

MULTI-CANONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

The development of English as a global medium has given rise and recognition to various English and this also involves a vital multicultural issues. The present paper envisages to throw light on Multi Canons and the Development of English language today. It emphasizes the need of understanding multicultural issues and norms and traits of various cultures in the process of learning and teaching of English language all over the world. The process of learning and teaching of English language is boosted further if we understand the cultural traits of a language in the light of the cultural traits of the target language. Culture is really an integral part of language learning and teaching. Part of learning and teaching is learning and teaching cultural norms in the language. In the early stages of language learning, students should be encouraged to use the language just to establish the fact that they can use it. Too much emphasis on so called appropriateness may result in an overwhelmingly chaotic situation for beginners or slow learners.

Key words: Discourse, cross-cultural, Judeo-Christian, multi-canons, pluralism, acculturation, cohesion, boosted, cultural traits, target language, appropriateness, slow learners.

Introduction:

“When we call English a global medium, it simply means that those who use English across cultures have a shared code of communication. And the result of this shared competence is that, in spite of various types of crucial differences, we believe we communicate with each other. We have one language but many voices” (Kachru, 1994, 1) It is this cross cultural function in education, in business, in tourism, in discourse and in personal social interaction that has given English an unprecedented status as a global and cross-cultural code of communication. The development and recognition of world English means English is a pluralistic language. The opening up of the language and the multiculturalism expressed in the language implies that the paradigms of teaching need not be based on monolingual and mono-cultural canon of the Judeo-Christian English language but on multi canons. All speakers should adept themselves to the present day international contexts. If we look at the global English use, norms of language interaction and literary creativity across societies- European, Asian, African- it is evident that majority of the world’s population is either diglossic or bilingual or even multi lingual. The diglossic users of a language choose between a formal and colloquial variety of language as do, for example, Arabic and South Asian speakers. In West Africa, East- Africa, South East Asia, and South Asia, bilingualism or tri-lingualism is a part of daily interaction. It is in such culturally and linguistically pluralistic contexts that African English, south and South Asian English have developed and grown. These English are loaded with various cultures and heritages, which shape a variety of cultural identities- Nigerian, Indian, Singaporean, and Papua New-Guinean- that are distinct from the Judeo-Christian identity of the language.

Typical Indian-culture-Related English Uses

The globalization of English has led to the recognition of world English and this has led us to multi-canons. Multi-canons and diversified uses of English language have created different scenario today which have challenged the age old Judeo-Christian identity of the language. This situation has prompted us to reconsider and re-examine English uses in India and elsewhere. What used to be considered as ‘mistakes’ in Indian-culture-related English uses does not hold line any more. It is only partially true that English is learnt as a vehicle to what has been labeled the Judeo-Christian tradition. With ethnic and linguistic pluralism as in many countries of Africa and Asia, English is learnt and used to impart native cultural values and historical tradition. Today, in the Indian context, the role English plays are primarily integrative in true national sense. Indian students of English will learn English not only to interact with the speakers of English from Canada or United States, but also to interact with other Asian speakers of English like Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese. Today, Indian learners of English need not to achieve or even target to achieve ‘native like’ characters. The following are some typical Indian culture related uses of English, which come into different groups:

I. Socio-linguistically characteristic uses

The uses in this category have to do with ways of greeting, addressing people and leave-taking. Some people for example call the family names of foreigners rather than the full names. And when it is time for them to leave, the use of- ‘where are you going?’ or ‘Are you going to.....?’ as a way of pointing is very common among the student learners. They also very often use ‘Respected Sir/ Respected Madam’ under the influence of their native culture and traditions.

II. Culturally characteristic uses

Frequently mentioned is the use of self-deprecation in expressing modesty. When complimented, many of the Indian learners respond with humility and modesty and try to deny the compliment because that is how they would respond according to their own cultural-social values. Indian English users are very humble and modest in this regard as compared to the users of European countries.

III. Different value systems

The concept of privacy in Judeo-Christian tradition is very hard for some Indian students to grasp or even to accept because what is regarded as ‘private’ in some places is often not thought as such in India. Questions about a person's age, marriage, salary or the price of an item are perfectly acceptable in Indian culture and social traditions. Indians are always prompted to enquire about the lives of other people to show their care, intimacy and friendship while this is not the case with western cultures.

IV. Stereo-typed world view or over generalization

It often influences students’ understanding of both the East and West and the West in general. Some of our students have stereo-typed misconceptions about other societies, for example, believing that all the people in the world are rich and affluent, formal and materialistic. This may be due to their limited knowledge of history and cultures of the West or widespread popular media resources.

For some students, their English may become more so-called 'native like' as they progress in English learning; for some others, this may not happen. An analysis of Indian students culture related uses here is intended that speakers of English, both from native speaking countries and non-native speaking countries, will have a better understanding for various international countries. Acculturation should take place in the international context.

However, acculturation is not achieved in a few days. It requires work as well as effort and time. It may do good to monolinguals to learn something about other cultures and languages. But bilingualism helps to foster both cognitive and verbal versatility and flexibility. Here, we must agree with the views of Hughes, who says that 'in a society as in farming, mono culture works poorly. It exhausts the soil. The social richness of America, so striking to the foreigners, comes from the diversity of its tribes, Its capacity for cohesion, for some spirit of common agreement on what is to be done, comes from the willingness of these tribes not to elevate their cultural differences into impassable barriers and ramparts'. This view is more applicable in the Indian context as we all inherit a very rich, diverse and age old cultural and religious practices. Herein lies one of the most appealing defenses of multi-culturalism that we have today. Besides, speakers of various English, today, need to develop awareness of sociolinguistic relativity and tolerance of what may possibly be conceived as 'different' pronunciation or some 'variation' in rules of speaking if that does happen.

To help students' acculturation, teachers must let students know that, between cultures, there are superficial cultural traits as well as subtle cultural traits that may contrast markedly with those of one's own culture and are interpreted as unbelievable and irrational. They must be aware of how another culture feels from the stand point of the insider. Our students must realize that culture is really an integral part of language teaching and learning. Part of teaching and learning is teaching and learning cultural norms of a language. A language can never be learnt without understanding the cultural part and norms of the target language. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to help the students understand the target cultures and thus help them acculturise in various English. The process of teaching and learning of the language is boosted as the learner acculturise himself with the cultural traits and norms of the target language.

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