Rogers (1982:144-145) gives examples of children in a variety of countries as:

—*Kweku (9), Accra, Ghana: My work is that I sell chewing gum around the Orion Circle at cinema time . . . My mother died before they born me. My father nobody know . . . I sleep in the far night at 2.00 a.m. sometimes 3.00 a.m. morning time. I no have sleeping house. I sleep at the lorry petrol station . . . The world for sick proper. I want 1979 to have no war and no children born like I am . . . I want 1979 to bring house for us and water for village people to drink. Don't take photo of me. I don't want white man see me dirty.*

—*Keshar (9), Nagpur, India: I am looking through all this rubbish every day. It is my work . . . I look for glass, paper, old iron things, plastic sandals . . . I don't like this work. You work in sun all day. You get dirty. You get sick easy . . . I would like to go to school. I like to see small*

girls going to school widi books and slate . . . I would like to have a house and two sets of clodies . . .

—Vinton (14), Kingston, Jamaica: *I want to go back to school and get myself a trade. I learn welding, woodwork, and learn to fix electric. You have some boys and diey get trade, but they follow their friends. They go robbin' and the police kill them. Them idiots. If I get a trade, I cool... In twenty years' time I wish I'm in nice job with my wife and children and house, you know . . .*

—Wambgu (12), Nairobi, Kenya: *I left school because I failed and I have no money. I want a job nicely. Every day I look for work. Mainly I work with cars. Look at my clothes. I am a dirty boy because I am a mechanic. I am the spanner boy. I only get 5 shillings a day. I try to save it. But I need the money for smoking.*

—Kenyatta (14), Kenya: . . . *The [boy] at school will get to be a manager and have a big car. The [boy] at home will just become a thief and a robber . . . If you don't know English they will say that you are a useless man and they won't do what you tell them. I want to be a manager and then they will just bring my letters and I will put my signature there. I will give many orders to others, and I will warn those ones who are lazy or drunk. And if they don't agree with me, I will sack them . . .*

—Fibi (15), Kenya: *At school we used tribal language. When we moved to Nairobi my English is not enough for school. I am sad because I used to do well and now you can see that I am not a person who is educated.*

Rogers ends the article with a metaphor from Edward de Bono's book 'The Use of Lateral Thinking' (1967) about digging holes: based on the digging holes metaphor, he challenges deepening and enlarging existing holes or digging new ones.

It is not possible to dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper . . . If the hole is in the wrong place, then no amount of improvement is going to put it in the right place.

In line with the above quotation, Rogers (1982:150) ended advising English Language Teaching / English as a Second Language / English as a Foreign Language / Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages professionals to climb out of the holes ELT is digging and look for digging new holes elsewhere.

As a reply to Rogers, Abbott (1984) in his article 'Should we start digging new holes?' refers to the 'digging hole' metaphor and suggests that ELT has a role to play in educating the people in developing countries. On the one hand, he encourages teaching and learning in the mother tongue; on the other hand, he asserts that ELT has a role to play in educating people in developing countries. Abbott (1984) points out that including English language in national curricula is a national education policy (p.98) and denying this opportunity would lead to preventing "the broad educational principle of equality of opportunity".

The teaching methods of the time and the social environment of the place where local languages are generally used, English is the only language of instruction and is used in official offices, it has been questioned whether education should be in the mother tongue or foreign language education during primary school years. During this period, it should not be overlooked that there is a gap between the local education facilities and educational tools such as books published in English. In the second half of the 20th century, the vocational training opportunities provided to English teaching and teachers surpassed other fields, English language education rose as a serious science branch, and education became a pioneer in other fields. In this period, steps were taken to make English a spoken language in addition to being a language for reading and writing. Firstly, audio recordings on tapes, then CDs attached to the textbooks later was followed by Internet resources.

During this period, one of the most prominent issues was the advantages of teaching English by native speakers or non-native speakers. Especially teaching English to preschool and primary school students when they can grasp the native speaker accent gained ground. Indeed, teaching English starting from an early age has become a world-wide exercise in order to open the door to a better education in the future. The efforts given to extensive teaching of English language all over the world resulted in what Philipson (1992) names “linguistic imperialism”.

While discussing the subject of English being taught as native speaker like or BBC English, the English language started to be used so widely in the world that Kumaravadivelu (2003:539) draws our attention to the fact that English is a world language and we need to talk about Englishes and at this point the term “World Englishes” can be used. “World Englishes” refers to the numerous varieties of creoles based in English and English that have been developed in various regions of the world. When different parts of the world started using English widely sociolinguistically the language has been affected from different users of it. Local usage differences have started to be observed.

Today’s world is the world of information; world of knowledge. People around the world wanted to learn new things. With the help of the Internet, it becomes easier to reach the information available on different websites. When people start using the Internet, they also realize that in order to dominate the information spread on internet they need to learn English as English is a lingua franca and it is used most of the documents available on the Internet.

Global Village

Efforts to spread English to the world have been crowned with the widespread use of Internet technology in the world. Today, the digital divide (Hilbert, 2011), which is considered to be the most real distinction, is made between having access to information, which is realized by the touch of the fingers on the Internet, and those who do not have the Internet. The widespread use of the Internet and its use in various parts of the world has facilitated and accelerated access to information. As the importance of time and place concepts is gradually decreasing and the world is turning into a ‘global village’ as McLuhan (1962) predicted.

The widespread use of the Internet has led to the use of Internet-related words such as 'apple', 'windows', 'google', 'mouse', 'Facebook' in almost every existing language in the world. In other words, languages of the world are somehow invaded by English words more than ever. Crystal (1997) summarizes the status of English as the language of global communication by putting forth that: “when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country”.

In the past having a job in your hometown or at least in your own country was enough for most of the people. However, as the world became a “global village” it is not weird for anyone to find a job in another country or to start studying in another country. In order to survive in today’s world getting better knowledge, getting better education is the main goal of the young generation. As some of them have dreams of living in developed countries they want to study in a university where the instruction is delivered in English since these people planning to have a better life in a developed country and in their minds these countries are mostly English-speaking countries, such as England, United States, Canada etc. When education becomes a market and the people in this market realize the importance of English, lots of English medium universities were established all around the world. With the help of internet and technology it becomes easier to advertise these universities to the people who are not the locals. “Global village” plays an important role while advertising these universities, and more students from different countries come together to study at these universities. This is another reason for the use of English. English is the only language for these people from different countries to communicate. Therefore, students need to learn English not only for their academic studies but also for communicating with each other.

Even the students who study in their native language need to know or learn English as English is the language of science and academy. In order to read the academic work in articles, journals, or books, they need to know English. Without learning English, reaching the resources in academic world seems impossible. Also any student who wants to continue his/her academic life and get an academic degree needs to learn English to write and publish his/her own articles. Attending international conferences also requires English. If the conferences given all around the world are examined, it can be seen that the language of all conferences which are labelled as international is English.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of the new millennium, the English language has established itself as the international language. Through technological developments, English language entered into almost every home on the lucky side of the ‘digital divide’ (Hilbert, 2011). Today English is the language of science and technology, academy, politics, etc. To conclude, technological developments, particularly the Internet technology *opened the new holes* Rogers (1982) suggested half a century ago.

Globally, the current concern is to whether to stick to our own cultural local values and our mother tongues, or go global and be a world’s citizen. Undoubtedly both have attractiveness of its own. On the other hand, Kumaravadivelu (2003:539) draws our attention to the fact that

most of the people who use English language as an additional language “see it more as a language of communicational necessity than cultural identity.”

Much has been written about the coloniality of the English language. Now more than ever, one senses among a section of the applied linguistics community a critical awareness of the fact that English language, in its long march to its current global status was aided and by colonialist and imperialist projects that trampled upon the political, cultural and linguistic heritage of millions of people across the globe (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:539).

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