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Historical Development of English as a Second Language in Nagaland: A Perspective from a Multilingual Society

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Abstract

This paper delves into two key aspects of the English language in Nagaland. Firstly, it provides an overview of the historical development of English, tracing its origins back to the arrival of Christian missionaries during the colonial era. Secondly, it explores the factors that led to the elevation of English as a second language and its eventual establishment as the sole official language of the State. This examination of the journey of English in Nagaland includes insights from a multilingual society and an analysis of its current status. The study draws upon secondary sources such as books, theses, and journals to gain a deeper understanding of the development of English in an indigenous reserved community. Furthermore, the paper considers the impact of Christianity and education in fostering the growth of the English language in Nagaland. Through a review of the literature and an analysis of the complexities within a multilingual society, the study concludes that a multilingual society like Nagaland facilitates the establishment of foreign languages with relative ease. Intriguingly, the study also reveals that languages not associated with the local cultural identity can become the official language, thus reinforcing the notion that complex tribal linguistic communities are sensitive to language dynamics. This sensitivity can lead these communities to prioritise and promote a foreign language over languages indigenous to other tribes.

Keywords: *education, Christianity, multilingual, missionaries*

1. Introduction

1.1. Brief History of the Nagas

Nagaland is known for its diverse socio-linguistic settings and is considered one of the most diverse states in India. The state's creation was based on linguistic considerations following the recommendations of the State Reorganization Committee in 1956. In 1962, the Indian Parliament passed an Act to formally include Nagaland as a state, and in 1963, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the second President of India, officially declared it the 16th state of India. The Nagas, an indigenous ethnic group primarily located in Nagaland, with communities in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam, have a

rich history as independent tribes governed by their customs and councils. British colonialism and the introduction of Christianity in the 19th century transformed Naga society, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity that blends traditional customs with modern influences. This unity fuelled the Naga political movement for autonomy, culminating in Nagaland's statehood in 1963, although political struggles continued. Today, the Nagas maintain a vibrant cultural heritage and have embraced the English language as the sole official language of the State.

1.2. Overview of Naga Languages

The Naga languages are part of the Tibeto-Burman language family but are not a homogeneous group, exhibiting significant differences and being mutually unintelligible. Burling (2003), Grierson (1903-1928), and Morrison (1967) significantly contributed to the classification of Naga languages and the understanding of their variety. The Nagaland state government currently recognizes 18 Naga indigenous languages. The State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) is primarily responsible for developing educational materials to preserve and promote these languages. Tenyidie, Sumi, Ao, and Lotha are taught up to the high school level, with Tenyidie also used for offering PhD at Nagaland University. According to Ezung (2017), there are approximately 85 indigenous languages spoken in Nagaland. This estimate is based on recognised languages and their dialectal variations. Nagaland designates English as the official language and Nagamese as the lingua franca, while Hindi and Sanskrit are also included in the school curriculum. Sachdeva (2001) describes Nagaland as one of the most complex sociolinguistic settings globally, with a population of 1.9 million offering such diverse culture and language, comprising approximately 60 Naga languages and dialects, which are genetically related but mutually unintelligible. The Nagaland Government's official portal showcases its rich linguistic diversity, with each tribe having its distinct language and various dialects. The state government recognizes 17 tribes and 18 languages, including dialects.

Table1. State-recognized Naga languages

Tenyidie	Kheza	Zeme	Konyak	Chokri
Ao	Sangtam	Liangmai	Khiamniungan	Phom
Lotha	Yimchunger	Pochury	Nthenyi	Kuki
Sumi	Chang	Nzokhwen		

(Editedsource: https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/people-culture)

2. Historical Development of English as a Second Language

To understand English as a second language in India, referring to an established model is helpful. Kachru (1985) presented a compelling classification known as **Kachru's Three Circles of World English**, which has become a prominent framework for categorizing the varieties of English worldwide. Kachru's model consists of three groupings:

The Inner Circle: This category includes countries where English is the primary language, or, in simpler terms, where English is the first language. Countries such as England and the United States are part of this group.

The Outer Circle: This category encompasses countries where English is not the first language but has been adopted as a second language and plays a significant role in the country's institutions. Countries like India and Singapore fall into this category due to their history of British colonization, which has integrated English into their societies.

The Expanding Circle: This refers to regions where English is learned as a foreign language. Countries such as Japan and China are examples of this circle, where British colonization did not occur, and English serves solely as a foreign language for international communication.

As mentioned above, India is classified within the Outer Circle of Kachru's model, where English functions as a second language and plays a significant role in various sectors of society, including education, government, and business.

2.1. English from a Foreign Language to a Second Language

The history of the English language in India is a fascinating story of cultural and linguistic transformation. In a multilingual nation, English has emerged as a dominant language, and its popularity continues to rise still today. While tracing the history of languages that have influenced mainland India, we find that foreign languages have significantly impacted and shaped the country in every sphere. During the pre-colonial period, the Persian language was predominant until it was replaced by English.

English, which was introduced by the colonial rulers, managed to establish a strong foothold in India for several reasons, with linguistic diversity being a key factor in its success. Although Hindi was a strong contender among Indian languages striving to become the national language, no single language has become the dominant language in India. To this day, Hindi and English are the two official languages of India, as per Article 343 of the Indian Constitution. The educational policies under colonial rule significantly strengthened the presence of English in India. In particular, Lord Macaulay's educational policies of 1835 aimed to create a class of people who could serve as intermediaries between the British and Indians and to develop a group of Indians who were "Indian in

blood but English in their outlook, morals, and intellect." These policies ultimately gave rise to a new class of intellectuals responsible for the making of modern India. Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" strongly advocated for the importance of English in education, stating that "Indians cannot be educated using their mother tongue."

In 1854, Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, sent the "Wood's Despatch" to Governor-General Lord Dalhousie. This document declared that the English language is to be the medium of instruction in the higher branches, and the vernacular in the lower. English is to be taught where there is demand for it, but it is not to be substituted for the vernacular languages of the country. The system of grant-in-aid is to be based on the principle of perfect religious neutrality.

This was perhaps the formal introduction of English in education, which is often referred to as the "Magna Carta" of Indian education for its recommendations that provided a new direction for education in India. After gaining independence, the growing popularity of English raised concerns about national identity. In 1950, Hindi was selected as the sole official language of the Union of India, while English was given the status of an "assistant" language, meant to be phased out after 15 years. However, the demand for English increased, as did the approval from educated Indians, further contributing to its development.

Additionally, the apprehension of non-Hindi speakers, who neither accepted nor supported the dominance of Hindi, led to tensions. This pressure prompted the government to enact the Official Language Act in 1963, elevating the status of English from "Assistant" to "Associate Language" indefinitely. The Indian Education Commission (1964-1966), also known as the Kothari Commission, further empowered the role of English by recommending its promotion from the school level and emphasising the strengthening of English in higher education.

2.2. Development of English in Nagaland

For the State of Nagaland, English is a direct product of colonisation but was introduced differently compared to mainland India. While English in India replaced and competed with established languages like Persian and Hindi, in Nagaland, it blended seamlessly into the education system without significant resistance. This acceptance was partly due to the lack of a common language among the Naga tribes.

Initially, there was limited documentation on early education in Nagaland, with missionary accounts being the primary sources. Kiremwati (1995) and Aier (2012) provide significant insights into this period. Education and the introduction of English were primarily driven by British colonial efforts and American missionaries. Aier noted that the Nagas owe their modern education more to the missionaries than the British. The British, unable to fully penetrate the tribal regions due to fierce resistance, invited American Baptist missionaries, who successfully evangelized and introduced

education. The advent of Christianity marked a new era for the Nagas, ending practices like headhunting and fostering a sense of unity and identity among the tribes. The first efforts of formal education began with American missionaries like Mrs. Mary Clark, who opened a school in the Ao area in 1878, and Rev. C.D. King, who established a school in Kohima in 1879. By 1941, the government and the missions jointly opened the first high school in Kohima, with private schools following by 1943. The missionaries were instrumental in creating written literature for the Nagas, with significant contributions from figures like the Clarks and Rev. Revenberg, who standardized languages using the Roman script.

English was introduced through mission schools not as a primary focus but as a tool for spreading Christianity. Missionaries recognized the need for an alternative language for education while developing tribal languages, with English serving as a suitable option due to its availability and global significance. By 1945, English had become the medium of instruction in government schools, demonstrating its integration into Nagaland's education system.

English's continued prominence in Nagaland is largely due to the absence of a dominant local language, allowing it to become a common and indispensable language for connecting Nagas to the modern world. Despite being a foreign language, English was embraced by the Naga society, who recognised its value without strong resistance.

2.3. Leading Factors Contributing to the Growth and Development of English in Nagaland

a) Absence of a Common Language: The growth of English in Nagaland can be attributed largely to the absence of a common Naga language. Language diversity is a defining feature of Naga society, with each tribe maintaining its own distinct linguistic and cultural identity. No single tribal language dominates over another, as no tribe is willing to accept another tribe's language as a representative common language. In this scenario, English, as a neutral and foreign language that does not represent any particular tribe, was accepted with minimal resistance. This acceptance has allowed English to become a unifying medium for communication and education.

b) Education: Education is a primary factor in the widespread adoption of English in Nagaland. Traditionally, education among the Nagas was conducted through youth dormitories called "Morungs," where life skills and cultural values were taught. With the introduction of modern formal education, English naturally became the primary medium of instruction, compelling students to learn the language as they pursued education.

c) Mixed Marriages: Inter-tribe marriages, especially in urban areas, have contributed to the growth of English as children from these marriages often learn English as their first language. This trend among educated urban Nagas has increased the popularity and use of English in daily life.

d) Government Role: In 1967, the Nagaland Assembly declared English as the state's official language, making it the sole medium for education and administration. This governmental endorsement not

only solidified the development of English but also emphasized its importance as a language of learning and governance.

e) Media Influence: Media, including music, movies, newspapers, and videos, play a significant role in the growth and popularity of English in Nagaland. English-language media is well-received among the Nagas, further boosting the language's popularity and use. As English content becomes more accessible and prevalent, it continues to reinforce English as a vital part of Naga society.

3. Contemporary Status of the English Language

English in India today symbolizes aspirations for quality education and broader participation in both national and international arenas (NCERT, 2006). The introduction of English reflects a political response to these aspirations, rendering academic debates on its early introduction almost irrelevant. As the most dominant global language, English is the first language in many developed countries, the second language in numerous developing countries like India, and a foreign language for many others. It serves as the official language for international bodies such as the UN, UNESCO, and the World Bank, and dominates media, trade, and education. English has become synonymous with modernization and is rightly regarded as a global language.

A 2004 U.S. survey named India the country with the largest English-speaking population worldwide (Crystal, 2004). In Indian society, English plays a crucial role in education and national life (Patel & Jain, 2008). The language has fostered a new intellectual class, including bureaucrats, elites, politicians, and educators, strengthening its foothold in India. A report by NCERT and EdCIL (2012) highlights a significant shift in public opinion favouring English, leading to its increased teaching at the primary level. Factors such as the growth of the middle class, rapid urbanization, changing employment trends, IT sector outsourcing, privatization of education, internet usage, tourism, and media popularity have increased demand for English-medium education. Once merely a "library language," English is now seen as a language of opportunity and global identity, prompting state governments to make it widely accessible.

Estefandiari (2013) categorizes English's functions in India as Auxiliary, Supplementary, Complementary, and Equative. The Auxiliary function sees English as a "library language" for knowledge acquisition, promoting passive bilingualism. The Supplementary function caters to limited needs, like tourist interactions. The Complementary function involves using English alongside native languages in social contexts, creating stable bilinguals. The Equative function positions English as an alternative language across all domains.

Meganathan (2011) summarizes the evolution of English in India. Initially seen as a library language in the pre-colonial period, English gained the status of 'Associate Official Language' after independence, expanding its scope and significance.

Essential highlights of English's role in India include: -

- English is a subject in the curriculum of all 32 states and Union Territories.
- English is offered as a second language in many states, preferred over other Indian languages.
- It is introduced as a second language in 19 states: 16 starts in Class I, one in Class III, and two as late as Class V.
- Across India's 29 states and 7 union territories, English serves as either an official or assistant language in 11 states.

Research indicates that English is the dominant language in administration and education in most Indian states. It remains a vital link language and will continue to play a crucial role in Indian society for decades. Although widely used, English is not one of the languages officially recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

4. English from a foreign language to a second language: A perspective from a multilingual society

Does multi-lingual society accommodate and accept foreign languages to avoid their internal language complexity? The transformation of English from a foreign language to a secondary language in India is a captivating journey. In mainland India, the history of the English language is a compelling narrative deeply intertwined with the politics of identity and the replacement of established languages such as Persian. In 1835, Lord William Bentinck enacted the 'English Education Act,' through which English supplanted Persian as the language of the higher courts. The increasing popularity of English in the post-independence period raised concerns about national identity, leading to the selection of Hindi as the sole official language of the Union of India in 1950. English was demoted to the status of an auxiliary language and was slated for official termination after 15 years. However, apprehension among non-Hindi speakers, who neither embraced Hindi nor supported its dominance, ultimately compelled the government to pass the Official Language Act in 1963, elevating the status of the English language from 'auxiliary' to 'associate language'. Language diversity in India is a delicate issue, and this is one of the key factors that has bolstered the English language, solidifying its foundation in India

The acceptance and establishment of the English language in Nagaland, an Indian state in the northeastern region, have unique characteristics compared to its entry into mainland India. Unlike in other parts of India, there was no strong resistance to the introduction of English in Nagaland, mainly because it became integrated with the education system. Also, at the time of its introduction, there was no predominant language in Nagaland, allowing English to establish itself in a society with multiple local languages. However, despite the lack of a dominant language, making English the sole

official language of the state is challenging due to the linguistic complexity among the various Naga tribes. Understanding how a foreign language became integral to such a multilingual and diverse cultural society helps us appreciate the sensitivity of a multilingual society.

In a multilingual society like Nagaland, which is also multi-tribal, there is a constant sense of insecurity and consciousness about identity. This feeling of vulnerability among the multilingual groups facilitated the acceptance of English. Each Naga tribe has its distinct language and dialectical variations. Elevating one tribe's language to be the language of the general populace inevitably leads to resistance from other tribes who want to maintain the status of their languages. In such a scenario, complex dynamics and strong resistance from the linguistic groups whose languages are marginalized are expected.

The historical evolution of English in mainland India provides evidence supporting the argument that in a multilingual society, it is easier to choose a language for general use that does not reflect identity. Presently, English, alongside Hindi, serves as the official language of India. Hindi could not be sustained as the sole official language of India, nor could it be accepted as the National Language due to resistance from the non-Hindi speaking population. Conversely, the Parliament had to pass the Official Language Act in 1963 to continue the use of English as the official language. Similarly, an inclination towards promoting a particular tribal language can also be expected in the context of Nagaland. This is the primary reason why English has been able to maintain and reinforce its role, ultimately becoming the sole official language for the Nagas.

To sum up this observation and draw inferences from the analysis, it is reasonable to conclude, at least in the context of Nagaland, that a multilingual society facilitates easier access and accommodation of foreign languages with less resistance. This is because internal linguistic diversity seems more complex and challenging to address. Promoting and designating English as the official language is the preferred choice, as English does not favour any specific tribe in Nagaland.

5. Status of English in Present Nagaland

English occupies a central role in Nagaland, serving as the sole official language, a second language, and the primary medium for formal education. It is essential for bridging the diverse tribes of the Nagas and advancing the state's development. As the only official language, English is used for administrative purposes, educational instruction, and as a common language among educated Nagas. It is introduced at the pre-primary level in urban schools and integrated from the primary level across all schools in Nagaland. Additionally, English is increasingly becoming the first language for many educated urban residents.

5.1. Assessing the Importance of English for the Nagas

Nagaland's unique choice of English as its sole official language underscores the importance of mastering the language. English is the primary medium of instruction throughout the education system, with students at the secondary level choosing between their mother tongue and English. However, this emphasis on English presents challenges. Students must learn a non-native language before even beginning primary school, placing a significant burden on teachers to provide instruction in a language that students may not fully understand. Moreover, the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning is a concern. The proficiency levels in educational settings often fall short of expectations, partly because many students encounter English only in formal educational contexts, which may not be ideal for language acquisition. English is frequently taught as a subject rather than as a functional language, which can diminish the effectiveness of language learning. Despite English's established role as a second language and its importance in Nagaland, a comprehensive review and enhancement of its role in the educational system are needed**.**

5. Conclusion

The evolution of English in Nagaland reflects a unique interplay between historical influences and sociolinguistic dynamics. English, introduced through the efforts of missionaries during the colonial period, has become deeply embedded in Nagaland's educational and administrative systems. Its role as the state's sole official language is a testament to its significance in uniting the diverse Naga tribes and facilitating communication and development.

The historical context reveals that English's acceptance in Nagaland was influenced by the absence of a unifying tribal language and the pragmatic needs of a multilingual society. Unlike mainland India, where English's role was contested and politically charged, Nagaland's lack of a dominant indigenous language allowed English to establish itself relatively easily. The absence of resistance to English can be attributed to its neutrality among tribal languages and its practical utility in education and governance.

In the contemporary context, English serves not only as a second language but as a primary medium of instruction and a critical tool for social and economic advancement. However, the challenges of mastering a non-native language from an early age and the effectiveness of English language education remain concerns. The need for a thorough review and enhancement of English language teaching practices in Nagaland is evident to ensure that it fulfils its role effectively and supports the linguistic and cultural development of its people.

Overall, Nagaland's experience underscores a broader pattern observed in former British colonies, where English has often been adopted as a key language due to historical legacies and practical considerations. This phenomenon highlights the complex interactions between language, identity, and education in multilingual societies and reinforces the global significance of English in contemporary contexts.

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