



English Connects or Disconnects? A Discursive Palaver

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeeks-04-04-024>

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Article Info: - Received : 22 February 2025

Accepted : 25 March 2025

Published : 30 April 2025

Abstract

Borders are giving in to the global market and in the present world 66.2% population is under the internet network. English now conspicuously yokes all the countries together on the platform of mutual comprehensibility. English has become the key to the realm of cyber technology. It has brought the whole world into knowability. It has the potential to be a medium of international communication. At present nearly 1500 million people speak this language worldwide. English now turns into englishes by constantly being hybridized and intertextualized with the multiple linguistic and cultural realities. Nowadays the world feels strongly motivated to learn it, because it puts us all in touch with more people than any other language without affecting the fundamental value of multilingualism. But at the same time English exercises its hegemony and leads the local and regional languages to the margin while it occupies the centre. After the Second World War, English assumes a paradigmatic shift from its colonizing to imperializing role. True, the present world needs English for international comprehensibility. But at the same time its evolution is a must, and this evolution is going on through hybridization, assimilation and synthesis. This paper seeks to address the research question: Does English really connect or exercise its hegemony upon other languages of the world? It borrows the theoretical framework from Homi Bhabha's Location of Culture.

Keywords: *Multilingualism, Knowability, Englishes, Globalization, Marginalizations.*



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1. GLOBAL RISE OF ENGLISH

English is the language of economy, trades and commerce, internet and cyber technology. After the Second World War with the rise of the United States of America as a super power, English confirmed its position as the language of global economy. In 1990s the world experienced an

explosion of global English. In this connection, David Crystal asserts:

The 1990s were a revolutionary decade, in that respect, with a proliferation of new linguistic varieties arising out of the worldwide implementation of the Internet, an emerging awareness of the crisis affecting the world's

endangered languages, and an increasingly public recognition of the global position of English. (Heredia, 2009)

Global English is now political and cultural reality as English by accommodating diverse syntactic and sociolinguistic characteristics has lost its radical status and now the world we live in is the world of Englishes.

2. THEORETICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

With the emergence of new internationalism the rise of English as an inevitable language for global communication side by side with postcolonial migrations, geographical, cultural and economic derangement is an outcome of cultural confusion wrought by wars and mutual conflicts. Homi Bhabha in his book *Location of Culture* refers to Goethe and asserts in his words:

Nations could not return to their settled and independent life again without noticing that they have learned many foreign ideas and ways, which they had unconsciously adopted, and come to feel here and there previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs.

This incapacity of the nations emanates from the transformation of historical agency into otherness made by the colonial power and hegemony, it is apparent that “[C]ulture is made by those in power...” (Anzaldúa 888). And language, one of the major ingredients of culture “is necessary for the spoken word to be intelligible and so that it can produce all of its effects” has the inherent power of transformation and derangement (Derrida 396). This project was implemented during the British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, too.

3. COLONIAL LEGACY IN BENGAL

Bangalees started learning English only when this language turned into a means of ensuring a dignified social status and gaining financial benefit. To be specific, “In 1774 the Supreme Court was established, and from this period a knowledge of English language appeared to be desirable and necessary” (Sarker 11). The Supreme Court needed interpreters with competence in both Persian and English languages. Ganesh Ram Das who came back from London was appointed to this job by the first judge of the Supreme Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal Sir Elijah Impey. When Bangalees found

an envious social status of such English-knowing people, they felt a vehement urge to learn English. According to Ramkamal Sen, the Diwan of the Treasury, Treasurer of the Bank of Bengal and Secretary of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, Ram Ram Misra was the first Bangalee Brahmin who acquired considerable skill in English. Very soon Ram Narayan Misra, Anindiram Das, Ram Lochan Nait, Krishna Mohan Basu learnt English with a view to getting the job of a clerk in a government office. Thus, from the very beginning of the colonial rule in this Sub-continent, English language worked as a means of attaining self, power and prestige, and even in the present age of corporate economy it maintains the same status and serves as a the gateway to knowledge, power and self.

4. LINGUISTIC AMBIVALENCE IN BANGLADESH

True, any ism may turn into a barrier or boundary if it dreadfully stereotypes thoughts and ideas, even in the age of cyber technology which is consistently and vehemently challenging the borders and moving through a shift of paradigm of ideas and knowability. Let's start this deliberation with a critique of the case of Bangladesh in terms of the present status of English here. At present a corrosive linguistic ambivalence regarding the status of English can be traced in Bangladesh. It is still a debate whether English is a second language or a foreign language in Bangladesh. Keeping pace with the globalizing world, where English has already established its status as the lingua franca, Bangladesh even after fifty three years of its independence cannot give English the status of a second language. This ambivalence emerging out of the conflict between people's historical legacy aligned with the linguistic nationalism emanated and triggered by the language movement of 1952 and the realities related to the globalizing and multicultural trends of the present world. Even today, though not alarmingly widely, a chronic apprehension that speaking other languages beyond Bengali may cause displacement of national identity, is soaring higher and higher among the rising bourgeois class of people. Religious ideology also gears up this failure further. Bigotry, parochialism and chauvinism emerging out of the over consciousness of the mother tongue for which a good number of heroic sons of this nation shed their blood on the 21st February of 1952 act, to a great extent, as a barrier

which stands between the Bangladeshis and the languages other than Bengali. True to say, we have already lost the treasure of Persian and Urdu languages for the same neurosis, though we have a rich legacy of these languages. The fatal irony is that the economy of Bangladesh is immensely dependent on the remittance worth approximately twenty two billion US dollars every year sent by nearly twenty million Bangladeshis working in global job market outside the country. Most of these human resources cannot earn as much as those from many other countries who are fluent in English, only because they cannot bargain with their English speaking employers mostly for linguistic barrier. The ambivalence caused by the uncompromising subjugation to the linguistic stereotypes, which in terms of the demands of the global situations, require to be deconstructed and reconstructed through synthesis and intertextuality.

5. BORDERS, IDENTITY, AND LANGUAGE

Borders separate, cause displacement and set humans apart, even characterized by the same ethnographic and linguistic phenomena. Language, an archive of memories and experiences possesses a unique power to connect. Amitav Ghosh in his *Shadow Lines* asserts:

I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance; I believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality. The only relationship my vocabulary permitted between those separate realities was war or friendship. There was no room in it for this other thing. And things which did not fit my vocabulary were merely pushed over the edge into the chasm of that silence.

So, only language can bring diverse entities together on the singular platform of brotherhood, solidarity and friendship. Borders confirm distinct identity, and at the same time affirm differences. Borders help build up nation-state but create awareness of nationhood, and when it develops over consciousness it leads to enmity. Borders are not only physical, but also mental. As Thamma, in Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* imagines a borderless world which will be her home where coming will, of course, overlap going, that is, wherever she will go, may be Kolkata or Dhaka, will seem to her to be her home. So, the whole world can be homely by virtue of a unique language. In the globalizing

world, borders are melting down for certain factors and English is one of them which work as a bridging language. But while dealing with the terms and terminologies like English, globalization, cyber technology, a contrapuntal re-reading is to be done as no issue regarding all these terms is apolitical. As capitalism works as a patron behind the promotion of these phenomena and there are the issues of domination and hegemony and a deliberate politics of compartmentalizing the world on the scale of economic capacity, the issues of border, borderlessness, globalization, connectivity are to be critiqued with academic seriousness.

English is a language of bridge, and if viewed contrapuntally, a language of borders. English helps us go across borders and communicate with diverse people with diverse linguistic and ethnographic identities. It has brought all the diversities on a singular platform which enables each other to tear off the barrier of inscrutability and opens up an opportunity of reciprocation and mutual comprehensibility. But, as language is an archive of a community's experiences, responses, culture and history, it can be deliberately used and misused as an apparatus of derangement, Otherization and transformation. Hence, according to Elizabeth Birch, "although language can serve as a bridge, there exists barrier that first needs to be broken in order for the bridge or the method of communication to be formed" (Heredia, 2009).

6. ENGLISH IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

Inevitably in the postmodern world, English has become a discipline without centre. If we question, what happens to English now, the answer is- "English has always been, as a discipline, fairly undisciplined and that while perhaps this used to be its strength, it was always going to be its weakness" (Lucy vii). English is now a course of studies in various disciplines. It has become a multidisciplinary subject. The status of English has become a paradox and anti-foundationalist. From the postmodern perspective, if English is considered to be a text, then it deserves to be deconstructed. After the process of deconstruction it is found that English which is used at present all over the world, except in the English speaking countries, specifically in this subcontinent, is an outcome of the dialogues between the native language and English language.

In the present world of borderlessness the “feeling of belonging to a territory, a language and a culture” can be experienced in terms of multidisciplinary perspectives (Landa 65). Hence, the location of English language is now dispersing, not spatial. It is now difficult to claim for any nation that English is its sole property. This claim will sound empty and it is like Schopenhauer’s declaration that “there is no emptier pride than the vanity of belonging to a certain people or nation” (Heredia 40). In fact, English has now become a bridge language we use to understand each other.

7. HEGEMONY AND RESISTANCE

In the same vein, its hegemony as ‘the language of the masters’ is now vehemently challenged by the rise of global English on the face of which English of any certain nation can’t be distinguished as the language of the masters. Gilles Deleuze and Guattari in their seminal writing, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* enunciate a dictum that “hating all languages of masters” embodies universal call for introducing the counter hegemonic impulses of the arts. During the colonial period English which was staunchly considered as the master’s language, tended to cause cultural displacement of the natives. Its objective was to displace the natives from their thought-process and epistemic practices. Even in the postcolonial period its hegemonic enterprise continued and contributed to neocolonizing the independent nations. But, in response to such hegemonic role a resistance in the form of, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, ‘counter-hegemonic impulses’ emerge, that is, English loses its elitist status and it is assimilated among the natives. Not a single country in Africa uses any of its nearly two thousand indigenous languages as its official language or lingua-franca. This phenomenon has both power and weakness. It has power because the Africans are now like Shakespeare’s *Cliban* writing back the imperial discourse. They have Africanized English as in this Subcontinent the Indians have Indianized English.

8. LANGUAGE AS POWER

In this connection, Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his book *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* mentions two functions of language. In his words:

Every language has two aspects. One aspect is its role as an agent that enables us to communicate with one another in our struggle to find the means for survival. The other is its role as a career of the history and the culture built into the process of that communication over time.

8.1 Ngugi further declares in his seminal book *Decolonizing the Mind*:

Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation, and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next. (Sarker, 2015)

Language is a complicated system encapsulating its speakers’ thought process and psychosomatic dispositions incurring their discursive narratives that receive formation through negotiation synchronically as well as diachronically with history, culture and heritage. Hence, language is power as the control of a language is equivalent to the control of its speaking community. It is an apparatus enabling its agency to exercise its hegemony.

9. ENGLISH AS AN APPARATUS OF MARGINALIZATION

Keeping the roles of language, as mentioned by Ngugi, in the mind, now let’s look at the case of the learning and teaching of English language. True, at present the English speaking people outnumber the native speakers all over the world. In the globalizing world English has become the language of commerce, trade, tourism and technology. With the booming phenomenon of cyber technology English has become the language of the links among different nations. It is commonly believed if a language works as a lingua franca with a view to facilitating dialogic interactions among peoples of the world then it is not a matter of anxiety. But when a language tends to substitute a people’s native language or languages, it turns into a weapon of Otherization, marginalization and alienation. In such a situation, language is no more a mere means of communication. It turns into an apparatus of marginalization and subjugation.

If English is juxtaposed in terms of ‘independence and equality’ with the languages of the Third World countries, then it does not trigger anxiety because in such a situation the interest of

both the parties are preserved on the basis of mutual understanding. But if the local language is substituted by the English language, then it leads the community to the subjugation to the country which imposes its language upon this community with a view to establishing its political and linguistic hegemony. In this connection, Ngugi apprehends that languages “are lost when the predominant class in society has no use for them”. The loss of local language or languages conspicuously causes displacement or derangement. For displacing the centre, the British colonizers used English language as a weapon in this Indian Sub-continent. In 1835 Babington Macaulay’s minute in the House of Commons of the British Parliament clarified what the British colonizers wanted to do with the natives. But subsequently, due to the rich linguistic history and heritage of this Sub-continent, the British could not attain absolute success and hence, English had to go through changes regarding its role in various phases of the history. While interpalating, the natives rather Indianized English and are now writing back. With Salman Rushdie’s winning of Booker Prize in 1981 for *Midnight’s Children*, the world knew for the first time that Indian English has fortified its position in the international academia and literary arena.

10. HISTORICAL CHANGES IN THE SUBCONTINENT

Regarding the changes of roles of English in course of history during the colonial era in this Sub-continent, Ravindra Baburao Tasildar, in his book *English Studies in Indian Universities: The Present Scenario* delineates:

English is now nearly a 400 year old language in India. Its role in the country has changed from time to time. During the colonial period it was an administrative tool of the British. After independence, though the regional languages had been a preferred option for tertiary education, the Education Commission of 1964-66 recommended that English should be a library language. Thereafter, English has been promoted as a source language to develop Indian languages and is also expected to function as a 4 Chapter One service language. In spite of frequent changes in the language policies of the central and state governments (Parasher 1998), English has been a medium of instruction in many PG courses. It also acts as a link language for inter-state

communication in the country. (Birch, 2012)(Crystal, 2003)

It is true that the arrival of English language was not under the condition of ‘independence and equality’. Its purpose was to transform the natives into other because it “came to the Third World to announce the arrival of the Bible and the sword” (Ngugi 49). Both these elements are the tools of transforming the natives into Other. Besides, in today’s world of globalization English has become the language of capitalist economy or corporate economy in the way that it replaces the old mode of socialism. Even in this Indian Sub-continent the mode of economy was sociological before the advent of the British colonialism. The British rulers translated the local texts from Sanskrit and Persian to English to captivate Indian epistemology and knowledge-system. They became successful to a great extent and replaced the local texts of literature and scriptures with English literature, history, philosophy and the Bible. By creating a vacuum the British colonizers placed their own texts upon the natives and went on with the Otherizing mission. In such a situation the literature that was derived from the British racist rulers repugnantly depicts the natives as a subhuman species. Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* mocks Huree Chunder Mookerjee “for aspiring to be that which he never can be- a member of the colonizing class rather than merely one of its subjects” (Tharoor 78). Even E. M. Forster, in the closing lines of *A Passage to India* declares that friendship between an Englishman and an Indian cannot be possible, “No, not yet” (256). So, English arrived at this continent to make the natives acquainted with the superiority of the British colonizers.

11. GLOBALIZATION, CAPITALISM, AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

It cannot be denied that for creating a common culture a common language is needed. In the present world of commoditizing everything from things to beings, capitalism’s mission is to spread market and bring the whole world community into a single network. Even the slogan of multiculturalism incurs a deliberate politics of fortifying the hegemony of the dominant culture among those who are in terms of economic ability lagging behind. Creating a new market does also require creating new consumers who will eat, drink, like and dislike the same things that the dominant culture and language manufacture. It is

just like the target of the Italian nationalist leader, painter, and author, Massimo Taparelli, Marquis d'Azelio who in 1861, after the birth of Italy remarked, "We have created Italy. Now all we need to do is to create Italians" (Tharoor, *The Battle of Belonging* 35). Thus, language takes up the role of an apparatus to transform a people into other.

But the moment in which we live is widely multicultural and interconnected. Identitarian paradigm frequently shifts on the face of intersectionality and hybridization. Malleable socio-cultural identity is no longer confined to the traditional borders of the nation-state and homogeneity of culture and language even religion is giving in to global capitalism. Absolutism turns into a ludicrous term. Now we live in the world where no country illegitimately can aspire to enslave another country in all respects. Nation-states are now being compelled to adapt the hybrid identity of the national subject, "if, of course, the demand for representational fairness does not alter the underlying forces that stubbornly structure our world" (Martin 174). With the rise of technological development the world is getting shrunk in size and time- and is increasingly measured in smaller units. Due to the breakage of the centre of the power into smaller units, even orthodoxy in thoughts and attitudes has started being refashioned all over the world. Globalization has obviously brought about an important paradigm shift in the conception of solidarity, indigeneity, patriotism and even in ontological and theological identity of humanity. Nominalism has been being ousted by universalism. In such a world (E)nglish inevitably turns into (English), that is, the word starts with small 's'.

12. ENGLISH AS A SITE OF CULTURAL STRUGGLE

True, language is a site for cultural struggle and by nature it is productive, not reflective. Paradigms of ideas and subjectivity of a community develop out of its language. Even the world community is now being constructed with English language as a First World countries with a view to going on with linguistic imperialism, claims that English is the language of power as it is a gateway to the world of technology and information. Even today IELTS is a must for a student of a Third World country if he or she intends to receive higher education in a university

of the First World country. Actually, the myth of the omnipotence of English has got an aspiration to impose the 'Whiteman's burden' on the shoulder of the Third World countries. In this connection, Macedo et al assert:

The assertion of English with success is also misleading. For example, the fact that approximately 30 million African-Americans speak English as their mother tongue did not prevent the vast majority of them from being relegated to ghetto existence, economic deprivation and, in some cases, to the status of sub-humans. It is most naïve to think that the uncritical acquisition of English will always be a great benefit. What is often left unexamined, even within the academy, is how the learning of English, a dominant language, imposes upon the subordinate speakers a feeling of subordination, as their life experience, history, and language are ignored, if not sacrificed. One can safely argue that English today represents a tool, par excellence, for cultural invasion, with its monopoly of the internet, international commerce, the dissemination of the celluloid culture, and its role in the Disneyfication of world cultures. (Tasildar, 2018)(Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1993)

Thus, English assumes a hegemonic role and monopolizes the world on behalf of a few capitalist countries. In most of the countries which were once colonized by the European forces English is one of the official languages. In most of the African countries where poverty, political failure, malnutrition and the high child mortality rate are a commonplace, English is an official language. In Asian countries also English plays an instrumental role as an official language. But these countries are categorized as Third World countries. Thus, the myth of the omnipotence of English is a construction of the previous colonial forces now imperialist power enables them to neo-colonize the countries of emerging economy, technology and science.

The realization of this naked truth and the politics of the imperialist force now inevitably give rise to a counter-discourse which questions the agency of English language. In 1972 Ngugi wa Thiong'o wrote an essay 'The Abolition of English Department' and declared that English department from Nairobi University was to be abolished with a view to establishing Africanism. Actually, Ngugi diagnoses how English even in postcolonial situation goes on with a deliberate mission to

marginalize the native language and local history and heritage. He means that English is not only a language but also an apparatus of transformation. Hence, juxtaposition between English and local language is to be ensured, not considering these two in the scale of master/servant dichotomy. Even the study and teaching of English language are to be accomplished in such a way so that the objective behind it cannot escape our exploration.

13. SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND ENGLISHES

In this connection, it is found that the prevailing trends of the study of linguistics deliberately “have marginalized the study of the social role of language” (Romaine 1). Language serves as an archive of a society and so while distinguishing the study of sociolinguistics from the mainstream linguistics, Romaine refers to Noam Chomsky in her book *Language in Society*, and asserts that sociolinguistics is not concerned with grammar; it is rather an object of serious study. Then she specifically reflects on what Chomsky asserts that, “questions of language are basically questions of power” (Romaine 1). Language is a system, an archive of a people’s memories, histories and experiences. It is an apparatus to control, to shape, to deconstruct and reconstruct. Hence, the study of language must be considered to be a serious multidisciplinary area. Chomsky further believes that “the narrowing of modern linguistics to the study of grammar has ruled out investigation of many interesting questions about how language functions in society” (Romaine 1). It cannot be denied that language is a highly social phenomenon. Hence, the study of language requires the study of the society. Social class causes diversity of use, pronunciation, accent, even vocabulary of a language. Urbanization which started with the onset of industrialization in the mid eighteenth century in Britain caused an epic migration of the rural people to East London for work. “At the turn of twentieth century 78 per cent of its population lived in towns” (Romaine 68). Concentration of diverse population from diverse areas and professions created a new form of dialect. Besides, urbanization created social stratification in terms financial ability. It also influenced native English in Britain. Keeping this analogy in mind, if the case of the colonized countries during the colonial period is explored, then it is easily found how English, the language of the colonizers got hybridized in

contact with the languages of the natives. Even in Indian Subcontinent English has been Indianized. In African English has been Africanized. In this connection, Chinua Achebe claims that English can aptly carry the load of his experience and so he uses English for writing to reach the international readership. But the misery is that the African cannot even today come to a consensus and choose one out of their nearly two thousand languages as their lingua franca.

14. CONCLUSION

To infer, because of hybridization and assimilation, now it can be said that speaking and learning English language transforms the natives into colonial others. We must use English in our own way, even in our own syntax. This has already started throughout the world. Now it is no more the time to debate whether we teach and learn English as a second or foreign language. English is now inevitably essential as it can carry the load of our experience. Above all, sociolinguistic diversities of different countries create different englishes, and as they are potent enough to serve the purpose of comprehensibility, there is no need to bother about British English or American English. In the present globalizing world functional nativeness of English “determined by the RANGE and DEPTH of a language in a society” is more important than genetic nativeness (Kachru 12). Sociolinguistic contexts and functional domains deconstruct English and reconstruct englishes as per the demand of comprehensibility and reciprocation. This research, in this context, may attract the successive researchers to investigate the role of englishes in the present world from the historicist perspective and it will impact the status of englishes upon the people whose second language is English.

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Cite this article as: Dr. Elham Hossain., (2025). English Connects or Disconnects? A Discursive Palaver. *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies*. 4(4), pp. 566- 573.
<https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeks-04-04-024>