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Language in India www.languageinindia.comISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 25:11 November 2025

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Neoliberalism and Plurilingualism: Global Role of the English Language

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Abstract

This paper argues that the global spread of the English language and the evolution of diverse versions of the language, sometimes labeled as Postcolonial Englishes, World Englishes, New Englishes, etc., promote the goal of global capitalism and free flow of economy in the era of neo-liberalism. Today, English has evolved into various regional varieties across the world with distinct, indigenous identities. These nativized forms of English shattered the concept of a single, universal English. The emergence of new varieties of English produces a kind of linguistic fluidity which results into the expansion of the communicative space for English and perpetuation of linguistic imperialism. These fluid language users of English do not adhere to a didactic mono-model of the English language but accept plurilingualism by combining elements from dominant forms and nativized versions of the language. This plurilingualism paves the way for economic power flow across the countries included in the communicative sphere of English. Thus, plurilingualism, which has become an integral part of cultural and linguistic imperialism is at present in the service of neoliberal economic interests. This paper examines briefly some aspects of various versions of the English language across the world and argues how these Englishes are used as linguistic capital in promoting the neoliberal agenda by administering linguistic competence to non-native speakers of English and making them 'fit' citizens in the neoliberalist world of free market economy. This paper also focuses on the role of language in

the world of trade and commerce and how English is imbued with more economic power than other languages and is the preferred linguistic currency in the neoliberalist regime.

Introduction

For the last few decades much attention has been drawn in scholarly discussions towards the emergence and evolution of diverse versions of the English language. They can be identified by their distinctive linguistic features. This paper examines the global role of these Englishes in the era of neoliberalism. Regionally appropriated, indigenized versions of English are used extensively across the world in their own rights. These new Englishes promote the goal of global capitalism and free flow of economy. Different varieties of English produce a kind of linguistic fluidity resulting into expansion of the English-speaking world. The increasing number of English speaking/using people across the world paves the way for free market policies of neoliberalism. The plurilingual approach of users of English makes the different varieties of the language mutually intelligible and fulfils their communicative purposes. This paper argues that English as the dominating global language serves the interest of neoliberal market policies. Markets are socially produced and based on social, political, and economic practices. Language is also a social product, and it has intrinsic political and economic resources. As such language plays an integral role in the neoliberal economic framework. The neoliberal free market policy requires mass communication practices for the free flow of capital, labour, resources, trade and commerce. English is the most preferred world language at various levels of business and communication. The expanding communicative space for English perpetuates linguistic imperialism and promote neoliberal agenda.

Emergence of Englishes

The English used in Great Britain and in the United States has been studied elaborately. But now-a-days such studies include these new varieties of English outside Britain and America. The local and indigenous population “have adopted and appropriated the English language for themselves, thus contributing to its diversification and the emergence of new varieties” (Schneider, 2007, p. 1).

The three-circle model of Kachru describes the spread of English in terms of three circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. These circles represent "the type of spread, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages" (Kachru, 1985, p.12).Non-native speakers of English in the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle use indigenized Englishes which have grown local roots. They are in contact with local languages and cultures. Schneider (2007) notes,

> From Barbados to Australia, from Kenya to Hong Kong, a traveler will today get along with English, but he or she will also realize that the Englishes encountered are quite different from each other--pronounced with varying accents, employing local words opaque to an outsider, and even, on closure inspection, constructing sentences with certain words in slightly different ways. (p. 2)

Thus, apart from the 'prestigious' American and British English, we have today Irish English, Australian English, African English, Caribbean English, Singapore English, Indian English and so on.

The nativized varieties are distinguishable and they, in many ways, differ from each other. The differences are at various levels of linguistic realizations: Phonology, lexis and Grammar.

In African English sometimes we see that the normal word order is altered:

For example,

This shirt, I like it. (African English)
I like this shirt. (British English)

In British R.P plural ending *–s* or *–es* is to be pronounced as /s/ when preceded by a voiceless consonant other than sibilants. For example, *cats* /kæts/.They are to be pronounced as /z/ when preceded by a voiced sound other than sibilants. For example, boys /bɔiz/.As there is no sound like /z/ in Bangla, Bengali speakers often confuses between /s/ and confusea result, he/she may pronounce some English words in different ways:*boys* - / bɔiʤ / . *Peas* may be pronounced as *peace*. Bengali and Oriya speakers of English would pronounce *sip* and *ship* alike.

The concept of a correct, monolithic or pure form of English is misleading today. All different versions of English are acceptable. Language is the property of the users and, as pointed out by David Crystal (2004),

> All these users have a share in the future of English. Language is an immensely democratizing institution. To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will. And it is just as likely that the future course of English is going to be influenced by those who speak it as a second or foreign language as by those who speak it as a mother tongue. (p.23)

According to Rushdie,"What seems to me to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it"(1991,as cited in Crystal ,1997, p.135-36). Therefore, today there is the urge to break away from the Anlgo-centric, purist view of English.

Plurilingualism and Linguistic Fluidity: Expansion of the English speaking world

In the era of globalization, the control and ownership of the native speakers of the English language is unacceptable. All Englishes around the world are valid and they contribute to "the linguistic mosaic which the speakers of the English language have created in the English-speaking world" (Kachru,1976,p.236). Though these different versions of English have been indigenized, they are not mutually unintelligible. There is a kind of 'intelligibility bond' between the speakers of one variety of English with the other. According to Suresh Canagarajah (2009),"Speakers negotiate their different Englishes for intelligibility and effective communication." (p.5). A plurilingual tradition has been emerged among the speakers in which "English continues to be negotiated and appropriated"(Canagarajah, 2009, p.6).They have developed plurilingual competence which allows them to effectively interact with each other. Thus, their Englishes may be mixed with the vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical structures of their own respective mother tongues, yet they are able to negotiate their different Englishes for communication purpose.

The emergence of Plurilingual English produces a kind of linguistic fluidity which results into the expansion of the communicative space for English. These fluid language users of English do not adhere to a didactic mono-model of the English language but accept plurilingualism by combining elements from dominant forms as well as nativized versions of the language. Linguistic fluidity beyond any standardized system is one reason of the global spread of English.The power of the English language does not lie in its bounded symbolic system, but in its fluidity which enables the English speakers of a particular variety to negotiate with other varieties.

Plurilingualism and linguistic fluidity, negotiation and mutual intelligibility play the role of catalysts in the process of ceaseless expansion of the English–speaking world. The non-native speakers of English across the world treat English as their own; they remake it, alter it in a manner that may suit their purpose. The consequence is that over 2 billion people speak English today across the world to make it the largest language by number of speakers/users.

Softer boundaries, neoliberalism and the English Language

Plurilingual approach and communicative practices have made it possible to establish a bridge among speakers belonging to the different domains of the English-speaking world. Fluidity of a language beyond any standard framework or classical set of rules makes a language living, dynamic, communicatively more resourceful and constantly expanding. According to Makoni & Pennycook,"the linguistic fluidity that was once positioned as inferior and undesirable is now being positioned as ideal (2007, as cited in Flores, 2013,p.509)". In the present context of rapidly growing number of fluid English language users, separated by geographical and socio-cultural boundaries, the non-native speakers of the language whether belonging to the outer circle or expanding circle of Kachru's tripartite model, have developed a plurilingual competence. This process results in making the boundaries between these Englishes softer and more fluid.

Plurilingualism and linguistic fluidity have produced a new global market for English. The expansion of the communicative sphere of English paves the way for economic power flow across the world. In the context of neoliberalism, the new world order constantly breaks the borders of traditionally recognised territories and it "entails the merging of the state and the

market in a new form of corporate governance (Klein, 2007, as cited in Flores, 2013,502). In this context it is relevant to mention that Neoliberalism allows

> economic power flows across and through continuous space, toward or away from territorial entities (such as states or regional power blocs) through the daily practices of production, trade, commerce, capital flows, money transfers, labour migration, technology transfer, current speculation, flows of information, cultural impulses, and the like. (Phillipson, 2009, as cited in Flores, 2013,503)

Relationship between neoliberalism and Plurilingualism has become very vital, because linguistic imperialism is a vehicle to implement neoliberal policies of free market economy. English language with its plurilingual approach and fluidity plays a vital role because of its increased mobility and number of users in the global market. Phillipson argues that one project of neoliberalism is "the normative goal of English becoming the default language of international communication and the dominant language of intra-national communication in an increasing number of countries (2009, as cited in Flores, 2013,p.504) ".Thus, English with its plurilingual charateristics has become an integral part of cultural and linguistic imperialism and as such is at present in the service of neoliberal economic interests.

Plurilingual Competence:Citizens in the neoliberal world

This paper argues that global spread of the English language and the evolution of diverse versions of the language play the pivotal role in implementing the policies of neoliberalism. The hybrid orientation of the English language and its flexibility are suitable for the purpose of global capitalism. In the neoliberal world order a new type of citizenship is being advocated and the new citizens would execute the policies of a global economy beyond the nation-state boundary. Traditional citizenship is gradually being replaced by the citizenship representing diverse communities whose movements are not restricted within the geo-political borders, rather they become vehicle for the free flow of economy, capital, labour, trade , commerce and so on. Englishes have enabled them to be mutually intelligible and such new “Citizens would regard one another as plurilingual and could constitute a community based on a common linguistic ideal(Beacco, 2007, as cited in Flores, 2013,512).*”* The fluid users of Plurilingual English become the ‘fit’ citizen in the neoliberalist world. The citizens of this world continuously

accumulate proficiency in different versions of the English language and are able to adapt themselves in the steadily expanding communicative sphere of English.

Teaching English in the Context of Neoliberalism

To cope up with the neoliberal world view, new modes of teaching English to the non-native speakers must be adopted. It must be kept in mind that the non-native speakers can never attain native-like command of the English language, and they don't need to. A plurilingual approach should be adopted to achieve realistic goals for teaching English as a second or foreign language. In this practice of plurilingualism the non-native speakers can develop proficiency to become plurilingual speakers of English. Instead of a single Anglo-centric model of the English language, a more dynamic poly-model accommodating different varieties of English fulfills neoliberal economic interest.

The neoliberal reform of education policy is continuously privileging English.The increased use of English has given it a prominent place in global language education. Therefore, learning English and developing skill in English are the economic needs today and "English language learning is thus better understood in economic terms as a form of consumption than in educational terms" (Piller, Takahashi, & Watanabe, 2010, as cited in Piller, 2011, p.29).The agencies of neoliberalism always attempt to valorize English education, because in today's globalized world English predominates in financial and commodity markets including trade and commerce, business and industry. As the most prominent global language English is imbued with more economic power than other languages and is the preferred linguistic currency in the neoliberalist regime.

Conclusion

The main contention of this paper is to show that though the different versions of the English language make the language communicatively more resourceful, these Englishes are used as linguistic capital in promoting the neoliberal agenda. Phillipson argues that English now represents the preferred language medium, in which most transactions take place within transnational business organizations, as well as political/economic ensembles such as the World Bank/IMF,the WTO and to a large extent, also in the European Union (EU) (2003, as cited in

Naaz Rassool ,2007, p.145). Referring Buck, Rassool comments, official discourse is produced in English first, and then is translated into different languages (2002, as cited in NaazRassool, 2007, p.145). This study provides an idea of how plurilingualism advocates linguistic fluidity resulting into widening communicative space in English. The steady expansion of English speaking/using world serves the purpose of neoliberal free market policy. Neoliberal framework accommodates different Englishes and advocates for a plurilingual approach in English teaching-learning curriculum in the non-native circles of the English-speaking world. By producing 'fit' citizens for a neoliberal world order these Englishes fulfil the economic need of neoliberalism.

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