

‘Phallogocentricism’ of English Language: Perceiving under Gender and Colonial Theories

Suparna Roy¹, Prasenjit Bhattacharjee²

¹Assistant Professor

Global Institute of Management and Technology

²Assistant Professor

Global Institute of Management and Technology

Abstract: *Otto Jespersen believed in the “reciprocal influence of language and the personality of its speakers” (Jespersen, 1983). Language and culture has an integrated and complex dynamics, a nature that has frequently sparked the desire to question the Language systems that exists. Amidst the numerous and diversified cultures that subsists; however, English Language and its supreme authority has resulted in the ‘colonial hangover’ to prevail over the colonized psyches till date. Language is one of the branches among many that allow ‘power’ to flow. Language rules, it oppresses, it controls, it orders, it denies, it accepts, it silences, it voices, it suppresses, it frees, and above all it does everything to construct a binarized strategical order of existence. Language is composed a signifier, signified and a sign, and all of them are arbitrarily connected. When Derrida in his essay *Différance*, establishes that language is a flux of is and is not, present and absent, which differs and defers creating its existence in its trace and not its place. In my paper, I would therefore focus on few technical aspects of English Language and how it became a power of cultural oppression till now.*

Keywords: Power, binary, post-colonialism, gender, centre, other, oriental

1.Introduction

Simply, Language is the medium to express ourselves, a universal medium to convey human personality in words. Culture has now molded this ‘medium of expression’ the way it wants to present, represent, re-present, establish, accept, and define. Culture modifies the language a speaker uses to reflect their ideas, we often fall short of vocabularies to express many such desires in today’s date- have we ever wondered the reason? It is because Culture stood as a canned standard in selecting our palaver; hence resulting in its limitations. Culture is a complex operative spectrum which has ordered and systemized the lives in a binarized pattern. Language, too being a cultural and politicized product is one of the many sources of marginalization. Language represents a culture, therefore replacing and omitting any language to establish another language is to veil up that existing culture with the mark of ‘absence’. So, when one calculates marginalizing points of an identity, language comes into consideration too. English Language as Tennyson said-“The English Language is a methodical, energetic, business-like and sober language...For words, like Nation, half revealed/ And half conceal the soul within” (Jespersen, 1983). It is known that English Language is written and spoken all over the world for historical, political, economical reasons. Like every other language English Language, too has its unique, appealing, inherent qualities and history. But history shows how the global power of English Language is only because it has entombed the echoes of other Languages with its own. To create an essence, an authentication, a fixed centre of Language is a constructive nature that mingles up with a culture to represent its ‘authority’. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), while dealing with Sex/Gender/Sexuality, said that everything is made of words; our identity is nothing but words.

Interpretation and Critical Evaluation of English Language

Reconsidering English Language within Indian context, we see, there is a presence of duality regarding the same. With its multifarious sui generis characters as a global Language, there also exists a history of ‘colonialism’, focused by Post-colonial studies, of how it became a global language and a ‘lingua franca’. Focusing on the enriching side of English Language we see, it is a language of “extraordinary receptive and adaptable heterogeneousness” (Wrenn, 2013). This clearly shows the steady growth of English Language in its lexical amassing. Back during the time of Anglo Saxons annexation of England, English Language had a limited vocabulary and was almost an unmixed language and made compounded elements without any foreign terms; however, eventually with amalgamation of cultural frontiers and ethnicity, foreign elements were assimilated in its character making it have an extensively outstanding vocabulary, and amazing ‘heterogeniousity’. For illustrations, the rule of English Language in India has provided abundance of terms to its dictionary, the most common ones are-Avatar-which first appeared in English way back in 18th century, and was also used in many films in Hollywood was taken from Avataraṇa (Sanskrit) which meant an alternative form of God, Bandana (colorful handkerchiefs) from Bandhnu (Hindi) meant the act of dyeing fabric by tying it in multiple places, Bangle from Bangri (Hindi), Cumberbund from Kamarband (Urdu) which meant the thick band wrapped around the waists of men to showcased complete and proper dress, Mongoose from Mangus (Marathi) which meant the same, a carnivorous animal known for its ability to kill venomous snakes, etc.

English is a very constructivist and binarized language, which the present post-structuralists have deconstructed. Few of its features highlights the constructive notion of

English Language like the second feature of English Language, the lens drops on its capability of simple inflexion, which is the ability to showcase the relation of one word in the sentence with other words, creating a meaning as a whole. English unlike other languages has followed a simple strategy of reduction to make inflexions convenient. However, deconstructivists like Derrida regarded Language to be a 'play' and pointed out that "no language game can constitute the core of language and logic; no one language game can be the origin of all others." Therefore, the second feature of English Language is a constructivist concept and which has been questioned by the post-structuralists. Emerging from this feature comes the third one, which shows that English Language unlike Russian or Latin has a fixed word-order. Ambiguity of anything language is the only essence it carries. Therefore, the variant meanings of the terms as per the situation and significance of the sentence is a need which was only possible due to inflexion. However, it worked towards establishing a core meaning of English language, an authenticity which kept ruling English Language till date. The two more characters that promotes the technical aspect of English Language includes how the process of reduction also allowed it to limit the large and complex tense system that initially existed, and it has also with time lost its inflexion but that somehow was replaced with intonations that assisted English Language to develop deeper and layered meanings of words without changing its shape unlike other languages like Chinese.

Moving from its technical characteristics of analysis, we would see the political aspect of English Language in Indian context; thereby, focusing with the help of Post colonial studies how the operation of English language, in marginalizing, modifying, oppressing Indian culture has been analyzed under the socio-political and cultural lens. Post colonial studies comprises of post colonial literature and theory. It emerged from the Britain colonized countries-Asia, Africa, and Caribbean. Post colonial theory is a literary device to analyze the post-colonial literature produced by the previously colonized countries. Post-colonial theory became a part of the critical tool box after Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. The relation of English language and colonialism is interrelated and interconnected, for English is the language of the Colonizers-the British, who ruled over many countries and established them as their 'colonies' for years. India too was a colony of British for two hundred years. The ruling of the colonizers on the people of the colonies is known as Colonialism, and post-colonial studies have tried to perceive how with both economic and political control, the cultural echoes of colonialism was eminent through the English Language, and how India's culture till present date also is impacted by the 'colonial hangover' in terms of language and culture. The growth of colonialism and its cultural dominance was reflected in what Annia Loomba in her book *Colonialism and Post Colonialism* stated-"By 1930's colonialism has exercised its way over 84.6 percent of land surface of the globe" (Loomba, 2015).

Cultural oppression has numerous branches out of which language is one. Colonial cultural dominance therefore

used the English language mechanism to create the centre/the self and the other/ the oriental/ the exotic. English being the language of the colonizers eventually through the two hundred years of its rule has tried to centralize English as the polished etiquette of human nature. The two hundred years of the mighty British rule made the English Language as the parameter to measure the value and quality of Indian languages, accents, dialects. India is a multicultural and diversified land, where exists no unanimous culture, religion, beliefs, ideologies, caste system, class system, etc. In this heterogeneous land, the English language tried to frame and veil the multifarious nature under a single, umbrella identity that will only reflect the superiority of English culture. As Michel Foucault said in his book *History of Sexuality* (1976), "power produces"-power has never oppressed anyone; rather produced to categorize, identify, and rule them in a norm. Similar was the role of cultural dominance of English Language on Indians and their culture. An effort was made to create a sense of Indianness, not unity. This sense of "Indianness" does not even exists, what is Indianness? Indian is nothing to be gripped as a whole thing. India is shelter to diversity. This whack of creating an umbrella identity was then to make few categorizations.

- English language as the sophisticated centre and vernaculars as the exotic other.
- English culture of folk, spoon, and knife as accepted behavior; while, using hands to consume food is a low standard behavior.
- Creation of Orientalism, mimicry, hybridity, ambivalence, third space, and essentialism.

Lord Macaulay in the Minute Parliament 1835 advocated the study of English Literature in India. He said that the riches of European learning must be imparted by a class of interpreters and the million people whom English governs so that "A class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste and opinion and moral and intellect" is created. The rule of English Language is like a power who sabotaged another culture with its own and makes the colonized ones understand that the native culture and language is valueless, there is no need to study and know about it, learning and knowing English will do. This concept is trained and ingrained by the colonizers on the colonized so that a homogenized identity can be created with a homogenized culture omitting the intersectionalities. Omitting one's language means diminishing that one's cultural existence and history. Since history validates our identities in every sphere extirpating one's historical cultural existence includes removal of the individual existence too.

Bringing the concept of Gender theory what gets portrayed is a clear organized construction of Gender identities which is also visible in representing the same through language. Lets draw in a little ideation on the term 'Gender' before I portray how the politicization of representation is binarized strictly. It was decided at the beginning of the feminist movement that women needed a language of their own to mark out a space away from patriarchal discourse. Although their questioning of the

language as patriarchal was all very well, but they took it for granted that the term 'woman' was unproblematic and that it could stay as it was. But what is a 'woman'? Juridical linguistic production constructs woman as a subject. So this identity of Woman and Feminism as a uniform umbrella is the creation of patriarchy. Political analyses take juridical structures as foundation but never look what lies *beneath* the foundation. Power produces and then represents the subject. So power is juridical and productive. So woman is produced and restrained by patriarchy. Men have created 'women'. Nature functions nothing than a fable, a foundationalist fable! Feminism should therefore declare the 'norm a variable constructional identity'! This assumption of variability may be a good premise to critique identity-solidifying discourses, and that the subject woman should not be stabilized as a solid, presumed monolith! Gender is a complex operative spectrum in a society, that functions in accordance to the numerous power dynamics operating with hunger of establishing themselves, of which patriarchy and feminism are the two powers that deals intensively with Gender. Gender is nothing but 'a set of rules' according to which bodies defined and categorized under various headings (men/women/LGBTQ/dalits/sex workers, etc) are expected to function and bodies that deviates from this mainstream are regarded as "disordered" bodies.

If Gender is constructed, who does the construction? If gender is a set of signs/meanings foisted on two kinds of bodies then meaning =s become dependent on bodies that must carry them. So it is not biology which is destiny, more clearly it is 'culture' which is so. Irigaray's theorizes that femininity is not 'othered' at all; rather it is a part of closed patriarchal economy, it is a fantasy of the other but very a creation of the patriarchal self. According to Irigaray, there is nothing outside the masculine text-the woman is still the man (encore) and patriarchy embodied (en corps). But Irigaray's theory is not universally applicable; rather it is more like a totalizing, appropriate, colonizing act. Coalition can be self-defeating if a 'strict' homogeneity is set as a precondition for the coalition and is followed. Divergence, breakages, splintering must be factored in too because that is the only democratic. Identity is a normative ideal and it is solidified through the sex/gender/desire teleology. It is when those troublesome beings emerge who do not conform to the telos that the binarization is in danger, like in present-agender, queer; gender non confirmative, transgender, gender fluid, etc. The identities have no limit because it is a continuum. Now this further overlaps and interconnects with sexuality where a gay is falling in love with a transman, or a person is aromantic, agender yet pansexual! Confusing, right? No it is not confusing, rather very simple-these are just few terms which came to reflect the exact way we feel about ourselves. Since the cultural demarcation of binarized identity has kept on ruling and ordering the bodies, these terms came out of the closet as a voice to 'reclaim' one's own self identity! In order to maintain and ensure the permanence of sex/gender/desire telos culturally 'unintelligible' are produced and removed from the visual vicinity, because removing these only produces the 'intelligent lot' of Gender limited between Man and

Woman. Heterosexualization of desire depends on the production of intelligibly separate and hierarchised binaries. But as Judith Butler said in *Gender Trouble* (1990), "sex" is not "natural"; sex (male/female) is seen to cause gender (masculine-men/ feminine-woman) which then is seen as a kind of continuum. Butler emphasizes the fact that identity is free floating and not connected to one's 'essence rather performance'. As Mary McIntosh in her article-*Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* said, "The way forward, instead, involves recognizing that gender attributes are performative rather than expressive" (McIntosh, 114). Apparently Feminism recognizes while Patriarchy recognizes to obliterate. Feminism is also a politics but Feminism has assisted in diagnosing the pathologies of culture which if described as a complex social apparatus dices the norms and regulations and is a stratified concept with hues that light up the disillusionment and dissent.

Similarly the language used to identity identities / designation is constructively polarized-for instance, chairman instead of chairperson, addressing any person as 'Sir' instead of the name, assuming the head is a male, and a very striking example in the books and in education system-referring human beings as "man", why? Why is it even considered the default gender in terms of language and politics as 'male'? Calling human as man makes other existing 'genders' question their identity because society defines man as a body which has-penis, beards, body hairs, broad and strong structure, heavy "masculine voice", acceptably brutal and strict by nature. But majority people do not identify themselves as this. They don't, even 'penis' bodies do not do relate with the 'established' masculine features. Then associating man and human as same means to obliterate remove the presence, existence of all such identities, which does not recognize as "man"! This is how language is 'phallus oriented and phallic motivated'!

2. Conclusion

Therefore, in today's situation the position of English Language as a globally accepted and needed one carries a huge history of cultural dominance where English language is nothing but a "cultural bomb" which exploded to destroy the 'other' cultures. Hence English Language's rule of two hundred years impacted and changed the education, language, culture of the colonized. There is still a superiority associated with the English language speakers because of that power and dominance of the English, which thus the post colonial theory has tried to reflect, as Leela Gandhi said, "Post-colonialism can be seen as a theoretical resistance to the mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath."

References

- [1] Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge Classics. Cixious, Helene. *Laugh of Medusa*. Oxford, 2008.
- [2] Foucault, Michel. 1976. *History of Sexuality*. London: Penguin.
- [3] Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

Cornell University Press, 1985.

- [4] Jackson, Stevi and Jackie Jones. "Contemporary Feminist Theories." Edinburgh University Press, 1998, pp. 280. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366.
- [5] Jerperson, Otto. 1938. Growth and Structure of the English Language. India: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Loomba, Annia. 2015. Colonialism/Post Colonialism 3rd edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- [7] McIntosh, Mary. "Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity." Feminist Review, 1991. SAGE journals, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1057>.
- [8] Wrenn, C L. 2013. The English Language. India: AITBS Publishers.