

English as 1st language vs English as 2nd language India: A Case Study

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Acknowledgements

On the auspicious occasion of writing a research paper, we would like to thank all our team members, teachers, mentors and the support staff.

We are obliged to all our colleagues from Institute of Engineering & Management who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research and without their cooperation this piece of work would not have been possible.

In particular, we would like to show our gratitude to our Dean sir, HOD sir, Abhishikta Ma'am, Samapika Ma'am, Riya Ma'am, and Mayurakshi Ma'am for believing in us, sharing their pearls of wisdom with us during the course of this research, and inspiring us throughout this journey.

Abstract

“Viewed freely, the English language is the accretion and growth of every dialect, race, and range of time, and is both the free and compacted composition of all.”

-Walt Whitman

It is often said “language is the vehicle for inter and intra communication. It is the tool to communicate across geographical boundaries”. All humans have an innate capability to acquire language. The learning of first language is a natural process and this language is termed as native language or mother tongue. In addition to first language, the language that we acquire is termed as the second language. English is the major language used for international communication. India is a country which has different languages, customs, cultures and rituals. English is an official language as well as an important language in India. It is considered as a gift that was given to the Indians by the British. And yes, it is absolutely true that most of the Indians thought English is a prestigious language and by using it one can acquire better education, better culture and higher intellect too.

English is an essential language because knowledge of English is required in many fields, professions and occupations. “English language stood strong here in India against all tests of time”. In today’s world people realize the importance of English. It is the most widely spoken native language in the world. English is indisputably the primary language of global trade and commerce. To survive in this modern era, it is necessary to acquire basic knowledge in English language.

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This paper will make an attempt to show how useful English is as a first language and as a second language. It also gives us an idea of how English reached India and evolved here through ages as the most important language of education and research. It also deals with the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring English as a first language and second language. It will also show how English became a significant language in India as well as different parts of the world and why is it so necessary to grasp hold of the language as a key to success in the outside world. And finally, we discuss about what are the flaws and leads in keeping the global language as a native tongue or a contingent language to be supported by another language.

Keywords: Britannic, Anglican, Her Majesty's, Commonwealth, lingua franca, contingent, Auxiliary, Language acquisition, EFL, ESL



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Introduction

“How can we learn a language?” is both a very fascinating and a very complicated question. It has been a quite interesting question with a sea of various answers, but so far only competing theories have come into existence. In 1965, Noam Chomsky invented the theory of a Universal Grammar which stated the structures of all languages and that babies were born with innate knowledge of this Universal Grammar.

However, mastering the foreign language is a complex problem as the Language of the Commonwealth was spread through the process of colonization, with each country being colonized grasping a part of the language. Soon educators from Britain were brought to teach and preach the language.

English is now regarded as the most widely spoken language in the world, it is spread to a stunning figure of 103 countries. But this leaves it with a vulnerability, which is often overlooked. The expertise in the language is depleting fastly. As in most of the countries the language is being acquired as a contingent or a “target” language, which is often very difficult to catch up and requires rigorous practice and an extensive vocabulary without which learners would not be able to independently express their feelings and emotions through the language. Whereas the European countries have a high English Proficiency Index, as most of them have English as a parent language. This allows them to have a voluminous exposure and hence leads to comfortable speaking with high fluency standards. As a result, students are able to

communicate amongst themselves in the vernacular and thus boost their learning outcomes.

Hence this leads to a more productive output.

In the context of India, education is not cheap. Since the people need to know more about this foreign language, they have to hire expensive tutoring and mentoring sessions which would give them expertise on the subject matter. It has also been said on various occasions that the Anglican language is now becoming more of the “world’s Achilles heel”. It’s spread over the Internet and across hundreds of countries can never be ignored and hence it can be stated without a shadow of a doubt: “The role of English in the modern Era is very vital.”

International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

IELTS

Origin

The “queen’s language”, English, stepped into the Indian subcontinent along with the British. The establishment of the British East India Company marked the beginning of Her Majesty’s language in India. By the beginning of the next century, many parts of India were under their control and thus the language which they brought along with them spread over several parts of the country.

In the year 1793, the famous British philanthropist William Wilberforce proposed to add two clauses in the company’s charter act, one of them was a proposal of sending school masters from England to India. According to the renewed charter act, there was a clause in which governor general of India was expected to send one lakh rupees for education of Indians every year. This had several major influences and impacts on the growth of English language in India. This act also promoted the production and publication of English books in India.

English education in India was carried out basically by two sources, one being the Christian missionaries and another source was the semi rationalist movement. Lord Macaulay is considered the prime personality who firmly supported the cause of education of Indians in English medium schools.

Prior to the entry of the British, India had no contact with the English language. During their time English was the only official language of administration. By the time India achieved independence, English had been acquainted by most of the people in all corners of India. Now, English became the common language that could link people from various regions in India. So, in a way it became the “Lingua Franca” in India.

Hence, we can say that the use of English is now inevitable. We cannot imagine the condition of India at present, had we rejected English language at that time. Thus, English language has been a gift of the process of colonisation in India as well as the other parts of the world.

The Indigenous Language

The Mother tongue or the native tongue is the language that a child acquires from his/her parents. He/she begins to learn this language in his infancy. The goals of teaching and learning mother tongue are different from that of teaching and learning the second language. The statement is definitely true that the “mother tongue is not caught but taught”. The learning of the first language is a natural process. “The encouragement given to the child by the grown-ups also acts as a stimulus to his language acquisition.”

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The role of English language in India context is undoubtedly strongly established with the technical advancement and globalization. No indigenous language has substituted English so far. There is something like 250 million people for whom English is the mother tongue. English may not be the most spoken language in the world, but it is the official language in most of the countries.

Following up, lets simplify the pros and cons of this vast sea of this subject.

Advantages

1. English is one of the most widely spoken languages. English can be used as a means of communication & enhances connectivity across the world. Most of the world's best films, books and music are produced & published in English. Even the internet is flooded by this "omnipresent" language!
2. The career prospects and employment opportunities increase vastly with a better grasp over the language of the commonwealth.
3. It is flexible & inexhaustible. Every year, new words are being coined and new definitions added to already existing word in the dictionary.
4. Technology plays a vital role now-a-days English is the language of science, of aviation, computers, diplomacy, and tourism so learning it is absolutely essential.

Disadvantages

1. People of India have already adopted the western culture in many ways. So, now if English is made official the national identity of Indians would be lost. It is often said that

2. growing is not at all harmful, but we should be always connected with our roots. By this India would lose its originality.
3. English is not difficult to learn. But people in India do face lot of difficulties while learning English, as the expertise in the subject teachers is often found to be lacking.
4. People with the inability to speak English fluently feel themselves to be inferior. This often puts unwanted demarcations in the society.
5. Different languages other than English are becoming endangered or extinct due to the dominance & extensive use of the English language.

The Auxiliary Language

English as a second or foreign language is the use of English by speakers with different native tongues. In their aspect, it is considered as a contingent language, which needs to be aided by another primary language. We know that in our country English plays a vital role not only in the field of education or business but in every aspect of communication.

Since times immemorial, people judge each other by their attitude, behaviour and most importantly: speaking skills. Most of the society has a mechanical mind set and their views differ vividly regarding this language: They speculate that perhaps the person having a good accent and a good word throw power are observed to be from a higher status.

Nowadays, every parent wants their child to go to be fluent in the language of the Commonwealth, and hence prefer an English medium school. Methods of learning English in these schools are very different, and the students' grasp over the course varies drastically

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depending on the student's level of English proficiency and the manner and setting in which they are taught, which can range from prerequisite classes in school to self-directed study at home. In some programs, education materials are provided in a mixture of English and the student's native language. In other programs, education materials are always in English, but the vocabulary, grammar and context clues may be modified to be more easily understood by students with varying levels of comprehensive. In India we normally use U.K. English due to our history. But as we know that there are major issues that influence the language differently, so they differ in expressions and usage. This is found to a great extent primarily in pronunciation and vocabulary.

The English language has a great reach and influence, and is taught all over the world. It is not our native language but if you really want a quality position in an esteemed firm then you must be proficient in English because now almost every major Indian organization is in collaboration with foreign concerns. If you don't have good English communication skills and you can't express then your knowledge is half backed sandwich, or you want to complete your higher studies for better degrees from foreign colleges or universities for example from Oxford University or Cambridge University, then you have to adopt English as your primary language else you won't be able to cope up with the other students for which English is their vernacular.

Moving to English-speaking countries or so called 'abroad', may not be possible for many people but there are possibilities to learn or get in touch with English by taking English classes by professionals in their respective countries.

Advantages

1. As compared to other languages (Example-Chinese), English alphabets are comparatively less than that of others.
2. Easy to learn as well as speak.
3. Spoken all over the world as a 2nd language. (Global foreign language)
4. Used for all purposes.
5. Facile to communicate.

Disadvantages

1. The English dictionary consists of words which have same spell but different meaning. This acts as one of the major drawback of English language.
2. It has a great time lapse, i.e., the English spoken by us is not actually spoken by the people of U.S.A. And also we can't declare it as the Latin English because both of them are completely different.
3. Many tutoring institutions that give classes on English speaking skills are often untrained themselves. Hence they cannot impart a valuable amount of knowledge to their scholars.

Conclusion

English as the primary language is a boon to those who have it as a birthright. They are privileged to have a prior knowledge of the language, which gives them a better command over the words. It becomes apparently easy for them to catch the various accents and their grammar grows steadily.

On the other hand, a child who has not been acquiring the language from his parents, would find it extremely difficult to understand the language independently. What generally happens is that the child first thinks of a statement in his vernacular, and then tries to translate the statement to the Britannic language. This is what we call as the “translative nature of the contingent language”.

This process is highly redundant and not only time taking but also very challenging to perform. So naturally, the people speaking English as their 1st language have the upper hand against others. Hence the secondary language suffers some very dramatic loopholes which need to be fixed for improvements.

Not having the English language as a common language amongst the people is a big flaw for any country as it is required in every single phase of life, hence learning Her Majesty’s tongue is a “qualification” in today’s world.

“I know grammar by ear only, not by note, not by the rules.” Is a famous quote by the prolific writer Mark Twain. The depth of the language, when professed with expertise, would result in the proper fluency, intonation, proper pronunciation, reading and writing. This when accompanied by the exposure would lead to mastery of the language.

This is the motive of our quest and can be achieved by the hard work and competence of the scholars at the receiving end. Lastly I would like to conclude by saying that we should try to gain the proper knowledge of the English language and should profess this language at par for our Higher studies and to aim better in life.

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