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Editorial and Perspective

YOUR TURN : OUR ENGLISH, THEIR ENGLISH

By SANJAY K BOSE

THE British, lament the historians and politicians alike, ruled us for nearly a hundred years, drained us of our wealth, and ruined us completely.

The last laugh will, however, be ours as we will eventually get our revenge by ruining their language forever. Half-a-century after they left our shores — probably in disgust at the English we speak, we are well on our way to deliver the coup de grace.

The English language is already tottering under the assault of Bill Gates's grammar and language checks and will not be able to survive the battering that it is receiving from us.

The "learn angrezi in one week" academies springing up all over the place are also doing a wonderful job of furthering this worthy cause. Soon there will be millions and millions of Indians speaking such execrable English that the British would probably have to switch to Welsh, Swahili or Basque to maintain their self-respect.

Even the schools do not lag behind. At one time, the GT Road, going from the campus to the city in Kanpur, used to be plastered with advertisements and hoardings from a large number of "English Midium" schools.

One was amazed at the versatility with which the words "English" and "medium" could be spelt in Kanpur. Incidentally, this road still remains a source of great amusement.

It has this shop which boldly advertises itself as "Pig Meet here". No, it is not a place that some animal lover has put up for porcine conviviality, where pigs can party, but rather a place where one can buy pork.

My wife and I, of course, have this fatal fascination for English. Though we speak Bengali at home, the language we fight in is English.

Because it seems to be the ideal medium for heated arguments, my vocabulary shows a distinct improvement at these times. Earlier we used English as a code language when we wanted to say something that we did not want our daughter to understand. That didn't work as one day, while in the middle of a heated argument, our three-year-old toddler declared that we should speak a little slowly as she is having trouble following us. Now all three of us fight in English.

The office staff are also not immune to this. What do you do when you get a message asking you to "wring" somebody? There are lots of people whose necks I would love to wring and the sender of this message topped the list.

But why would he suggest such a thing? My prosaic family members suggest that he merely wanted me to "ring him". I however prefer to think that it was a part of his diabolical plan to see me spend the remainder of my days in jail!

Our English can lead to some embarrassing situations as well. I recall a dinner I attended at a fellow Indian's place in Adelaide. Apart from my wife and daughter, the other guests were an elderly professor and his wife. The dinner was sumptuous.

After the dinner was over and we had retired to their drawing room, our host generously asked me if I wanted some "pot". I thought this was some strange new

Ozzie custom. I have never tried pot myself but am sufficiently open minded to have my friends smoke the stuff around me if they want.

However, the presence of the elderly professor and his somewhat intimidating wife, cramped my style and I babbled something about this not being the proper time and place for "pot".

Only when we were driving back, was the mystery resolved. My wife complained about my being rude and not responding properly when offered a glass of after-dinner port. I rest my case.

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