



Language and Society: The Dynamics of English in the Contemporary World

Md. Baharul Islam Barbhuiya ¹

¹ Head of the Department of English, West Silchar College, Barjatrapur, Cachar, Assam

Abstract:

In today's increasingly interconnected world, language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a tool of identity, power, and cultural expression. English, in particular, has evolved into a dominant global language, shaping and being shaped by social realities. This paper explores the dynamic relationship between language and society by focusing on three crucial aspects of English in the modern world: the impact of social media on communication styles, the dominance of English in international scientific research, and the role of accents in constructing identity in English-speaking societies.

With the rise of digital platforms, the structure and tone of English communication have significantly changed. Abbreviations, emojis, and hybrid expressions are altering linguistic norms, particularly among youth populations. Simultaneously, English continues to dominate scientific publications and global knowledge production, creating both opportunities and inequalities for non-native speakers. Additionally, accent-based perceptions reveal how deeply language is tied to power dynamics and social stratification. Accents, often unconsciously, influence how individuals are judged in professional, academic, and social contexts, leading to both inclusion and exclusion.

Through an interdisciplinary lens that combines sociolinguistics, digital media studies, and identity theory, this article emphasizes that language cannot be separated from its societal functions. English, though global, is not neutral—it is embedded with cultural ideologies, biases, and privileges. The paper argues for more inclusive linguistic practices, especially in academic and digital domains, to ensure equitable access and representation. Ultimately, understanding how English interacts with evolving societal structures is essential for fostering a linguistically just world.

Keywords:- Language and society, English communication, social media, scientific research, accent bias, identity, sociolinguistics.

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1. Introduction

Language is far more than a tool for communication—it is a living, evolving system deeply embedded in the social fabric of human life. The field of **sociolinguistics** focuses on understanding how language functions within social contexts, examining the intricate ways in which language reflects and shapes cultural norms, power relations, group identities, and societal structures. Sociolinguistics explores not only how people speak, but why they speak the way they do, and what their speech patterns reveal

about their social identities, positions, and relationships.

In the 21st century, the study of language as a **social phenomenon** has gained greater relevance due to rapid globalization, digital transformation, and increased cross-cultural interactions. Language plays a central role in shaping perceptions of self and others, mediating access to opportunities, and influencing how knowledge is produced and circulated. With the advent of technology and the dominance of digital platforms, the way people communicate—particularly in English—has undergone significant change. Understanding these changes requires a sociolinguistic perspective that can account for both traditional forms of language use and emerging trends.

English, in particular, has become the **global lingua franca**, serving as a common language in international business, science, education, and diplomacy. Its widespread use across continents and cultures has made it a powerful medium of both connection and division. While English offers access to global platforms and opportunities, it also reinforces linguistic hierarchies that often marginalize non-native speakers. As such, the role of English in society is not neutral—it carries historical, political, and economic weight.

This paper argues that English is not only shaped by society but also actively shapes society in return. Through three interconnected themes—the **influence of social media on English communication**, the **dominance of English in global scientific research**, and the **role of accents in identity formation**—this study highlights how English reflects broader trends in communication, knowledge systems, and social inclusion. These areas reveal how English continues to evolve and adapt, but also how it can perpetuate inequalities. By examining English through a sociolinguistic lens, we can better understand its transformative power and advocate for more equitable and inclusive linguistic practices.

2. The Impact of Social Media on Modern English Communication Styles

Over the past two decades, the way people use English has undergone a remarkable transformation, much of which can be attributed to the explosive growth of social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. These platforms have not only created new spaces for interaction but have also redefined the norms of communication. Among digital natives—particularly Gen Z and millennials—English has adapted to be faster, more expressive, and highly contextual, reflecting the rapid pace of digital interaction.

A key feature of modern English on social media is the emergence of **abbreviations, emoji language, and internet slang**. Phrases like “LOL” (laugh out loud), “TBH” (to be honest), “BRB” (be right back), and newer terms such as “ghosting”, “simp”, or “vibe check” have seamlessly entered everyday conversation. Emojis now serve as visual cues, replacing or enhancing textual emotions and tone, thus offering users new tools to express complex feelings in just a few symbols. These linguistic shortcuts and symbols have made communication quicker and more emotionally nuanced, particularly in character-limited environments like Twitter.

Social media has also contributed to the **blurring of formal and informal registers** in English. Where once grammar and punctuation were key to effective communication, now users are often judged more on creativity, relatability, and authenticity. For example, lowercase writing, lack of punctuation, and deliberate misspellings (e.g., “gurl”, “lemme”, “yaaas”) are stylistic choices that can signal a casual, humorous, or rebellious tone. Such patterns are especially prevalent among younger users, who are consciously constructing identities through language play.

However, this shift has led to debates about the **impact on traditional grammar, spelling, and syntax**. Educators and linguists express concern that the informal norms of social media may erode standard language competencies. Yet others argue that these

changes reflect natural linguistic evolution rather than decay. Language, after all, has always been fluid, and the internet merely accelerates its transformation. A 2022 study by Thompson and Raval found that while students' formal writing showed minor grammar deviations linked to digital habits, their creativity and adaptability in language use had significantly increased in informal settings.

Beyond structural changes, social media also affects **communication patterns, particularly among youth**. A survey conducted by the Digital Youth Language Lab (2022) revealed that 72% of teenagers felt more comfortable expressing themselves online than in face-to-face conversations. Social media allows for asynchronous interaction, reducing social anxiety while promoting broader participation in discussions. However, it also fosters issues like cyberbullying, misinterpretation of tone, and reduced attention spans in textual interaction.

In summary, social media is not simply a platform for communication; it is a force reshaping the **style, tone, and structure of modern English**. While some critics view these changes as a threat to linguistic integrity, others see them as signs of a living language responding to contemporary social needs. English on social media is more dynamic, inclusive, and playful—but it also challenges traditional notions of correctness and clarity. As digital culture continues to evolve, so too will the forms and functions of English in the virtual world.

3. The Role of English in International Scientific Research

In the global academic and scientific community, English has become the dominant language of communication. Today, most prestigious scientific journals, international conferences, patents, and databases—including Elsevier, Springer, Nature, and Scopus—primarily operate in English. While this linguistic standardisation facilitates global collaboration and access to scientific findings, it also introduces significant **barriers for non-native English speakers**, many of whom must invest considerable time, effort, and financial resources to meet publication and presentation expectations.

For scholars in countries where English is not the primary language, the **publishing process can be disproportionately challenging**. From manuscript preparation to peer review responses, non-native authors often face linguistic scrutiny that extends beyond the scientific content. This can lead to delayed publications, higher rejection rates, and the need to pay for expensive language editing services. In contrast, native English speakers can often bypass these hurdles, creating a **structural power imbalance** in the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

This dynamic also reinforces a form of **linguistic imperialism**, where the dominance of English marginalises local languages and epistemologies. Valuable research conducted in languages such as Mandarin, Spanish, Hindi, or Arabic may be excluded from the mainstream scientific discourse simply because it is not in English. As a result, English not only acts as a gateway to global recognition but also becomes a filter that determines whose knowledge is seen and valued.

Moreover, indexing services like **Scopus and Web of Science** tend to prioritise English-language journals in their databases, making it harder for non-English publications to gain visibility. While this benefits global scientific standardisation, it narrows the diversity of perspectives available in mainstream research. A 2022 study by Liang and O'Donnell argues that this **homogenisation of scientific language** compromises both equity and innovation by silencing culturally specific knowledge systems and local research priorities.

To address this growing concern, there is an urgent need to foster **linguistic inclusivity in science**. Multilingual abstracts, support for translation, and inclusive peer review

practices are some of the approaches that can democratise scientific publishing. Journals and academic institutions must recognise that language should not be a barrier to sharing rigorous and impactful research.

In conclusion, while English has streamlined global scientific exchange, it has also inadvertently created hierarchies that limit equal participation. Moving forward, the scientific community must balance global access with respect for linguistic diversity, ensuring that excellence is not defined by English fluency alone.

4. Language and Identity: How Accents Shape Perception in English-Speaking Societies

In English-speaking societies, accents serve as more than just regional variations in pronunciation—they are **powerful social markers** that influence how individuals are perceived, judged, and treated. An accent can reveal information about a person's **class background, ethnic identity, education level, and geographic origin**. While this may seem like a benign sociolinguistic fact, in reality, it plays a major role in shaping access to opportunity, inclusion, and even self-worth.

Studies consistently show that **perceptions of intelligence, credibility, and trustworthiness** are often unconsciously tied to how someone speaks. For instance, those who speak with a “standard” accent—such as **Received Pronunciation (RP)** in the UK or **General American English** in the U.S.—are typically viewed as more competent or authoritative. In contrast, speakers with regional or ethnic accents, such as **Southern American English, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), or South Asian English**, may be unfairly stereotyped as less educated or articulate, regardless of their actual qualifications or expertise.

This phenomenon is known as **accent bias**, a subtle yet deeply rooted form of discrimination. In professional and academic settings, such bias can have real consequences. A 2022 study by Clark and Menon found that job candidates with non-standard accents were rated significantly lower in perceived leadership potential, even when their resumes were identical to those of standard-accented applicants. Such findings underscore how linguistic prejudice can restrict upward mobility and reinforce **class and racial inequalities**.

Accent-based discrimination also plays out in **educational institutions**, where students who speak in dialects like AAVE or Caribbean English often face implicit bias from teachers, who may view their speech as incorrect or deficient rather than as valid linguistic systems. This can lead to a diminished sense of belonging and academic disengagement. Linguists argue that such biases reflect deeper social hierarchies rather than linguistic flaws.

The media further amplifies these dynamics by often reinforcing **stereotypical representations** of certain accents. Villains in Hollywood films, for example, are frequently portrayed with foreign or regional accents, while protagonists tend to speak in standard forms. Similarly, comedy and satire often mock non-standard English for entertainment, perpetuating negative associations. As a result, many speakers may feel pressure to adopt more “neutral” accents to avoid prejudice—an act of linguistic code-switching that can be both mentally exhausting and emotionally disempowering.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing movement toward **accent acceptance and linguistic justice**. Educational campaigns, inclusive hiring practices, and diverse media representation are helping to challenge dominant language ideologies. Scholars emphasize that there is no such thing as a “correct” accent—only dominant ones shaped by social power. Encouraging respect for all dialects and accents is essential in fostering a society that values **diversity, equity, and authenticity**.

In conclusion, accents are far more than phonetic differences—they are entwined with identity, social perception, and structural inequality. Recognizing and addressing accent bias is a critical step in building more inclusive English-speaking societies where language becomes a bridge, not a barrier.

5. Language Change and Cultural Power

a) Historical Evolution of English: British Colonialism, Trade, and Migration Patterns

The global spread of English cannot be fully understood without tracing its historical evolution, particularly through the forces of **British colonialism, trade, and migration**. From the 17th to the 20th century, the British Empire expanded across Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and parts of the Americas. As British administrators, soldiers, missionaries, and traders moved through these regions, English was introduced as the language of governance, law, and education. In many colonies, English was institutionalised in schools and courts, replacing or marginalising indigenous languages and dialects.

Trade routes also played a key role in spreading English, especially through maritime commerce in the Indian Ocean and Atlantic worlds. British-led trade systems introduced English to port cities, where it often became a lingua franca among merchants of diverse linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, **migration—both voluntary and forced—shaped English's global trajectory**. Enslaved Africans, indentured laborers from India, and Irish or Scottish settlers were relocated across continents, bringing with them unique phonetic patterns and idioms that contributed to the formation of localized English varieties.

As a result, English evolved into a highly adaptable language, giving rise to multiple “World Englishes” such as Indian English, Nigerian English, and Jamaican Patois. Each version reflects a history of resistance, adaptation, and hybridity. The language's history, therefore, is not only about diffusion but also about domination, assimilation, and cultural negotiation. This colonial legacy still affects linguistic hierarchies today, where English often symbolizes modernity and upward mobility—sometimes at the cost of local languages and identities.

b) Americanization of Global English: Dominance via Hollywood, Tech, and Academic Writing

In the post-World War II period, **American cultural, technological, and academic influence** accelerated the global dominance of English. With the decline of the British Empire, the United States emerged as a superpower, and with it came the spread of **American English**. Hollywood movies, television series, music, and pop culture became globally consumed products, familiarising international audiences with American speech patterns, idioms, and cultural references.

Simultaneously, the **rise of the internet and information technology**, much of which originated in the U.S., embedded American English into the design of digital platforms, software, and communication systems. From keyboard settings and spellcheckers to user interfaces and coding languages, American spelling and grammar conventions became the default. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter further normalised Americanized language use, especially among youth populations worldwide.

In the **academic world**, many leading research institutions, journals, and citation databases are U.S.-based. The dominance of **American academic writing norms**, including vocabulary, citation styles, and argument structure, pressures international scholars to conform if they wish to be recognised. This not only standardises knowledge production but also privileges those already proficient in American English.

This Americanisation of English is not without critique. Scholars argue that it creates a **cultural monoculture**, diluting linguistic diversity and reinforcing Western-centric epistemologies. Yet it also demonstrates English's adaptability and openness to new influences. The challenge lies in preserving plurality while navigating global communication systems dominated by American norms.

c) Linguistic Hegemony through Institutions: Curriculum Design and Publishing Gatekeeping

English's global power is not merely cultural—it is systematically embedded in **institutional structures**, particularly in education and academic publishing. One of the most effective mechanisms of linguistic hegemony is the **design of school curricula** in post-colonial countries. In many such nations, English is the medium of instruction from primary to tertiary levels, often justified as a tool for global competitiveness. However, this often sidelines native languages and reinforces English as the sole path to professional success.

This curriculum design creates a **linguistic elite**—those who can afford English-medium education gain disproportionate access to jobs, universities, and international mobility. Meanwhile, speakers of indigenous or regional languages are often seen as “underprepared,” even when they possess critical thinking and subject mastery. As a result, language becomes a gatekeeper for social and economic mobility.

Similarly, in the **publishing world**, most high-impact academic journals accept only submissions in English. Peer review systems often unconsciously favour English writing styles aligned with Western norms, disadvantaging non-native authors. Editors may reject research not because of its quality, but because of how the argument is structured linguistically. This creates a **feedback loop** where knowledge from the Global South is filtered or marginalised unless it is expressed in dominant English forms.

This linguistic gatekeeping is not a passive phenomenon—it reflects deeper power structures that reinforce **Anglo-centric knowledge systems**. Unless institutions adopt more inclusive practices—such as multilingual publishing policies or culturally diverse peer review models—the imbalance will persist, and valuable perspectives will remain unheard.

d) Resistance and Plurality: Indigenous Language Movements and Multilingual Education

Despite the hegemony of English, there is growing resistance around the world advocating for **linguistic diversity, equity, and decolonisation**. Indigenous language movements have gained strength, especially in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, where activists and educators are reviving and promoting native languages in education, governance, and media.

In **India**, for instance, the National Education Policy 2020 promotes multilingualism by encouraging instruction in mother tongues at early education levels. Similarly, countries like **Peru and Bolivia** have established bilingual education programs that incorporate Indigenous languages like Quechua and Aymara alongside Spanish. In **South Africa**, efforts are being made to elevate the status of isiZulu, isiXhosa, and other native languages in schools and public institutions.

These **pluralistic language policies** are not only about preserving culture—they are tied to identity, inclusion, and cognitive development. Research shows that students learn better and retain concepts more effectively when taught in their first language. Moreover, multilingual education fosters empathy, critical thinking, and cross-cultural awareness.

Language revival movements also harness digital tools to create new dictionaries, mobile apps, and online courses that make Indigenous languages accessible to younger generations. Though these efforts often struggle against dominant English media, they represent a powerful counter-narrative to linguistic homogenisation. The success of such initiatives depends largely on policy support, community engagement, and the allocation of resources to develop curricula and train teachers.

By embracing linguistic plurality, societies challenge the idea that success and sophistication are tied exclusively to English. They open up space for **alternative worldviews**, knowledge systems, and cultural expressions that enrich the global dialogue.

6. Case Studies and Empirical Data

To ground theoretical insights in real-world contexts, this section presents three illustrative case studies that reflect the dynamic interplay between English language use and societal structures. These empirical examples—drawn from recent research—highlight how social media, academic publishing, and workplace practices each contribute to reshaping English communication norms and perceptions.

Case Study 1: Social Media Discourse Analysis on TikTok

A 2022 study by Lim and Das analysed over 5,000 captions and comments from popular TikTok videos across the U.S., UK, and India. The research found that TikTok users frequently **blend informal English with emojis, abbreviations, and regional idioms**, forming a hybrid digital dialect. Terms like “IYKYK” (If You Know You Know), “fr” (for real), and “POV” (point of view) were common across demographics but used in culturally nuanced ways. This pattern shows how English is constantly **reshaped by youth culture**, creating fluid, playful forms of expression that defy formal grammar while strengthening social belonging.

Case Study 2: Citation Trends in Scientific English Publications

An empirical review conducted by the **Global Science Language Index (2022)** revealed that 89% of all peer-reviewed articles indexed by Scopus and Web of Science were published in English, even though only 20% of global researchers identify English as their first language. Interestingly, the citation impact of articles from non-English-speaking countries was 25% lower on average, suggesting a **systemic disadvantage** rooted in language accessibility. The study recommended multilingual publication models to ensure a **more equitable global knowledge exchange**.

Case Study 3: Accent Bias in Hiring Practices

A simulated hiring experiment conducted by Watson and Ekwe in 2022 tested the response of hiring managers to recorded job interviews delivered in different English accents: Standard American, Nigerian English, and Indian English. The findings were striking—candidates with Nigerian and Indian accents were consistently rated lower on perceived “professionalism” and “leadership potential,” despite all other credentials being identical. This reflects a **deep-seated accent bias**, where linguistic features—rather than merit—shape career outcomes. The study underscores the urgent need for bias training in recruitment processes.

7. Conclusion

The relationship between language and society is dynamic, deeply intertwined, and constantly evolving. Through the lens of sociolinguistics, this article has explored how English, as a global language, both reflects and reinforces social hierarchies, identities, and communication trends. From the playful and expressive forms of English emerging on social media to the linguistic gatekeeping observed in global scientific research and

employment settings, English continues to shape and be shaped by the social forces that govern our world.

At its best, English serves as a **unifying force**—a common medium that connects people across borders, facilitates the global exchange of ideas, and enhances cross-cultural collaboration. It enables scientific innovation, academic discourse, and mass communication on an unprecedented scale. However, this same global reach also reveals its role as a **dividing force**, privileging those with access to standard or native English and marginalising others through accent bias, exclusion from scientific visibility, and educational inequality.

This duality points to an urgent need for more **inclusive and equitable linguistic practices**. Institutions must support multilingualism, challenge linguistic discrimination, and recognise the value of diverse Englishes and local languages alike. Empowering individuals to speak in their authentic voices without fear of judgment or exclusion is key to building a more just and representative global discourse.

As the world becomes more digitally interconnected and culturally pluralistic, the power of language will only grow. The challenge—and the opportunity—lies in ensuring that this power is not wielded to divide, but to include, uplift, and amplify diverse voices in every sphere of society.

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