

Emergence of Nepalese English: A Case of Short Stories

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Abstract

The wide use of English language around the globe in the recent decades has generated different varieties of English language with their own distinctive features; one of such varieties is Nepalese English. Several English literary texts written by Nepalese writers along with different other factors are contributing to establish Nepalese English as a different variety of English. Analyzing six English short stories written by three Nepali writers, this article examined the Nepalese English used in the short stories to find out their distinctive features. The stories were analyzed and interpreted using interpretative research paradigm. After the analyses, it was found that there is code mixing and code switching (Nepali and English) in the stories; Nepali names are given to the characters to give real flavor of Nepaleseness and the short stories reflect the Nepalese societies in terms of the condition of women, development, education and employment.

Keywords: World Englishes, Nepalese English, code mixing and switching, short stories

Introduction

The use of English language in the recent decades has expanded dramatically around the globe. Due to this reason, "English by now is the most widely taught, learnt and spoken language in the world" (Karchu & Nelson, 2011, p. 9). Karchu and Smith (2008) state that the spread, status and functions of English around the world are really inspiring that in recorded human history no other language has had such a position. Both the west (native speakers) and the east (nonnative speakers) are busy promoting English language (Imam, 2005). This suggests that English language is now not only the property of its native

speakers but also of those who speak it as second and/or foreign language.

Due to the wide spread use of English language, “it has entailed some demographic changes in the use of the language” (Sharifian, 2013, p.7) and the notion of world Englishes is being a burning issue in academia. The rapid spread of English as a language of communication has encouraged interesting but at the same time controversial debate about the status of English in its varieties, which are commonly called World Englishes (Kachru, 1985 as cited in Kilickaya, 2009). Kachru (1996) writes, ‘Englishes’ symbolizes variation in form and function, use in linguistically and culturally distinct contexts, and a range of variety in literary creativity” (p. 135). Since the term ‘ world Englishes’ has a range of meanings and interpretations, different scholars term it differently like ‘world English’ in the singular, ‘global English’, ‘international English’ while others adopt the same terms in their plural forms like ‘global English(es)’, ‘international English(es)’, ‘localized varieties of English’, ‘new varieties of English’, ‘non-native varieties of English’, ‘second-language varieties of English’, ‘world English(es)’ and ‘new Englishes’ (Bolton, 2006). The term ‘world Englishes’ is inclusive and does not associate any privilege with English in any one of its specific varieties rather it denotes the historical facts of the origin and diffusion of English around the world (Karchu & Nelson, 2011). To summarize the premises of ‘World Englishes’, Proshina and Nelson (2020, p. 526) write:

English is not a monolithic and homogeneous language anymore. Being pluricentric (which is due to historical, political, and economic, as well as cultural and informational reasons), it has differentiated into a great number of varieties – world Englishes. Each variety is underpinned by its linguaculture, which means it is able to express the cultural identity of its users and has certain features transferred from their mother tongues and/or other languages that are in regular contact with this variety.

Different varieties of English like: Indian English, Australian English, Singapore English, British English, American English and Irish English are seen and heard today (Maftoon & Esfandiari, 2013, p. 35) and this has resulted in the emergence of three broad categories of regional varieties of English: i) the first set includes the varieties in the countries where the English language has its origins, ii) the second set comprises the varieties that have developed in countries where English has a long history due to colonization and the language has undergone acculturation and nativization and iii) the third set consists of the varieties that are developing in countries where English is primarily used for international purposes but is fast becoming an instrument of identity construction and artistic innovation (Karchu & Nelson, 2011). This reveals that the varieties of English are based on the countries where it is spoken. According to Kachru (1985 as cited in Kachru & Nelson, 2011), the diffusion of English is best defined in terms of three Concentric Circles: i) the Inner Circle, which represents the traditional, historical and sociolinguistic bases of English in the countries where it is used as a native language, includes the countries like: the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, ii) the Outer Circle, where English has been adopted as an additional/second language for the purposes like administration, education, law, etc., comprises the countries like: India, Nigeria, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia and iii) the Expanding Circle, where English is primarily used as a medium of international communication, includes the countries like: China, Japan, Korea and the Middle East . What can be summarized from the concepts of three concentric circles

presented by Karchu (1985) is there are mainly three contexts of English use namely: English as native language (ENL), English as second language (ESL) and English as foreign language (EFL). These contexts determine the varieties of English though “there are many other factors that influence how varieties of English are used in any particular context” (Karchu & Smith, 2008, p. 4).

In the countries of outer and expanding circle, “English has a special place today because of its widespread functions in significant domains of social life, education, and cross-cultural communication” (Kachru, 1997). In countries like: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, English is viewed as a language of power and as a means of economic uplift and upward social mobility (Gargesh, 2006). The presence of English language in these countries for over 200 years has led to nativization of the language which enriched English as well as the indigenous languages through processes of borrowing and coinage of new words and expressions and through semantic shifts (Gargesh, 2006). With its unprecedented use and spread, English has been diversified, nativized, and hybridized in different countries (Dewan & Laksamba, 2020). The adoption and adaptation of the English language across the globe have resulted several nativized varieties of English such as Indian English, Japanese English and Singaporean English (Karn, 2011).

English in Nepal

As in other South Asian countries, English is being widely used in Nepal. English language has a vital role in multilingual Nepal. English language is a global lingua franca and is an appropriate international language for Nepal to be connected with global community (Curriculum Development Center [CDC], 2007). English, in Nepal, is generally regarded as a foreign language in the sense that it is not used as official language to this date though different government documents and artifacts are found in the English language. This implies that English, in Nepal, is mainly used for instrumental purposes like academic purpose, getting job, promoting international trade, tourism and like. In recent years, English has become an integral part of life for the Nepalese people (Giri, 2015). English, in Nepal today, has been established as a language of power because it is used not only as a tool but also as a resource for economic and educational benefits, linguistic superiority, and social mobility (Giri, 2020). Talking about Nepalese people’s views on English language, Loch (2019, p. 13) writes, “The general phenomenon in Nepal seems to be that people nowadays instinctively associate English and English education with the chance of enjoying better opportunities in life.” As a consequence, the number of speakers of English language is increasing day by day. Eagle (1999, p. 302) observes:

English is the second most widespread language in Nepal in terms of popularity, education, and use. It is spoken at all socio-economic levels, by both literate and non-literate people. No statistics is available for the number of people who speak or read English. The general impression is that a large percentage of the population speaks at least some English, with varying levels of accuracy and fluency.

English is not only the second/ foreign language but also one of the national languages in Nepal due to the fact that Constitution of Nepal, 2015 states, “All languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation” (Article, 6) and “0.01% speakers speak English as their mother tongue in

Nepal” (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2012).

These days, English language teaching is given due emphasis considering it as a global language. It is taught as a compulsory subject from grade one to Bachelors level. Moreover, it is also taught as optional subject in different levels. It is used as the language of literature, media, trade, tourism and diplomacy. This discussion displays that there is the wide spread and use of English language in Nepal these days.

Having a closure look to the history and present factors which are responsible for the spread of English language in Nepal, different factors can be found responsible. The entry and the settlement of European missionaries in Nepal, colonization of India by British Empire and its direct and indirect influence in Nepal, the recruitment and the retirement of the Nepalese British Army, the establishment of the Durbar School and Tri-Chandra College which adopted English as the language of education, British Council, American Embassy, Nepal English Language Teachers’ Association (NELTA), business, research, tourism, technology, education (particularly private schools), mass media, and global cyber culture are such contributing factors to name a few (Dewan & Laksamba, 2020).

Nepalese English

The widespread use of English in Nepal has contributed to the formation of a nativised variety of English i.e. Nepalese English (Karn, 2011), Nenglish (Rai, 2006) or Nepali English (Giri, 2020). Here, I prefer to use the term ‘Nepalese English’. This variety of English has got distinctive features which differentiate it from the so called standard variety of English. Though there has not been enough study of the formal aspects of Nepalese English to find out its distinctive features, different scholars have been working on it. It was in the early 1980s when the issue of Nepaliness of English was first raised in the ensuing discussion in a paper entitled ‘The sound of English and Nepali’ presented by Shishir K. Sthapit; he pointed out that the sounds of Nepali have had some influence on the way the Nepalese people speak and use English (Giri, 2015). Being based on a small study, Rai (2006) presents four characteristics of Nenglish: i) Nepalese words are making their entries; ii) English suffixes are being attached to Nepalese words and vice versa; iii) word order of English is changed in Nenglish and iv) literal translation of Nepalese proverbs are being introduced. Karn (2012) studied the nativization in various genres of literature written in English in Nepal and found a tremendous nativization of literary texts written in English by Nepalese authors. He further found that although there has been resistance towards English, the literary creations in English creates a sense of belongingness in Nepali people towards English. Stating the findings of his own study conducted in Kathmandu in 2011 and other parts of Nepal, Giri (2015, p. 104) writes; “There is large-scale code-mixing and code-switching between Nepali and English; the transliteration of English words into Nepali is a common feature; and the standard rules of English are modified at the lexis, grammar, and writing levels. In a study on Nepalese English, Sharma, Joshi and Teijlingen (2015) found i) the incorrect use of the definite article ‘the’ and indefinite article ‘a’ and ‘an’; ii) use of plural forms where native-English speakers would find the singular sufficient like ‘peoples for people’, ‘staffs for staff’, ‘stuffs for stuff’, ‘researches for research’ and so on; iii) the use of the wrong verb, commonly ‘to know’ (passive) instead of ‘to find out’ (active), for example: “I was conscious to know” or “I was anxious to know”; and iv)

unique usage of certain words, ‘sticks’ for individual cigarettes, for example, “he smokes five to ten sticks a day” meaning he smokes five to ten cigarettes a day.

In the similar vein, Dewan and Laksamba (2020) studied the hybridity in Nepalese English and found that hybridity is found in affixation, reduplication, compounding, blending, neologisms, and calques.

As mentioned earlier, English in Nepal is used in different sectors. One of such sectors is literature. It is widely used in different genres of literature. Several Nepalese writers like: Govinda Raj Bhattarai, Vishnu Singh Rai, Samrat Upadhyaya, Manjushree Thapa and Ravi Thapa are active to write different genres of literature in English. The writers and their literary works in English have been contributing to establish Nepalese English as a different variety of English since they make use of nativized variety of English to create their literary works let it be fiction, prose, poetry and/or drama. Though there has been the wide use of English in literature in the context of Nepal, there has not been enough research on the literary texts to find out their distinctive features. In this scenario, with the help of text analysis, this study mainly aims to: i) find out distinctive features of the short stories; and ii) suggest some pedagogical implications.

Methodology

For this study, I purposively selected six short stories written in English by three Nepalese writers. I selected the stories by the writers namely Vishnu Singh Rai, Manjushree Thapa and Samrat Upadhyay purposively on the basis of the popularity of the writers. These writers, who include the Nepalese culture and context in their literary works, are the prominent Nepalese writers writing in English. Three short stories ‘Sounds that the Tongue Learns to Make’, ‘Love Marriage’ and ‘Three Hundred Rupees’ by Manjushree Thapa and two short stories ‘Freak Street’ and ‘What will Happen to the Sharma Family’ by Samrat Upadhyay were selected. Similarly, only one short story ‘Little Islands of happiness’ by Vishnu Singh Rai was selected. All these short stories were purposively selected since they are written by Nepalese writers in English language. I read and analyzed, and interpreted the texts using interpretative research paradigm.

Results and Discussion

Being based on the analytical framework developed inductively based on the reading of stories, the data as the evidences collected from the analyzed texts are discussed in three broad areas here. Revealing the context of the texts, I have tried to analyze and interpret the texts.

Code Mixing and Code Switching in Short Stories

The analyses and interpretations of the English stories written by Nepalese writers are presented in this section. The stories were analyzed in terms of code mixing and code switching (here the term ‘code mixing’ has been used for the mixing of words and the term ‘code switching’ has been used for the switching of sentences) i.e. the use of Nepali terms/words and sentences in English texts.

Text 1

Baba was sitting on the bed, his shawl wrapped around him even though it was not cold, and he waved Sukumari over. He was usually bedridden and his speech had slowed down the past month or so. ‘*Ke bhayo?*’ he asked. ‘*Ama chhori kina jhagada gareko? Jhagada garnu hunna.*’

(Upadhyay, 2017, p. 101)

Text 1 is an excerpt taken from the short story 'Freak Street' written by Samrat Upadhyay. This is the part of the short story where the condition of one of the characters 'Baba' is reflected. Since he cannot walk, he is on bed wrapped with his shawl. He heard his wife and Sukumari (central character of the story) speaking in a loud voice and asked Sukumari why they were quarrelling and further suggested that quarrel should not be made. The writer has switched the code here i.e. Nepali from English. Instead of using English question 'What happened?' Why are you (mother and daughter) quarrelling?' 'Quarrel should not be made', the writer has switched the code to Nepali language and written '*Ke bhayo?*', '*Ama chhori kina jhagada gareko? Jhagada garnu hunna.*'

Similarly, in the same story, the writer has mixed the code i.e. Nepali terms in English story. Nepali terms like *raksi* (alcohol), *jaand* (home-made wine), *kuiriney* (a female foreigner), *phuli* (an ornament on nose), *chillum* (conical clay pipe filled with hash), *mitho* (tasty), *laddoo* (round sweet), *ganja* (hash) and *gagro* (a pot for filling water) etc. are used in the story.

Text 2

Nearby, Keshab was asking the lodge owner about her infant son: '*kati barsa bhayo?*'

She loved to listen to him talking. *Kati*. Silently, Sarah mouthed the soft '*ta*' that didn't exist in English. '*Barsa*': the purr of the *ra*.

(Thapa, 2012, p. 19)

Text 2 is an excerpt of the story 'Sounds that the Tongue Learns to Make' written by Manjushree Thapa. The writer here has used Nepali sentence and words (italicized in the given excerpt) rather than using English language. She has code switched writing '*kati barsa bhayo?*' instead of asking the question 'How old is he?' Similarly, the writer has mixed and switched the code i.e. Nepali into English in this story. The Nepali words/expressions like: *barsa* (age), *timi mero saa 'rah sansar hau* (you are my entire world), *naai* (no) *chiniya gurans* (Chinese rhododendron), *yo baato chiplo tcha* (this road is slippery), *mero khutta dukhyo* (my feet hurt), *ghaans* (grass) and *salla* (pine trees) are used in the story.

These two texts and evidences of the stories presented here reveal that there is code mixing and code switching in Nepalese English in general and short stories written in Nepalese English in particular. The Nepalese writers included in this study, mix and switch the code in order to respect the religious and cultural values of the given terms. The use of the Nepali terms like: *raksi* (alcohol), *jaand* (home-made wine), *phuli* (an ornament on nose), *chillum* (conical clay pipe filled with hash), *laddoo* (round sweet) and *ganja* (hash) in the story 'Freak Street' written by Samrat Upadhyay (as presented above) has helped to respect the cultural and religious values of the terms. Moreover, the writer may have done this to give real Nepalese flavor to the terms and texts. Similarly, code mixing/ code switching in these stories has helped the readers to have the cultural and religious flavor of the texts. Had the writers used only the English terms, the Nepali readers would not have got what they were expected to get.

Use of Nepali Names for the Characters

This area presents the analyses and interpretations of the short stories in terms of the use of Nepali

names for the characters. The Nepalese writers included in this study have used Nepali names for the characters of the short stories.

Text 1

The phone beeped and gave them both some time to collect their breath. *Mohan* picked up the receiver, listened and then said, “Thanks!” He looked at *Mina* incredulously who asked, “Who was it? It must be that woman *Shalini*... who else can ring you at this time of the day. She is such an...” But she was cut short by *Mohan* who came close to her and hugged her passionately and said, “It was *Mahesh* congratulating us for our wedding anniversary.

(Rai, 2010, p. 271)

In the text 1, the italicized names *Mohan*, *Shalini*, *Mina* and *Mahesh* are Nepali names given to the characters of the short story ‘Little Islands of Happiness’ written by Vishnu Singh Rai. Apart from these characters, there are other characters like *Puja’s father*, *Prakash Sab* and *Rekha Mem Sab* in the short story. The term *sab* (master) has been very often used in the story to show respect to the masters.

Text 2

After *Monica* and *Karuna*, there was *Rekha Chettri*, the second daughter of *Dhundi Raj Chettri*. *Rekha* managed Bake Cake, her father’s restaurant. *Nirmal*- you’ve heard about him, my best friend from before, his mother was *Rekha’s father’s* first cousin- *Nirmal* said *Rekha* stayed in the store at the beginning of the week.

(Thapa, 2012, pp. 92-93)

In the text 2, the italicized names *Monica*, *Karuna*, *Rekha Chettri*, *Dhundi Raj Chettri* and *Mahesh* are Nepali names given to the characters of a short story ‘Love Marriage’. Apart from these characters, there are other characters like *Lalita*, *Bimal*, *Rohit Bajracharya*, *Laxman Khanal*, *Binita* and *Kalyan Bikram* in the short story.

Text 3

Their eighteen-year-old daughter, *Nilima*, fat and smart, said, ‘Maybe this is a sign we should turn back.’ She had strongly resisted the trip, saying she needed to study for her A-level exams, whereas everyone knew she didn’t want to be away from her *Jitendra*, who was stunningly handsome, with a sleek body and a puff of hair on his forehead. *Mr.* and *Mrs. Sharma* often wondered what he saw in their fat daughter.

(Upadhyay, 2017, p. 64)

In the text 3, the italicized names *Nilima*, *Jitendra*, *Mr. Sharma* and *Mrs. Sharma* are Nepali names given to the characters of a short story ‘What will Happen to the Sharma Family’. Apart from these characters, there are other characters like *Nilesh*, *Ahuja*, *Kanti* and *Changu* in the story.

The use of Nepali names in these three stories shows that Nepali writers who write in English give Nepali names to the characters. They use such names either they are influenced by their Nepaleseness or to make their text comprehensible to Nepali readers since Nepali readers are used to with Nepali names. In other words, use of Nepali names/Nepalese characters helps to nativize the English language. The

deliberate use of Nepalese characters in the stories play a significant role in demonstrating Nepalese socio-political and cultural attributes (Karn, 2012). Moreover, this implies that Nepali writers writing in English can/should make use of Nepali names for the characters of literary texts (fiction and drama) so that they can gradually contribute to promote Nepalese English as a distinct variety of English

Nepalese English for Reflecting Nepalese Society

With the help of the analyses and interpretations of short stories, this area reveals how Nepalese societies are reflected in the stories written by Nepali writers writing in English.

Text 1

You've been slaving and I've been enjoying the cooking and cleaning for you, bearing and rearing your three children. Never ever in my whole life, I enjoyed even a moment of rest in this house.

(Rai, 2010, p. 271)

Text 1, is an excerpt from the story 'Little Islands of Happiness' by V.S. Rai. These are the words spoken by Mina to her husband 'Kumar' (Mina and Kumar are the central characters of the story). As the lines depict, Mina is complaining that she is tired of cleaning, cooking and bearing and rearing three children satirically. She has not got a single moment to take rest in the house. The lines spoken by Mina are the representative lines which reflect the condition of most of the Nepalese married women. Most of the Nepalese women are busy in their household works since their husbands are busy at their offices or some other business. The women are limited to bearing and rearing children. Nepalese society, due to the lack of education, has not given proper place to the women. In most of the cases, they are deprived of their rights and limited within the four walls of their houses.

Text 2

'All those lamps on the roads,' said the other woman. 'And they won't give our village one bulb! And look at those houses, they're all offices.'

'So many offices. What do people do in them?'

'They sit at tables and claim to be developing our country.' (Thapa, 2012, p. 71)

Text 2 is an excerpt from the story 'Three Hundred Rupees'. In the story, these are the lines spoken by two women on the way in Kathmandu. These lines show that they (the women) are in Kathmandu for the first time and amazed to see the road lamps and so many offices. This infers that they are from any remote part of the county where there is no access to road lamps and different offices. This shows that though the urban areas of Nepal are developed, the rural areas are yet to be developed. There are better infrastructural development for education, health, employment, transportation facilities and other facilities in urban areas whereas rural areas lack such infrastructural development. The last line 'They sit at tables and claim to be developing our country' satirically shows that our leaders without reaching the villages or remote parts make plans sitting in the cities.

With the help of the analyses and interpretations of the texts (text 1 and 2) presented here and other short stories, I came to a conclusion that literary texts written in Nepalese English reflect the condition of Nepalese societies. The short stories reflect the sociocultural aspects, ignorance, condition of Nepalese

women, condition of Nepal and Nepalese society in terms of development, extreme poverty, and repression and struggle for survival prevalent in Nepalese societies.

Conclusion

The widespread use of English in different sectors in Nepal has gradually led to the growth of new variety of English known as Nepalese English with its own distinctive features. As this study and other studies have highlighted there is code mixing and code switching in literary texts written in English by Nepali writers and the texts depict the sociocultural aspects of Nepalese societies. The literary texts written in English by Nepali writers create a sense of belongingness in Nepali people towards English language. The Nepalese writers writing in English give the flavor of Nepaleseness in their literary texts writing the texts being based on the topics and situations/conditions related to Nepalese societies. It helps to “communicate the Nepalese social values to rest of the world and shows some empathy towards the English language, the second most used language in Nepal after Nepali” (Karn, 2012, p. 37). Moreover, the use of code mixing and code switching and Nepali names given to the characters in literary texts contributes for the development of Nepalese English as a distinct variety of English like Indian English, Australian English and Singapore English.

The above analyses and the discussions in Nepalese English suggest a number of pedagogical implications. Nepalese English language teachers should not only focus on standard variety of English rather should make their students aware of the distinctive features of Nepalese English in English language classrooms. They can provide some English literary texts written by native and Nepali writers and ask the students to have a comparative study to find out the distinctive features of the texts written by Nepali writers. Similarly, teachers can switch their code and/or mix the code (Nepali from English) to give real flavor to teaching and learning English in Nepalese context. The vocabularies, pronunciation and grammar they use in the classes can be nativized so that the students can learn easily on one hand and Nepalese English can be promoted on the other. The development in Nepalese English in general and use of Nepalese English in literature in particular have added new dimensions in Nepalese English language teaching (ELT) and English literature. As the evidence of this, different university and school level English syllabi have prescribed English literary texts written by Nepalese writers i.e. in Nepalese English. Very recently, Mid-Western University in Nepal has designed a course on Nepalese English for its Masters level students. These two examples show that we are gradually moving forward to institutionalize Nepalese English. So it is necessary to explore more on Nepalese English since there are a lot of areas to be explored.

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