

## Role of English language in India: It's earliest and today

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### Abstract

English has been considered to be the first global Lingua Franca. In today's modern world the English language has become part and parcel of every existing field. It has been an international language of communication, business, science, information technology, entertainment and so on. Earlier everyone was considered to be literate by their degrees and diplomas, but the knowledge of English language makes an individual literate in today's world. Different people can communicate with one another with the knowledge of English. 'Language is an apt tool for communication. It is not only a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but also a means of building friendships, economic relationships and cultural ties. Language shapes the way people observe the world and it also helps to define culture of any society. Any language is a gift of the knowledge of more than one language makes a man more efficient and skillful in many ways. English is required to exchange views on and gain from various international schools of thought, varied cultures and world literature as well as also to interpret Indian thought abroad. Hence, English is found essential in India for its utility value and not necessarily for the purposes for which the British had introduced it. Today the world has become one family.

**Keywords:** history of english, language of India, official language, role of english, today status

### Introduction

English has been considered to be the first global Lingua Franca. In today's modern world the English language has become part and parcel of every existing field. It has been an international language of communication, business, science, information technology, entertainment and so on. Earlier everyone was considered to be literate by their degrees and diplomas, but the knowledge of English language makes an individual literate in today's world. Though many countries do have English as their native language, those who have the command over the English Language are considered and respected as highly educated. It has become the working of English and also an expected requirement for a number of fields, professions such as computing and medicine.

In today's world, they have to acquire knowledge of advanced technologies and all kinds of branches of Science. There is an urgent requirement of such a common language which can be understood by youth all over India and the language in which all data and information is available. Moreover, English language becomes a store house of social and political knowledge. The most recent and the most sophisticated discoveries and inventions in science and technology are being made in the universities located in the United States of America where English language is the means of scientific discourse. The world of today needs English for some of the following reasons: Internet, Education, Communication, Travel, and Business etc.

### History of English Language

The history of the English language really started with the arrival of three Germanic tribes who invaded Britain during the 5th century AD. These tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and

the Jutes, crossed the North Sea from what today is Denmark and northern Germany. At that time, the inhabitants of Britain spoke a Celtic language. But most of the Celtic speakers were pushed west and north by the invaders - mainly into what is now Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The Angles came from "Englaland" [*sic*] and their language was called "Englisc" - from which the words "England" and "English" are derived. The invading Germanic tribes spoke similar languages, which in Britain developed into what we now call Old English. Old English did not sound or look like English today.

### History of Indian Language

Language is one of the main seeds of a person's cultural identity. In different parts of India, different languages are spoken in India. Most of the languages of India belong to two families, namely *Aryan and Dravidian*. Languages spoken in the five states of south India belong to the Dravidian family and most of the languages spoken in the north India are of Aryan family. The general writing of the Aryan languages is highly different from the general writing of Dravidian languages. The Indians also differentiate between the general north Indian accent and general south Indian accent. Along with these two main language families, there are other languages from the Simi - Mongoloid family spoken in east India.

At present, language developed in different parts of Indian history. In the earlier stage of Indian history other languages were spoken by Indian people. The holy books of different religions that developed in ancient India are written in different languages. The holy books of *Hinduism* were written in Sanskrit. The holy books of *Buddhism* were written in Pali. The holy books of Jainism were written in *Ardhamaghadhi*.

These three languages aren't spoken fluently in India today, but Sanskrit is recognized as one of the official languages of India. The modern Aryan languages are considered to have changed from Sanskrit. The evolvments of south Indian languages aren't clear. Some of the tribes of north India speak in dialects similar to Dravidian languages. Among the present Dravidian languages of south India, Tamil language had used its greatest.

Before its independence, most of India was a British colony. Before the British the most dominant Empire of north India was the *Moghul Empire*. The *Moghuls* were Muslim invaders who arrived in India from the present day Afghanistan. The official language of the *Moghul* courts was Persian. The *Moghuls*, like other people who lived to the west of the Indian sub-continent named India as 'Hind' or 'Hindustan', after the river Indus which flows in the present day Pakistan. The language spoken in 'Hind' was called by them Hindi or Hindustani. Some of the *Moghul* family members were great customers of poetry and music. Slowly there are developed a '*Hindustani*' poetry, based on Hindustani language which used words from *Arabic and Persian* and was written in Perso-Arabic script. This language was called Urdu and Urdu also replaced Persian as the language of the *Moghul* courtyards. And so there developed two languages with different writings but were actually one language when spoken except for their higher vocabularies. For example, rulers were titled in Urdu language as *Shah, Nawab or Nizam*. While in Hindi they were called *Raja or Maharaja*. Among the Hindustani speakers of north India, Urdu became the language of the Muslims while Hindi became the language of others.

After the collapse of the *Moghuls* the British became the rulers of north India. The British introduced English to India and continued using Urdu for official purposes. But nationalist Hindus demanded from the British to change the official language from Urdu to Hindi which is written in Indian script. Even Hindus whose mother tongue was not Hindi supported this argument. This debate between the Hindus and the Muslims continued right up to the independence of India. Against this stand of two different languages of Indian notable leaders, *Jawaharlal Nehru* and *Mahatma Gandhi*, supported the idea of one Hindustani language which could be written in both forms. But, when British India was divided in two countries, *India and Pakistan*. Muslims who got Pakistan made Urdu their official language and Indians made Hindi with Devanagiri script (The Devanagiri script is used for over 120 languages, including Hindi, Marathi, Nepali, Pali, Konkani, Bodo, Sindhi and Maithili among other languages and dialects, making it one of the most used and adopted writing systems in the world. The Devanagiri script is also used for classical **Sanskrit** texts as their official language). But the debate over the official language didn't end up with choosing Hindi with Devanagiri script as the official language.

### Comparison between English and Indian Languages

Many Indian languages like Sanskrit, Hindi and Tamil are much older languages than English. The literature of Sanskrit which is also known as the God's language in India is thousands of year old. Devanagiri script which is used for most North Indian languages pre-dominantly for Hindi (the national

language of our country) and the language is much older in comparison with English. Tamil which is Tamil state language and mother tongue is also older than English. The literature written and used in these languages are rich in diversity and class.

### Role of English language in India

When the British started ruling in India, they searched for educated Indian intermediaries who could help them to administer in India. The British Government turned to high caste Indians to work for them. *Many high caste Indians, especially the Brahmins and the other people of high caste* worked for them. The British policy was to create an Indian class who should think like the British. It was said then in England "Indians in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions and morals and intellect". The English also instituted in India universities based on English models with emphasis on English. These Indians also got their education in British universities. The English Christian missionaries arrived in India from 1813 and they also established schools at primary level for Indians in which the language of instruction was local language and also they taught English. After that the missionaries established high schools with English as the language of instruction which grateful the Indians who wanted to study to have a sound knowledge of English Language. The British rulers started building their universities in India from 1857. English turned to be the first language in Indian education. The 'modern' leaders of that age in India also verified English language and stated it to be towards victory. Indians who knew good English were considered as the new elite of India. Many new schools were set up in which the language of instruction was English. According to the British government laws the language of instruction at university level and therefore schools that stressed English were chosen by ambitious Indians. Even after the independence of India, English continued to be the leading language of India. Officially English language was given a status of an assistant language and was supposed to end officially after 15 years of India's independence, but it still continues to be the significant language of India. English was introduced in the country in the early 19th century; the purposes were far from agreement with the ideals of the country today. Lord Macaulay introduced the teaching of English in India.

The role of English as a value language spreads not only in India but also in the world. English was adopted by the constituent assembly to continue as the '*associate official language*' for 15 years from the date of the adoption of the Constitution (that is, 1950) after which Hindi was to take over. However, in 1963 on violent opposition to Hindi from South India, the Parliament enacted the official Languages Act providing for continued use of English for an indefinite period. In this connection, the views of Jawaharlal Nehru worth quoting: "English is likely to have an important place in the likely future. There are many important functions which English continues to perform in India today according to the reports of various commissions appointed by the Government to assess the role of English language in India. It is the language favoured by the industrial houses, legal and banking systems, trade and commerce and defense.

English continues to be the medium of instruction at many

post-graduate institutions. It is expected that English will continue to perform these functions for a long time to come. It is necessary to provide facilities for learning English to those students who may want to pursue their higher studies at these institutions. The role of English as a "library language" cannot be damaged even where the medium of instruction is other than English. However, the role and functions of English vis-à-vis national/regional languages has to be understood. While the important role English continues to play in post-independent India is accepted, the role of one's mother tongue cannot be damaged. Mahatma Gandhi, though he himself wrote a great deal in English, also made a strong case for instruction through the mother tongue that is of paramount importance especially at the school level. English language shapes the way people perceive the world and it also helps to define culture of any society. Any language is a gift of the knowledge of more than one language makes a man more efficient and skillful in many ways. Many freedom fighters in India started adopting English as a language to make a suitable platform for communication. The linguistic diversity between languages was so sharp that it was very difficult enough to understand or learn other languages. In such a situation English helped in bridging the gap between state to state and region to region. Many popular freedom fighters started using this language as a terrific tool to reach the mass. English worked not only as a language for communication but also as a language for unity and interrelation among Indians. The development continued even after independence and in the constitution this language was given the status of official language.

### Official Language of India

'One of the main political issues in Indian politics is connected to language problem'.

After India independence the government decided that the official language of India will be Hindi. Hindi belongs to the family of *Aryan* languages. Speakers of other languages, especially the *Dravidian* languages, saw in this decision an attempt to erase their language cultures (see also Aryans and Dravidians). But the Indian constitution has declared that English language can be used for official purposes only. Hindi has at least 13 different dialects and she is the most commonly spoken language in India. But the reason Hindi was chosen to be the official language of India but it has connection with Indian history before its independence.

The Indian constitution recognizes now, 18 official Indian languages. But, almost each of these 18 languages, include different dialects or variations of that language. Besides these 18 languages, there are other languages which are recognized by the central government, but not as official languages. There are other languages which aren't recognized by the central government. Some of the present India's states limitations created were based on the limitations of the main Indian languages as recognized by the Indian constitution.

In spite of the different languages and vernaculars, most of the official languages speakers have developed a standard of speaking language which has become the accepted style of speaking for that language. Sometimes, like in the case of Hindi this language is completely different from some of its vernaculars.

The Indian constitution uses the term 'mother tongue' instead of language or vernacular. Officially the central government recognizes 18 languages, but each language includes in it many mother tongues. The Indian census records over 200 different mother tongues. The different states of India have different official languages, some of them have not been recognized by the central government. Some states have more than one official language. Bihar in east India has three official languages - Hindi, Urdu and Bengali - which are all recognized by the central government. But Sikkim, also in east India, has four official languages of which only Nepali is recognized by the central government. Besides the languages officially recognized by central or state governments, there are other languages which don't have this recognition and their speakers face political struggles to get this recognition. Anyway as stated earlier the central government decided that Hindi is the official language of India and therefore it has also the status of official language in the states. The central government recognizes another language that has an official status in all states is common in English language.

### Importance of English language in India

In our country, English is important for a number of reasons. India is a land of variety. Different people speak different languages. A person of Tamil Nadu does not speak Hindi. So he can't understand Hindi of a person from North India. However he can understand in English.

So English is a link language. Different people can communicate with one another with the help of English language. Secondly, all advanced knowledge in science, technology and medicine is available in English language. The results of the latest researches come to India through the medium of English. If they give up English, they will hold up behind in the higher fields of study. Today the world has become one family. English is an international language. English is the language of the constitution, the Supreme Court, the High Courts and official departments. English is now firmly rooted in the soil of India. It has become a part and parcel of Indian life. Thus, English has got great importance for the honesty of India. It has to be a second language in our country for the better development of the country.

### Today status of English language

India is a country with more than 25 dominant languages and 6000 dialects. There are more than 16 major languages spoken and used in this country. English appears as a common platform for many Indians when in a cross-linguistic situation. They must also attribute the hypocrisy of many Indians for the development of English language in our country. They take pride in claiming that we can speak, write or use this language comfortably fluently. English is the official language in government and private offices. This is also the language of instruction in all the Universities and colleges across the country. The scenario is such that one needs to polish the skills of English to obtain a job. Mere knowledge of subjects is no more the only criteria to secure a job in today's date. One needs to be a master in English communication skills to be a professional. English has evolved as language of status. This clearly reflects status symbol. If one is able to communicate in English, they drive respect for themselves.

English Communication has become essential to get a job, move up in the career and earn a lot of money. Not only in India but also in the world market, English communication is highly required. Globalization has been adopted by almost all the developed and developing countries. In this globalized era, English language is an important tool in the professional's hand. In addition to the evolution of the language, they must also understand the economic value of the language. In most developed countries like US, Canada, England, Australia and other major countries English language used for speaking and official correspondence. English is no more a language but a bread winner in today's date. India is a developing country.

In India, Corporate, software companies, industries as well PSU's and government organizations need professionals who is fluent in English communication skills. Keeping in view the need of the language, they need to learn this language. In understanding this context, almost all the Universities insist on English communication skills as a compulsory part of their curriculum for all kinds of professional course and other courses. English communication skills have become an integral part of the curriculum. Today, first to survive and secondly to move ahead in our career are two important things. One must understand the importance of English Communication skills in the present time in a broader perspective rather than with a narrower vision

### **Conclusion**

English plays a role of common language between all countries. English is the official language for many countries and it plays a prominent role in all sector soft work and it is highly useful for business field and private sector. However, love for our mother tongue should not bias against other languages. Current linguistic research has proved that no language is superior to any other language. All human languages have similar potential. The growth and development of a language depends upon its use. In the present circumstances, it seems only right that as a citizen of the world, every one learns at least two languages - one's mother tongue and an international auxiliary tongue. English is not the cause of cultural insecurity or ethnic preconceptions in India. It is no longer the foreign dictator's language, nor is it the exclusive possession of the exclusive; it has become the common property of millions of ordinary citizens. English has quite a big role in day to day life. English is used in banks, railway stations, bus stations, airways, educational sector, medical, private sector, etc. English is a trade language with other countries. Many students fly aboard for education and jobs. If their mode of communication is English they can manage their communication with the local people. And students are prime learners of English because they want to build up a good career; they have to have good speaking skills and confidence to face many people in interviews. Without English it is very tough to manage in this ultra-modern world.

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