THE CHANGING NATURE OF ENGLISH IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL HUMANITIES PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF NEP 2020

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Abstract :

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions an education system that is holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible, skill-oriented, and responsive to the changing demands of the digital age. The rapid growth of digital technology has significantly transformed the nature, use, and functions of the English language. Social media platforms, online learning, digital journalism, blogs, podcasts, artificial intelligence, and other digital spaces have created new forms of communication and contributed to the emergence of evolving linguistic practices. The study argues that digital platforms—social media, messaging applications, and AI-driven tools—have enhanced lexical innovation, reshaped grammatical norms, and restructured the relationship between speech and writing. It explores phenomena such as code-switching, abbreviations, emojis, internet slang, multimodal communication, and the emergence of new forms of digital expression.

It argues that English in the digital age is no longer confined to conventional written and spoken forms but functions as a dynamic, flexible, and multimodal medium of global communication. The study suggests humanistic approach to teach English, that combining technological skills with critical thinking, cultural understanding, and responsible communication. English is not only as a means of effective communication but also as a medium for meaningful, global interaction in the digital age.

Key words : code-switching, digital platform, multidisciplinary, technological skills, social media.

Introduction :

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a transformative, technology-enabled, and multilingual education ecosystem that balances global competence with India's linguistic diversity. Within this framework, English occupies a complex and evolving position. It is a language that provides global opportunities, plays an important role in digital communication, and is taught alongside mother tongues and regional languages. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a significant shift in India's approach to language

education, and its idea has particular relevance to how English is taught, learned, and used in an increasingly digital world. It doesn't look at English merely as a subject or a skill for an employment but it has different approach which develops learners intellectually, socially, culturally and ethically. English has always been a changing language, but technology has accelerated this process dramatically in the digital age. From social media posts to programming languages, English is present throughout the online world and continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace.

The digital revolution has made English an important part of everyday life, going beyond its traditional role as an academic subject. Many software programs, coding languages, research papers, AI tools, and online courses such as YouTube tutorials, edX, and Coursera are mainly available in English. NEP 2020 recognizes this importance by encouraging the use of technology in education through platforms such as DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and PM eVidya. It is evident that half of the content on the google or online apps are in English, making it 'default language' of the digital platform. English often serves as a common language that connects people around the world through online learning, digital communication, and web development. At the same time, efforts are being made to provide more learning content in regional languages. Hence English is not just treated as a global language but medium of communication, knowledge, creativity and human connection.

Sociolinguistic Change and Digital Discourse :

Sociolinguistic change in the digital age is characterized by the rapid, platform-mediated evolution of language practices that challenge traditional norms of variation, dissemination, and standardization. Technology has created a new form of communication that can be called Digital English. Digital discourses comprise of - social media, messaging apps, and online forums- working as language laboratories where buzzwords, abbreviations, emojis, and memes emerge, circulate, and stabilize at extraordinary speed. It is marked by the use of new words, slang, hashtags, and popular online expressions. People also use short sentences, informal grammar, and GIFs to communicate quickly. These changes are influenced not only by technology but also by the language of younger generations, cultural diversity, and new ways of expressing ideas and emotions online.

Recent studies based on language data from 2025–2026 shows that platforms such as TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram are contributing to several changes in English at the same time. These include the creation of new words and expressions such as *fr*, *bestie*, and *delulu*, changes in the meaning of words such as *slay* and *cringe*, and informal spellings such as *tryna*, *cuz*, and *ion*. These innovations serve the dual purpose of facilitating effortless communication and establishing the user's identity through digital linguistic practices, particularly among the younger generation marks cultural hybridity and generational nuisances. Significantly, it highlights – as a character limits, algorithmic visibility, and the rapid spread of memes influence how language is used and developed online. Through defining, discussing, and correcting meanings, digital communities create and maintain new language norms. Therefore, digital language should not be viewed as a decline in language

use. Instead, it shows creativity, adaptability, and flexibility. Emojis, hashtags, and GIFs also play an important role in expressing emotions, opinions, attitudes, and relationships in digital communication.

Cultural Hybridity :

Code-switching and translanguaging in digital English show how multilingual users express their mixed and changing identities. On platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok, users often switch between English and their local languages depending on the situation. English is commonly used to present a professional image, connect with a global audience, and appear credible, while local languages help users express their cultural identity and connect with local communities.

Multimodal communication :

Emojis, memes, and hashtags add meaning beyond written words by combining visual, symbolic, and linguistic elements. Emojis are not simply decorative; they play an important role in communication and work together with text, images, videos, and GIFs to convey meaning. They help express emotions, provide context, and represent facial expressions and gestures that are often missing in text-based communication. In crisis discourse (e.g., natural disasters, political upheaval), emojis enable emotional expression, modify tone, emphasize key messages, and provide referential cues, with repetition heightening emotional intensity and fostering collective experience. Memes combine images and text to communicate cultural ideas in creative ways. They use humour, irony, and visual elements to express opinions, ideas, and social or political messages. This often helps people form groups, express their identities, and build a sense of community, while sometimes making it difficult for outsiders to understand the meaning.

AI tools and language diffusion :

In the digital age, algorithms and AI tools play an important role in shaping language. They influence words and forms of communication, become more visible, widely used, and accepted as new language norms. Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) are also influencing the way people communicate and write. AI-generated writing is often more formal, organized, and positive than everyday human writing. Certain words and expressions frequently used by AI, such as *delve*, *comprehend*, and *boast*, are now appearing more often in human writing and speech. This shows that AI is not only reflecting changes in language but is also helping to shape them. As people increasingly use and share AI-generated content on platforms such as podcasts and YouTube, AI and human communication influence each other. In this way, technology and AI are becoming important forces in the development of language in the digital age**.**

Code-Switching and Mixing Languages in Indian Digital Communication :

Indian students often mix English with their mother tongue or regional language while

communicating on social media and messaging apps. For example, a student may write, "*Kal assignment submit karna hai, so please mujhe notes send kar dena."* Here, English words such as *assignment*, *submit*, *please*, *notes*, and *send* are mixed with Hindi. Similarly, a Marathi-speaking student might write, *"Aaj lecture la yeshil ka? We have an important presentation."* Such language mixing makes communication informal, quick, and natural. It also reflects the multilingual nature of Indian society and shows how students use different languages together to express their ideas, emotions, and identities in digital spaces. Mixing English with Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Bengali, etc., reflects India's rich multilingual and multicultural identity. People change their language according to the person, group, or situation they are communicating with. Friends may use informal mixed language, while formal communication may use standard English. Social media, WhatsApp, Instagram, and other platforms encourage short, informal, and creative forms of multilingual communication. Code mixing is multidimensional practice in which young generation (Gen Z's) build connections, maintain cultural identities, and become a part of digital world.

The role of technology in modern language fluency :

India's mission is to integrate technology in education as stated in the document 'The National Education Policy - 2020'. The NEP-2020 broadly talks about digitising education and its implications with key initiative on accessibility, equity and affordability. The leading initiatives like *PM e-VIDYA, DIKSHA, SWAYAM, and the National Digital Library,* NEP 2020 seeks to create a "One Nation, One Digital Education Infrastructure" that delivers inclusive, technology-enabled learning to students across urban and rural India. For language education specifically, NEP 2020 envisions technology not as a replacement for human interaction but as an enabler of *blended learning, digital literacy, and critical engagement* with diverse linguistic and cultural content. By integrating ICT tools, AI-driven platforms, and virtual labs into curricula, the policy aims to prepare learners for 21st-century communication effectively.

- **AI-based learning tools** can personalize English instruction, adapting to a student's pace and proficiency level.
- **Speech recognition and translation apps** help bridge the gap between regional languages and English, supporting the policy's multilingual vision without disadvantaging students unfamiliar with English.
- **Virtual classrooms and digital content** allow rural and underserved students access to quality English instruction previously limited to urban, English-medium schools.
- **Gamified and adaptive learning platforms** make English acquisition more engaging, especially for young learners.

Bridging the Digital and Linguistic Divide :

One of NEP 2020's core concerns is equity. In the digital age, English Proficiency often determines who can access the best online resources, employment opportunities, and higher education platforms. To reduce this gap, the policy promotes bilingual and

multilingual digital content and encourages teachers to use blended learning methods. In this way, English can become a bridge to digital opportunities rather than a barrier to access.

Challenges Ahead :

Despite the vision, ground realities pose challenges like uneven digital infrastructure, teacher preparedness for tech-integrated English instruction, and the risk of widening urban-rural gaps if implementation is uneven. Balancing mother-tongue-based early education with the practical demand for English fluency remains a delicate task.

Conclusion :

The digital age has changed English in many ways, making it more flexible, creative, and influenced by technology. New forms of communication, multilingual practices, social media, and artificial intelligence are shaping how English is used and understood. NEP 2020 provides an important framework for responding to these changes by promoting multilingualism, digital literacy, Indian Knowledge Systems, and the use of technology in education. A human-centred approach to English teaching should therefore combine language skills with critical thinking, cultural awareness, creativity, and ethical communication. By following the vision of NEP 2020, English education can support digital learning while respecting India's rich linguistic and cultural diversity.

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