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The Role of English Language in the Era of Intercultural Communication and Globalization

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Abstract: Language and culture are inseparable parts of a community. Both are interdependent and have their roots in each other. In the late 1950s, a new phenomenon in the field of communication was brought under light named Intercultural Communication. Intercultural communication is communication between or among people from different socio-cultural backgrounds who do not share a common language or culture. This concept has a lot to do with Globalization. The present paper shows the relationship between Intercultural communication and Globalization and also how language and culture influence each other. The aim of the present paper is to highlight the importance of English language in the field of Intercultural Communication and Globalization in the present scenario. The paper tends to show the outcomes and problems in the filed of Intercultural communication and also how English language can act as a lingua-franca and make the idea of the world being a Global Village true.

Key Words: Intercultural communication, globalization, culture, English language, lingua-franca.

Man is essentially a multiethnic being. Today, almost each and every human being is a part of some one or the other community. A community is basically a group of people who belong to a common geographical location, with a similar or dissimilar cultural background and are indulged in unrelenting conversation. Through communities human beings get indulged in the process of socialization and socialization has conversation at its root. Conversation is a process between two or more people in order to exchange ideas and thoughts by the dint of a system called language. To converse and communicate a common sign system is required. The system should be understood by all the people who use it and this sign system is called Language. Language is more than semantic



and syntactic structures or a systematic arrangement of spoken or written words. It is the fundamental medium of communication among the members of a society. In a society language and its need becomes even stronger because it becomes the most indispensable part of communication process. Society attains self-awareness through communication. The people of a community consciously or subconsciously reflect their culture and ethnicity in their communicative patterns. When a person speaks or talks he manifests his cultural background as words have a deep association with the social norms and culture in which these are being used. Almost every word has certain history, belief and the culture of their origin and must be used accordingly. If we go back to the roots of history, it becomes quite clear communication has been an inseparable part of culture. Language is largely formed by culture and in turn culture gets affected by linguistic aspects of communication process. The traditions, laws and norms of a culture clearly manifest in the language spoken by the speakers of that specific culture and language in turn affects that culture massively. Our assumptions and thoughts, expressed through language and concepts, are greatly influenced by our surroundings and these surroundings have a significant role to play in the formation of culture. Language and culture are interdependent and deeply related to each other. Language is generally seen as verbalism of a culture and a vehicle that carries off culture and its knots. It enables a person to make him socially adaptable. Through language a person communicates with other people of society and makes his needs meet. Language is defined in many ways and on the basis of its functions, language is described as a system that is discretionary and human beings use it to communicate their ideas, thoughts, morals and values. There is an ambient bond between the language and the culture of a society. Both share a profound relationship. To understand and take into account both one cannot do without a simultaneous and parallel knowledge of these two important constitutive parts of communication.

Culture may reflect in body language, customs, superstitions, and even expressions of friendliness. Though these may vary in various social groups still it cannot be denied that the effect of culture on the patterns and usages of a language is deep and persuasive. In this context, culture refers to the lifestyle of a community: the way its members behave, their beliefs, their values and,



most importantly, the way they communicate. Language mediates between the individual and the community.

In a culture, a language is more than mere marks in black ink on a white paper or just a chain of well-organized spoken or written words, making sense. It has both semantic and syntactic associations, with the culture of the community in which it is being spoken. Generally, the origin of words is deep in the roots of a culture and not just words but the way a person speaks and conveys his thoughts has a stamp of the culture which he belongs too. His selection of words, accent and non-verbal behavior and all those things which are related with communication always have an impression of culture and its ways on it. People from different cultures have their ways and patterns of communication which clearly reflect their social background and other cultural elements. When people from different cultures converge to communicate their thoughts, ideas or feelings and even if they simply talk with each-other, this is called intercultural communication. Intercultural communication has paved a path named Globalization at a massive scale. In the past two decades, the world has witnessed a rapid development of globalization and this quick emergence of globalization has changed and affected human life in all ways. There are changes in each and every aspect like culture, language, economics, technology and others. The manner in which the above-mentioned things were used earlier has quite changed, with this growing phenomenon.

Today, the world has become that edge where myriad cultures converge. Globalization, although, is an economic and business oriented concept yet today it has become a wider phenomenon which goes above the economic sphere. It is basically a process by which people, businesses and different governments of various countries interact and this integration is called globalization. It is driven by investment and international companies and is supported by information technology. This process has impact on many different cultures, environment, economic development, prosperity and political systems in societies of the world. But as the word globalization itself indicates, people across the globe, today, meet not just for business, economic, commercial or political purposes, but also for sharing their cultures, norms, morals, ideas and values. The term 'globalization' means the diffusion of ideas, values, cultures and morals across the globe. So it becomes both a social and an economic phenomenon. At present, the universe has as



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many cultures, languages and ethnicities as there are shades in a rainbow. Not in the world, but even in a continent or a single country, at every 10-20 kilometers, we may find varied cultures and languages practiced by people. Globalization is the increase in the relations among people, culture and economy. It is contributing to economic growth in different countries. The term can also refer to the transnational circulation of ideas, languages, and popular culture. The last two decades can aptly be called the decades of Globalization. The economic, cultural and social reach of various services is increasing internationally, with every passing day. An entirely spic and span global phenomenon, 'one world or no world' has knocked at the door of this world. There is hardly anything now that falls in the category of being local. Everything has become global, whether these are problems or facilities. Though the term globalization came into the limelight and thrived the most during the 1970s, it is said that this trait is ancient and is followed by the English language. Every conscious human being seeks his/her ideas and thoughts to be communicable across the cosmos and in the era of universal interdependence, a global language is required to make this connection denser and more effective. It can obviously not be denied that the need for an efficient way of communication across the world is not dependent on our willingness and is an unavoidable fact.

Today, the impact of globalization is such that not just in the field of business across the globe that multicultural workforce is found but even in one and the same country interaction with people coming off different cultural backgrounds has become very common. So, to fulfill our day to day requirements of communication efficacious intercultural communication skills are the need of the hour. The more cultures and varied communities converge, the smaller the world turns to be. People, now days, have been working in multicultural workplaces. Both globalization and intercultural communication have wiped out communication and cultural frontiers. The present globalized world is marked with a kind of oneness, in which people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds come in contact and communicate their ideas, norms, values and concepts. This communication is simply the result of increased proximity in myriad areas like, business, commerce, science, education, tourism and entertainment. All these reasons are somewhat



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individualistic. There are many other reasons like migration from one country to another. Moreover, there are political associations and communities that often bring the leaders or representatives of different countries on the same platform. In all the above-mentioned contacts, people come together and communicate according to the needs that are to be catered of culture to. The discipline which studies communication in various social groups and cultures and shows the influence of cultures affecting communication and its patterns is called Intercultural Communication. It is used to speak about the vast range of communication procedures and issues that come naturally in an organization or social scenario made up of individuals belonging to varied social religious, educational, social or ethnic backgrounds. It tries to understand how people from various cultures and nations act, perceive and communicate the world surrounding them. The field of intercultural communication affirms that culture is responsible for the way people interpret, encode and transmit messages.

In the global environment, communication competency is one of biggest challenges ever faced by the world and its people. When there is no language in common, differences and misunderstandings are obvious. But, even if people share the same language to communicate, there are still chances of being misunderstood and misinterpreted. The reason is varying ethical and cultural values. In the business sector, for more than a decade, there have been cases of miscommunication and consequently, poor performance of the related organization or company. It is very important to understand the influence of globalization on Intercultural communication and vice-versa. As mentioned above, the global oneness of the universe has boosted the importance of smearing the prevailing cultural boundaries. The act of blurring predominant cultural borders is not smooth and easy. The most important role is played by communication and with the rise of the concept of globalization. Communication is affected by a number of elements. Human language and behavior patterns have a lot to influence the process of communication. If the behavior of people from other cultures may appear unusual to us, the same way they too may find us queer at some one of the other point while conversing. Undoubtedly, same expression may have different values conferred upon by the respective speakers of the language in different cultures. The divergence in interactive patterns is deeply related with a culture its norms, values and traditions.



The root cause of barriers in Intercultural communication is cultural shock, a foreign way of living which is not acquainted with others. The solution to this can be found in various ways. Acculturation is one of them. This process can be seen as cultural accommodation i.e. to know, adjust and learn a new culture. Moreover another simple solution to the problem of miscommunication in varying cultural backdrops can be found in facilitating different speakers and communicators a common language. This common language can be referred to as a global language or a lingua-franca. The role of being a lingua-franca or a global language is being played by English on a massive scale worldwide. This rapid rise in globalization has triggered the use of English as an international language and in his, 'The Role of English Language in the Context of Intercultural Communication', Ingrid Madarova comes up with the idea that:

Within the concept of English as a language used for international and intercultural communication, it is consequently important to consider the inseparable role of culture in a language as the cause of the shift from the cultural aspect in English as a foreign/second language into the intercultural aspects in English as an international language including consideration of its possible impact on teaching English as an international language. (Madarova 1)

English has come up as the most popular lingua-franca among the people of various countries who do not have any language in common to share their ideas. The importance and role of English is explicitly visible through its use as the official language of various international organizations. English is the most reliable working language of organizations. Even the leading universities of the world use English language as their official language. This proves that the knowledge of English is the core requirement for a professional institute or organization, in any domain, to be successful. English has become a language that unlocks the doors of all round development on the international stage.

Thanks to the development of Internet and services like E-mail, World Wide Web and others, the use of English language is very much enhanced. There is hardly any country in the world



where English language is not being used in one or the other way. Overall, it will not be an exaggeration to say that we are living in the age of English Language. The use of English terms in other languages is very frequent and again it would not be an overstatement to say that if someone is not familiar with English language today, s/he is living on the other side of an opaque veil from where s/he cannot look through and contact with the rest of the world. Today, English is not just a language, connecting the borders, but one which makes people work and act locally, socially and globally.

People have been using English to communicate with those from different cultures and even with people in their own culture. This has made the language Global English. Though the language used by various people has the same form, it has different natures. These differences manifest the culture, norms, values and surroundings of the concerned group. Using any language is based on the knowledge of the language itself, so is the case with English. So, while using a language, it is necessary for the user to have the knowledge of every layer of theoretical and practical understanding as it is used in the social world. The use of a language is centered on its social nature. Meaning is a dual phenomenon that is formed by the users, i.e., the listeners and the receivers of it. Adding to it, the environment and surroundings in which the language is developed and is being spoken has crucial impact on it, which indicates that meaning is a social phenomenon. The process of linguistic knowledge and learning a language has already been acquired by the learner as he has a command over his mother tongue. So, when one begins to learn another language, he/she already has a good hold over the linguistic patterns and usages of a language and when someone learns English, he/she can boost the knowledge of both the languages through comparisons and the level of understanding.

The learning of a language involves these stages -

1. The knowledge of the whole system of the language
2. The knowledge of the words and vocabulary and usages in social context



3. The knowledge of organizing the text.

The knowledge of the above fields creates a communicable environment for speech engagement. The systemic knowledge contains the knowledge of the whole system, i.e., the stages of linguistic organizations that are constructed by the native speakers of the language, which makes the use of that language more flexible. And, people are free to form sentences and understand on the basis of their levels of knowledge of the related language. In it, a person already knows that the formation of meanings enfold in the constitution of cohesive measures.

After it comes the knowledge of the vocabulary and the words relating these to their social and conventional use. In it, a person has to look into the text for getting an accurate meaning from a coherent understanding of the whole.

The final type includes the knowledge of the organization of the information in a way a native speaker uses it. One must have the skills to put information in correct and understandable order for making it comprehensive to the receiver. It is somewhat related to the domain of conversation, which will be referent to a certain area, topic or a way of putting words in the perfect order. The chief aim of all these levels is to present a way in which English can be learned to march ahead and indulge in the process of communication in a globalist's world. In 'A Dictionary of Language' David Crystal wrote about English becoming 'Diglossic' (Crystal 142).

'Diglossia' denotes the two varieties of a language. While one variety of English will be used by the locals as their language of identity and will be called the low variety, the other type will be used to express intelligence and knowledge, and will be referred to as the high variety.



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A successful intercultural communication requires settlement of a situation, norms, traditions, values and roles of other cultures. Negotiation is all that is needed at its best. Both the listener and the speaker must be able to negotiate without expecting the other one to do the same. If it is done, a better way to understand and comprehend the other person from different culture will be unveiled. This mid way can somewhere lead to the construction of a 'third culture' in which there is a silent agreement and respect for both the cultures prevail and lesser chances of misunderstanding and miscommunication comes forward. Acculturation has again a significant role to play in the process of formation of 'third culture' through negotiation. Lingua- Franca like English beyond affectation of national and regional stereotypes can help carrying off successful Intercultural communication.

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