

**INDIAN ENGLISH: LINGUISTIC AND SOCIAL
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E mail: negirasmita@yahoo.co.in**Introduction:**

English has come to stay in India for over four centuries now, when the British East India Company started trading and English missionaries first began their efforts. A large number of Christian schools imparting an English education were set up by the early 1800's. The process of producing English-knowing bilinguals in India began with the epoch making Minute of 1835, which officially endorsed Macaulay's goal of forming *a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect* (Kachru 1983, p. 22). English gained the status of the associate official language of India by the early twentieth century. The rising of the nationalist movement in the 1920's brought some anti-English sentiment with it- even though the movement itself used English as its medium.

When India got independence and with it the English also left, the perception of English as having an alien power base changed; however, the controversy about English has continued to this day. Kachru notes that *English now has national and international functions that are both distinct and complementary. English has thus acquired a new power base and a new elitism* (Kachru 1986, p. 12). Only about four percent of India's population uses English, but they are the individuals who lead India's economic, industrial, professional, political, and social life. Even though English is primarily a second language for these persons, it is the medium in which a great number of the interactions in the above domains are carried out. Having such important information moving in English conduits is often not appreciated by Indians who do not speak it, but they are relatively powerless to change that. Its inertia is such that it cannot be easily given up. This is particularly true in South India, where English serves as a universal language in the way that Hindi does in the North. Despite being a three percent minority, the English speaking

population in India is quite large. With India's massive population, that three percent puts India among the top four countries in the world with the highest number of English speakers. English confers many advantages to the influential people who speak it - which has allowed it to retain its prominence despite the strong opposition to English which rises periodically.

Indian English (IE) and its Characteristics:

Indian English is a distinct variety of English spoken by Indians with its own features. Many Indians claim that it is very similar to British English, but this opinion is based on a surface level examination of lexical similarities. Of course, one must keep in mind that not every linguistic item is used by every Indian English speaker and that a great deal of regional and educational differentiation exists. Even so, items can be identified which are indicative of Indian English speech and which are widely used. These operate on various levels: a) phonological, b) morphological, c) lexical, and d) syntactic.

Phonology:

I was able to do very little on the phonological level. I set up a test to see if the English alveolar /t/ would be articulated as the Indian retroflex /t/ or as the dental /t/ in different phonological environments. The result was that the retroflex completely replaced the alveolar; in fact, it has been found that the entire series of English alveolar consonants tends to be replaced by retroflex consonants (Trudgill & Hannah 1994, p.128). One item that did come out of the experiment was that some Indian English speakers had a tendency to drop the -ed ending after /k/ and /t/ (eg: *walked* becomes *walk*).

Some interesting things seemed to be happening with the articulation of /ð/ (as in *then*), which normally is pronounced as an inter dental /d/, but which sometimes seemed to become alveolar. Also, listening to the taped discussions revealed that sometimes *a* was used in front of vowel-initial words before which American English and British English speakers would use *an*. This is a very natural adjustment for native speakers, yet it is apparent that a conscious effort to do this is sometimes required by Indian English speakers. To discover whether or not these observations are significant would require further testing.

Other items listed by Trudgill and Hannah (1994) are that Indian English tends to have a reduced vowel system; /r/ tends to become a flap or retroflex flap; the consonants /p/, /t/, and /k/ tend to be unaspirated; and in some regions, /v/ and /w/ are not distinguished (*volleyball* is the same as *wallyball*), while in others, /p/ and /f/, /t/ and /θ/, /d/ and /ð/, and /s/ and /ʃ/ are not. They also note that *Indian English tends to be syllable rather than stress-timed. Also, syllables that would be unstressed in other varieties of English receive some stress in Indian English and thus do not*

have reduced vowels. Suffixes tend to be stressed, and function words which are weak in other varieties of English (of, to, etc.) tend not to be reduced in Indian English (p. 128).

Morphology:

Indian English morphology is very creative and it is filled with new terms and usages. Indian English uses compound formation extensively, as in *English-speaking* classes or *convent-going* students. The compounds *cousin-brother* and *cousin-sister* allow the Indian English speaker to designate whether their cousin is male or female - a function which is inherent in the terminology of most Indian languages. Others include *chalk-piece*, *key-bunch*, *meeting notice*, *age barred*, and *pin drop silence*. Indians also pluralize many English mass nouns and end up with words such as *litters*, *furnitures*, and *woods* (Trudgill & Hannah, pp. 129-130). Sometimes words which should be pluralized are not; for example, S.Shah says, *One of my relative*. A quintessential Indian English term which comes from compound formation is *time-pass*, which denotes something as non-exciting, as in *That movie was real time-pass*. It can also indicate the act of passing time without a specific purpose or motivation.

Indians also shorten many words to create commonly used terms. Enthusiasm is called *enthu*; as such, it can be used in new ways. One can say, *That guy has a lot of enthu*. While this is simply an abbreviation, *enthu* can also be used as an adjective where enthusiasm cannot, as in *He's a real enthu guy*. The same applies for fundamentals, which is shortened as *fundas*. *She knows her fundas*. What is interesting about *fundas* is that when the -as ending is dropped and -u is added, it takes on a new meaning and can be used in a new way. *Fundu* basically means wonderful or brilliant. One can say *He is a fundu person* or even *He is fundu*.

When bringing Indian words into English, terms such as *roti* (bread), which are already plural, will be pluralized for English by the addition of -s (*rotis*). English suffixes are also appended to Indian terms. An example which was brought up in the first discussion is the practice in Bombay of adding -fy to a Hindi word to indicate that an action is being done to someone by someone. From the Hindi word *muska*, to *muskaify* means to flatter somebody or to butter them up. Similarly, to *pataofy* is the action of wooing someone. Other suffixes such as -ic (Upanishadic), -dom (*cooliedom*), and -ism (*goondaism*) are used to create new usages for Indian terms. Prefixes can also be used in new ways. In Indian English, pre- is substituted for post- in postpone to create *prepone*, which indicates, for example, that a meeting has been moved to a sooner time.

Lexicon:

The Indian English lexicon has many distinct terms which are commonly used by its speakers. Some arise through the use of old and new morphological features, as discussed above. Others come from acronyms and abbreviations. Many terms from Indian languages are utilized and new

usages for English words or expressions are created. It must be noted that many of these terms and usages are specific to the population of Indian English speakers who are currently between twenty and thirty years of age. Examples of the use of acronyms include the following:

ABCD = *American Born Confused Deshi* (native of India)

FOB = *Fresh Off the Boat*

FOC = *Free Of Charge*

ILU = *I Love You* (from a song; pronounced ee-lu)

MCP = *Male Chauvinist Pig*

MPK = *Maine Pyar Kiya* (a popular movie)

QSQT = *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (a popular movie)

FOB is actually used by American-born Indians against Indian-born Indians who come to America and tease them for being ABCD's. Other acronyms stem from entire Hindi sentences. Many abbreviations are used by Indians. For example:

Jan = January

Feb = February

subsi = subsidiary

supli = supplementary

soopri = superintendent

princi = principal

Gen. Sec. or *G. Sec.* = General Secretary

Soc. Sec. = Social Secretary

lab ass = laboratory assistant

ass wardi = assistant warden

What is interesting about Indian English abbreviations is that they are pronounced the way they are spelled after they have been shortened. An American English speaker will generally read an abbreviation as though it were the entire word (i.e. *Sec.* is read as Secretary). Also, American English speakers tend to abbreviate phonetically when spoken abbreviations are used (i.e. *Soc.* is pronounced soash). When read by an Indian English speaker, *Soc. Sec.* is pronounced sock seck. Actually, many English words which are pronounced quite differently than their spelling would indicate are pronounced as they are spelled by many Indians. Vowels which have been dropped by American and British English speakers are typically articulated by Indians. For example, *typically* is generally pronounced ti-pick-lee, but Indian English speakers will often say ti-pick-ah-lee.

New words and new usages of standard words are introduced as well. A *food grinder* is simply called a *mixi*. Jangos are people who are very *maud* (modern) and fashionable - such people could be described as fast (nontraditional and modern). A deadly movie or event is hard-hitting and action-packed. Something which is hi-tech is exceedingly incredible. It is not just limited to technology; for example, one could be wearing a hi-tech outfit. A reception is sometimes called an at home. An illiterate person may be called a thumbs-up because they use their thumbprint to sign documents. For an Indian doing math, two into four means "2 x 4" and six by three or six upon three means "6 3". A square root is known as an under root. Sometimes, a series of words is used to approximate a word which momentarily escapes one's mind. Indian English speakers use *less* to indicate that something is insufficient, e.g. *There is less salt in the curry*. Often this is extended to *too less of*. The extraneous *of* also appears in the expressions *too much of* and *so much of*, e.g. *so much of heat*. It is interesting that it did not come from Hindi or any other Indian language.

Syntax:

Hindi syntax affects Indian English syntax in several ways. There is a seemingly arbitrary use of the articles *a* and *the*, which do not have parallels in Hindi. Often, *one* is substituted for *a*; for example, *And one black lady.... The* and *a* are often dropped when they should be said and used when they should be left out. It is not uncommon to hear something like, *We are going to temple*. Whether or not these apparent misuses are actually arbitrary would require further study. Something which Indian English has that is not found in other varieties of English is the use of *only* and *itself* to emphasize time and place. It comes from the Hindi word *hi* and produces sentences like *I was in Toledo only* and *Can we meet tomorrow itself?* Indian English speakers often use reduplication as a way of emphasizing an action -I have been told before to *Come come! Sit sit!* Reduplication can also replace *very* for intensifying or extending something, as in *hot, hot water* and *long, long hair*. Such usage is common in spoken Hindi. Another thing Indian English speakers do is leave out when giving a range of numbers, e.g. , *...two three languages...* This often expresses exaggeration when larger numbers are used, as in *one hundred, two hundred*.

Certain verbs are used in Indian English in the same way they are used in Hindi. Indians use *kholna* and *bandh karna* when asking someone to turn a light on or off; the literal translation is retained, so some Indian English speakers say *open the light* and *close the light*. The same is true of giving a test (from the Hindi verb *dena*) rather than taking a test. *Take* means consume when used with food and drink items- *Will you take tea?* The verb *lena* is the Hindi equivalent of this. Take another Hindi-based syntactic element, the tag question, e.g. *Yeah, like this guy Gotham felt like when he went back, no?* This use of *no* (and the expression isn't it in the same manner) stems from the use of *na* in Hindi.

Indian English speakers often use certain verbs in ways that are confusing to speakers of other English varieties. *Keep* is used for *put*, so one finds Indians saying things like *keep the ball there* or *keep the ball back* to a person who is still holding the ball. *Leave* replaces *keep*'s lost function of allowing something to remain somewhere. *Put* is often used without an explicit destination or direction, so an Indian might say, *Shall I put the tape?* or, *put an image*.

One of the most indicative signs of Indian English grammar is the use of the *progressive aspect* with habitual actions, completed actions, and stative verbs. This produces sentences such as *I am doing it often* rather than *I do it often*; *Where are you coming from?* instead of *Where have you come from?*; and *She was having many sarees* rather than *She had many sarees* (Trudgill & Hannah, p. 132). The word order of questions is often unique in Indian English. Sentences such as *What you would like to eat?* and *Who you will come with?* show the absence of subject-verb inversion in direct questions.

Another example, *...what is your companion*, in which an inversion does not take place where it should. Another aspect of grammar that is often inconsistent is the use of *also* (a very popular word in Indian English). It can be found in various parts of a sentence, but it tends to be placed at the end, like, *We never even used Hindi word also*.

Indian English (IE) expressions having Hindi influence:

Some items are directly related to characteristics of Indian languages. Indians will often ask, *What is your good name?* which is a somewhat literal translation of *Aapka shubh naam kya hai?* *Shubh* means auspicious or good, and it is basically used as a polite way of asking for someone's full name. An Indian English speaker says *today morning* (*aaaj subha*) or *yesterday night* (*kal raat*) to mean this morning and last night.

Indians also run the risk of offending Americans when they use certain literal translations which have the intended meaning, but which also have offensive connotations, e.g. *Shut up* in Hindi is *chup baithen*, which is generally used more casually (but which can be used offensively as well). Also, Indians commonly use *you people* when they want to address more than one person. They do not realize the belittling, racial connotations that it carries with it - for them it is a simple translation of *aap log* or *tum log*. Hindi terms and expressions used in Indian English.

When Indians use English, it is often a mixture of English, Hindi, and other languages which is called *kichiri*. *Kichiri* is a meal which is composed of several random ingredients - a rather accurate description of the way Indians often talk to one another. Even in *pure* Indian English, many Indian terms slip in frequently. Some expressions such as *general mai* (in general) and *ek minute* (one minute) are prevalent in Indian English. Among the Gujaratis speaking English, expressions like *take care karje* (do take care) are common. These mixtures come quite naturally

when one is acquainted with two or more languages. Similar is the case with Hindi where we use expressions like *awesome mausum* to refer to awesome weather. The use of *nahi* (no) and *kya* (what) is typical of the sorts of ways Hindi terms are employed. Other commonly used Hindi terms and expressions include the following:

achcha = good (in response to a question like *How are you?*)

bahut = a lot (in response to a question like *How many people were there?*)

bus = that's it (

ek = one (as a number)

ghotu = one who reads a lot

hajar (hazar) = a thousand (more than a lot)

ho gaya = done; finished

koi bat nahi = no problem

kya hall hai = how are you

lakh(s) = one-hundred thousand

lekhin = but

masala = risqué; spicy; hot (like a film)

muthlab = meaning

paka = pure

teek hai = okay (lit: it is right)

yaar = buddy; pal

Indian English (IE) vis-a-vis American English (AE):

Indians are very cognizant of the differences between North American English and Indian English. Those who come here find themselves bombarded by new expressions, new terms, and new slang. Often these are simply lexical differences between American English and British English (with which Indian English has more terms in common), but sometimes Indians can be surprised when they try to translate an American English expression into their own languages. There are also many regional stories and jokes about certain individuals who have been to the US and come back talking and acting in a peculiar manner.

Conclusion:

This leads to the question - do Indians appreciate their own English? And the answer to this question is in the affirmative. It has been said that Indians have made English into a native language with its own linguistic and cultural ecologies and sociocultural contexts. It has been indicated that in many ways, Indian English is very much their own. Its special functions have engraved English into the cultural life of India, and it is very much a part of the experience of being Indian - even if one does not speak it. Many Indians feel that the use of English should be

actively encouraged because of the many advantages it confers - the greatest of which is its universal character. The Indian writer and philosopher Raja Rao wrote:

Truth, said a great Indian sage, is not the monopoly of the Sanskrit language. Truth can use any language, and the more universal, the better it is. If metaphysics is India's primary contribution to world civilization, as we believe it is, then must she use the most universal language for her to be universal... And as long as the English language is universal, it will always remain Indian... It would then be correct to say as long as we are Indian - that is, not nationalists, but truly Indians of the Indian psyche - we shall have the English language with us and amongst us, and not as a guest or friend, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and our tradition (quoted in Kachru 1986, p. 12).

Many others fear, perhaps legitimately, the loss of India's native languages. English has changed Indian languages in many ways - mostly through the incorporation of new words. However, the population of English speakers in India, though socially influential, is a small minority compared to the rest. Also, most of these individuals are conversant in at least one, if not two or three, other languages, and unless the situation necessitates English, they usually speak in their native language. It seems that multiple languages can function together when they each have their particular domains of use. The sheer number of speakers of India's native languages more or less insures that they do not face extinction.

English is in a slightly more precarious position. Although it has a strong base in the elite class of India and in the general culture, it could easily fall victim to an anti-English movement - if one ever arose. Public fervor is known to be especially forceful in India, and a skillful leader could use it to create such a movement. Hopefully, this will not happen. Indians have a lot to gain from knowing English, and the world has a lot to gain from Indians knowing English. Some Indians complain that English brings in too much Western thought, but English in India also exports a vast amount of Indian culture and thought to the rest of the world. This increases the diversity of experience that people around the world receive as part of their education. Rather than worrying about whether or not English should be used, people should focus on extending an education to more number of children which allows them to learn and use English, but which also puts a great emphasis on using and understanding their native languages.

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