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Contribution of the English Language to Advancing Travel and Tourism

Ramesh Kandel

Okhaldhunga Campus, Okhaldhunga

Author Note

Mr. Ramesh Kandel ( <https://orcid.org/0009000480480944>) is a Lecturer in English currently working at Okhaldhunga Campus, Okhaldhunga. He has been awarded Master's degree in English from Tribhuvan University in 2005 A.D. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to him on his email kandelramesh165@gmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the intricate relationship between language and tourism, focusing on the role of English as a global lingua franca in facilitating communication and cultural exchange. While English is often viewed as a colonial language used for resource exploitation, its knowledge is a resource that attracts and facilitates tourists, enriching tourism. The research questions address how English has become integral to tourism and its impacts on tourist experiences and destination choices. The study employs a historical and sociolinguistic analysis, examining the historical, political and economic factors contributing to the globalization of English. The paper emphasizes the importance of effective communication in tourism, illustrating how language proficiency in English enhances tourist experiences and influences destination selection. Additionally, it highlights the significance of linguistic diversity in enriching the tourism experience and promoting inclusivity. Findings indicate that English proficiency significantly enhances tourist experiences while linguistic diversity adds value to tourism. The paper advocates for sustainable tourism practices that embrace

cultural and linguistic diversity. Overall, it calls for a deeper understanding of the interplay between language and tourism to foster cultural appreciation and sustainable tourism practices globally.

Keywords: expansion, lingua franca, tourism, travel

Language within Social Contexts

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistic study that explores the interplay between language and society. A community consists of the unique social and cultural context that influences the status of the language in use. When individuals from different linguistic backgrounds come closer into a shared location, they typically communicate in either English or the local language. In such instances, English serves as a global lingua franca bridging the gap between the people representing distinct linguistic as well as geographical regions.

When a language gains rapid popularity and becomes widely adopted, two primary factors are typically at play. Firstly, political origins play a crucial role such as the colonial expansion of the British Empire until the nineteenth century. Secondly, economic forces, particularly tied to the influence of the United States, contribute to language proliferation, particularly in tourism-driven economies. David Crystal opines about the reason for globalization of English language as:

British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was a language ‘on which the sun never sets’. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted, almost single-handedly, through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower. And the language behind the US dollar was English. (1997, p.8)

The economic dominance of the United States exerts a magnetic pull on people worldwide, both attracting them to its shores and propelling Americans across the globe for business expansion. Whether driven by commercial motives or other reasons, this movement results in cross-border travel, effectively making foreigners of those who venture beyond their home countries. In this broader context, such travel constitutes tourism.

Tourists travel to foreign lands not only for business but also for other reasons. The global spread of English serves a crucial educational purpose, anchoring its cultural significance beyond mere intrinsic qualities. According to Crystal, A language does not become a global language because of its intrinsic structural properties, or because it has been a vehicle of a great literature in

the past, or because it was once associated with a great culture or religion . A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people – especially their military power. (1997, p.7)

English's global prominence, for whatever reasons, has nonetheless facilitated tourism by enabling communication across diverse cultures. Originally confined to the British Isles centuries ago, English persisted despite Norse invasions and the use of Scandinavian and Germanic languages. The Anglo-Saxon roots of modern English remain evident, and British colonial power further spread the language worldwide, influencing people's travel and settlement choices.

Language and Tourism

Despite the political, economic, and cultural factors that make a language global, there are other more genuine factors that contribute to the expansion of the language. Among many other factors for why English language has spread far and wide, use of the language in tourism industry is one of the main reasons for the expansion.

As we see the history of travel and tourism, Christopher Columbus's discovery of America stands as a pivotal moment in the history. While aiming for India, he unexpectedly reached the vast American continent, drawing countless visitors to this newfound land. Europeans were captivated by its magical allure. Europeans moved across the Atlantic in the form of exodus. This is the remarkable moment in the history of travel and migration towards the new geographical areas. This moment is marked as a significant migration to uncharted territories. English language that was carried by these settlers as a means of communication among them played a crucial role in their establishment.

These days the English language is not the language of the English people rather it is the language of everyone in this world. Ralf Waldo Emerson observed the use of English language and opined, "The English language is the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven" (cited. in McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil, 1986, p.11). In the simple term, English has gained popularity across diverse communities whether the smaller or larger, transcending the conventional national borders. On a narrower scale, it serves as the first language in Britain, Ireland, North America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Caribbean Islands.

The global spread of English did not occur overnight; it evolved through historical shifts. When Julius Caesar arrived in ancient Britain, English had yet

to take shape. Nearly five centuries later, an early, somewhat unintelligible form of English emerged with limited impact. By the late sixteenth century, during Shakespeare's era and other canonical writers, English was spoken by nearly six hundred million people in the British Isles, albeit within a relatively confined sphere.

The spread of English lacks a uniform and linear trajectory. It has been shaped by interactions with migrants to the British Isles, who adapt to the language of their host communities. Simultaneously, English absorbs influences from other linguistic groups as they introduce their own vocabulary in new territories. Travelers, tourists, and settlers play pivotal roles in this dynamic process.

Nearly four centuries later, English has experienced a remarkable ascent. From 1600 to 2000, English speakers in military forces, fleets, corporations, and explorations "travelled into every corner of the globe, carrying their language and culture with them" (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil, 1986, p.19). Presently, there exist an immense number of English speakers. The crux lies in the extraordinary popularity of English among populations, with "whatever the total, English at the end of the twentieth century is more widely scattered, more widely spoken and written, than any other language has ever been. It has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language." (McCrum, Cran, and MacNeil, 1986, p.19). It makes a point that English has evolved into the planet's language i.e. the global language.

Despite the official visit of Jung Bdr. Rana's journey to Europe, his inherent desire was to admire the charm of both London and Paris. While some knowledge was gained from English individuals and newspapers, firsthand experience surpasses reading in print. Jung Bahadur and his companions were immensely delighted, nearly mesmerized by the enchanting beauty of these locales.

Whelpton (1983) says that the places London and Paris were so enticing that Jung Bahadur Rana enjoyed the place and had the desire to stay there for ever. But his responsibility as a Prime Minister of a sovereign nation, Nepal he could not do that.

Upon returning home from their European journey, a book named *Belait-Yatra* was penned to recount the visit. Subsequently, this book underwent translation into English, broadening its accessibility to a wider audience. John Whelpton's book *Jung Bahadur in Europe* serves as a read for both European

residents and individuals across the globe. According to him, the primary aim of Jung Bahadur's visit to Europe was to "learn about the rulers of the elven islands of Belait and their industries and that after gaining that language he would make the rulers his friends" (Whelpton, 1983, pp. 150-151). It was clear that he required English proficiency to engage with English individuals, or alternatively, he relied on interpreters to foster interpersonal connections with them. Otherwise, how would he glean insights into the foreign populace and their culture without employing English, either firsthand or via interpreters/translators?

Upon Jung Bahadur's return from Europe, he instituted an English school for his people, albeit within his court. Throughout his journey and exploration, English assumed a pivotal role. Even upon his return, Jung Bahadur strongly believed that English remained indispensable domestically.

During the visit, the European press, especially British publications, extensively covered the arrival and reception of the Nepalese delegation. Numerous newspapers in London and Paris contributed to making the visit widely known, reaching virtually every corner of the globe. This widespread dissemination was facilitated by English, which had already evolved into an international language by that time. Following is an example of the extract from the British Press:

The oriental company's steamer Ripon, Capt. Moresby, arrived from Alexandria, Malta and Gibraltar, at Southampton, at seven o'clock on Saturday morning, with the heavy portion of the India mail, and with 166 passengers, 101 of which were first class. Among the passengers were his Excellency General Jung Bahadur Koorman Ranagee, Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief of the kingdom of Nepal, situated on the borders of Thibet. (Whelpton, 1983, p.223)

As straightforward as the account of the event appears, it nonetheless conveys significant information about a Himalayan state that would otherwise remain unknown to the rest of the world. Had it been narrated in Nepali, its audience would have been limited to the Nepali people alone.

Despite the distinct characteristics of language and tourism, they nonetheless share a commonality: both are human activities. While the former serves as a medium of communication among humans, the latter involves the organized movement of individuals from one place to another for the purpose of exploration or leisure. Language represents a spontaneous, non-economic endeavor, embodying one of the fundamental cultural traits of humanity. Conversely, tourism constitutes a deliberate human activity intertwined with economic dimensions.

Just as tourists encounter new places and people during their travels, the inhabitants of tourism destinations have the opportunity to earn income, enhancing their quality of life. A prevailing trend among traders in these locales is to offer services catering to tourists who visit and stay for extended periods.

Various expectations confront the residents of tourism sites. Providing food and lodging facilities is one such expectation, while effective communication stands as another obvious requirement. Naturally, service providers in the tourism sector must be versed in the languages spoken by tourists from different nationalities. Both parties must possess the ability to communicate in their respective languages. Effective communication in intelligible language holds the potential to attract a greater number of tourists, whereas inadequate communication hinders the attraction of visitors. Without the ability to draw in more tourists, the acquisition of foreign currencies becomes unattainable. This paper endeavors to delve deeper into the intricate connection between language and tourism.

When a new tourist from another country struggles to communicate with the locals, it poses challenges for both parties. However, there exists the possibility of a shared language that is mutually comprehensible to both the tourist and the local population.

English's global prominence is undeniably linked to its communicative power. As people worldwide adopt English for communication, tourists also rely on it. For instance, when British or American visitors come to Nepal, they converse with Nepali nationals in English. However, if Nepalis cannot comprehend their messages, effective communication breaks down, impacting tourism. Thus, the significance of language in the tourism industry becomes evident. In this paper, I delve into the relationship between language and tourism, illustrating it with relevant examples.

Among the crucial channels of information dissemination are the media. Newspapers, magazines, billboards, and signboards play a vital role in providing information about places to visit and explore. While most of these media outlets use English, some occasionally make errors. This highlights how language proficiency, especially in English, directly influences successful communication and tourism experiences.

According to the census report of Government of Nepal (2021), Nepal is a diverse nation with 124 national languages and 12 other languages spoken (p.8). In this context communication is vital as people from different linguistic

backgrounds interact. Whether settling in a new location or visiting briefly, individuals must find ways to connect with locals. Nepali has emerged as the common language, serving as the lingua franca across the country. This facilitates internal tourism, enabling people from regions like Lumbini to converse with those in the Mt. Everest area, or individuals from Jumla to communicate with those in Saptari, all in Nepali. While seemingly simple, these linguistic interactions play a significant role in promoting tourism.

In situations where a person is isolated in a place devoid of human presence, such as when Robinson Crusoe was stranded on an uninhabited island, communication with other humans becomes impossible. In the “Preface to Volume III of Robinson Crusoe” Daniel Defoe says, “. . . I had a Parrot, and taught it to call me by my Name . . .” (cited. in Shinagel, 1994, p.241). This demonstrates that even animals can serve as companions in isolation, where language serves as the primary means of communication.

Jonathan Swift presents an intriguing scenario in his depiction of the Lilliputians, where the narrator encounters a peculiar communication method. In contrast to English-speaking societies, the Lilliputians use elaborate descriptions consisting of multiple words to refer to a single object, such as describing a watch as a “Globe, half Silver, and half of some transparent Metal” (Swift, 2000, p.50). This confounds the narrator, as he struggles to grasp the cultural nuances of this community. Language serves as a powerful conveyor of culture, and for travelers to unfamiliar places, understanding the local culture can feel alienating.

Conclusion

In essence, the interdependence between language and tourism is evident in their ability to facilitate connections among diverse individuals and cultures. English, as a global lingua franca, has emerged as a key facilitator, enabling seamless communication and fostering cultural exchange in the tourism industry. However, it’s essential to acknowledge and respect linguistic diversity, as it enriches the tourism experience by embracing different cultural identities. Moreover, language serves as a vital lifeline in situations of isolation, emphasizing its significance beyond practical communication. Ultimately, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between language and tourism can guide efforts towards promoting inclusivity, cultural appreciation, and sustainable tourism practices on a global scale.

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