



INDIAN ENGLISH THROUGH THE YEARS

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ABSTRACT

As a former colony, India is like a basket of surprises in the language sector. Lord Macaulay, who set up the format of English language teaching more as a ‘white man’s burden’ would not recognize how the English language he envisioned in all its etiquette has become a fearsome hydra sprouting new heads at every metaphorical corner. The English spoken in the subcontinent is tremendously oppositional in a way. The old-school format of English is still taught in schools and universities. However, everyday English encompasses specific regional and cultural words and bastardizes them into an accepted language mode. The theory here is that the conventional rules are not necessarily applicable as long as it is understood. When we speak of ‘standing on the shoulders of giants, we refer to the legacy inherited from our ancestors. We necessarily build, blend, and evolve as we go on. This article aims to delve into the fascinating journey of the English language highlighting its transformation into the Indian version through the years.

Keywords: English Language, Indian English, Dialect, Variation, Acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

Everything changes, and language is one of the first things that begins the change and becomes the new normal. The English, the British colonists, taught is an archaic skeleton at best and has been fleshed out with a more global appropriation and turn of phrase. Every year, more and more ‘Indianisms’ make it into dictionaries as official vocabulary and are assimilated from throughout the vast country, whether it is the exclamatory “Aiyyo” or the more local parlance

“Jugaad”, meaning a stopgap solution. English has a special status in India. Apart from having a place in the public institutions of the country, in parliament, the law courts, broadcasting, the press, and the education system, English has spread in our daily lives. English plays a crucial role in professional relationships between foreign and Indian companies. Fluency in English symbolises in Indian minds better education, better culture, and higher intellect. This can be a remnant of colonisation, as Ahmad (2000, p. 75) states: “Only the literary document produced in English is a national document; all else is regional, hence minor and forgettable so that English emerges in this imagination not as one of [the nation’s] languages but as the language of national integration and bourgeois civility.” Only 4% of Indians use English. Thus, India ranks third in the world after the USA and the UK to use English as a spoken language. Indian English comprises several dialects or varieties of English spoken primarily in India. The ability to speak many regional languages sometimes hinders actually ‘thinking in English.’ Sometimes, the ideas to be conveyed are literal translations that are not grammatically correct in the English-speaking context. Added to the regional accents, which colour how English is spoken, it can be challenging to comprehend. Indians tend to emphasise every single syllable. The evolution of English in India is a fascinating journey that reflects the historical, cultural, and linguistic interactions between Britain and the Indian subcontinent.

Early Influences

- **Pre-British Era:** Even before the British Raj, South Asian words from Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, and Tamil had already made their way into foreign tongues. Words like "loot," "nirvana," "pajamas," "shampoo," and "shawl" were part of everyday English.
- **Ancient Routes:** Some words entered English through ancient trade routes. For instance, "ginger," "pepper," and "indigo" reflect early Greek and Roman trade with India and travelled through Greek, Latin, Old French, and Old English. These words became global commodities.
- **Portuguese Influence:** As global trade expanded, many Indian words entered English via Portuguese. For example, "mango" and "curry" came to us through Portuguese, with "Mangai" originating from Malayalam and Tamil. ‘Brinjal’ or aubergines, as the rest of the world knows, has its etymology from the Portuguese ‘Berinjala’ and was brought by traders to the tropics. The seeds were both crossing continents, and the seeds of languages were also crossing.
- **Hobson-Jobson:** The Definitive Glossary of British India. This landmark book, compiled by Henry Yule and Arthur C. Burnell in 1886, records the etymology of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and phrases. It reveals that some words pre-date British rule and have diverse origins. For instance:
 - **Ayah:** Originally a Portuguese word meaning "governess" or "nurse," it was absorbed into Indian languages and then entered English. It has primarily South Asian connotations because a similar person in European circles would be a nanny or governess. So, it is assumed that the reference is only for South Asian colonies and almost primarily refers to native people employed in such positions.
 - **Chilly:** The popular Anglo-Indian name for the pod of red pepper. Surprisingly, chillies were

not native to India but were a trade import from South America and Mexico. Nowadays, chillies are almost synonymous with Indian cuisine.

Post-British Rule:

- **Indian English:** Over time, English in India evolved into distinct variants. These variants incorporated pronunciation, grammar, and semantics features from native Indian languages. Collectively, they form what we refer to as "Indian English."
- **Language of the Elite:** Since India's independence in 1947, English has remained the language of the educated elite, higher education (primarily legal and technical terms), business, government, and academia.

Synchronic Studies:

Synchronic studies focus on examining a language "at a specific point in time". Instead of considering historical changes, synchronic analysis explores the language's structure, function, and features as they exist in the present moment.

Example: If we analyze the current state of Indian English—its vocabulary, grammar, and usage patterns—we are adopting a synchronic approach. This snapshot captures the language as it stands today.

Diachronic Studies:

Diachronic studies, on the other hand, investigate language "over time". These studies track the historical development and evolution of a language, observing how it changes across different periods.

Example: Suppose we examine Old English in England, tracing its transformation into Middle English and eventually Modern English. This historical perspective falls under diachronic analysis.

Indian English (IndE):

IndE is considered "the oldest 'non-native' variety of the English language" and holds significance both in terms of the number of speakers and its global impact. Despite its prominence, historical descriptions of IndE have been scarce. Researchers have called for more diachronic research to understand its evolution. While diachronic studies have started to emerge, much of the work on language change in IndE has relied on synchronic data. Comparisons between contemporary genres and styles provide insights into ongoing linguistic shifts.

In summary, synchronic studies capture the language at a specific moment, while diachronic studies explore its historical trajectory. Both perspectives contribute to our understanding of Indian English's rich linguistic journey. Indian English has developed a fascinating array of dialects, influenced by the diverse linguistic landscape of the country. Let's explore some of these regional and occupational variations:

1. **Malayali English:** Spoken in Kerala, this dialect reflects the influence of Malayalam. It may differ significantly in phonology and vocabulary.
2. **Telugu English:** This language, found in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, blends English with Telugu expressions and idioms.
3. **Maharashtrian English:** Associated with Maharashtra, it incorporates Marathi elements. The phonetic features may diverge from standard English.
4. **Punjabi English:** Common in Punjab, it combines English with Punjabi words and intonation patterns.
5. **Bengali English:** Influenced by Bengali, this dialect is prevalent in West Bengal and Bangladesh.
6. **Hindi English (Hinglish):** A dynamic blend of British English and Hindi, Hinglish freely switches between the two languages within or between sentences.
7. **Butler English (Bearer English):** Originally an occupational dialect among servants during the Madras Presidency, it has evolved. It is now associated more with social class than occupation. Notable features include using the present participle for future indicative and unique preterit forms.
8. **Babu English:** Originating from clerks in pre-partition Bengal, Babu English was characterized by ornate, excessively polite, and indirect expressions. It has extended beyond clerks and can be found in various social circles.
9. **Bazaar English:** A lesser-known dialect, it likely emerged from interactions in marketplaces and trade. This is more of trade communications without any emphasis on grammar or vocabulary. The pertinent words are sufficient for interaction.
10. **Code-Mixed Varieties:** India's linguistic diversity leads to code-mixing, where English blends with regional languages. These hybrid forms are prevalent in everyday conversations. English is a stress-timed language; syllable and word stress, where only certain words in a sentence or phrase are stressed, are essential features of Received Pronunciation. Indian native languages are syllable-timed languages, like Latin and French. Indian-English speakers usually speak with a syllabic rhythm. Further, in some Indian languages, stress is associated with a low pitch, whereas in most English dialects, stressed syllables are generally pronounced with a higher pitch. Thus, when some Indian speakers speak, they appear to put the stress accents at the wrong syllables or accentuate all the syllables of a long English word. Certain Indian accents are of a "sing-song" nature, a feature seen in a few English dialects in Britain, such as Scouse and Welsh English.

Scholarly differences between Indian English and British English can be pretty evident. Indian English, a vibrant dialect with its quirks and characteristics, deviates from British English in several key areas:

Phonology (Pronunciation):

- **Rhoticity:** Unlike British non-rhotic accents (dropping the "r" sound), Indian English is generally rhotic, pronouncing the "r" clearly. (e.g., "car" vs. "caah")

- **Retroflexion:** Influenced by Dravidian languages, Indian English features retroflex consonants not present in British English. (e.g., the "d" sound in "daughter")
- **Vowel Sounds:** Indian English may have different vowel qualities, particularly diphthongs (combinations of two vowel sounds). (e.g., the "ou" sound in "house")
- **Stress and Rhythm:** Syllable-timed rhythm is more common in Indian English, contrasting with the stress-timed rhythm of British English. (This means all syllables are given roughly equal emphasis in Indian English.)

Grammar:

- **Subject-Verb Agreement:** Indian English may show relaxed agreement, especially with collective nouns treated as singular (e.g., "The team has decided").
- **Articles:** The definite article "the" might be omitted before proper nouns in informal contexts. (e.g., "I am going to see doctor.")
- **Tense Usage:** The present continuous tense may be used for future events, influenced by some Indian languages.
- **Indirect Speech:** Reported speech may not always follow the sequence of tenses seen in British English.

Vocabulary:

- **Indianisms:** Words and phrases specific to the Indian context, often derived from Indian languages (e.g., "rupee," "chai")
- **American Influences:** Globalization and media exposure lead to some American vocabulary usage in Indian English (e.g., "apartment" instead of "flat")
- **Formal Register:** The formal register of Indian English may retain some archaic British terms no longer common in Britain itself (e.g., "lift" instead of "elevator").
- **Code-Mixing and Switching:** Indian English is known for its code-mixing (using elements from two languages within the same sentence) and code-switching (shifting between languages) with various Indian languages.

Indian English is a valid and dynamic dialect, not a corrupted form of British English. It reflects the unique linguistic heritage of India and continues to evolve in the modern world. English has played a role in India's upward mobility, but it is a complex story with both positive and negative aspects.

The Positive Impacts

- **Global Integration:** English fluency has allowed India to participate more actively in the global economy, attracting foreign investment and boosting trade.
- **IT Sector:** English skills are crucial for the IT industry, and a major driver of India's economic growth and job creation.

- **Education:** Access to English-medium education opens doors to Western scientific literature, research, and global educational resources.
- **Social Mobility:** For some, fluency in English translates to better job opportunities, particularly in white-collar professions, leading to upward mobility.

The Negative Impacts

- **Unequal Access:** The emphasis on English can disadvantage those without access to quality English-medium education, creating an uneven playing field.
- **Linguistic Diversity:** Over-reliance on English might threaten the vitality of India's rich tapestry of regional languages.
- **Social Stratification:** English fluency can become associated with higher social status, potentially creating divisions within society.

English has been a significant factor in India's economic growth but is not the sole driver. The benefits have not been evenly distributed, and concerns about its impact on linguistic diversity exist. English proficiency can be a tool for upward mobility, but it should not come at the cost of neglecting India's unique linguistic heritage.

Language acquisition, the remarkable process by which humans develop the ability to understand and produce a language, is not a linear progression but a complex interplay of various factors. Suppose we delve into language skill coalescence, where diverse language abilities – phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics – combine to form a cohesive and functional whole. In that case, we will find that Indian English has evolved like a statue laden randomly and thickly with jewels beyond the original scope of jewel-wearing. It is understandable only to one born and raised on the sub-continent. This dialect evolved due to the British colonial rule of India for nearly two hundred years. English is the co-official language of India, which has the world's largest English-speaking population. After Hindi, English is the most spoken language in India. However, Indians usually mingle in English with other Indian languages. The stylistic influence of Indian local languages is a particular feature of Indian literature in English. Indian English speakers often mix Hindi and other languages with English. There is also a tendency to translate the regional language directly into English, which sometimes is grammatically awkward but is easily understood by the native speaker in the circumstances. It is also fascinating to note that certain words are so constantly misspelt and mispronounced that a new avatar has risen and is used in its stead—for example: 'auntie' instead of aunt and 'cheater', meaning a person who cheats. If one were to say 'cheat' as a noun, understanding it would only be that of a verb. So, how do these language skills coalesce? It can be termed as a Symphony of Input, Interaction, and Internalization.

Input: The cornerstone of language development is exposure to language or input. This encompasses spoken language (conversations, stories, songs) and written language (books, articles, signs). Through input, learners encounter the building blocks of language—sounds, words, sentence structures, and communication patterns. In Indian English, however, academic English traces a parabola of sorts because the apex of English education is sandwiched between an environment teeming with diverse languages and a tendency to translate local languages into English.

Interaction: Input alone is not sufficient for language acquisition. Learners require opportunities to interact with language, putting their burgeoning skills into practice. This includes conversations, dialogues, discussions, and even self-talk. Interaction allows learners to test their understanding, receive feedback, and refine their language use. In India, even the most backward regions have appropriated commonly used English words and phrases from interaction.

Internalization: The magic of language acquisition lies in internalization – the process by which learners take in language input, make sense of it and store it in their mental lexicon. This involves unconscious processing, pattern recognition, and the development of mental representations of language rules. The plethora of Indian languages has made most Indians quickly pick up languages and the rules primarily by speaking. Over time and with growing confidence, the words and sentences come more accurately and efficiently.

Coalescence, an image borrowed from merging separate entities into a unified whole, aptly describes how various language skills come together. Let us explore how this plays out with each essential area:

Phonology: As learners receive input, they begin to distinguish and categorize the sounds of a language. They refine their pronunciation and prosody through interaction (speaking and listening). Internalization allows the mapping of sounds to symbols and the development of a mental inventory of phonemes (distinctive sounds). With the advent of television, social media, and the usage of English in local cinema, for example, the pronunciation and understanding of correct usage are more accessible and more widespread.

Morphology: Input exposes learners to the units of meaning within words – morphemes (prefixes, suffixes, roots). Through interaction, they experiment with word formation and analyze how morphemes combine to create new meanings. Internalization enables learners to understand and manipulate morphological rules, building an active vocabulary. Indian English, with its tendency to omit articles or simplify verb conjugations in informal contexts, has influenced a more relaxed style of global English, particularly in online communication.

Syntax: Input gives learners a window into how words are arranged to form sentences. Interaction allows them to practice sentence formation and participate in dialogues demonstrating grammatical structures. Internalization leads to developing an implicit understanding of syntax, enabling them to combine words into grammatically correct sentences. Most educational institutions teach some level of English so the students are aware of the grammar, etc., even if it is not a completely immersive experience.

Semantics: Input acquaints learners with the meaning of words and phrases. Through interaction, they learn how to use language to express ideas, ask questions, and convey information. Internalization allows them to build a mental dictionary, associating words with concepts and understanding how meaning is constructed in context.

Pragmatics: Input provides examples of how language is used in different contexts for various communicative purposes. Interaction allows learners to practice using language appropriately in social situations. Internalization fosters the development of pragmatic competence – the ability to use language effectively in different contexts, considering the audience and purpose.

Coalescence is a dynamic process influenced by individual differences. Learners acquire language at different paces and may possess strengths in some areas while needing more support in others. Cognitive abilities, learning styles, and exposure to diverse language environments all play a role. Being exposed to English that is formally correct puts into place language skills that can be built on. In the coming years, a host of different platforms and skill sets will enable more fluency of thought that translates to correct speech.

CONCLUSION

Formal education can promote language skill coalescence by providing structured input, interaction opportunities, and internalisation scaffolding. However, informal learning environments like conversations, media exposure, and immersion experiences contribute significantly.

Language skill coalescence is a beautiful and complex process akin to an orchestra where various sections (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) work together to create a unified and harmonious whole. By understanding the interplay of input, interaction, internalization, and individual factors, we can better support learners as they develop their unique linguistic abilities and build a strong foundation for lifelong language learning. Indian English, lacking the solid regional accents of some native English speakers, can serve as a more neutral accent for global communication, promoting wider intelligibility.

In summary, Indian English is a rich "network of varieties" shaped by historical, cultural, and linguistic factors. Each dialect reflects a unique sociolinguistic background and contributes to the colourful tapestry of Indian linguistic expression. In summary, the journey of English in India is a rich tapestry woven with words, cultural exchanges, and historical connections. It continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic relationship between two diverse yet interconnected worlds.

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