

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Grave Impacts of Consumerism and Digitalization on English language**

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Abstract: A Language takes birth as a carrier of knowledge and culture, then it grows slowly and there comes a time when this composite of signs and symbols becomes an integral part of a culture, rather it starts guiding the same to a certain extent. It develops an aesthetic of its own. This process is quite slow and takes centuries of continuous efforts by the men of letters. The same stands true for the English language. It can be labeled as one common medium of communication throughout the world. The process of colonization played an important role in this. Great writers of different ages and places contributed to the richness of this language. Then the advent of digital era and the rapid expansion of market-culture started demeaning this beautiful language and it started shrinking to mere functionality and utility. The gradual insignificant changes in the beginning of this process were anyhow imbibed by the language, but it has now reached a stage of saturation and is under threat of getting converted into a mere mechanical tool.

Key Words: transmission, communication, carrier, aesthetic, functional

In the process of evolution of the human race, the rise of a language is one of the most crucial milestones that directed the path of the growth and development of any culture and civilization. It has been time and again defined in various ways by writers of all ages. To quote one,“...language is a system of the means of expression, a system of signs, manifested in actual communication as the sum total of the possibilities available to the members of the same language community at a given time in a given place for the purpose of communication through speech, and identifiable from their realizations in particular utterances.”(Vilem) Though all these attempts to define language have truth in them; but none can fully cover the vastness and the potential contained in a language. As was its primary function, Language provided the medium for transmission of knowledge across cultures and also from one generation to the other. It very well performed the function of being a carrier of the culture and civilization. The advancement attained by one generation was safely handed over to the next one through the use of language and hence no efforts went wasted and it’s just because of this that we can boast of such great achievements of our civilization today. Along with this, one more very important function it has always performed is to satisfy our emotional and psychological needs. “Each language, as it develops, establishes a special constitution and structure, which, once having come into existence, influences the inner responses of man.” (Verma 66) The scientific rules of grammar and syntax somewhere got converted into exceptionally beautiful expressions evoking various responses. The language thus got shifted, from a science of signs, more into the category of an art with an aesthetic of its own. Writers of every age and nation played a key role in that. The carrier of culture and civilization also became one of the major contributors to the same. Here, we limit the scope of our study to just one language, English. English is widely accepted as the only global language, joining all the fragments of knowledge across the globe.

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Despite this, English has developed into n number of varieties, differing not only with the varying geographical locations, but also with the change of professional fields. English used by one belonging to the colonized world is different from the one of the colonizing country. A person of technical stream speaks English which is quite different from the one of medical circle; the language of a politician is sure to differ from that of the teacher. English of a man of literature, though it has been time and again claimed to be same by various great writers, is different from the one used by a common man. You can even perceive an obvious difference even in the language used by a man and that used by a woman. This shows that language does not stand in isolation but has various kinds of associations. It can be said without contradiction that language has embodied both its functional and aesthetic dimensions. So far, it has more or less maintained a balance between the two.

First and foremost function of the language is communication. Every language develops certain signs and symbols to signify certain things, beings, ideas or emotions. It involves a kind of encoding and decoding process where mutually understandable symbols or signs are used. With the passage of time, these simple signs and symbols develop into more complex patterns of words. The growth of a language ran parallel to the growth of the society and in the process words started carrying the contextual cultural baggage. The phenomenon continued for centuries of human growth and development. But in recent past, the global village experienced a radical shift in the values and ideas of culture. Human creativity is being overlapped with the technical creativity. A marked shift has been seen in the idea of culture— a shift from the focus on the pursuit of beauty, sweetness and perfection, as Arnold put it, to the hunt for speed, suitability, ease and money. This shift, as was quite natural, resulted in an obvious shift in the form and functions of language. The change in the beginning was not so significant. But even these small changes were criticized by the sensitive learned ones; for example “Swift objected to the practice of omitting a vowel to save a syllable like *drudg’ d*, *disturb’ d*, *rebuk’ t* on the ground that these contracted forms have so “jarring a sound and so difficult to utter”” (Rao3) But somehow English language imbibed all such changes smoothly maintaining the balance between its basic functions and its more refined ones; but now it has reached an alarming phase where the equilibrium is under serious threat of permanent disruption. As already mentioned, the problem now is that, to match the fast pace of the so-called technically advanced modern world, language is more and more moving towards its functional aspect, completely losing its aesthetic aspects. In the recent past, more and more emphasis had been laid on this aspect and people were rather trained in this. If we take example of India, we can find many You-tube channels getting rapid popularity here just because they provide tips in this functional English. A whole lot of youth is ready, quite trained in this functional English, as per the demands of the market. Any other aspect of the language, not needed by the market, is neglected. Nobody is to be blamed here because market offers a great opportunity of jobs to the youth well-versed in this functional English. If one is able to increase productivity and sales, he or she is welcome, however vulgar be the use of language. In a developing country like India, which has been under colonial Britain for so long, English has also acquired a significance of superiority. To move upward on the social ladder, one needs to have a workable knowledge of English and this workable is sufficient, no need to move deeper into the fine nuances of the language. Once one feels comfortable in his daily interactions in this language of the “superior”, the road to success is sure to open. More and more inclusion of technological tools in our life has also done a great damage to the essence of English language. Let’s take the example of language used in text messages—the absurd telegraphic version of English language. Every kind of bizarre abbreviations and expressions are being used. The alarming thing is that this use has been so much in-vogue that it has even stopped to bother the reader. It has got a wide

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acceptability. Colin McIntosh, lexical programme manager at Cambridge Dictionary enthusiastically admits that “Internet culture is changing the English language..”(Tribune) and the effect is fascinating enough. This internet vocabulary is sure to stay here and this is the very reason it has entered the established platforms of a language like dictionaries. “*Skibidi* is a gibberish term coined by the creator of an animated YouTube series and can mean “cool” or “bad” or be used with no real meaning as a joke.”(Tribune) Several such new words are being added with every passing year and the reason is as McIntosh defines; “We only add words where we think they’ll have staying power.”(Tribune) Another shocking trend is observed in northern regions of India— using English script for Hindi words and the writer can boast of knowing the language. It seems to mock at the once subtle expressions used by native writers like R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao to give a flavor of their native culture, where they kept the words of native language in their English texts for justified literary reasons. In fact a kind of vulgarization of language is going on. Be it media, advertising or entertainment, all have made language a slave to the Mammon god. Whatever the market wants, words and expressions are molded in that fashion. Language, as mentioned earlier, started from being a carrier for the transmission of culture and subsequently itself became an essential component of the culture; now the process is going in the reverse direction. It is again being converted into a mere expression of the popular culture. This fast moving high-tech generation has no time and place for the charming intricacies of a language, it is only concerned with the level which can make its magic boxes—mobiles, tabs and laptops work. As Hermon Wouk observes in his famous “*A Talk on Advertising*”, the “bubble-double” rhyme that was used to create “two immortal lines in *Macbeth*” is now being used to increase the sales of a mere “*Duble-Buble Shampoo*”. The diverse connotations and the suggestivity contained in various expressions—are all being used in the most vulgar situations and for the meanest of purposes. To quote Wouk again, the flame of “the Promethean fire that lifts man above the animals”(Wouk53) is now being smothered in mud. Imageries, puns, alliterations, antithesis and analogues remain only where they have a utility. One more serious impact also needs immediate attention and that is the rapidly losing credibility of the language. When words serve the market, they lose their actual potential. For example, if the word “truth” is used repeatedly to offer a fake, it won’t remain truth or rather people will come to believe that when the word “truth” is uttered, it’s meant to be a lie. The beauty, power and energy attached to a word are wasted forever in that manner; the modern user is not even aware of what is being wasted; while the writers of the past used to weigh it properly:

“Words are the only
Jewels I possess
Words are the only
Weapons I possess
Words are the only food
That sustains my life
Words are the only wealth
I distribute among people” (Says Tuka)

Reducing everything to usefulness will eventually result in the death of the real language. The warning that Wouk left in his discussion on advertising has come true in almost all other walks of life now, be it social media, mass media or individual communications; “You are cheapening speech until it is ceasing to be an honest method of exchange, and that people, not knowing that the English in a radio commercial is meant to be a lie and the English in the President’s speech which follows, a truth, will in the end fall into a paralyzing

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skepticism in which all utterance will be disbelieved.”(Wouk53) A language is an organic whole, not some mechanical product. It has its own pattern of growth. Mere placing of the words in a correct grammatical sequence to produce the intended meaning doesn't form a language. Just as a plant is more than the putting together of leaves, roots, stems and branches, so is language. This process can't result in the flowering and there is no possibility of fragrance thereafter. Without the aesthetic of the language, its fragrance that induces pleasure will be lost forever. If this thoughtless switching on to the mere functional aspect of language continues, there is a great possibility that in the near future, it will shrink to a mere muddy puddle of sounds.

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