Is English a 'Lingua Frankensteinia'?: A View from a 'Non-Anglo Englishes' Perspective by Anindya Syam Choudhury

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Abstract
It is a commonly held view that the global spread of English has led to a precarious situation for many major languages of the world, with English having penetrated various domains of language use like, for instance, national school systems as a medium of instruction, thereby threatening the world's linguistic ecology and creating a kind of linguistic imperialism. In this sense, English has often been called a 'lingua frankensteinia', a killer language. However, a view has recently gained currency that instead of being a tool of linguicism, English has, in fact, in the many sociolinguistic and cultural contexts that it functions, become a powerful tool both for the sustenance of multilingualism and for the linguistically and culturally subalternised groups to access the global economy. Drawing examples from the Indian context, the paper will first attempt to argue in favour of the view that the entrenchment of English in India has not led to any language shift but it has rather helped multilingualism in all its facets to flourish as can be seen in the way in which English participates in the local multilingual practices. The second part of the paper would try to show how for the disadvantaged and marginalised people of India like the Dalits, for instance, mastering English means liberation from the rather oppressive and prejudicial

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Indian languages. In this context, the paper will try to bring to the fore a multiplicity of views expressed by Dalit intellectuals on the issue of 'Englishising' Dalits in India.

Keywords: Linguistic imperialism, lingua frankensteinia, Englishes, subaltern, Dalit

1. Introduction: The Two Perspectives on the Global Diffussion of English

The phenomenal spread of English across the world has resulted in the creation of several diasporas of English, the most important being the one which Y. Kachru and Smith (2008) have called the third diaspora (p. 5), which Kachru in his Three Circles Model of the spread of English, proposed in his article "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle", refers to as the Outer Circle, comprising colonized countries such as India, Nigeria, Singapore, and the Philippines, where English became an institutionalized second language. This spread, growth and entrenchment of the language in the English language diasporas have been explained at least from two different perspectives which are not absolutely mutually exclusive (Bhatt, 2008, p. 532). According to one perspective, the spread of English, especially in the Outer Circle contexts, was actively promoted via agencies such as the British Council of the UK and Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the US, as instruments of the foreign policies of major English-speaking states. This theory, known as English linguistic imperialism, has been expounded by Robert Phillipson in his writings (1992a, 1992b). Phillipson claims that he was motivated to write a full-length book on this by "the belief that language pedagogy, the scientific study of language learning and language teaching, has been isolated from the social sciences for too long" (1992b, p. 2). It is primarily because of holding such an opinion that Phillipson critiques, at times rather a little too harshly perhaps, scholars like David Crystal, whose book titled *English as a Global Language* he calls "a slim volume" since it neglects, in his opinion, critical issues related to colonialism, linguistic imperialism, globalization, cultural hegemony, language education, minority languages, linguistic human rights, and so on (1999, p. 265). Phillipson's primary argument in his book *Linguistic Imperialism* is that "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (1992b, p. 47). In this book, Phillipson tries to show how the standard varieties of English of the "core English-speaking countries" like the UK and the USA are imposed as norms in "periphery English countries" and how this act of imposition gains legitimacy through deliberate contrivance,

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successfully displacing and/or replacing many indigenous languages of the latter group of countries (1992b, p. 17).

The other perspective on the spread of English is the econocultural model, according to which English became the "commercial lingua franca" of the world since the UK and the USA were at "the epicentre of industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century", making English a natural choice as the language of global commerce (Bhatt, 2008, p. 532). Hence, according to this model, the spread and growth of English happened as a result of linguistic pragmatism rather than linguistic imperialism.

2. Englsih as a Hegemonic Tool: Phillipson's Work

Although both perspectives seem to have their own merits, it must be said that the notion of English as an oppressive hegemonic tool of linguistic and cultural domination, which gained attention primarily after Phillipson's book-length treatment of the same in *Linguistic Imperialism*, has held sway over the academic world for a long time. Of course, it has to be pointed out that Phillipson has often been faulted by critics for his rather aggressive rhetorical style and some puzzling "assertions and terminology" like, for instance, his calling Scandinavia a "country" in certain sections of his book or referring to communicative language teaching as a "bandwagon" (Berns *et al.*, 1998, p. 275). In addition, as Holborow (1999, p. 79) has pointed out, although Phillipson (1992) concedes that "language can be used to underpin the status quo as well as oppose it, to oppress people as well as to liberate them", the thrust of the latter's argument "does not allow him to take full account of this fact and forces him to conclude that the dominance of English can best be countered by its linguistic mirror-image – promotion of the local language." However, having taken cognizance of the above and some other possible drawbacks in Phillipson's work, there is no gainsaying that it has marked a watershed in the domain of language policy and planning, especially in the postcolonial contexts. Apart from the above-mentioned seminal work of his, Phillipson has contributed several books and articles on the hegemony of English, the principal among them being "Linguistic Imperialism: African Perspectives", "Linguistic Imperialism: A Conspiracy, or a Conspiracy of Silence?", "The Tension between Linguistic Diversity and Dominant English", "English in the New World Order: Variations on a Theme of Linguistic Imperialism and 'World' English", *English-only Europe?: Challenging Language Policy,* "English, a Cuckoo in the European Higher Education Nest of

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Languages?", "English: From British Empire to Corporate Empire", "*Lingua Franca* or *Lingua Fankensteinia*?: English in European Integration and Globalisation", etc.

3. A Critique of Phillipson's Notion of English as a 'Lingua Frankensteinia'

It is the article named at the end in the above list which is the main inspiration for the present paper. In this article of his, Phillipson, in his characteristically caustic manner, expresses his concern at the unbridled spread of English across Europe dressed cunningly in the garb of a 'lingua franca', and goes on to call English various names:

> a *lingua economica* (in business and advertising, the language of corporate neoliberalism), a *lingua emotiva* (the imaginary of Hollywood, popular music, consumerism and hedonism), a lingua *academia* (in research publications, at international conferences, and as a medium for content learning in higher education)... (Phillipson, 2009b, p. 148)

Phillipson sees this situation as part of the globalisation process, driven chiefly by the interests of the American corporate houses. In his endeavour, Phillipson attempts to support his arguments by a plethora of scholarly quotations from various sources, from Roosevelt to Kant, from Russell to Eco, which undoubtedly have the effect of lending credibility to his point of view. However, as Saraceni (2009, p. 189) points out, Phillipson "does not seem to recognize any agency in those who choose to add English to their linguistic repertoire. They are, presumably, the victims – unaware – of the subtle strategies of world domination encoded in English Language Teaching". In Phillipson's view, English operates with lupine cunning to entrap the gullible people speaking other languages, functioning much like a cuckoo's egg, stealthily planted in the higher education nest in postcolonial contexts, only to be hatched as a bird that will eventually drive away the 'native' birds (i.e., the 'native' languages). This narrative of English being a "lingua cucula" (Phillipson, 2009b, p. 150)), bent on threatening the lives of other languages or at least attempting to clandestinely occupy the territories which have traditionally been their preserve, sounds very simplistic for at least the following two reasons:

> (i) it ignores the fact that English works in tandem with other languages in multilingual contexts, and tends to serve "distinctively local needs and is used, in various forms, as a local language among locals" (Higgins, 2009, p. 1)

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(i)   it seems to view English as a kind of a single homogenized entity which it obviously
      is not as the increasing evidence from the work done in the domain of 'World
      Englishes' by scholars like Braj B. Kachru and others suggests.

Braj B. Kachru's work, in particular, epitomised by his articles like "World Englishes and the Teaching of English to Non-native Speakers: Contexts, Attitudes, and Concerns" and "Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: The English Language in the Outer Circle" and books like *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India* and *Asian Englishes: Beyond the Canon*, has been very influential in challenging the hitherto unquestioned duopoly of American English and British English, stressing by the use of the plural term 'Englishes' the significance of the growth and development of the non-Anglo Englishes, a term used by Tan et al. (2006, p. 84) for postcolonial varieties of English like Singaporean English and Indian English (as distinguished from Anglo Englishes like Australian English and New Zealand English), in different sociolinguistic contexts across the world. The focus on local appropriations and adaptations and pluricentricity in Kachru's work, stresses, firstly, as Kachru (1996) himself says, "the *WE-ness* among the users of English", who attempt at owning the language by altering it to suit their local purposes, divorced from the norms of the standard English varieties of countries like the U.K. or the U.S., thereby throwing into critical focus several sacrosanct notions like the importance of the so-called 'native speaker', the issue of ownership of English and the model in the English classroom, and so on (p. 135, emphasis in original). It is this adoption and adaptation of English by different peoples across the world that seems to be ignored by Phillipson (2009b). The transformation of English from a colonial language into indigenised local varieties became necessary "to represent faithfully the ethos of its cultural context of use, and to enable speakers of English in multilingual contexts to use it as an additional resource for linguistic, sociolinguistic, and literary creativity" (Bhatt, 2005, p. 25). If we take Indian English (which, at best, can be used as a cover term for all the varieties of English spoken in India) as an exemplar of what is meant by 'non-Anglo Englishes', it may be pointed out that the English language, which was transplanted to the Indian subcontinent over 400 years ago, has developed into an integral part of the linguistic repertoire of India, with "the emergence of a distinctly Indian variety of English which fulfils a wide range of communicative functions in present-day India and which is a significant vehicle for Indian identity-construction for a relatively small but substantial and increasing part of the population"

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(Mukherjee, 2010, p. 167). The Standard Indian English variety, discussed in great detail by Pingali (2009), "is used competently and regularly by c. 35 to 50 million Indians today – which makes Indian English [IndE] the third largest variety of English world-wide in terms of numbers of speakers, outnumbered only by British and American English" (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 167). If we make a diachronic study of English in India, using Schneider's Dynamic Model of Postcolonial English (2007), which conceptualizes Englishes as going through five stages of evolution: Foundation, Exonormative stabilisation, Nativization, Endonormative stabilisation, and Differentiation, it can be said on the basis of empirical evidence that Standard Indian English is a variety which is in the fourth phase of the Schneider's Dynamic Model, distinctly marked by endonormative stabilization in which some traces of the nativization phase, the third phase, can also be found (Syam Choudhury, 2015). The endonormative stabilization phase of a variety of Englishes is one in which the process of nativization is almost complete and the home-grown or endonormative norms are widely accepted by local users who do not any longer feel it necessary or desirable to look to the varieties of the so-called 'native' speaking countries for norms. In this context, it is perhaps pertinent to mention what Mukherjee (2007, p. 163) very eloquently points out regarding how two opposing forces, one progressive (which is responsible for experimentation and innovation at different levels of linguistic organization, the primary being vocabulary, where most of the innovations in IndE are usually found) and the other conservative (which wishes to hold back the development of IndE, considering it a relic of the colonial past), are at work with regard to the present-day Indian English, "keeping it in a stable equilibrium", making it a semiautonomous variety, which is endonormatively stabilized but shows many aspects of the ongoing process of nativization.

The progressive force can be seen in operation especially in the domain of IndE lexis where a profusion of loanwords taken over from other Indian languages is found to be present in order to give a distinctive local colour to the evolving variety, making it able to carry the weight of new cultural and geographical experiences. Some of the very common loanwords used in Indian English are 'bandh', 'challan', 'crore', etc., for which the British English expressions (which are also used in Indian English, especially in its standard acrolectal form) are 'strike', 'bank receipt' and 'ten million' respectively. In addition, as Lambert (2014) has shown, in IndE usage a word like 'abuses' (in the sense of 'insulting language'), which is strictly uncountable in the standard 'Anglo-English' varieties, is countable (because of probably

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being influenced by existing comparable forms in other Indian languages), and exhibits great diachronic stability by being in existence for a long period of time despite the onslaught from "the exonormative stance of corrective literature, educationalists, and language purists, who have long evinced a disapproval of local innovations, viewing them as language 'abuses'" (p. 124). The above-mentioned examples are only a few to show how a non-Anglo English like IndE has gone through the process of nativitization and acculturation in the sociolinguistic and cultural context in which it has grown and developed. It may be pointed out further that according to recent research, Indian speakers of English have been found to have "a positive attitude towards their local variety, which is attitudinal evidence for the status of IndE as a variety in its own right" (Bernaisch and Koch, 2016, p. 129).

In his article, Phillipson (2009) raises the point regarding the widespread concern "in political and academic circles in Scandanavian countries" about the domain loss suffered by languages like Danish, Norweigian and Swedish because of "the English monster" (p. 149). In the Indian context, it has sometimes been alleged that English has led to the erosion of the natural articulacy and elegance of Indian languages (like Hindi, for instance) by making the innate lexicon of these languages seem exotic and esoteric even within their own geographic territory. As Snell (2011, p. 29) says, "[f]or many speakers, Hindi words for such items as relationship terms, colours, left/right directions, kitchen, bathroom, garments, table, time, and an almost infinite number of other such items, have been all but displaced by their English equivalents in everyday usage." However, although to an extent, this seems to be worrisome, it must be pointed out that in a language contact situation involving English, just as the nativization of English is expected, the Englishization of other languages is also expected and should be welcome. It is absolutely possible that the Hindi words for the items mentioned by Snell above are not really removed permanently from the lexicon of the bilinguals or multilinguals but are rather drawn upon when required. Bhatia (2011) has shown how it is not very profitable to look at bilingual and multilingual code-switching and code-mixing from the point of view of 'language deficiency hypothesis' since it cannot explain the systematic mixing of synonyms in the same utterance in modes of communication like Hinglish (a blend of Hindi and English) to underscore or paraphrase a point they are making (pp. 37-52). Quite unlike Phillipson's (2009b, p. 193) view that Hinglish "involves distinctive lexis in contexts of 'banter'" only, research on the code-mixing of English and Hindi in various domains, from advertisement on audio-visual and print media, public walls and billboards to flyers and other

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artefacts and artistic expressions of various kinds, including fiction, poetry and performances (Y. Kachru, 2006; Vaish, 2013), show how English works in tandem with Hindi in seamless juxtaposition to create "new meanings which are not simply the product of monolingual capacities combined but tend to involve a greater degree of linguistic blending at the lexical and even morpho-syntactical levels, demanding hybrid literacies" (Rubdy, 2014, pp. 114-15). Far from being supplantive, English in a postcolonial context like India, therefore, is found to exist by getting code-mixed with a local language like Hindi, building a hybrid space where different systems of identity representation converge, creating "the possibility of a new representation, of meaning-making, and of agency" (Bhatt, 2008, p. 182).

It must be mentioned here that although the above-mentioned article of Phillipson explores "how we think of English and 'English Studies' in present-day Europe" (2009, p. 147), as its abstract makes it clear, his assertions occasion responses from other contexts as well for he begins his dilation on English as a "lingua frankensteinia", a so-called monstrous language out to devour other languages, with a reference to the Indian experience of Chamaar (2007) in an attempt to show how in India and other former colonies "English is the language of elite formation, social inclusion and exclusion" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 149). This line of thinking is pretty similar to the one in Ramanathan's work (2005), which Phillipson, quite unfortunately, fails to mention. The fundamental argument of Ramanathan's work (2005), which is based on the empirical evidence which she finds in the data collected from three tertiary institutions in Ahmedabad in Gujarat, is that English, "which stands at the core of class-based inequalities (intertwined with caste and gender dimensions)" in India, divides (Tupas, 2008, p. 9). However, a counter discourse to this is created by Vaish (2005), who, drawing her data from the primary section of a Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalay (SKV), a government school run by the Delhi administration, located in East Vinod Nagar, an underprivileged locality, presents "a peripherist view of the spread of English and ELT in India where English is", as she asserts, "a tool of decolonization in the hands of subaltern communities and can help them access the global economy" (p. 203). Questioning Phillipson's (1992) idea of the hegemonic spread of English, Vaish points out how the former's position is rather Orientalist in the sense that it assumes an almost "childlike nature of the natives", who do not have any agency to resist (p. 200). The peripherist view, on the otherhand, "is a distinctive viewpoint and ideology of those groups who have historically been linguistically subalternized and have only now gained more equitable access to linguistic capital due to the market forces of globalization"

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(Vaish, 2005, p. 192). Unlike Phillipson, who sees globalization as "global Americanization" (2009b, p. 152), a peripherist view takes a more balanced view of globalization and desists from seeing it through the narrow lens of East-West dichotomy, which would tend to consider globalization as a means of domination of the West over the rest. Hence, a peripherist view, much like the one of Sen (2000), would not consider globalization as a curse but rather as an agent of benefaction.

4. English in the Dalit Context in India

In the context of the growth and development of English in a postcolonial context like the Indian one, for instance, a peripherist view would like to consider the possibility of how mastering English, although it has been a language which an imperial power used to enslave the local population, could be a means of liberation for the marginalised sections like the Dalits from the other rather oppressive and prejudicial Indian languages. The Dalit political thinker, Kancha Illiah (1996, p.13), points out how the Telegu textbooks in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh have always been written in a kind of brahminical bookish Telegu, much different from "a production-based communicative Telegu" with which the Dalits are more familiar. Hence, instead of fighting the battle of political and social empowerment through the languages of local elites, isn't it better to do it in English which, even though as alien as the standardized local languages, is, in the context of Dalit activism "a more neutral language", the neutrality of which "is premised on more direct access to power, one that bypasses more traditional or engrained social boundaries"? (Sadana, 2012, p. 22). The liberating character of English in the Dalit context is eloquently pointed out by Anand (1999, p. 2053) when he says that

> one has to acknowledge the fact that (western/ colonial) 'modernity' that comes with English is something that is not inaccessible to the 'untouchables' – the dalits and bahujans whose marginalisation has been justified over centuries by dominant varieties of Hinduism. Today, English is a language dalitbahujans can aspire to, unlike classical Sanskrit which they were kept away from. That the Sanskritic vedas were not supposed to be read (or even heard) by the sudras, ati-sudras and women is something that is upheld by authorities like the *Manusmriti* ...

In addition, the lack of any sacredness associated with English and its being free from caste affiliations, as Kothari (2013) points out, make it an interesting proposition for the Dalits and

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other marginalised sections. In her article, Kothari (2013) shows how the castelessness of English actually appears as strength rather than inadequacy in the Dalit context, promising Dalit writers like Neerav Patel, Limbale, Balbir Madhopuri and Laxman Mane, et al., as representatives of their communities, "agency, articulation, recognition, and justice" (p. 61). The very act of getting the works of Dalit writers (written in non-standard registers of local languages) translated into English not only allows for a renewed representation but also makes it possible for them to get their voices heard across a cross-section of the people outside their local communities. In an email interview with Kothari, Limbale points out how the translation of his autobiography, *Akkarmashi*, into English has helped him:

> Because of English translation I get [a] world platform to present myself and my community. It proves that the academic discussion is started today on Dalit problem. Dalit literature is a socio-political document of Dalit movement. We use our words as weapons. It is our struggle through pen and pain against inhumanity. We want liberty, fraternity, and freedom. We want to eradicate this cruel Hindu caste system. This message reached out [to the] the world at large through English translation. Not only my life, but our movement strengthened. People know we are living here (qtd in Kothari, 2013, p. 62).

It must be pointed out here that the passionate thirst for English education among the Dalits is not a post-independence phenomenon in India but it can be traced back to the 1850s to the pioneering efforts of Savitribai Phule, a crusader for girl education, who in her collection of poems titled *Kavya Phule* (cited in https://drambedkarbooks.com/2015/01/03/few-poems-by-savitribai-phule/) exhorts the Dalits to take up English education. This is exemplified by the following poem titled "Learn English":

<div align="center">

Learn English

Make self-reliance your occupation,

Exert yourself to gather the wealth of knowledge,

Without knowledge animals remained dumb,

Don't rest! Strive to educate yourself.

The opportunity is here,

For the Shudras and Ati Shudras,

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To learn English

To dispel all woes.

Throw away the authority

Of the Brahmin and his teachings,

Break the shackles of caste

Another poem, titled "Mother English" (Phule, 1859) could be seen, as Raghavan (2014) points out, as "a simultaneous attack on the wretched social hierarchies prevalent in India and a grand welcome to a foreign tongue. The foreign tongue, English, is taken as the representative of a more inclusive democratic tradition and social formation" (p. 126):

Mother English

"Brahman's rule is now in ashes

Under the English whips and lashes.

English is the inheritance of none

Persian, Brahman, Yemeni and Hun"

In more contemporary times, we find tech-savvy Dalit activists like Meena Kandasamy mixing their internet skills with their command over English to actively resist marginalization and get their voices heard. In a blog of hers, she points out

> Big media houses which own the major publications rarely give opportunity to Dalit (ex-untouchable) writers, and there's an absence of Dalit/anti-caste writers who write in English. The elitist writers want to write the feel-good stuff, India Shining myths, and that's the work that gets into print. So, I wanted to tap the power and enormous outreach of the internet: how anyone can write and be read/heard in the virtual space. I was not writing because anyone was commissioning me, I didn't have to follow other people's diktats, I could speak my mind.
>
> (https://sotosay.wordpress.com/2009/10/29/dalit-english-poet-meena-kandasamy/)

From the above discussion, we can see how for the marginalized Dalits, who have been mired in a labyrinth of suffering – social, political, economic, etc. –, English education can provide

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a bit of succour. Hence, from this perspective, the role of English in a non-Anglo English context like India does not appear to be that of a 'lingua frankensteinia' at all.

5. Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion, it can be inferred that although there are certain merits in Phillipson's standpoint like, for instance, his view that English aids to an extent the Americanization of the world, which ought to be denounced in no uncertain terms, it becomes difficult for us to accept his monsterization of the language. In the Indian context, which serves as an exemplar of the non-Anglo Englishes contexts around the world, we find that English has not been a supplantive language at all. Rather than devouring other languages, English has been found to develop a symbiotic relationship with them. Adapting itself to the local circumstances by getting nativized, English has been found to not only aid the sustenance of multilingualism in India but has also been an agency for the empowerment of the subalternized groups like the Dalits.

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