

Vanishing Voices of the Minorities : A Critical Study of English as a Global Language

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ABSTRACT

English as language commands an omnipresent status in the world owing to some of distinctive and dominating perspectives. Its global acceptance due to its functional flexibility has given birth to some million dollar controversial issues, more importantly, the one that considers its global spread as a threat to the languages of the minorities. It is believed that the number of non-native speakers is continuously increasing against its native speakers due to the acculturation and nativization processes. Whether we take international business or the relation English is globally recognized as a medium and is gaining momentum regularly. The job value that is assigned to this language leads to its proliferation in academic sector as well. In short, it has become the only window through which people can reach to each other. Under such a situation other languages face marginalization and are in a constant threat of extinction which would not only lead to the fragmentation into the “family of languages” but also sound a death blow to the linguistic diversity eventually. This paper aims to undertake a critical evaluation of the English as a global language and study the ways whereby minority languages that represent particular multiethnic culture are engulfed into the threat of losing their identity and scope in spite of carrying along a rich baggage of linguistic, historical, social, cultural, and anthropological information. It also attempts to discuss English as a killer language that thrives and enjoys the current position at the cost of the languages of the minorities and thereby perpetuates a language loss.

Keywords : Omnipresent, Minorities, Globally, Marginalisation, Diversity, Threat, Killer Language, Language Loss.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language as an exclusive human property is a central characteristic of human identity, rooted in a particular culture. It is language that gives recognition to an individual in a particular social set up and is considered to be the rich heritage of that culture. As per an estimate, “Our world is home to 7,105 living languages; among them, 1,481 are in trouble and 906 are dying” (qtd. in Majidi 33). A concern has been voiced not only for the unwritten languages but also for some other languages which are under the threat of extinction. Such a situation will, therefore, result in a great ancestral loss for if a language dies, a community’s link to its past is severed, its tradition and knowledge is lost for the unifying factor that links people to that knowledge is abandoned.

A language assumes a status of a global language only when it comes out of the prototypical feature conveying

thoughts and feelings of linking people and begins to take role in the overall affairs of the people and nations. This implies that English as a global language has come out of the traditional definition of communication and has taken interest in the other domains of life of the people. From the world economy to the world politics the power of English language speakers is a phenomenal one. The seeds of this language were sown during imperialism and gradually it entered the courts, schools, parliament, travels, restaurants, shops and more boost came from globalization, employment trend and especially from new information technology. The global communication through the technology is working wonders in enhancing the reach of this language to every nook and the corner of the world. Today it has entered into the bone marrow of the people and even their level of proficiency is gauged on the basis of this language. Gai Harrison rightly observes:

English has dominated many international conferences and consequently disadvantages other language speakers who have less communicative power. While English is not the only language that has assumed political significance in the broader world context, the rapid development of worldwide communication networks, international market deregulation and the amalgamation of world finances have all served to elevate its status further. (409)

Since we know English as a global language means creation of a single monolingual class what happens to be the state of the languages of the minorities? Normally we refer minority language to a language specific to a locality numerically smaller than the state's population. Such a language too has its legacy and this gives rise to a critical question; does English as a prominent medium of communication behave well with these languages without threatening their existence? The answer to this question is, no. Given that there occurs a turn of people towards English as one supreme language, the other languages are bound to disappear. Single monolingual class means one all-pervading language and a language is alive as long as it is actively spoken and once it loses its speakers it is labelled as dead or extinct. Commenting on this loss David Crystal observes:

The situation continues today, though the matter is being discussed with increasing urgency because of the unprecedented rate at which indigenous languages are being lost, especially in North America, Brazil, Australia, Indonesia and parts of Africa. At least 50 percent of the world's 6,000 or so living languages will die out within the next century. (20)

The loss of a language is not just social, cultural or linguistic loss for ecolinguists rate a language equal to that of any specie of plant or animal on the earth and thus they consider it as one of the serious challenges to the bio-diversity, in general, resulting in a tragedy. Besides the personal disinterest of the people, the global compulsion that forces a minority culture to assimilate with the more dominant one is a grave detrimental factor that pushes a language to its death gradually. Technically this change is observed as one of the serious repercussion of the language shift: the case when a society decides to forgo its language and takes recourse to another one. A number of factors have been rated

contributing to the serious challenge of language shift. These factors range from external to internal aspects of the inhabitants of a particular society undergoing a linguistic shift. They include social, economic, political and values of inhabitants of a society.

People usually tend to shift to the places that guarantee better socio-economic and political prospects. This leads to traffic towards urbanization where English already looms large. This mobility causes them to "either rely on language mediators or take up that role for themselves" (Polezzi 173). Since here global language negates any scope of the minority language, the non-native begins to imitate the natives and mimic their style in order to come up with the standards set already by the natives. Whether we take jobs, industries or any other business establishments, the necessity for English speakers is what provides them little chance to practice their own languages. Looking for ones cultural expression in such a society is what Frantz Fanon call a "frequent mistake" (196). To survive here claims acting like the natives which the non-natives imitate and with the passage of time the native taste is much internalized and the point of the gap is more and more minimised. The repercussions of this all is that some of the seriously good languages are wiped out of the map for once and all. Brazil's indigenous languages are the apt examples of this damage. If Cronin remarks, "A language may be displaced from the public sphere and thus increasingly marginalized from use in various areas of life because of invasion, conquest and subjection by a more powerful group" then creating a global compulsion for English is nothing but a form of colonialism perpetuated by hegemonic language (170).

However, the role of the minority community equally in pushing for the language loss is not minuscule but a considerable one. Sercombe rightly puts it:

Language death is rarely imposed from without, that the phenomenon is determined primarily by internal changes within language communities themselves, even if there are powerful factors at work beyond a language community's boundaries that may result in language shift. In addition, language death follows rather than precedes socio-cultural shifts, or changes in individual or group values, which are reflected in language change, language shift, or the death of a language. (98)

Their attitudes and values towards their cultural legacies are equally responsible for the strangulation of their legacies. The importance of language, being an important manifestation of culture, is best highlighted by Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). He calls it as:

The expression of a nation, the expression of its preferences, of its taboos and of its patterns. It is at every stage of the whole of society that other taboos, values and patterns are formed. A national culture is the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external extensions exerted over society as a whole and also at every level of that society. (ibid)

It is believed that more than the global language's enticing, it is the communities own faults that result in language loss and thereby the loss of one's identity. Due to English assuming the status of a global language and more importantly the language of prestige, non-natives tend to look their language and cultures down for they are shrouded in an inferiority complex in comparison to the language of the others. This kind of attitude is nothing but a hypothetical construct directed to be what one is not. Thus, we can say it is a mask, not the reality that prompts the non-natives to sever their ties with their own languages. The greatest damage is caused when the children of this community interact with the English speakers and day in and day out they are exposed more to it leading to the diminishing of whatever there had remained of their own identity.

This implies that a language loss is perpetuated not only the external factors but at times the natives of a minority language are consciously involved. In spite of all this, we should not forget the fact that how much English has done well to the world but what is more important to understand is the fact that it is a means, a tool to reach a particular position but not an end.

II. CONCLUSION

Although this brings to limelight the fact that we cannot escape the importance of English language in our lives, yet it also needs to be kept in mind that giving English undue place in our lives at the cost of our own languages will be unjust. Besides we know that the English is not the only language in the world if one is to sustain a good

neighbourhood. The best thing is that rather than feeling condescend to the other languages of the globe, one should work on developing an acquaintance with them giving due respect to all. We know that survival of a language is possible only when it is used, valued and transmitted from generations to generations. English as a language should ignite us about the other languages of the world rather than taking their place.

III. REFERENCES

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