



INFLUENCE OF DIGITALIZATION ON LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Language is a purely human phenomenon. It is a means of communication whereby humans exchange their ideas, emotions, and information verbally. Every human community has its own language which keeps evolving along with the evolution of the community. In the course of time societies advance. This advancement brings the emergence of new fields of knowledge. Things which were beyond our conception before a century or two have become our routine today. The advancement in science and technology has opened new horizons which can be realized only with the help of language. Our world is the collage of languages and the language which acculturates with the new fields of knowledge is bound to dominate the other language. This may lead to linguistic imperialism. Each and every change in human society influences language. Digitalization has become an indispensable part of all the fields of modern society. Undoubtedly it has its influence on language. The present paper attempts to discuss the influence of digitalization on language.

Key words: Language, evolution, knowledge, digitalization, linguistic imperialism

Every species in this world requires knowledge for its survival in a better manner. Knowledge refers to facts, information, skills acquired through experience. It means awareness acquired by experience of a fact or situation. Actually, it is the understanding of a subject which can be either practical or theoretical. For example, a baby understands what to eat and how to eat through observation and by experience. If it happens to eat the green leaves of a neem

tree, by experience it would acquire the knowledge that the leaves of neem are not for regular consumption. Moreover, knowledge is shared with the help of communication systems. The communication system differs from species to species. The communication system can include physical actions such as dancing in birds, beating chests in gorillas and other monkeys and giving calls. When it comes to human beings, language is used as a communication system. It is species specific and species uniform. Species specific means only human beings use language and species uniform means all human beings use language. Language is a means of human social communication. Human brain has miraculous reasoning power with which humans can conceive a variety of ideas which can be realized socially only through language. Subsequently, the scientific and technological innovations are the consequence of human reasoning but the realizations of these innovations are done with the help of language. Naturally with advancement of the society its language advances. Language bears the influence of each and every change in the society. It is a naming system in which every tangible and intangible thing, quality and action are named. According to Guy Cook, Language is at the heart of human life. Without it, many of our most important activities are inconceivable. Try to imagine relating to your family, making friends, learning, falling in love, forming a relationship, being a parent, holding—or rejecting—a religious faith, having political ideals, or taking political action, without using words. There are other important activities, of course, which do seem to exist without language. Sexual relations, preparing and eating food, manual labour and crafts, the visual arts, playing and listening to music, wondering at the natural world, or grieving at its destruction. Yet even these are often developed or enhanced through language. We would perceive them quite differently had we never read about them or discussed them. (2003, p. 3)

In this way, the language of a progressive society progresses in the course of time. English is a very good example of this. Some centuries ago English was the language of a small island but presently it has emerged as a global language. On the other hand, the languages like Greek, Latin and Sanskrit which once used to be very significant languages having prestige, but now no more bear the

same status. Today's is the world of information technology. There has been the experience of the explosion of information. The world today has almost shrunk into a global village. The advancement in science and technology has enabled us to have better and quick access to and contact with the world around. English has played a key role in this process. It can be called the language of digitalization. So it has the influence of digitalization. At the same time, English has influenced the other languages which find it difficult to operate without digital technology. In this way it is possible that all the modern languages in the world have some influence of digitalization. This paper attempts to present the nature of the influence of digitalization upon languages. Digitalization means integration of digital technologies in day-to-day life. It includes processes like computerization, electronization and digitization. Computerization refers to the process of taking the new activities on computer and fixing them into that space. Electronization is a process of publishing a paper-based item electronically and digitization is conversion of analogue information in print or voice form to digital form with suitable electronic devices for the processing, storing and transmission of information through digital circuits, equipment and networks. Digitalization of language can be a never ending process. Language is creative. It has the ability to produce infinite messages with the help of limited number of symbols. Moreover, language is culture. It evolves with evolution of culture. Language is culturally transmitted. It is transmitted from generation to generation. Every new generation modifies language as per the need of the time. With every advancement, there is a chance of language modification which is attained through neologism which means the coining or use of new words. For instance, the word, 'aeroplane' was first used in late 19th century. Before that, there was no need to have such a word. On the other hand, the word, 'computer' was first used in a 1613 book called *The Yong Mans Gleanings* by the English writer Richard Brathwait. But then it meant 'a person who carried out calculation and computations'. The word came to be meant as 'programmable digital electronic computer' from 1945. This clearly shows how a language evolves with the need of the society. There are instances of neologisms under the influence of digitalization. Information Technology is a buzz word of 21st Century. It refers to the use of computers and technology to manage information. This is what we mean by digitalization of information which has influenced major language of the world. For the

sake of convenience, let us consider the influence of digitalization on the English language. There is no doubt that the process of digitalization has caused the English neologisms like applet, attachment, authentication, bandwidth, blog, Bluetooth, browser, buffer, cache, captcha, CD-ROM, courseware, cursor, cyberspace, database, dialogue box, download, DVD, email, emoticon, Ethernet, homepage, hyperlink, internet, JAVA, knowledge base, LAN, LINUX, log in, log out, modem, mouse, multimedia, nameserver, network hub, online, PDF, Quick Time, RAM, router, search engine, software, telnet, Twitter, upload, URL, VDI, virtual classroom, Wi-Fi, WWW, XHTML, XML, zip, zoom and many more. This list goes endless as language is open-ended. The other languages may not have equivalent words for the English ones mentioned above. They have to adopt these terms as they are. In this way digitalization may result into universalization of new terms. The field of IT is advancing so rapidly that we have no alternative but to keep up with new advances.

Furthermore, digitalization has enabled the languages to get the linguistic data updated easily. Digitalization has made the ordeal of the production of lexicon much easier. For instance, the first edition of the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary was published in 1948. It took almost fifteen years to bring out the second edition of the dictionary in 1963. The third edition of OALD came out in 1974. Again it took fifteen years to publish the fourth edition of the dictionary and it was published in 1989. But the most important thing to be noted here is that in 1988 the first electronic version of the OALD was made available. The fifth edition of the dictionary was published in 1995 and in 1997 the first of its CD-ROM edition was published. After that, after every five years, the new edition of the OALD (Sixth edition -2000, Seventh edition-2005, Eighth edition-2010, Ninth edition, 2015 and Tenth edition-2020) has got published. No need to wonder. The whole credit goes to digitalization. Apart from that Oxford University Press has published myriads dictionaries such as Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Academic English, Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English, Oxford Learner's Wordfinder Dictionary, Oxford Learner's Thesaurus: A Dictionary of Synonyms, Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary, Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary of Business English, Oxford Learner's Pocket Phrasal Verbs and Idioms, Oxford Learner's Pocket Thesaurus, Oxford Learner's Pocket Word Skills, New Oxford Intermediate Learner's Dictionary, Oxford

Advanced American Dictionary for learners of English, Oxford Basic American Dictionary for learners of English, Oxford American Dictionary for learners of English, Oxford ESL Dictionary, Oxford ESL Dictionary for learners of English and multitude of bilingual dictionaries English and regional national or local languages. Would it have been possible without digitalization? (Wikipedia, Oxford Dictionaries)

Another area which is the direct result of the influence of digitalization is the corpus linguistics which is a recent discipline of applied linguistics. ‘Corpus’ means a databank of language which has been actually used. The linguistic data can be in written mode or spoken mode or it can be mixture of both written and spoken modes. Guy Cook (2003, p.73) rightly points out: Before computers some headway was made in this kind of study by collecting printed corpora, laboriously reading through them, and manually recording facts. In recent years, however, corpus linguistics has been transformed by electronic storage and automatic searching. Millions of words can be searched within seconds to yield extensive information about word frequencies and word combinations. This is why corpus linguistics has made such extraordinary advances in the last few decades. There are around ninety to hundred English corpora. They include British Academic Spoken English Corpus (BASE), British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE), British National Corpus, Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), Indian Corpus of English (ICE), Brown = A Standard Corpus of Present-Day Edited American English, COCA = The Corpus of Contemporary American English, DCPSE = Diachronic Corpus of Present-Day Spoken English (Oxford Handbooks Online,2012) and many others.

Digitalization has been significantly contributing in the preservation of languages which are on the verge of extinction. The endangered languages having only oral tradition or spoken form have been preserved with the help digitalization. However, the lack of proper software or programming it would difficult to preserve these languages digitally. Consequently some of these endangered languages could become extinct in the present digital world. It means that the languages which have been digitalized have chances to survive and grow in this era of digitalization. Language changes from community to

community. Each community is proud of its native language as it is a key to cultural identity and expression. Language is a cultural heritage of the community. If not digitalized most of the languages may be extinguished and the world may be ruled by the digitally powerful languages. This may result into linguistic imperialism.

To conclude, digitalization has influenced language in both positive and negative ways. It is useful in the preservation of language. It preserves the evolution of language by recording every minute change that language undergoes. Digitalization of language has made research activities pursuable with a few hardships but the languages which lack the digital support are endangered and they may extinguish in the course of time. In fact, nothing is eternal in this world. The languages which are utilized will surely keep progressing and those which will not be used will perish. Digitalization is the key aspect of today's life. We have to either digitalize our language or use the language which is digitalized, as this would enable us to have better life.

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