

TOASTED ENGLISH

In the American restaurants they call for 'Toasted English', referring to English muffins which though being made in America, now retain 'English' as a sort of concession to their origin. The same may be said of their language too. Americans too, went through a phase of throwing out the British but retaining their language and letting it flourish on American soil; the resultant language is somewhat different from its British counterpart; it may be said to have gone through a process of toasting. One noticeable result of this toasting is that much of the formalism surrounding the use of English has been abandoned.

In America, they have freed the language from the stifling tyranny of the Passive Voice. Where we should say ceremoniously 'Trespassing prohibited', their signboards, as I noticed in the parks of Berkeley merely say, 'Newly planted, don't walk'. Absolutely 'No Parking' leaves no room for speculation, and no motorist need spend too much time peering out and studying the notice. In a similar situation our authorities are likely to plant a twenty-line inscription on the landscape to say, 'Under Municipal Act so and so this area has been reserved, etc. etc., and any vehicle stationed thereon will be deemed to have contravened subsection so and so of the Motor Vehicles Act, etc. etc. I saw on many American office doors just 'Do not Enter'. The traffic signs at pedestrian crossings never mince words; they just say 'Go' or 'Wait'. In a Hollywood studio I was rather startled to read, 'Mark Stevens—Keep out'. Mark Stevens is a busy television personality who does not like to be disturbed by visitors. Incidentally, it left me wondering why, if Mr Stevens does not like interruptions, he should announce his name at all on the door! But it is one of the minor mysteries that make travel through that country so engrossing.

The 'toasting' of English has been achieved through other means also. Americans have evolved certain basic key words which may be used anywhere, anyhow, words which have universal multipurpose use. I may make my point clear if I mention the example of the word 'Check' which may safely be labelled the 'American National Expression'. While British usage confines it to its bare dictionary definitions, the American uses it anywhere, this expression being so devised that one may blindly utter it and still find that it is appropriate for the occasion. I'll check means I'll find out, investigate, examine, scrutinise, verify, or probe. 'You check' means your ticket, token or whatever you may have to produce. 'Check room' is where you leave your possessions for a while. 'Check girl' is one who takes care of your coat, umbrella, or anything else you may leave in custody. 'Check in' and 'Check out' (at first I heard it as 'Chuck out' and felt rather disturbed) refers to one's arrival in a hotel and departure therefrom. And there are scores of other incidental uses for the word. If you are ever hard-up for a noun or a verb you may safely utter the word 'check' and feel confident that it will fit in. 'Fabulous' is another word that is used in that country freely, without much premeditation. Of course everyone knows what fabulous means, but the American usage has enlarged its sense. I found a lady in Wisconsin declare 'Oh, those cats of mine are fabulous and meaning that they were eccentric. "Oh, so and so, he is

fabulous!" may mean anything from a sincere compliment to an insinuation that so and so displays a mild form of charming lunacy.

'Ok' is another well-known example. It is the easiest sound that ever emanated from the human vocal cords. Everyone knows how comprehensive its sense can be. 'Okay' is a self-sufficient word which needs no suffix to indicate any special respect for the listener; it can stand by itself without a 'Sir' to conclude the sentence. In this respect it is like 'Yeah' which seals off a sentence without further ado. 'Yes sir', or 'Yes, darling', is conceivable but 'Yeah Sir', or 'Yeah darling', is unthinkable. 'Yeah' is uttered in a short base-of-the-tongue grunt, which almost snaps off any further continuation of a sentence. 'Yes' involves time as the sibilant could not prolong.

The refinements of usage in countries where English has a bazaar status are worth a study. On a London bus you will never hear the conductor cry, 'Ticket, ticket'. He approaches the passenger and says 'Thank you', and on receiving the fare says 'Thank you, sir'. I found out that one could calculate the number of passengers in a bus by having the total number of 'Thanks' heard. In any Western Country if a receptionist asks 'Can I help you?' it really means 'Have you any business here, if so, state it.' Or it may mean 'Evidently you have wandered off into a wrong place, go away.' A man who wants to pass you always says 'Excuse me', while he may with all justice burst out, 'What do you mean by standing there gaping at the world while you block everybody's passage? Stand aside, man!' When you send your card in, the busy-man's secretary appears and whispers in your ear, 'Would you like to wait?' Though the tone is one of consultation, you have really no choice in the matter. The thing to do is not to answer the question but say 'Thanks' and look for a comfortable seat in the waiting room, although you may feel like saying, 'No, I wouldn't like to wait. I have other things to do.'

The time has come for us to consider seriously the question of a Bharat brand of English. So far English has had a comparatively confined existence in our country, chiefly in the halls of learning, justice, or administration. Now the time is ripe for it to come to the dusty street, market place, and under the banyan tree. English must adopt the complexion of our life and assimilate its idiom. I am not suggesting here a mongrelization of the language. I am not recommending that we should go back to the days when we heard, particularly *in the railway*, "Wer U goin', man?" Bharat English will respect the rule of law and maintain the dignity of grammar, but still have a Swadeshi stamp about it unmistakably, like the Madras handloom check shirt or the Tirupathi doll.

- R.K. Narayan

About the Lesson

In *Toasted English*, R.K. Narayan shows the difference between American and British English. The essay is infused with humour. The author states that like Indians, Americans too, retained the English language and let it flourish even though they drove the British away. The Americans simplified the usage of English by eliminating

the passive voice in the language. For instance in place of ‘Trespassing Prohibited’ the notice reads ‘Newly planted, don’t walk’. American English also includes words such as Ok, check and fabulous – words which can be used anywhere and in any context.

He further discusses the ‘bazar status’ of English in London. In day-to-day activities in London, English is used in a fine, polished way. The writer illustrates this by discussing certain expressions (as they are used in practical life) and what they connote. For instance “Can I help you?” actually implies “Have you any business here, if so, state it”.

He concludes by proposing that Indians should follow a ‘Bharat brand of English’ in post independence India. The writer feels that like American English, Indian English should have its own flavour and style. There should be a “Swadeshi stamp” on it.

R.K. Narayan is one of the most popular Indian English novelists.

GLOSSARY

toasted English	:	toasted means to heat and turn brown bread. Here the expression toasted English means adding local flavour to English to suit local sensibilities.
muffin	:	a small, sweet, cup - shaped cake
abandoned	:	given up
stifling	:	suppressing and choking
tyranny	:	injustice and unfairness
mince words	:	to hold back words for the sake of politeness
pedestrian	:	person walking on a street
inscription	:	words carved or engraved on a rock
trespassing	:	going on to a privately owned land without permission
speculation	:	supposition, guessing
Hollywood	:	centre of the American film industry
eccentric	:	peculiar, not normal
insinuating	:	suggestive
emanate	:	to flow out from a source or proceed
ado	:	fuss
sibilant	:	characterized by hissing or a hushing sound like that of ‘s’ or ‘sh’
mongrelisation	:	mongrel means any cross between different things.
of the language	:	mongrelisation means to make mongrel in race, nature, or character. Here it means creation of a new language by mixing different languages.

Activity 1: COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternative:

1. The only thing American could not abandon along with other British things is–
 - (a) their traditions
 - (b) their language
 - (c) their food items
 - (d) their ideas
2. In this lesson “Toasted English” means –
 - (a) British English
 - (b) American English
 - (c) British English with necessary modifications required for local sensibility
 - (d) American English in its entirely different form from British English
3. The shift on emphasis throughout the lesson is to encourage and guide us to use English as –
 - (a) A Bharat brand of English
 - (b) American brand of English
 - (c) World brand of English
 - (d) English as used by Britishers
4. Check girl is one who takes care of –
 - (a) Your coat and umbrella
 - (b) Some of your important belongings
 - (c) Items of travelling
 - (d) Anything you ask her to take care of

B. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 10-15 words each:

1. Why have American restaurants not changed the name of English muffins ?
2. What was the British thing which Americans did not abandon ?
3. Is American English less complicated and more informal compared to its British form ?
4. What do Americans use instead of ‘Trespassing Prohibited’
5. Where does English have a bazaar status ?

C. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 30-40 words each:

1. Explain the phrase ‘no room for speculation’ ?
2. What is check room ? How long can we put our belongings in a check room ?
3. In what manner can we say Americans have ‘freed English’ ?
4. How did Americans simplify the usage of English ?

D. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 60–80 words each:

1. How does R.K. Narayan explain ‘Toasted English’ ?
2. According to the author O.K. can be used in many ways. How? Explain.
3. How does the writer define his Bharat brand of English ? Why does he strongly advocate its use ?

F. Say whether the following statements are True or False. Write T for True and F for False in the bracket:

1. Americans adopted various ways to free themselves from British English. []
2. Semantics play an important role in the interpretation of grammatical structures. []
3. There are certain key words which may be used liberally without sticking to dictionary meanings. []
4. When you are blocking somebody's way unnecessarily, in American English he would say 'Excuse me'. []
5. In this lesson, R.K.Narayan has tried to show difference between American English and British English. []

Activity 2: VOCABULARY

A. Given below is a list of words. Look up in your Dictionary and make sentences to illustrate their meaning.

A	B
mince	means
devise	device
wonder	wander
connote	denote
context	pretext
confirm	conform
possession	procession
artist	artiste
desert	dessert

B. Find the odd one in the following:

1. hazard, risk, safe, danger
2. deprivation, loss, lacking, depreciation
3. addition, addiction, habit, accustomed
4. understanding, perfection, perception, grasp
5. caliber, competence, weakness, capacity
6. neglect, ignore, negate, omit
7. endowment, endurance, stamina, guts
8. accommodate, adopt, adapt, adjust
9. morbid, shocking, pleasing, traumatic
10. adolescence, adult, teenage, youth

Activity 3: GRAMMAR

The Past Continuous and the Past Perfect

The Past Continuous form shows an action in progress in the past.

It was raining all day yesterday.

We were shopping all this morning.

The Past Perfect shows that two events happened in the past and it also shows which one happened first, i.e. which had happened before the other. The Past Perfect has the meaning of past-in-past and it shows the relationship between two events in the past and the priority of one of the two events. The Past Perfect, as its name implies, expresses an act in the past that was completed before another act in the past. So, the past perfect is used in tracing back events that took place in the past. The simple past is used when there is a succession of actions in the past.

When I reached the class, the students had left
(First the students left and then I reached)

I told the students that I had done the work
(First I did the work and then I told)

Exercise

Fill in the blanks with the Past Perfect form of the verbs given in brackets:

- i. When she entered the cinema, the film..... (start)
- ii. When Ram went out again, the rain.....(stop)
- iii. After all the students..... (leave), the place was cleaned.
- iv. The sun ... (rise) ... before they awoke.
- v. The crowd.... (begin) to hoot even before the minister began his speech
- vi. After they... (do) their homework, they went out to play.
- vii. They ... (leave) by the time we arrived.
- viii. Previously she ... (be) a very good teacher.

Activity 4: SPEECH ACTIVITY

Suppose you are the President of your school students' Union. Organize a Debate on "A Bharat Brand of English is the Need of the Hour"

Activity 5: COMPOSITION

How can an Indian flavour (with Swadeshi Stamp) make the learning of English more effective in the Post Independence India? Discuss.