

## **The Journey of ‘Communication’ from its Evolution to its Exploiters**

**Acharya, S.**

*National Institute of Technology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Rourkela, Orissa -769008, India*

### **ABSTRACT**

Communication begins at birth with touch, then with vision, and finally with speech and hearing or audition. Each child needs to learn the “codes of his/her culture” because the language of each culture is different. Yet, if a child is to learn about his/her world, the ability to communicate must exist. Even after a baby learns the rudiments of communication through touch, vision and hearing, those skills need to continue to be refined until about age seven, when the brain is ready to deal with the abstracts/concepts involved in reading, writing, comprehension, maths “language” or concepts and body language. This short article is a dissemination of concepts with concern to the evolution of communication or language as expressed in the famous dubiety, “First came the egg or the hen?” Today when research into languages, culture and language acquisition is at a peak, we should not shy away from the question of the origin of ‘communication’ and ‘language’ in order to consider which may have come first. The second part of this article is a brief discussion on the global language and its significance and incorporation in language classrooms in India. The last section of this article focusses on the types of change occurring in the use of the English Language as used by young people nowadays.

*Keywords:* Communication, language, evolution, global, classrooms, technocrats

### **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this short article is to envisage the term “Communication” as an ongoing process emerging from ‘lexis’. The term originates from the Latin word “communico” which means “to share.” In prehistoric times, communication among primates was probably first through gestures and

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*E-mail address:*

sharda.acharya@gmail.com (Acharya, S.)

then through grunts, squawks and squeals generated by the vocal apparatus. With the passage of time, meanings conveyed by the use of limbs, body signals and voice became refined as “language”. It is no wonder that language is the most important evolutionary invention of the last few million years. It may rather be called an adaptation that has helped our species to exchange information, make plans, express new ideas and totally change the appearance of the planet. Miller (1981), in his book *Language and Speech*, says, “the most complicated mechanical motion that the human body can perform is the activity of speaking. While generating the sounds of spoken language, the various parts of the vocal tract perform movements that have to be accurate within millimetres and synchronized to within a few hundredths of a second.” It is a fact that we can all speak without thinking. However, we cannot solve basic mathematical problems without concentration. Why is doing mathematics difficult for many, in comparison to generating or interpreting language, which is more complicated? Evolution definitely designed some parts of our brain to specifically deal with language.

In order to keep communication between individuals as an ongoing process, human beings have emerged as generators of different languages in addition to the age-old non-verbal signifiers of communication. I am interested in how certain languages, such as the English Language, have become prominent around the globe. Languages, like human beings, may not assume immortality. However, the English Language continues to

be called a living language. The third section of this paper is a discussion of whether the English Language, if it has lived so long, has retained its real self. Focussing on the youth fraternity of India, here there is an attempt to address the hypothesis in the research.

**PURPOSE AND HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:-**

1. “Communication” came prior to “language.”
2. English Language is the global language.
3. English Language as used by young adults has changed with time. Though students are aware of their imperfections in the use of the language, do not hesitate to communicate in the language in a forum because it shows that they are cool, modern and belong to Gen Y. Is there any struggle to keep this reform alive? The language ‘English’ has its lights and its shades. The lights seem to be more prominent. The total number of languages as listed in “The Ethnologue” is 6805<sup>1</sup>.

Languages	Total countries speaking	First language speakers (in millions)
Spanish	44	329
English	112	328

(The Ethnologue, 2009 )

From the above figures we can very well estimate the popularity of the Spanish and English languages worldwide. However, the latter is more widespread in use in

<sup>1</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> Ed. M.Paul Lewis, Editor, 2009, SIL, International

comparison to the former which may be established by the number of countries that speak it.

### **ORIGIN: LANGUAGE OR COMMUNICATION?**

On the matter of the history and development of particular languages, one question has intrigued scholars for ages, and that question has to do with the origin and evaluation of language in the human species in general. What was the nature of the first language? "Considerable evidence suggests that the capacity for language is a species-specific, biologically innate trait of human beings. Another mesmerising question is: which came first, 'language' or 'communication'? Did we already have a language for communication or did we simply communicate without language in pre-historic times? One idea that mildly satisfies is that human beings began to mimic the sounds of nature and used these sounds as referents for the sources of the sound. This theory is sometimes disparagingly referred to as the "bow-wow' theory" (Akmajian *et al.*, 2001). The existence of onomatopoeic words such as bow-wow, meow, crash and boom might be taken as evidence of such mimicking. It has also been suggested that a gestural language, that is, a system of hand gestures, facial expressions and signals, also played a role in communication. In addition, it is sometimes speculated that human language gradually evolved from the need for humans to communicate with each other in coordinating certain group tasks. The idea here is that people working in groups

can co-operate more efficiently if they can use a vocal language to communicate. But such "functional" theories of the origin of language seem quite dubious. Why could not a sign language or gestural language work as a communication system in the context of groups at work?

Once human language evolved, language came to be exploited fully for all kinds of social functions; but the needs involved in such functions cannot be identified as the first cause of language evolution. At present the most reasonable suggestion on the origin and evolution of human language is that it was intimately linked with the evolution of the human brain. Over the last 5 million years there has been a striking increase in brain size, ranging from about 400 cubic centimetres in our distant hominid ancestors to about 1,400 cubic centimetres in modern *Homo sapiens* (Miller, 1981). The mere increase in brain size would not necessarily have led to superior intelligence and the evolution of language, since dolphins, for example, have a brain comparable in size to that of humans, yet have only a rudimentary communication system. Furthermore, even a mere increase in general intelligence might not necessarily have led to the evolution of language. Dolphins and primates, for instance, are considered to be more sophisticated or complex than birds. Lenneberg (1964) has pointed out that humans with IQ levels significantly below normal can nevertheless grasp the rudiments of language. So, brain size is only one factor that may have played a role in the evolution of language; changes

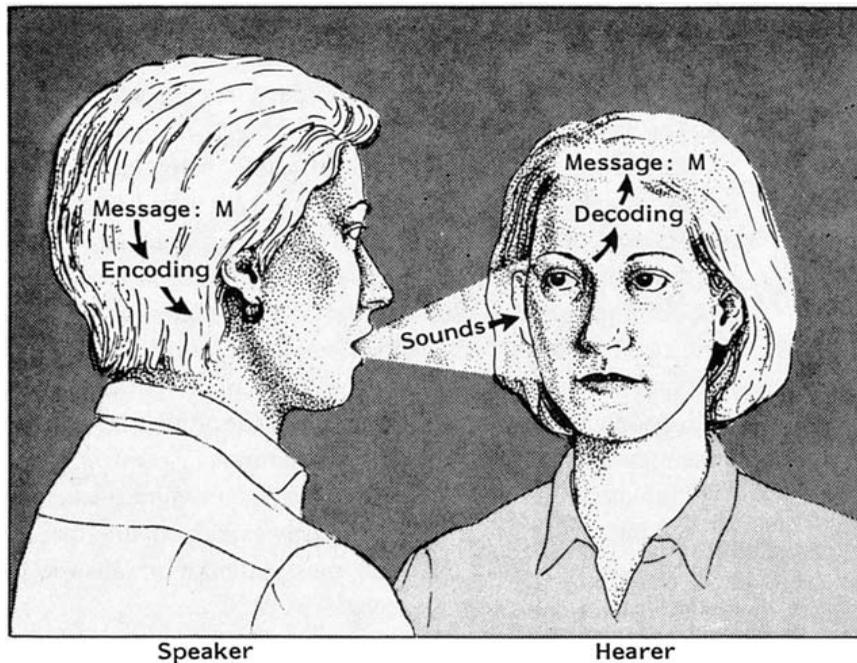
in the organisation and complexity of the brain must also be supposed to have played a crucial role. Hypothesis speaks of the origin of language, some 50,000 to 1,00,000 years ago. There is an abrupt change in the quality and nature of tool development between 50,000 and 1,00,000 years ago, signalling to some anthropologists the emergence of modern humans. It is plausible that this increased ability may have been associated with a qualitative change in language ability. Because of inadequate solid evidence to base any claim concerning the origin and evolution of human language, the questions still remain unanswered. Leieberman (1975) contended that the vocal tract of Neanderthal man had only a limited capacity for speech because his vocal tract was shaped differently from that of modern humans. However, recent evidence negates this (National Geographic, 1989).

Not only are we clueless about the commencement of language, we do not have any idea of what the earlier stages of language might have been like, even in the more recent stages before the modern era. As mentioned earlier, language is a biological phenomenon, and in the biological world it is frequently possible to find earlier forms of life existing simultaneously with more evolved forms. For example, the Coelacanth was a biologically primitive fish known only in fossil form until a living specimen was discovered and identified in 1938 (Akmajian *et al.*, 2001). Might it be possible to encounter a group of people who speak a form of language that can be identified as an earlier form of modern language? Small,

previously unknown groups of people have indeed been discovered from time to time in jungle areas in New Guinea and the Philippines (Molony, 1988). These groups have apparently been isolated from other humans for long periods of time and have no knowledge of the modern world. Their existence might claim that they speak a more primitive language that could be an earlier form of modern human language. Hence, we are limited to studying the history of languages on the basis of written records, dating back only 6,000 years.

### **SUCCESSFUL LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION**

For the last 50 years the most common and popular conception of human linguistic communication has been the "Message Model" (Akmajian, 2001). When the Message Model is applied to human linguistic communication between speakers of a language, the speaker acts as a "transmitter", the hearer acts as a "receiver", and the vocab-auditory path (sound wave) is the relevant channel. This model accounts for certain common-sense features of talk exchanges: it predicts that communication is successful when the hearer decodes the same message that the speaker encodes; and as a corollary it predicts that communication breaks down if the decoded message is different from the encoded message. Likewise, it portrays language as a bridge between speaker and hearer whereby "private" ideas are communicated by "public" sounds, which function as the vehicle for communicating



(Akmajian *et al.*, 2001)

Fig. 1: Successful Linguistic Communication

the relevant message. Another issue lays in wait for discussion and that is the level of difficulty of communication, based on the simplicity or complexity of the concepts of knowledge to be conveyed. Table 1 explains lucidly how the message may be communicated to the different strata of audience and what tentatively interests them in the linguistic communication.

### ENGLISH GOES GLOBAL

For the linguistic communication to be successful a language comes to the scene. With the fast and widespread expansion of colonialism both in time and space, English became established in the colonies of the British Empire. In due course of time, colonialism gained momentum in

various forms affected largely by economics and technology. Consequently, more and more countries started falling prey to monolingualism in the form of English currently popularly labelled as a global language (Chandalia, 2009). First among Indians, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the chief protagonist who wanted English to be taught in Indian schools and colleges. He believed like many others that the knowledge of English could facilitate the possibility of early freedom for India by giving the Indians the knowledge of several democratic and freedom movements abroad. The importance of the ability to speak or write English has recently increased significantly because English has become the de facto standard. Learning English has become popular for business, commerce

TABLE 1  
Simplicity of Thought and Level of Communication

The audience	The audience asks	Typical Explanation
Semiliterate or illiterate	How can we use the information?	Chalkboard presentations/posters, oral tradition
Primary-school or equivalent	What is it?	Simple talks about nature, inventions
Secondary-school or equivalent*	Why is it?	Illustrated texts, magazines, audiovisual material
University students, graduates*	What is the basis in quantification, philosophy?	Experiments, tests, seminars, conferences
Other : Scientists, Engineers**	What must I do to develop my career?	Interdisciplinary journals, workshops, visits
Decision-makers : governmental industrial, university**	Why should society adopt and pay for discoveries, technical innovations?	By consultants, research and development advisors, special committee named to guide the decision-makers

\*These two categories comprise the large, public audience often called the urban literate population.

\*\*These two categories can be expected to have access to technical media of various kinds of scientific and engineering journals.

(Richardson, 1993)

and cultural reasons and especially for internet communication throughout the world. India is the catalyst of various global changes, with the potential to command international growth, possessing the largest youth workforce and is the world's second-largest English-speaking country. With globalisation and Indian companies going global, Indian professionals are expected to interact with international clients and customers. Proficiency in the English Language has become inevitable for grabbing an opening in the global concerns. The phenomenon seems unavoidable because only English-speaking Indians can connect a contemporary India with the modern world. Corporate India is finally beginning to engage in the global talent pool. A diverse workforce is today a business imperative. In the corporate

world, English is used for international communication, top management meetings and high-level negotiations. English is the preferred language for internal and external communication inter- and intra-companies worldwide. Employers expect the workforce to possess excellent communication skills apart from knowledge and expertise in their respective field. "Speaking English increases your salary 35%- Business Week Statistics" (Chaudhary, 2009). India appeared to have an edge over international competition because of its long association with English, the use of English for administration and the fact that English is taught either as a school language or is used as the medium of instruction. With the number of foreign investors flocking to India growing and the growth of outsourcing, English has come to play a key role in professional relationships

between foreign and Indian companies. However, business organisations have started to realise that our language skills are inadequate for international communication.

Demand for Business English has burgeoned in recent years and there has been a mushrooming of courses for learners, courses for teachers, materials for learners and reference materials. There is further proliferation of terms used in Business English that focus on people, purpose or jobs. So, we hear about “English for Professionals”, “English for Professional Purposes”, “English for Secretaries” or “Secretarial English” and many more. In a competitive market we aim to distinguish our products and services from those of our competitors to find a special niche. This may be one significant reason for the range of terms: the need to sound as if we have a unique selling point (John, 1996).

### **THE CHANGING ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as we witness the rise of interactive digital media such as the Internet, conditions are even more conducive to the production of innovative styles of youth culture. Language will necessarily take on new forms and uses in a world in which communication is mediated through numerous agencies. With the proliferation of television channels, social networking sites, blogs, animations, film-culture, video and computer games, today's generation of youths live a life that is completely dominated by technology and pop culture.

The pressure to fit in the group, to be one of the crowd, is so overpowering for youngsters today that most of them live a life dictated by what they see in movies, TV serials, fashion and popular magazines. Language is used creatively in specific local contexts to achieve particular social and interactional goals, and in the process, both language and culture are being reshaped to fit new, locally meaningful identities. With regards to this, Clark and Kenji (2011) have rightly stated that the rapid expansion of Internet use, electronic communication and user-orientated media such as social networking sites, blogs and microblogging services has led to a rapid increase in the need to understand casual written English, which often does not conform to rules of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Besides the two familiar modes of communication, written and spoken language, there exists, Prof. David Crystal argues, a “third medium” of Internet language, or Netspeak as he calls it. Irregular language used in casual English found in social media can be grouped into several distinct categories as follows (Clark & Kenji, 2011).

1. Abbreviation (shortform)  
e.g. nite - night  
sayin – saying  
gr8 – great
2. Abbreviation (acronym)  
e.g. lol – laughing out loud  
iirc – if I remember correctly
3. Typing error/misspelling  
e.g. wouls – would  
rediculous – ridiculous

4. Punctuation omission/error  
e.g. im – I'm  
dont – don't
5. Non-dictionary slang  
This category includes word sense disambiguation (WSD) problems caused by slang uses of standard words, e.g. *that was well mint* (“*that was very good*”).
6. Wordplay  
Includes phonetic spelling and intentional misspelling for verbal effect, e.g. *that was soooooo great* (“*that was so great*”).
7. Censor avoidance
8. Using numbers or punctuation to disguise vulgarities, e.g. *shlt, f\*\*\**, etc.
9. Emoticons

The development of mobile phones with full keyboards, touch screens or advanced word formation programmes has facilitated the process by which young people have embraced this technology as a hallmark of their generation (Skierskowski & Wood, 2012). Studies seek to determine the linguistic specificities of SMSes defined as a register (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002) of written communication. Along these same lines, Crystal (2001) emphasised the importance of the concept of “language variety” which can be applied to oral and written language, legal language, scientific language, regional particularities of a language, literature and also to computer-

mediated writing, including SMSes. Some examples of the linguistic alterations may be slang/abbreviated slang terms (e.g. “dunno”), acronyms (e.g. LOL), g-drop (e.g. “doin”), number for sound (e.g. L8), letter omissions (e.g., R for “are”), emoticons (from the 2001 LIWC), abbreviations (e.g., x for kiss), combined words (e.g., nevermind) and expansions (e.g., bitchhhhhhhhhhh).

## CONCLUSION

Thus it may be definitely understood in the line of the hypothesis that it is still a dilemma whether Homosapiens first communicated with or without a language. That English has gone global has been established in the paper, and with regards to the third hypothetical statement we find innumerable examples of English use by youth who call themselves “cool” because they use deviations from Standard English. There is a wide scope of study beyond this paper as to how this emerging language can be used in the language classrooms as curricula in tertiary-level education.

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