Living on the Edge: Globalization and Language PeripheriesAmong the Youth of Kerala

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ABSTRACT: English is a global language. Globalization has created enormous possibilities for English to get connected with other languages and cultures. Globalization has also distorted vision about key concepts like the Centre and Periphery. The youth of Kerala are experiencing the pressure for adaptation of culture and languages while responding to global challenges. With the availability of technology and foreign languages like English, they have developed systems of communication among themselves which fall beyond the set parameters of language practices.

This article speaks about globalization and its traits among the youth of Kerala. It speaks about living in language periphery. The language spoken by the youth of Kerala demonstrate that there are default combinations between languages and linguistic operations. There is a higher sense of adaptability and amalgamation which the youth of Kerala practice in their living within the society. These are lives on language peripheries.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization is a phenomenon which nations experience today. A globalized life is that which has become the ordinary sort of life for most of the people across the globe. In one way or the other, the current generation of people is living the effects of globalized scenario in all the spheres of life. When it comes to youth and their lives over the internet in a special manner, there are more evidences of how people change their *modus operanti* for survival in such a polyphonic social situation. A reflection on this merits a place even in the scientific world as those youth involved in such a living are the same people who become consumers and producers of the same at the same time.

This article intends to brighten up this thinking basing on a participant observation intervention conducted for the intention in a group of youth from all over Kerala, the southernmost and most literally developed state of the Indian Federation. This is an inquiry into the way English is being used by the youth in their day to day communication.

The research question in this article is posed as this: Can one attest that the youth of Kerala are living lives on language peripheries in a globalized scenario? The question can be expanded for better clarity. There seems to be a globalization impact running through the society of Kerala. The youth loving in Kerala are using English as their second language both official and unofficial purposes. English had been taught to them right from the elementary classes. While this is being so, the regular communication of the youth in Kerala reflect anomalies and absurd combinations of languages, phrases, words and letters in their communication. Are these abnormalities signs of lives on language peripheries?

This article intends to expose language anomalies in the globalized situation. Using expository and exploratory methodologies it will present the current language preferences of the youth. It will analyse those preferences of the youth of Kerala against the background of globalization, centre-periphery polarities and practical lives of the youth today.

The hypothesis is that the youth of Kerala are prone to systems of adaptation, especially with regard to languages, and those anomalies are signs of adaptation which cater to the needs of societal living today.

II. GLOBALIZATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Globalization is considered to be a process in which the global inhabits the regional. It can be a process at multiple levels, starting from economic consideration, to that of values and cultures. It can be considered as a phenomenon in which the entire living of societies get coloured as they assimilate elements of other cultures and societies to ones' own situations. It could be pictured as containers and porters of cultural traits across the globe,

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transmitting elements at a bipolar system in which the national goes international and the international comes regional. Even if these interventions are only partly present the correspondence of different elements of such interventions do manifest traits of each other within the given social scenario (Saskia, Saseen 2007, 3). Itbecomes a phenomenon beyond the geographical and territorial borders and claims new borders at multiple levels. The fact is that there are people who do not accept the national territorial claims posed by authorities just because they are within the geographical territory (Saskia). People like international tourists, state embassies are given as examples for this claim.

At this point what globalisation is to be specified so that the inquiry can be conducted. Globalization is a process at two levels. It coul dbe considered as a process, on the one side, of global and international organizations and processes being formed and directed beyond borders. Institutions like United Nations Organization, World Trade Organization International War Crimes Tribunels, Multinational companies etc. On the other side, globalization could be a process that takes place within the geographical territories of nation states. With multiple levels of processes taking place within the territory this could be a situation in which global trends influence the regional and global associations get involved in the local situations like humanitarian interventions, market dynamics, etc.

It is against this globalization phenomenon that languages ply their trade. For every communication across individuals and societies languages are the preferred medium. And hence language do for part of the globalization process. English for its part have become part of this globalization make overs especially after the colonization processes. English is used today as one of the most used international languages for communication. Every continent has countries which has English as one of the main languages of communication, either as the primary language or as a secondary language. International communications especially that which is held through the internet and allied channels, do use English as one of the primary means of interactions. And that is why English is used a global language.

English is used to transmit many international processes beyond the territorial boundaries which have been overcome through cross border transactions. Unlike other colonial languages like French, German, Spanish and Italian, English has dominated international communications in the battle for survival. The economic strength and the cultural diversity together with the availability for adaptation has enabled English to stay afloat in the battle for visibility. Today, English is one of the primary languages for global communications.

III. CENTRE AND PERIPHERY

Centre and periphery are two concepts which need to be kept in mind while a study on globalization is considered. Centre is often considered as the centre of gravity and centre of attraction and even of action of all the social activities, governance and availability of resources. Periphery is considered to be those areas wherein such availability is scarce and that the development ratio of the region would be at a lesser grade. This dichotomy is also seen through the mobility of people in search of higher standards of life and prosperity (Pascariu, G.C., Frunză, R. (2011, 590-611). Through primarily this bipolar discussions are held at the level of market logic and economics (Krugman, 1991, Fujita and Thisse, 2002, Baldwin et al, 2003, Chromy and Janů, 2003, Vaishar, 2006), one cannot exclude other sociological elements of lives in this regard. Cost of living and cultural imprints do vary from centre to periphery. The dichotomy between modernity and tradition are differently evidenced in centre and in periphery. There are observations that there are disparities in the marks of development between the centre and periphery. There seems to be also a sort of dependence of the periphery on the centre for survival and sustenance (Baldwin and Forslid, 1999).

Imprints of language in this discussion cannot be sidelined either. While these bi-dimensional polarities of centre and periphery cannot be evidenced physically as in geographical space, the phenomenon is present also in the communication scenario. Those who are fluent in a language have better possibility of communication while those with lesser capability often suffer from the same process. With regard to language we cannot identify logistics of centre and periphery but comprehend the language availability and its proficiency as centre and periphery.

While in the centre there is more availability of resources in the periphery there is more adaptability with the available resources. One cannot neglect the fact that those with higher possibilities for development are those with higher availability and consistency of resources (Olson, 1996). The situation is the same even in the cases of languages as well. It is this concept that is being developed in the language periphery scenario.

IV. YOUTH OF KERALA AND ENGLISH AVAILABILITY

Kerala, as a state with highest literacy rate in India, as per the census of 2011, is habituated with at least three main syllabuses of school learning. The state syllabus controlled by the Government of Kerala, and two central board syllabuses, the Indian Certificate of School Examination (ICSE) and the Central Board of School Education (CBSE). While there are other education syllabuses like Montessori, homeschooling etc. the above

said three syllabuses form major portion of the English training. All the three forms do have scientifically practically proven systems of teaching English.

The English taught in Kerala form under three categories. English is taught as a language, as literature and is used also as the medium of instruction in many schools. And hence, it is expected that English becomes a fluent language in Kerala. It is against this background that one needs to identify the usage of English among the youth of Kerala.

V. THE INVESTIGATION

The English usage by the youth of Kerala can be identified in different ways. Bu the methodology used for this article has been that of participant observation in which a random group of youth have been encountered during one of their annual gathering. Youth in the meeting hailed from the districts of Malappuram, Wayanad, Kannur, Thrissur, Palakkad, Ernakulam, Idukki and Kollam. These districts form a substantial portion of Kerala as there are only fourteen districts in Kerala, geographically. Moreover the validity of this research is to be identified against the fact that being the case of language and its usage, especially among the youth with higher mobility and technological availability.

The investigation was conducted on 10th October 2018, at Don Bosco College, Mannuthy, in the district of Thrissur. Total number of participants were 56. The age group of the youth consisted from 17 to 23. This segment was ideally chosen for the investigation as they were more adept into the technology based informal communications especially using WhatsApp, the social media platform.

The youth were encountered during their informal gathering moment and were introduced into the research. With clear intensions of research the youth were introduced into speaking in informal fashion and share screenshots from their conversions over WhatsApp to confirm their vocal expressions. Topics under discussions varied from sports, to film to relationships and scholastic matters. Here below are a few salient features that have been found from the investigation.

VI. FINDINGS

From the participant observation it has been found that the youth of Kerala speak fluently in vernacular. They use English words all too often in their ordinary conversations and seem to communicate desired ideas. Swapping between languages do not seem to be a problem for their communicability. Encouraging to speak only in English, it was found that the language proficiency to speak only in English or in Malayalam was not available for most of them. Due to the regular usages of mixed up languages they needed extra care to avoid English words in their sentences. Most of them did not possess correct forms of grammar or words in English to complete sentences in good Standard English. All of them called this form of communication as "Manglish" a combination of English and Malayalam, the state local language.

In the figure below, two random screen shots from group conversations of the youth over WhatsApp, there are a few elements which pour more light into the findings from the participant observation conducted among the youth. These screenshots are from two different group conversations just as they have shared it in the group under investigation. Elements that are evident in these shots do give us more information regarding the level of proficiency with languages and technological edge are seen. These re important to be noted as the reflection is on language peripheries in the globalized scenario.
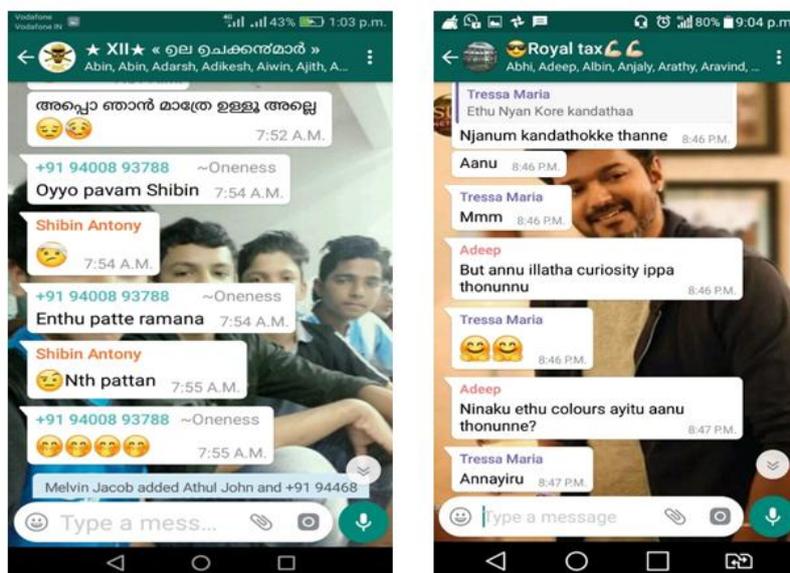
Figure1– WhatsApp Group conversation from the youth.

From figures above one can read that there are combination of different sorts in the communication protocol. English characters are utilized for most part. Malayalam fonts are also used. Malayalam words are written using English characters. 'Smileys' or 'emoticons' as they are known are used as well. To answer if they are communicating in English would be a difficult question to answer here as parameters of English are seldom used here. No complete English sentences are used in the bargain. There are combinations of English words with Malayalam words just in the send frame of the figure in which "*But Annuillatha curiosity ippothonnunnu*" is written.

Taking into consideration these elements one can realize that they are communicating in a language which is a combination of English, Malayalam, and Technology default. This is a concrete example of language adaptation which the youth of Kerala are comfortable with. The Bi-lingual efficiency was seen both at the formal speaking and at the informal speaking. The lack of regular availability and consistent usages of neither the languages seems to be highlighted in their communications. Trying to find out reasons for the same it was asserted that there is a lack of availability of higher words for better English communication and lack of trained concentration to speak only in Malayalam.

Technology is used to enhance communication beyond words especially taking recourse to images and by taking quotes from previous conversions. The same technology make it difficult for the technological non savvy to be at the forefront of communication scenario over the internet. In this scenario languages get mingled, technology becomes auxiliary and adaptation become the ongoing *manthra* and the living *suthra* in Kerala.

VII. CONCLUSION

English language has a global reach and that is evident also from the English training the youth in Kerala have undergone. The availability of English has not grown so as to make it an exclusive language in which all other languages retire to oblivion. English, taking with it also cultural traits of technological developments conversation from the youth in Kerala demonstrate that they have the availability of languages.

The availability of English does not fall under the minimum necessary for a fluent conversation and hence they take recourse to a mixture of languages in their conversations. Trying to get settled with the available resources, especially at the technological edge, they use English characters to speak in Malayalam. All do not have Malayalam fonts to write over the Cellphone whatever they would otherwise say at the open.

The youth have found that many of their emotions can be expressed with figures and images, in a faster, shorter and smarter way using 'emoticons' or 'emojis'. And that too become part of regular conversation. There are large collection so f such expressions which they use in their conversations.

Staying with the discussion developed at earlier stages, this is to be noted that the young in Kerala, especially those who had been under investigation, have language resources available for communication. But they do not have it to sufficient levels for independent and exclusive linguistic performances. They have technology available for faster intervention, but that too is not available in sufficiency. These elements fall part of the characteristics of a periphery.

And hence it is a natural conclusion that follows. The youth of Kerala, with the availability of resources at multiple fronts of languages and technology, live lives at the periphery. While they may be economically

stable and adequate with the minimum of education together with possibility of technological advancement, they still live lives of peripheries.

Globalization has granted access to different culture, economic availability and linguistic advantages. But these have not proved to be as effective as to enable them lives of the centre, where affluent lives still remain as desired dream. The comfort zone created and enjoyed by the youth of Kerala remain still within the purview of Malayalam as preferred language together with English as the main auxiliary language. The linguistic adaptability of the youth with English and Malayalam have eventually become, in their own terms, "Manglish" the combination of the two languages. Adding technological traits to the communication process, especially in the written format the communication of the youth of Kerala have become a typical example of adaptability in the peripheries of society.

Globalization ensuring that the global become local and the local grows as global creates also peripheries at different levels. Some of such peripheries do generate newer possibilities of linguistic growth patterns and cultural amalgamations. Adaptability becomes the trade mark of lives on the edge, that of peripheries; especially linguistic peripheries.

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