



A ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA'S CULTURE AND IDENTITY: A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Culture is complementary to language. Language is out come of culture. It affects thought process and creates a distinctive system of beliefs pertaining and peculiar to that culture. Cultural identity is associated with linguistic distinctiveness. The shared cultural knowledge and the shared non-cultural knowledge (recipe, geography and economics) in thought process and thought content produce the language. Culture plays an important role in developing and shaping the language. As Goodenough explains the relation of language and culture, "That a society's language is an aspect of its culture ... the relation of language to culture is that part to whole". [Hudson, 83] Language and culture together give an identity to individual and interlinking of three aspects (language, culture and identity) make the peculiar identity of that particular society in this world.

INTRODUCTION

The root of the language is very deep in the culture. Language is the source to convey culture and cultural ties. It is the means of communication and it helps to share each others ideas. Use within one's culture and the whole intertwining of these relationships start at one's birth which makes his own identity through it. Language and culture are twined such that people in the society cannot live without using the two. Language is used to express the thoughts and ideas that are the out come of culture. And by expressing thoughts he/she share the culture and create his/her own identity in the world. Learning a new language means being familiar and friendly to a new culture. Consequently teachers of a language are also good teachers of culture. Culture can be spread all over the world through the language, the means of communication.

A noted soviet semiotician, Juri Lotman, views language as a 'Primary Modeling System' and describes literature and art in general as 'Second Modeling System'. For the later are derived from the former so he declares –

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“No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language”.

[Bassnett-McGuire, Susan, 7]

If culture is the body then language is the heart within that body and it is the interaction between two that results in the continuation of life energy. The language and his culture give him an identity in the world. The effective and fluent language competence person is supposed a well cultured and mannered as it brings an identity to him. Language has a long history of development. It has developed with culture. Being a means of human communication as essence of culture, it has been in existence since the earliest period of the history of human race. It has continued to be refined and diversified through use by different people of the world. The combination of particular language and culture give special identity to the person such as English language and its culture give him/her an identity of Englishman/Englishwoman, Hindi language and its culture give him/her an identity of an Indian and Marathi language and its culture give him/her an identity of Maharashtrian. It is difficult to trace the origin of any language but the history of its development has been traced to great extent. Since the end of the 18th century, the study of the history of languages of the world has gained momentum. The study of the history of language and its cultures go hand by hand. The study of history of language can be understood better with the history of its culture. The study of the history of Indian language has given grammatical and cultural base as Bloomfield says –

“It was in India that arose a baby knowledge which was destined to revolutionize European ideas about language. It was the Indian grammar that presented to European eyes for the first time a complex and accurate description of a language based not upon theory but open observation”. [10]

Indian, Greek and Roman linguistic studies are the oldest and most valuable which reveal the rich culture and the intellect identity of ancient Indians, Greeks and Romans. Greek and Latin’s linguistic studies are speculative and philosophical but the study of Sanskrit language reveals that the Indians were the first to have initiated descriptive and analytic studies of language based on observation, observation of culture, from where the language originated.

Constant change is the nature of language. Languages change with the change in culture with time. When a language ceases to change, it is called the dead language. The constant change of living language can be easily seen in its vocabulary. Old words out of use, new words are added to vocabulary and existing words change their meaning. A change in language takes place with transliteration, transference, transcreation and transposition in vocabulary. For

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instance certain food items of Indians, word of common use in everyday conversation based on culture are borrowed in English as it is without any change such as wdad-pav, pav-bhaji, halawa, kheer and the same way foreign words like pasta, noodles, pizza, burger and Manchurian of common use in everyday conversation based on foreign culture are borrowed in Indian language as it is. Borrowing words into each others languages not only enrich the vocabulary of language but also make familiar to its culture.

The language plays an important role in the personal, national and even cultural identity of a person. The person of any nation mostly speaks in their national language such as a Francis speaks French, an Englishman speaks English, a Germaine speaks Germany and an Indian speaks Hindi. The relation between a language and the people who speak it, have their identity. Because of speaking that language, the two can scarcely be thought of apart. A language lives so long as there are people who speak it and use it as their native language and its greatness is only that given to it by these people. The language gives to the speaker personal as well as cultural identity. A language is important because the people who speak it are important – politically, economically, commercially, socially and culturally. English, French and German are great and important languages superior all around the world people have been starting to accept their culture with their language because they are the languages of great and important people; for this reason they are widely studied outside the country of their use. Supposing their languages superior people have been starting to accept their culture with their language. In accepting superior language with their culture people are going far away from their language and culture and losing their identity such as Marathi, Punjabi, Kannada, Tamil, Malyalam and Telugu these Indian languages are not studied out of India and the native people rarely learn it as supposing inferior to their language. Language influences personal, national and cultural identity too.

Sometimes the cultural importance of a race of nation has at some former time been so great that their language remains important among cultivated people long after it has ceased to represent political, commercial or other greatness. For instance Sanskrit is studied in its classical form because of the great civilization which its literature preserves the most complete record of it. But now Indians stopped to write in this language, result is neglected by the outside world too. Latin and Greek, ancient languages of European were rich and knowledgeable.

In India English is the most important language. After Hindi it is the most commonly spoken, read and written language in India. Indians who know English will always try to use it and show that they know English. It symbolizes English is superior language for them and they like to accept the culture of it. Indians think English medium education offers the better education, culture, higher intellect and an opportunity of good job. English speaker Indians often mingle it with Indian languages in their conversation. Indians abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversation in any Indian language is very common

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practice among Indians, such as language of Hindi movies and serials. English is used as first, second and even third language in India. It has wattage in Indian society as well as in its culture.

People live in certain location at a certain period of time and at that time they develop language according to their particular needs and share a way of life and culture. Language is strongly intertwined with culture and identity. The identity of the person depends on the way he/she uses language while speaking. The acquisition of English by Indians may not change their biology (blood and skin colour) but could create a new culture (taste, opinions, morals and intellect) with which the native speakers could interact. English is affected by vernacular in Indian English literature by Indian English writers who have brought new identity to them. As Raja Rao in his preface to his novel *Kantapura* says – “English is not a ‘foreign tongue’ in India, but it is only the language of our ‘intellect makeup’, not of our ‘emotional makeup’”. [1970: p II] He highly suggests that the Indian English writers must express ‘Indian sensibility’ and he should learn to write in Indian English and not Babu English, the English of Oxford and Cambridge educated Englishman.

“The Indianness of English consist not in the sprinkling of Indian vocabulary, though it is there, but in the manner in which they dislocate the conventional syntax to approximate to the patterns and rhythms of Punjabi, Kannada or Tamil speech, in the attempt to catch the very tone of voice, the gesture of hand and the twinkle in the eye of the men and women who figure in the work of art”. [Verghese, C. Paul. 1971: 24]

Indian English must be used to express Indian sensibility to convey the ‘feel’ of cultural and emotional life of the Indians to the readers.

English is supposed to be the superior, global, business, science and international language. The culture of this language is also accepted as the superior culture. The western culture and languages are accepted as the superior and eastern culture and languages are decided inferior. To create the identity and prove the superiority of Indian culture and language, the Indian English writers have written in English affected by the vernacular, about the Indian and Indianness. The Indian English writers like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Girish Karnad, Vikram Seth, Upmanya Chatterjee, Arundhati Roy, Rohinto Mistry, Salaman Rushdi, V. S. Naipaul, Shashi Tharoor, Shashi Deshpande and Amitav Ghosh have brought Indian culture on international level through English language and have created their own identity at international level. For instance R. Tagore is winner of Nobel Prize, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga are winner of Booker prize. It proves that Indian English writers have got the identity at international level with the essence of Indian culture. On the other hand the vernacular speakers are influenced by English culture and



language and consideration of inferiority about vernacular and our culture we are decentering from both. Accepting the western culture and language we are losing own culture, identity and language.

Globalization and multilingualism bring changes in all cultures and languages. It hybridizes Indian languages and culture. The effect of globalization process on language is an emergent field in sociolinguistic. Globalization shakes traditional obedience networks based on gender. It impacts cultural change too. For Smith [1999, p. 24] “The word globalization is substituted for the word imperialism”. Traditions and languages reach into one another and exchange word and concepts is the impact of globalization. There are numerous words so common in English that no one remembers they actually came from Hindi. “Wearing a ‘khaki’ hat, the ‘thug’ took the ‘loot’ to his ‘cushy bungalow’ in the ‘jungle’ ”. In the given sentence there are five Hindi words which are totally supposed as a part of English language. At the same time there are many words that have been borrowed from English into Hindi such as bus, tank, torch, taxi, bomb, pencil, fan, cyber café. Many English words are originated from Sanskrit or Hindi such as divine, mother, father, brother etc.

Globalization not only exchanges the words but also exchange the concepts such as, when the British first came to India in the 16th century, they were not accustomed to the daily rituals of personal hygiene. During that period Europeans rarely took baths; hence they used perfumes of India. But in India a morning bath is an integral part of Hindu ritual. The British brought this cleanliness habit which was initially called a craze to the west. The idea that “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” which inspired a Christian revivalist movement in early 19th century USA grew out of the revolution in bathing rituals that the Europeans learned from their contact with Hindus.

India is a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi religious country. There are 1652 mother tongue according to the 1961 census of India. As a multilingual country it is very obvious to borrow Punjabi, Marathi and Gujarati words in Hindi. Due to the globalization the mixture of two or more languages takes place all around India. It hybridizes the language and culture of India and has brought the new identity of Indians. Although globalization has been associated with the destruction of our cultural identities, cultural identity is much more ‘Product of globalization and multilingualism’ than its victim. The best example of this is the Hinglish and mobile language of young generation.

The language, culture and identity vary on the basis of Indian social class, age, ethnicity and sex. The Indian social classes are divided in three different classes – high class, middle class and lower class society. The language of individual shows to which class the person belongs. As high class society has sophisticated and very cultured language and lower class society uses much slang in their language. Differences in the social roles of adults and children also influence how language is used. Home, school and college contexts may represent different



cultures, subcultures or both may influence language acquisition in noticeable ways. In average the language of male is dominating whereas the female language is polite with confidence.

Language, culture and identity go hand in hand as all three have birth, growth and death. The Indian language Sanskrit, the language of Vedas and GOD, has ceased to change. It has ceased to represent economical, political, commercial and other greatness. Sanskrit, the most ancient language of India which dates from about a thousand years before Christ, has ceased in the present age. The new language takes the place of old one. The modern forms of Sanskrit are languages of northern India and Pakistan like Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Marathi, Assamese and Oriya. We may call it the dead language as it has ceased to change. Even the culture of Sanskrit is not followed by the Indians as the culture has changed with the change in language.

At the same time Pali, the language of Baudha religion, Prakrit, the language of 12th and 13th century of Maratha religion is no more in use. The Buddhism and Maratha religion exist but with the different languages like Marathi of Maratha. Each language and its culture had its own identity in the past and even in present time we see, the language and its culture have its own identity as language without culture and culture without language is difficult to get an identity in the world. No language is superior or inferior, the speaker of that language and culture make it superior or inferior. The person who has sound knowledge, fluency, inwardness knowledge of that language, culture and command on it makes it superior language. The speaker gets his own identity in world with the proper use of language.

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