Attitudes to Varieties of English: The Postcolonial Scenario
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ABSTRACT

The spread of English across the globe is a unique phenomenon. From the language of the one-time colonial masters it has emerged to be the choice of the people all around. It is no more looked upon as a colonial imposition rather a passport to better employment and a medium for cross cultural communication. One of the most notable results of the global diffusion of English is its nativization which in turn has given birth to varieties of English. Despite the growth of democratic values and an acceptance of differences, these varieties are not ranked the same by many. There are those who valorize them and there are those who denigrate them. This paper looks at such varying attitudes to the varieties of English and tries to analyze the reasons behind the fostering of such attitudes.

Key words: global diffusion, varieties, denigrating attitude, valorizing attitude, native speaker, non-native speaker

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1. Introduction
English is everywhere in an unprecedented way. It is the first language to some, a second language to many and a foreign language to yet many others. No other language has spread and stayed on the global stage like English. There have been historical, political, scientific and economic reasons behind this global diffusion. One notable result of this global diffusion is the birth and growth of the varieties of English. Today, the name English has given way to names such as ‘Englishes, ‘International English’, ‘Global English’ and ‘New Englishes’. This, in turn, has sprouted many new issues such as the ownership of English, acceptance of varieties, linguistic imperialism, cultural hegemony, native speaker -non-native speaker division, cultural appropriateness of learning materials etc.

The paradigm shift in the postcolonial linguistic scenario is that the prescriptive principles of language are challenged. Thus, there is a resistance towards accepting any variety of English as the standard variety to be emulated. Varieties are justified as English does not have a single variety to represent all the cultures. Put the other way, the inadequacy of English for universal pragmatics necessitates the existence of varieties of English. However, there is no consensus in the way these varieties are dealt with. This paper is an examination of such varying attitudes towards the varieties of English around the world.

The Global Spread and the Varieties
As discussed above, though English has reached every nook and corner of the world, the fact remains that the Englishes used around the world are not the same. There are marked differences even among the inner circle countries where English is the first language. A variety of Englishes also exists in multilingual countries such as India and Singapore. These varieties of English differ from one another in terms of lexis, grammar, pronunciation and in certain expressions. The same word can have different meanings and connotations in different countries. However, as Jenkins (2003) observes, “these Englishes have much in common, through their shared history and their affinity with either British or American English. But there is also much that is unique to each variety, particularly in terms of their accents, but also in their idiomatic uses of vocabulary, their grammars and their discourse strategies” (p.8).

Contrasting Views on English
In fact, English itself is not viewed the same way around the world and even within individual countries. English, even while actively in use, is vehemently opposed by certain segments of the society. To take the example of India, Nehru and Gandhi had contrasting views on English. Gandhi was of the opinion that the very presence of English in India would be retention of the British colonialism. He believed that English would dampen the Indian spirit and would adversely affect the moulding of national identity. Hence, he wanted the colonial language of the master to be done away with. However, leaders such as Nehru and Raja Ram Mohan Roy had positive views on English. Even before independence, Mohan Roy had appealed to the British government to start English schools in India. Nehru also took it as an imperative factor for the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge in economic and scientific sectors (Thirumalai, 2003, pp. 60-66).

The implications of an Attitude
The focus in the session is on the attitudes towards varieties of English. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines attitude as a way of thinking about something or somebody or behaving towards something or somebody. By
implication, attitude determines a person’s choice or acceptance of a particular variety of English or any other language. As Gardner (1985) says attitude includes cognitive, affective and conative components and consists, in broad terms, of an underlying psychological predisposition to act or to influence behaviour in a certain way. Attitude is thus linked to a person’s values and beliefs and promotes or discourages the choices made in all realms of activity, whether academic or informal (as cited in Padwick, 2010, p. 16).

The Denigrating Attitude

Attitudes towards varieties of English, both native and non-native, are varied. One group denigrates them whereas the other valorises them. The very terms Englishes, World Englishes, New Englishes, etc. imply that English is not a monolith but a group of varieties. However, as Patil (2008) points out, there are linguists and scholars who view English prescriptively. A prescriptive approach always connotes some sort of hierarchy. But, when we adopt a descriptive point of view, we imply that all the varieties have equal status (p. 29). It is this prescriptive approach to English that Phillipson (1992) calls linguistic imperialism or linguistic hegemony.

Even native varieties are not spared by this denigrating attitude of the prescriptivists. For example, the Welsh or the Scottish varieties of English are not treated on a par with the Southerner’s English in Britain. Thomas (2004) highlights that there are negative reactions towards what are labelled nonstandard varieties of English in Britain or towards African American vernacular language usage in the US (as cited in Padwick, 2010, p. 17). Padwick also points out that there are many instances when a particular variety is stigmatized and thought to be inferior to another variety (ibid. 17). Kachru (2005) gives the example of James Kelman to highlight this discriminating treatment by native varieties. Kelman who received the prestigious Booker Prize in 1994 had to encounter the same attitude that Asians and Africans have traditionally encountered. His novel was called a ‘disgrace’ by one of the judges, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, and ‘literary vandalism’ by Simon Jenkins (p. 22). Kelman in his heavy Scottish accent retaliated saying that to him those words (disgrace and literary vandalism) were just another way of inferiorizing the language by indicating that there was a standard. He said, “The dictionary would use the term ‘debased’. But it’s the language! The living language to accept the criticism of and it comes out of many different sources, including Scotland before the English arrived” (as cited in Kachru, 2005, p. 23). Kelman refused the language of his work as ‘vernacular’ or ‘dialect’. Kachru gives two more examples to this effect. He quotes the words of Mencken, the great pandit of the American language to show the British attitude to American English. Kachru (2005) says that it is summarized well in the following words of Mencken (1936), “This occasional tolerance of things American was never extended to the American language” (p.23). The second example is a more recent one. It shows that the British negative attitude towards American English persists. Prince Charles views American English as ‘corrupting’ and the English version as the ‘proper’ one. He urges the British Council to ensure that the English English maintains its position as the world language (ibid. 23). Britain would not like to see the hen that lays golden eggs killed or even side-lined. For the show to go on, the hegemony should continue.

The intolerance of one native variety towards other varieties was also extended to the non-native varieties. The native speakers of the English language refused to accept the innovative deviations in the non-native varieties necessitated by the contextual dislocation of English. As Kachru (1996) rightly observes, “the native speaker’s attitude toward the development and the institutionalization of varieties has traditionally not been one of acceptance or ontological recognition” (p. 59). However, he points out that there has been a new attitude of
linguistic tolerance since World War II. He exemplifies this with the increased acceptance and recognition given to commonwealth literature and the acceptance of the linguistic and functional distinctiveness of the institutionalized non-native varieties (ibid. 60). This newly gained acceptance is likely to increase with the revived economic and political dominance of the erstwhile colonies.

Non-native speakers are also not unanimous in their attitude towards the indigenized varieties. While some are continually on the battle for the recognition of their varieties, some others condemn their own varieties. Patil (2008) thinks that this self-nullifying attitude of the non-native speakers toward their own varieties is one of the factors nourishing and perpetuating the hegemony of the native speakers (p. 29). The Asian employers’ cry for native English language teachers is another instance of the approval of the superiority of the native varieties and the deficiency of their own nativized varieties. Many Asian educational institutions insist on good grades in TOEFL or IELTS to continue studies in their own Asian institutions. The Ministry of Manpower in Oman, for example, has made TOEFL compulsory for all the students. The grades in TOEFL decide the future course of their studies. Teachers also contribute to the devaluation of the non-native varieties. They speak their own varieties but expect their students to speak American or British varieties. Ironically, they also assume their varieties to be native varieties. Patil (2008) rightly observes how even decades after independence Indian English suffers under the yoke of Received Pronunciation. He calls Asian teachers of English schizophrenics who unrealistically expect their students to speak American or British varieties of English (p. 30). This resistance to own nativized variety was also observed in Singapore. McKay (2002) talks of how the use of Singlish on a local Singaporean television programme led to controversy. Many Singaporeans urged the authorities to intervene and regulate the use Singlish lest the Singaporean children should be exposed to ‘bad English’ (p. 55).

Some scholars have even taken the extreme step of saying that the non-native varieties will never gain international acceptance. Nemade (1985), for example, names Indian English a temporary and rootless phenomenon, as it contains no magnificence (p. 31). He views attempts in Indian writings as mere parrotry (p. 33) and mimicry (p. 36). He goes further to say that no Indian writer can be a successful writer in English because English cannot represent his national culture and language (p. 36). His argument is that an Indian writer can express himself honestly only in his regional language. Any attempt in a foreign medium can only be suppressive of his natural talent (p. 33). Patke (1986) who believes that English is not the language of the intellectual and emotional make up of an Indian (p. 33) also supports him.

The Valorising Attitude

However, this contempt of the non-native varieties is only one side of the story. Many writers and scholars are enthusiastic about these varieties. Kachru (2005) argues for a greater linguistic tolerance and asks why the diaspora varieties of English should not be considered as functionally viable parts of our linguistic and cultural heritages (p. 11). Raja Rao (1971) is all for the domesticated use of English as he says in the forward of his Kanthapura. His argument is not just that we cannot write like the English but we should not. He is optimistic that the Indian variety of English will one day be as prominent and distinctive as the Irish or the American. History has proved his words prophetic. Patil (1994), in this context rightly comments that the British now have become the importers of their own language in a modified (Indian) form (p. 23). His reference is to the Indian teachers and the publications in Britain. The more recent mushrooming of call centres in various parts of the country has also
increased the load of this linguistic import. Thakur (2008) justifies the Indian features in Indian English as the result of Indian sociosemantc space that the people of India share. The native varieties are different because they have yet another sociosemantc space particular to the west. He argues that Indian English should be studied and recognized in the context of the Indian sociosemantc conventions. He suggests that the Indian variety can be named Hinglish or Indlish (p. 202). Many native linguists also have written in favour of the Indian variety. The Assistant General of British Council declared Indian English to be the most wide spread dialect on earth (King, 1980, p. 3). Quirk (1985) looks upon it as a self-respecting and established variety of English (p. 51).

**Towards a Greater Appreciation**

Attitudes do not remain the same. Unlike in the early years of English education in India when the model was the native accent and style, there is now a slide towards the indigenous variety. This can be due to consciousness about national identity and pride in the wake of the economic emergence in the country. The status of Indians as globally employable and the various achievements in the fields of English literature have also certainly contributed to this shift. Researches conducted by Kachru in 1979, in 1994, and by Shaw in 1981 clearly indicate the swing towards endocentric varieties. These studies reveal that the majority of the educated Indian speakers of English prefer to use their own unique variety (as cited in Padwick, 2010, pp. 24-26). Padwick’s research done in 2009 also shows that the acceptance of Indian English among the Indians is increasing over time. The recent revision of the NCERT (The National council of Educational Research and Training) curriculum framework is a clear evidence of this. They write:

> There is substantial evidence available now to show that Indian English as used by fluent educated Indian speakers does not differ in any significant way from standard varieties of English in the UK or the USA. There is no doubt that there are significant differences at the phonological and lexical levels. But that is also true of British and American English within those countries. Indian English can be considered a distinct variety with an identity and status of its own and should serve as a model in teaching learning situation (NSF 2005, NCERT, as cited in Padwick, 2010, pp. 27-28)

**Conclusion**

The attitudes towards English in general and varieties in particular are changing. English is no more viewed as a colonial imposition. Rather, English medium schools have become the choice of every parent aspiring for better education for their children. Many parents do not send their children to English medium schools only because they cannot afford to do so. People strive for admissions in English medium schools even in the slums of Mumbai. They view English as a panacea for all their ill-fated sufferings. The present situation, especially in the background of globalization, demands greater accommodation of varieties and cultures. The rise of new economic centres and the dependence of the corporate multinationals on call centres are bringing in new equations. English has stayed with the non-natives for long and observing the present scenario one can predict that it will continue to be so as an adopted child nurtured in the cultural background of the new family.
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