

Textaufgabe für das 1./2. Abiturfach

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- Titel:** For Indians, English Is a Language, a Legacy and a Political Football

For Indians, English is a Language, a Legacy and a Political Football

BY STEPHEN KINZER

New York Times Service

MADRAS, India - In India, the English language is: (a) one of the few things that bind the nation together and connect it to the wider world, or (b) an oppressive legacy of colonialism that robs people of their native heritage and identity.

The issue has been argued since India won its independence from Britain 50 years ago. But debate has become especially emotional in the current national election campaign, with prominent members of the governing coalition urging that English no longer be used for the conduct of government business or as a language of instruction in public schools.

Last month, Defense Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav vowed in a speech here that he and his followers "will not rest until English is driven out of the country".

"English should not dominate this country's linguistic map," he said. "We've had enough of leaders who ask for votes in their mother tongues but spend their parliamentary tenures speaking in English."

Defenders of English point out that the language played a key role in the development of modern Indian nationalism, and some suggest that the campaign against it merely diverts attention from more pressing social problems.

Eight hundred languages and dialects are spoken in India. Many of the 18 official languages, ranging from Urdu in the north to Kannada in the south, have little or nothing in common.

20 According to the government, 45 percent of the populace speaks Hindi, the most widely used language. Less than 5 percent speak English, but they include nearly all of the educated elite.

Some of English's detractors advocate Hindi as an alternative. But Hindi faces political and cultural obstacles because it is associated with the poorer northern regions of India as well as with the Hindu religion. In large regions of the country, 25 almost no one speaks Hindi, and people there fear that they would be at a disadvantage if Hindi had a preferred position in public life.

Today, when Indians choose to learn a second language, it is nearly always English, not a second local one. The number of English-speaking schools is steadily increasing, 30 especially in the more literate and prosperous parts of the country.

One news commentator who supports curbs on English, Ashwin Mahesh, has urged that English be taught only "as a special skill for those who care to acquire it". To do otherwise, he warned, would be to "throw away the literary traditions that espouse and glorify who we are".

35 The newly passionate debate over language also reflects the fragmentation of Indian politics. Parties with national appeal are losing ground to smaller ones based on religion, caste and region.

This has led some politicians to conclude that there are votes to be won by attacking English.

40 Over the last few years, regional parties that have come to power in several states have changed the names of some of India's best-known cities. Madras, where Mr. Yadav made his speech, is now officially Chennai. The city long known as Bombay is now officially Mumbai.

In this year's campaign, calls for the suppression of English are also oblique 45 attacks on Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Mrs. Gandhi recently plunged into national politics with a speech in English, and her rivals are seeking to highlight the fact that she has not fully mastered any of India's native tongues.

Defenders of English say it is a vital tool in the modern world.

50 "There is no denying that English was introduced in India as a tool of imperialism," the essayist Amberish Diwanji wrote recently. "Yet it was Britain's gift to In-

dia, uniting the country as little else had, bringing in the ideas of the Enlightenment and Renaissance to India and helping the birth of modern Indian nationalism. It was the language our leaders debated in when fighting for freedom."

55 Mr. Diwanji called English "the most potent weapon of India's growing middle class to meet their rising expectations," but added:

"The English-speaking elite are an incredibly selfish lot, aggrandizing their power at the cost of their poor brethren, which is why millions of deprived persons despise the use of English."

60 "There exists a glass ceiling in speaking English for rising to top positions in India, which is a despicable attitude of the urban elite. Is it any wonder that Mulayam and other English-baiters invariably receive a rousing reception every time they threaten to throw out English?"

ANNOTATIONS

The present text is an unabridged article by Stephen Kinzer, published in the **International Herald Tribune**, January 29, 1998.

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| <p>appeal (l. 36): quality that makes you like someone or something, be interested in them, or want them</p> <p>Enlightenment (ll. 52 f.): period in the eighteenth century when many writers and scientists believed that science and knowledge, not religion, could improve people's lives</p> <p>(to) aggrandize (. 57): (<i>fm</i>l.) to in-</p> | <p>crease the power, rank, wealth, etc. of something</p> <p>glass ceiling (l. 60): imaginary limit that allows people to see their aims but prevents them from achieving them</p> <p>English-baiter (l. 62): person who tries intentionally to make speakers and supporters of English angry</p> |
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GUIDELINES FOR ANALYSIS

- (1) Which arguments for and against the use of the English language in India are mentioned in the present text? (**Comprehension**)
- (2) Do you think Stephen Kinzer envisages Indian people as his readers? Analyse his linguistic choices. (**Analysis**)
- (3) Write a letter to the editor of a quality newspaper, dealing with the increasing use of "Denglish", i.e. the increasing use of English (loan)words in the German language. (**Evaluation/Re-creation of Text**)

Erlaubtes Hilfsmittel: A.S. Hornby, **The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English** (London, ⁵1995)