

International Journal of Language, Translation and Intercultural Communication

Vol 1 (2012)

Special Issue: Varieties of English



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doi: [10.12681/ijltic.13](https://doi.org/10.12681/ijltic.13)

To cite this article:

Bhaya Nair, R. (2012). Bringing English into the 21st century: A view from India. *International Journal of Language, Translation and Intercultural Communication*, 1, 103–122. <https://doi.org/10.12681/ijltic.13>

Bringing English into the 21st century: A view from India

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Abstract

English in India has had an extended and elite colonial history. It was the dominant language of governance in the 19th and 20th centuries till India became independent and a new set of language policies came into being. This paper traces the narrative of English on the Indian subcontinent from its genesis as a foreign and imperial tongue to its acceptance and 'democratization' as one amongst the many languages of India. It is emphasized that English in India has always existed in a vibrant multilingual environment and that the emergence of Indian English as a 'world' variety owes much to this fact. A detailed analysis of the lexicon, grammar and pragmatics of the English spoken today in urban India especially by India's youth who comprise over 65% of India's population is undertaken in the paper with a view to demonstrating that radical and striking shifts in attitudes toward English in India have occurred over the last few decades of economic liberalization and technological growth. Yet, the timeline created in this paper also shows that many of the paradoxes and dilemmas that attended English from its inception in India have not quite been banished. Rather, they have taken on new, acutely self-reflexive and challenging forms that will require a radical reassessment in the 21st century.

Keywords: English, Colonial/Postcolonial, India, Multilingualism, Self-reflexivity, Youth

1. Introduction: 'English has become an Indian language'

If India was the 'jewel in the crown' of the British empire, the English language, equally, is the beguiling jewel that the British left behind when they finally exited India in 1947. Since then, generations of Indians have argued over the value and worth of English in the context of India. This essay will examine some of these arguments, focusing on the cultural transformations that the English language has both wrought and undergone on the Indian subcontinent over the last 200 years. It will also seek to engage with that maddeningly insoluble conundrum which all observers of the phenomenon of English confront from time to time, namely, to predict the 'global' future of the language from fragments of local evidence. I now initiate this enquiry into English as a postcolonial tongue in contemporary India by referring to the leading Indian English writer Salman Rushdie:

English has become an Indian language. Its colonial origins mean that...it has no regional base; but in all other ways, it has come to stay.
(Rushdie and West, 1997: xii)

To reframe the speculation about the global role of English in the 21st century viewed through the lens of the local, we might now take our cue from Rushdie and ask: What does it mean to say that 'English has become an Indian language'? Conversely, we can enquire whether 'Indian English', formed out of a complex relationship with the other languages of India, has now become 'a global tongue', given that India has the largest number of speakers of English (more than 350 million, with approximately another 100 million in Pakistan) after the United States, if second-language users are counted. These questions will be addressed in the sections that follow.

2. Reading and Methodology: Mapping English

In attempting to answer the mammoth questions posed above, I shall not place my observations within any specified theory of 'world Englishes' since there are still many unresolved differences between them; however, I shall draw on their insights throughout. Kachru (1983), for example, has long argued for a language map of English that ripples outwards in circles from the core 'native speaker' areas to peripheral 'non-native speaker' areas such as India and Caribbean while Chandran (2011) suggests, contra Kachru, that Indian English varieties in fact offer evidence of irregular 'eccentric' transformations rather than concentric expansion. Jenkins (2006) helpfully provides a 'resource guide' of the key terms required for a study of 'world Englishes' and in the same year Crystal maintains that the current e-technologies are changing the grammar of 'global English' so dramatically that we shall have to devise new grammatical paradigms and may not be able to rely on the old key-terms anymore.

In addition to these general models, English in India has been diachronically described from time-to-time in a fairly thorough-going fashion (Yule and Burnell, 1928; Nihalani. Tongue and Hosali 1971; Hankin, 1992; Mehrotra, 1998). Ch'ien (2004) specifically examines the linguistic features of the 'weird English' constructed for literary purposes from the 1980s on by Indian English writers such as Rushdie and Roy. Finally Graddol (2010), Raghavan (2010) and Meganathan (2011) have each recently produced excellent profiles of English in contemporary India. Of these, Raghavan's unpublished 2010 study forms, at the time of writing, the main basis of the Wikipedia entry on 'Indian English'. The entry provides a detailed account of the phonology, intonation patterns, morphology, vocabulary, syntax of Indian English, as well as its regional variations and is recommended to all those who wish to get the 'feel' of this language variety. *Graddol's English Next: India*, also available on the Internet, gives us a clear, accessible demographic profile and coherent description of the uses and users of English in 21st century India while Meganathan's analysis lays out, amply supported by official statistics, the language policies adopted by the Indian state with special reference to the role of English.

To simply replicate the huge mine of linguistic information on English in India, some of which is referenced above, appears to me redundant. My method in this essay, consequently, will be to:

- i. Trace, via a narrative timeline, the history of English in India as it has interacted with the other languages of the subcontinent using, wherever possible, actual quotations from the main players in the 'great English language debate' from Macaulay in the 19th century to Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, in the 21st. I adopt this strategy because of the passionate involvement of the architects of the Indian state in questions of language (Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru) (Nair, 2002).
- ii. Examine public attitudes towards English in India not so much through facts and figures since these are already copiously available in the sources quoted but rather via a few illustrative cartoons that demonstrate the self-reflexive and ironic stances that Indians hold towards English (Nair, 2009, 2011).
- iii. Adopt a 'case-study' approach, instead of simply providing lists of typical idioms and usage since this has been done very competently before (see especially, Nihalani and Tongue, 1987; Puri, 2008; Raghavan, 2010 and Graddol, 2012), illustrating my argument with examples from my own research (Nair, 1992, 1997, 2008 etc.).

Finally, I end with some brief speculations on the 'future of English' based on current evidence from the Indian subcontinent. These remarks bring me to my next section, entitled:

3. A Narrative Time-line: English

The Indian subcontinent has had an extraordinary tradition of linguistic pluralism. India is currently thought to be home to about 865 of the world's estimated 6000-odd spoken tongues, a figure of one-sixth which happens to roughly correspond to India's share of the world population. While it is important to note that these counts, usually based on interpretations of census data, vary, even the most conservative estimate gives us about 325 spoken languages (Singh, 1992), of which 22 have the status of 'official languages'. India's languages, moreover, belong to four different language families (Australasian, Dravidian, Indo-European and Tibeto-Burman). English in India has thus always existed in the most fecund of sociolinguistic environments and its many sub-varieties on the subcontinent have been significantly shaped by its long-term interaction with several Indian languages and literatures. No evaluation of the role of English in India can be undertaken without first underscoring this basic fact, which had an effect on the narrative of English in India from its very inception, as the timeline below shows.

3.1 Pre-colonial and Colonial India 1786-1946: 'Why Talk English at all?'

This section suggests that the spread of English in India did not by any means occur in a vacuum. Political and technological developments provided the often

tumultuous narrative context in which English took root. Simultaneously, innovations in the Indian languages were stimulated by English. The import of the genre of the English novel, for example, influenced writers in other Indian languages to write novels for the first time in their own languages while communication technologies such as the post, telegraph and railways carried English to remote corners of India and academic discussions furthered its role in governance.



Cartoon from Punch: The 'Jewel in the Crown', India, is in the foreground

1786: William Jones delivered his 'Third Annual Discourse' before the Asiatic Society in Calcutta (published in 1788), arguing that English and the European language were related 'in antiquity' to Sanskrit. Not only did this hypothesis profoundly influence the study of historical and comparative linguistics, it also ensured that, in future discussions, the fate of English would be conceptually linked to the languages of India.

1818-1835: A series of Parliamentary debates lasting nearly fifteen years took place in England on how India was to be governed - and in what language. The doctrine of Orientalism suggested that things should be left as they were. Evangelism, sought to "bring the Christian West to the East and India will reform herself as a flower turns to the sun." Utilitarianism not only consisted of a belief in the doctrine of free trade but an equally passionate faith in "the superiority of the Western world and in its indefinite progress with the release of the principle of reason as the mainspring of development. All other civilizations were static or in decay" (Spear, 1965: 120-121)

1853: Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' firmly established Utilitarianism as the 'winner' in the debate on Indian governance and the English language as the prime medium of instruction designed to produce "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." (Macaulay, 1935: 116)

1857: A key date in colonial history was the year of the Sepoy Mutiny now known as the 'First War of Indian Independence'. Ironically, this was also the year of the establishment of the Indian Universities Act, instituting the first full-fledged universities in Calcutta, Bombay, Lahore, Allahabad and Madras. The main language of instruction at these universities was to be English - and remains so to this day in these and almost all other prestigious Indian institutions and universities of higher learning.

1858: As a direct consequence of the 'Mutiny', the Crown took over from the East India Company and the Empire was officially established.

1864: The first Indian novel in English, *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, was serialized. This same year, immense damage was reaped by a **cyclone** in Bengal with 50,000 lives being lost. The East Indian **railway system** from Calcutta to Delhi was completed and the Post office in Calcutta built on the alleged site of the 'Black Hole'.

1882: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay published his revolutionary, nationalist novel *Anandamath* but this time he wrote in **Bengali**, and his song *Vande Mataram* (a part of the novel) became a clarion call for anti-imperial forces. Lala Srinivas Das also wrote the first Hindi novel, *Pariksha Guru*. The Bombay, Calcutta and Madras **telephone-exchanges** were established. A.O Hume, retired ICS officer, started up a society for 'educated' Indians (educated in English of course) which later (1923-25) becomes the Indian National Congress, the main anti-imperialist party.

All in all, it should be noted that the 19th century British encounter with India was marked by a degree of mutual sensitivity to the linguistic and literary dimensions of cultural contact. For instance, a plethora of bilingual dictionaries appeared during this period many of which forged useful links between English and the Indian languages. Yet, the goal of establishing the 'superiority' of English was also paramount as the following verse demonstrates:

To Dufterkhana, Ottor, Tanks

The English language owes no thanks;

Since Office, Essence, Fish-pond shew

We need not words so harsh and new. (Anonymous in Kincaid, 1938: p 161)

In these lines, the very sound of native speech ("harsh and new") is anathematized. This is an attitude towards the languages of India that is in fact found from William James on; for Jones, too, wonders why the western world considers "the Asiatick languages...inharmonious and inelegant." (Jones, Vol. 12: p 343) Thus, postcolonial theory today might suggest that a particular 'ideology of language' was being constructed from very early on in British India which would ultimately install English as the prime language of smooth intellectual discourse. By the early 20th century, a major policy initiative had been initiated in this direction by the British government, the task being to describe the grammars of the languages of India using western grammatical categories as a benchmark. Back to our timeline:

1903: The first volume of Grierson's *The Linguistic Survey of India*: is published, the entire 11 Vols. in 19 parts being brought out between 1903-1928. In quite another corner of the world, Mahatma Gandhi began the publication of *Indian Opinion*, a journal which used the English language to convey the opinions of local Gujaratis to imperial South Africans.

1908: Kipling gets the Nobel Prize for *Kim* and Gandhi writes *Hind Swaraj* (Home Rule), an extremely trenchant critique of British rule, in Gujarati. The tract includes Gandhi's views on the English language:

To give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid for education has enslaved us. I do not suggest that he has any such intention, but that this been the result. Is it not a sad commentary that we should have to speak of Home

Rule in a foreign tongue?...We write to each other in faulty English... our best thoughts are expressed in English, the proceedings of our Congress are conducted in English; our best newspapers are printed in English...I think that we have to improve all our languages... Those English books which are valuable, we should translate into the various Indian languages. ('Education', Chapter XVIII)

1915: Tagore, who had received the Nobel Prize in 1913, championed by WB Yeats for his **Bengali** sequence of poems, *Gitanjali*, translated into English by himself, mounts a strong critique of English education: "When I intently ponder over the spread of education, the main obstacle seems to be the fact that its carrier is English..." (Tagore in Bhattacharya, 2009: 39)

1928: *Hobson Jobson*, a comprehensive lexicon of 'Anglo-Indian' usage still in print today, is published. The same year the important Motilal Nehru Commission Report on language policy is also published. An extract:

It is well recognized that rapid progress in education as well as in general culture and in most departments of life depends on language. If a foreign language is the medium of instruction, business and affairs and the life of the country must necessarily be stunted... [But] We are certainly not against the use of English. Indeed from the necessities of the situation we feel that English must, as at present, continue for some time to come...(2005; online reference cited)

1942: The 'Quit India' movement is launched.

1945-46 E.M. Forster visits in India. He writes:

It was a dull, cold Friday morning in October 1945 when I left England. Two days later, I was in India...The Indians I met mostly talked English. Some of them spoke very well, and one or two of them write in our language with great distinction. But English, though more widely spoken than on my last visit, is worse spoken, more mistakes are made in it and the pronunciation is deteriorating. 'Perpendicule' for 'perpendicular' and 'pip' into my office for 'pop'... Why talk English at all? This question was hotly debated at the P.E.N conference of all India writers. Writers from central or upper India were in favour of Urdu or Hindi as a common language for the whole peninsula. Writers from Bengal favoured Bengali...Writers from the south, on the other hand, preferred English. The debate...continues...Meanwhile, in this uneasy interregnum, English does get talked and gets interlarded in the oddest way with the Indian vernacular (Forster, 1951: 328)

Forster's essay, written, just two years before India became independent, ironically continues to be part of the English Pass syllabus prescribed in Delhi University today. In sum, though, whether it is Macaulay or Forster or a host of Indian leaders and policy makers, the overwhelming pre-Independence opinion seems to be that English in India is a distinctly 'foreign' language, destined to play second-fiddle to the other Indian languages. How then, just a few decades later, does Rushdie declare with such patent conviction that 'English has become an Indian language'? It is this bend in the narrative time-line, this radical change of mindset towards English, that will concern us next.

3.2 Postcolonial India, Linguistic States and the English Language 1947-1979:

‘The real fight is between the Hindi and English mentality’



- 1947: India gained independence from British Rule.
- 1948: The Partition of India; a new nation, Pakistan, was born.
- 1950-1955: The ‘language question’ was debated extensively in the Indian parliament and four main conclusions were reached:

Table I

1.	The Indian state would adopt the principle of Linguistic States.
2.	It would adopt Hindi as an ‘official’ (national) Language.
3.	It would adopt the three-language formula which meant that every child schooled in India had to, in principle, learn three languages: his or her mother-tongue, Hindi the ‘official’ language of the state and one ‘international’ language, which de facto overwhelmingly meant English.
4.	It would adopt English as an interim language, for an initial period of fifteen years, until Hindi and the ‘other languages’ of India became sufficiently ‘strong’.

In this essay, I will consider only the last decision concerning the role that English was to play in the newly constituted Republic of India. Today, it is common knowledge that English is far from being ‘given up’ after fifteen years. Economic globalisation, the rise of the IT industry in India and the privileging of electronic media the world over, as well as the dominance of America as a super-power, has changed language contexts in such a way that Indian democracy must now respond to these forces in a manner that was simply unforeseen when India’s language and educational structure was first laid out after decolonization. Given this current dominance of English as a language of aspiration in India, we face a classic dilemma which was strongly articulated in the years immediately following Indian Independence in 1947.

1955-1975: There were two main developments during these post-Independence years: first, the fashioning of a 'new language' of democracy, secularism, progress and freedom was undertaken and a national Emergency declared in 1975-76 and powerfully resisted; second, this was the period when the big three of Indian Fiction in English - Mulk Raj Anand (*Coolie, Untouchable*), Raja Rao (*Kanthapura, the Serpent and the Rope*) and R.K. Narayan (*the Malgudi novels*) emerged as stalwart authors. These novelists created a vision of independent India - eulogizing the underclass and village and small-town life - but, paradoxically, wrote in the language of the former colonizers. This paradox led to a struggle articulated by no less than two recent Prime Ministers (see below).

1981: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* on the theme of Indian independence, including independence from the straight-jacket of speaking 'correct' English, published.

1980s: A period of political turmoil (great internal strife, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi assassinated, bomb-blasts etc.); but these were also the years when the liberalisation of the Indian economy was initiated, energizing the demand for English in India. A number of English language publishers led by Penguin entered the Indian market with a view to publishing new Indian authors in English.

1990s: The technological makeover of India gets underway in earnest; once again, the large population of Indian English users is crucial to this transformation.

2004: Inaugurating a seminar on the 'national language' Hindi, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee contended: "It is a bitter truth that even now (56 years after Independence), Hindi has not been able to achieve the desired position (of an official language)." He then went on to refer to the anti-Hindi agitations in South India in the 1960s, adding significantly:

The real fight is not between Hindi and the regional languages, nor between Hindi and English but between *the Indian and English mentality* (2004, online reference cited)



2005: Speaking at the Oxford Union a year later, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said:

It used to be said that the sun never sets on the British Empire. I am afraid we were partly responsible for sending that adage out of fashion! But, if there is one phenomenon on which the sun cannot set, it is the world of the English-speaking people, in which the people of Indian origin are the single largest component. Of all the legacies of the Raj, none is more important than the English language and the modern school system... Today, English in India is seen as just another Indian language (2005, online reference cited)

By 2005, then, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has come to emphatically agree with Salman Rushdie that 'English is an Indian language' as well as disagree vehemently with his predecessor, Atal Behari Vajpayee. I would contend that these musings by two recent Indian heads of state on the status of English reveals something of the 'split-personality' of postcolonial discourse. Or, it may be said that we today face a conflicted choice between two models of language education: the **multi-literacy** model whereby the local languages of India are valorised and the **mono-literacy** model, wherein is inscribed a deep need to acquire 'an English mentality' in order to 'succeed in the world.' So where do we go from here? Short answer: we need to look at the situation on the ground.

4.1 A Contemporary Case Study: Youth Language in India, circa, 2012

The 'youth bulge' said to be the cause of much sociopolitical unrest in areas like Southwest Asia (Zakaria, 2001, p. 20) is also evident in India. Demographic estimates in 2012 indicate that over 50% of India's population today is below the age of 25 and over 65% below the age of 35. There is little doubt that this situation is likely to impact dramatically on the future of the region in the next few decades. In this section of my paper, I shall therefore analyze the language and vocabulary of the English spoken in college campuses across the Indian subcontinent.

I argue in this section that whereas the extent of the Indian contribution to the English tongue was once estimated in terms of the servility of the so-called 'babu' and 'butler' colonial varieties, these familiar sites have been replaced by the subversive markers 'bakra' and 'bakwas' in the youth culture of the new millennium. The former pair of concepts had a) little to do with youth and much to do with class hierarchy, and b) usually denoted a certain bumbling linguistic incompetence. In contrast, the latter pair a) arises directly of young people's usage and self-consciously derides establishment values, and b) usually implies a cocky command over several languages, including English. The word 'bakra', for example, literally means 'goat' but its metaphorical meaning is that everyone and everything can be the butt of ridicule. Nothing is sacred; similarly, 'bakwas' means 'nonsense' and illustrates a sophisticated use of meta-language by the young to describe their own talk-exchanges. Irreverence is thus built into semantic structure of the current youth code.

Bilingualism and code-switching constitute the overarching features that link the 'bakwas' variety of 'Indian English' with its predecessor the 'babu' variety. However, my thesis is that the functional significance of these varieties - related by history but separated across a generation divide - differs vastly. An attitudinal shift is revealed as,

over the years, the stilted language-contact between English and the other languages of the subcontinent has given way to a much freer and literally more 'youthful' relationship. The data I consider in pursuit of this conjecture comprise the following:

1. A lexicon of 'youth' terms displaying productive morphological processes;
2. A series of advertisements aimed at Indian youth.
1. **The Lexicon of Youth:** As part of my work on sub-continental youth patois described above, I have collected several hundred words. Of these, for reasons of space, only twenty terms are listed below (but see Nair, 2008, for a fuller list). While the glosses for these terms are mostly provided by the college students themselves, I have sorted the selection into five morphological categories for analytic purposes:
 - i. clippings and abbreviations
 1. **Arbit:** *Adj.* An abbreviation of 'arbitrary', this word is used to describe something/someone weird, e.g. "That guy does arbit things" or "He's an arbit guy" implies that the person being referred to is a bit on the strange side.
 2. **Disco:** *Noun.* Double clipping from the conjunction of 'disciplinary committee'. Note the bitter irony of the pun.
 3. **Funda/fundae:** *Adj.* Abbreviations of 'fundamental(s)'. The 'funda' of something means the basic principle behind it. 'Fundae' are a collection of several 'fundas' and the person with the best fundae is called a 'funda man'.
 4. **DOSA:** *Noun, acronym.* Dean of Student Affairs (A 'dosa' is also a very popular food item: a South Indian pancake).
 - ii. inflectional and derivational suffixes
 5. **-giri:** *Nominal derivation producing abstract nouns from verbs*, as in 'Gandhi-giri', to be altruistic.
 6. **-i:** *Adjectival derivation from nouns, Hindi root.* For example, 'canti', a generic term for the Hostel Canteen, 'freshie' for 'freshmen' and 'futchi' for 'fresh-woman'. The word 'futchi', with an '-a' ending is also a widely used form for referring to a 'first year-ite'. Similarly, **-ite:** *Derivational ending, noun to adj.* English suffix attached to words of Indian origin as in 'Kailash-ite', a female from Kailash, the only girls' hostel in IITD.
 7. **-ing, -s and -ed:** *Inflectional calques.* English verb endings are regularly attached to words of Indian origin, as in 'maro' (to filch), 'maro-ing', 'maro-ed' or 'kato-ed', 'kato-ing', (to leave) etc. This is an extremely productive process in Indian English. Likewise, the English plural morpheme '-s' is routinely affixed to Hindi nouns, e.g. 'larka-larkis' (boys and girls); 'buddhus' (idiots) etc.
 8. **-o:** *Derivational calque*, this very productive -o ending is peculiar to subcontinental English and does **not** derive from standard Hindi morphology. For example, 'despo' a clipping of 'desperate' with an -o ending. 'That guy is depso for a school.' Or 'Diro' for Director. The English suffix '-fy' can also be further attached to words with an '-o' or '-i' suffix as in 'maro-fy' or 'chutni-fy'.
 - iii. neologisms

9. **Bindaas:** *Noun or Adjective.* Happy-go-lucky. A common attitudinal term signalling youthful insouciance
10. **Bong:** *Noun.* Someone from the state of West Bengal. See also 'Maddu'/'Tam'/'TamBram' to denote persons from the state of Tamil Nadu; 'Mallu', indicating people from Kerala, speakers of Malayalam. 'Ghat' or 'ghati' describe persons from Maharashtra, the origins of these terms probably deriving from the nearby Western Ghats. 'Punju' refers to someone belonging to the Punjab, while 'Surd' is term for a Sikh, with 'Surdi' as an affectionate version. People from Andhra Pradesh are called 'Gults'. The etymology of this word is unclear, but it is thought to have originated from 'Telugu', the language spoken in the state of Karnataka.
11. **Hukkah:** *Adj.* Applied to humanities courses at the Indian Institutes of Technology or IITs, implying that they consist of mostly smoke and very little substance - a cultural pun on the idea of the leisurely 'hookah'.
12. **Mug:** *Verb.* To mug is to study/cram. Such characters are known as 'muggoos'.

iv. **nonce words**

13. **Sidey:** *Adj.* Can mean 'fart' or 'shady' - another flexible, context-dependent word.
14. **Types:** *Noun.* A vestigial word added to sentences for no reason whatsoever. Lately 'types' is being pronounced 'taaps', a sign of the live and ever changing nature of youth slang. 'OK-types' is a further derivation that signifies anything that is good.

v. **re-lexicalized items which have undergone changes in meaning**

15. **Crack:** *Verb.* This word, whatever its negative connotations in the real world, has a very positive meaning in Indian youth slang. Use of this term implies that the person is referring to somebody's - perhaps his own - excellent performance/stroke of good fortune, e.g. 'I cracked a school' or in true IIT style, 'crack maar diyaa'
16. **Fight:** *Verb.* To 'fight' means to give something your best shot.
17. **Scene:** *Noun.* Situation, as in 'kya scene hai? (what's the situation?)', a popular greeting on campus.
18. **Stud:** *Noun.* Someone extremely good at his/her field.
19. **Sutta:** *Noun.* Cigarette; 'sutta marna' means 'to smoke'.
20. **Tension:** *Verb phrase.* On campus, people constantly 'take tension' over several things and people (especially Profs.) 'give tension' too.

When asked to comment on the use of the above lexicon, one of my students responded: "It's difficult to 'explain' our grammar, since it was created in the first place to express things that English couldn't." However, even a rough inventory of the items in the mini-lexicon presented above shows that the boundaries between the grammars of Hindi and English are extremely fluid with rich morphological processes cutting across these languages. The table below illustrates that words from both languages occur in almost equal proportions in this language-variety:

Table II

Language Categories	English*	Hindi**	Suffixes	Total
Nouns	9	10	-	19
Verbs	8	5	-	13
Adjectives	5	5	-	10
Speech acts, excl.	1	2	-	3
Speech acts, decl.	0	1	-	1
Suffixes	-	-	6	6
Total	23	23	6	52*

*One word functions as a noun as well as a verb; one word is a noun-cum-adjective, hence the count is 52.

Further, the urban Indian 15-25 year olds popularly known as ‘Generation Next’ or ‘X’ are - quite literally through their walk-mans and music-videos - ‘hooked into’ an international culture dominated by television channels like MTV and V, which also promote code-switching and mixed biligualism. For example:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Hello ji. Ek favour kar sakte ho</i> Hello
(honorific) one favour do can [you] | [Can you do me a favour?] Expressive/
Directive speech acts. |
| 2. <i>Sir ji aapko yeh car award mein mili hai.</i>
sir (hon.) you (hon.) this car award in got is | [Sir, you have got this car as an award]
Representative speech act. |
| 3. <i>Baithiye, hum long drive pe chalte hain.</i>
sit (hon.) we long drive on will go | [Please sit, let's go on a long drive]
Directive/Commissive speech acts. |
| 4. It is OK <i>Bhai Saab, humko gadi chalana</i>
<i>aata hai.</i> it is okay brother sahib I (acc.) car
driving know | [It is okay. I know how to drive.]
Declarative speech acts. |

Simple as these utterances are, they cover the entire range of basic speech acts, showing how serviceable this ‘new’ bilingualism is, whether the matrix language is Hindi or English. In this sort of idiom, the youth of India can both be seen to publicly *performing* an innovative set of cross-cultural linguistic feats as well *forming* a linguistic vanguard in pursuit of ‘freedom of speech’ across international boundaries.

The mind-set fostered by such a ‘liberated’ verbal culture on television is reinforced in the visual medium by a number of ‘hit’ films such as *Dil Chahta Hai (DCH)*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (K3G)* *English-Vinglish*. These films, aimed at a young bi-cultural, often non-resident Indian (NRI) audience, display a bilingual ‘international’ repertoire and exhibit all the processes of acronym formation, coinages and code-switching already noted. Small budget ‘campus films’ that deal with the aspirations of young Indians are another recent addition to the youth repertoire: *Bombay Boys*, *Hyderabad Blues*, *B.A.L.S (or Barchelor of Arts Low Society)*, *Three Idiots*, *Aarakshan* etc.

Finally, Indian English fiction, placed on a ‘world-stage’ by Rushdie and others who pepper English with sub-continental words without any apologetics, glossaries or explanations, and foreground ‘the enigma of arrival’ in connection

with immigrant destinies, also contributes. Just as the films mentioned above often unabashedly mention the US as a desired destination, English language fiction too seems to have shaken off the 'nationalist guilt' characteristic of an earlier generation schooled in 'butler' or 'babu' attitudes.

Overall, these developments attest the post-independence rise of a nouveau 'chattering class' of educated Indians, reared on television and the Internet and well versed in the language of the technologically attuned, 'multinational' world. I offer just one very striking example of this phenomenon below, consisting of a set of extracts from the aptly named 'Bakwaas' advertisements of the 'Harvest Gold' bread company.

On cricket, India's beloved postcolonial sport:

1. Cricket was our only hope. That too we have got *dhakka*
By God *ji*, aside from Harvest Gold, life *mein aur kuch nahi rakha*



On Indo-Pakistan relations:

2. *Bauji, Agra mein*, I must say, *bahut bura hua*
General Musharraf scurried home like a *bheega chuha*

On recent political events:

3. The attack on America is barbaric. Innocent lives have been lost.
The attackers should be punished. *Oh ji* at any cost
4. Why can't there be *aman* on earth? *Shanti kyon nahi hoti*
Why can't people have *Harvest Gold ki doubleroti*?
On the post September 11 trading downturns:
5. America *haadse ke baad*, stock market has crashed
Sensex is nonsense. My *ji* hopes have dashed
Wife is asking *kya hogaya?* She is wondering how
I said "*barbaad hogaye*. Look at the bloody Dow!"

Apart from the exuberant and complex code switching by now familiar in this type of discourse, we are able to identify the following broader semantic and pragmatic features of the language favored by the youth of India:

- i. Clearly, no subject is too elevated to be exempt, from a humorous treatment in this discourse, and socially significant topics, which can range from domestic discord to financial stress within a single ad (6), are commented upon with amazing swiftness and dexterity.
- ii. Emotive opinions, however 'politically incorrect' are expressed upfront. The signifier America is persistently referred to and feelings are continually foregrounded (1-5).
- iii. Recurrent honorifics (e.g. *ji*, *Sirji* and *Oh ji* in 1, 3, 6) and kinship terms (*Bauji* in 2, 'wife' in 5) also indicate that this is primarily a language of bonding. Interestingly, regional (i.e. 'North Indian') affiliation is concurrently marked as well.
- iv. Crises of all kinds from a defeat in cricket (3) to a political fiasco (2) are indicated as the focus of affective youth identity.
- v. Self-reflexive, bilingual commentary on its own 'style' is explicitly maintained at all times in this language variety (1-5).
- vi. In terms of speech acts, this idiom is acutely performative, recognizing its own 'playful' role, both marginal and central, in mediating and 'advertising' attitudes towards critical social issues - national, international *and* personal.

5. Conclusion: Is 'Indian English' a global language?

What are the global implications for the future of English of the new formations and practices delineated above that characterize the use of English in India today? I now briefly attempt to address this question in my final section.

First, many studies of bilingual competence have so far emanated from predominantly monolingual societies where borrowing, code switching and language mixing are seen as indicative of a *lack* of command over the target language - in this case, English. In the Indian situation today these same features may offer evidence of *self-confidence* rather than inadequacy. This is an important interpretive insight that accrues from a study of the youth argot of the subcontinent, where huge interpersonal gains and an enhancement of international visibility and power result from these very linguistic practices.

The English-educated Indian immigrant in America



Second, among an earlier generation of Indian users, the 'babu' and 'butler' modes marked a classical 'subject positioning' vis-a-vis the 'master language', English. Then, the model tongue was undeniably 'British English'; today, the youth of the subcontinent seem much more strongly influenced by a relatively easy-going brand of 'American English' disseminated worldwide via a range of powerful public media. This postcolonial makeover highlights the changing landscape of English as it is being rapidly 'internationalized.'

Third, extremely local in its phonological, semantic and syntactic choices but global in its reach, the youth idiom I have described is pervasive on the Indian subcontinent. Its most distinctive feature in my opinion is that, in it, *one language is used to comment on another language* with enormous, reflexive sophistication. The much vaunted cultural pluralism and rooted democratic diversity of modern India are, I would argue, thus showcased in this language variety.

Fourth, the present generation of middle class, post-Independence Indians, schooled in at least two languages, one of them always English, are 'natural born' translators. Their skill at crossing linguistic boundaries aids their propensity to smoothly traverse other boundaries - such as those defined by nation and corporation.

Fifth, while nationalism and an allegiance to 'desh' (country) are still important motifs, the simplified diction of an earlier nationalism is being reinvented within a more sceptical, post-nationalist frame by the technologically savvy Indian youth now represented by 'outgoing' diasporic groups like the IIT undergraduates. When supported by 'instant access' electronic communication in the form of email and chat, these youth are thus particularly well poised to chart new 'e-Indian English' routes across the world.

Sixth, sub-continental youth inevitably carry with them in the process their 'bakra' and 'bakwaas' epistemic baggage, linguistic portmanteaus that help them identify and bond with their increasingly international fraternity - whether in Delhi, Dhaka or Dallas. The radical speech acts of affiliation promoted in this discourse derive paradoxically from the fact that the 15-25 year olds pioneering it have managed to create a stable argot that could ultimately serve the independent and 'free' self-image of society as a *whole*. That is the signal contribution of this unique yet cosmopolitan form of 'youth' language forged in contemporary India.

Indian English, especially in its e-forms, is thus definitely 'going places'; however, a cautionary note is in order here. Today, emerging from the colonial shadows, many in India argue that we find ourselves in an equally aggressive neo-colonial world where English gives such a competitive edge to its users that it is in effect a 'killer language', cannibalizing other languages. We also have to recognize that we still live in a society where far from having access to English, thirty percent of the Indian population is still illiterate in any language. Yet the need among the world's population - whether they live in Hangzhou, in Holland, or in the agricultural Indian state of Haryana! - to acquire this language is apparently insatiable. How then can we even begin to think about making English available to anyone who wants to learn it?

In broad terms, three factors are pertinent here: one, the **individual's need or desire** to acquire English; two, the **social goals** that might encourage various state

governments, which in the Indian case each have their separate languages and scripts, to support these desires; and, three, the **practical classroom methods** to be employed in order to deliver English to its numerous eager consumers. Once again, for reasons of space, I will concentrate just on the last factor which could have lessons for ELT across the globe.

Let me take the risk of declaring my own preference as a linguist at this juncture. I believe that norms for 'correct' usage should be discovered locally rather than be passively accepted from elsewhere. Take pronunciation, for example. My hunch is that all the 'native' varieties of English - British, American, Australian etc. - have one important feature of spoken English in common that non-native varieties do not share. Native varieties are stress-timed, whereas Indian English, like most non-native varieties that I know, is syllable-timed. Now, in my opinion, there are today enough speakers of these syllable-timed varieties of English to accept syllable-timed pronunciation as a possible norm for English speakers, just as Indian English has already 'naturally' introduced pure vowels in place of the RP diphthongs in IE. e.g. wro:te, not wreut, fa:te, not fait, etc.

Moving from phonology to syntax and semantics, we find evidence everywhere of the fluid mixing of English with the other languages of India. The point I'm making here is that these forms already exist; our task as scholars and teachers is now to legitimize them by documenting and incorporating them in our teaching and thus possibly establishing 'alternative' norms. That is, we in 'developing' countries like India, which already has so many flourishing varieties of 'Indian English', need to insist - through seminars, conferences, in the media and in journals such as the present one - that we have new insights to offer about the forms of English in a productive and often insightfully self-reflexive bilingual context, both in terms of academic research and classroom teaching.

English, as we know, is already the world's foremost 'passport' tongue, an immigrant language which no longer emanates essentially from England but exists in a worldwide scenario of bi- and multi-lingualism. In global classrooms, the lesson from the example of 'Indian English' would be to focus on English as part of a multicultural world where Indians and other 'non-native speakers' can make major contributions. Indeed, the success of the Indian 'software revolution' is in this sense largely language-based; Indian BPO and call-centers, for instance, require employees not only to have technical skills but make information easily palatable and user friendly in English. In other words, as English Language Studies enter the 'keyboard culture' of the 21st century, it might bring with it - quite literally, a more hands-on, interactive culture. We need to be aware of in order to devise flexible e-packages for English that are locally attuned.

Pragmatically, my argument is that the goals of individual as well as social emancipation can be achieved by actively encouraging a **bilingual view of English**, by introducing **translations** as a key component in English Departments and by keeping up with **developments in faraway parts of the English speaking world** through the **new internet universe**. These moves will automatically go towards inculcating a generally healthy 'mentality' where pluralism, an experimental attitude and a 'Gandhian' spirit of tolerance are foundational values. To return to the strange question posed

by Prime Minister Vajpayee in January 2004: Is there a particular 'mentality' associated with English? What I have tried to suggest in this paper is that such a mentality is not so much 'there' but rather could be created and recreated as we move into a new millennium. There are many models before us in this task. For example, the 'untouchable' Dalit community in Banka village of Uttar Pradesh, India, astonishingly erected in 2010 a statue of the new 'Goddess English' since they felt that the classical languages of India had kept them oppressed and one way to bypass this long-standing linguistic hegemony was to 'worship' English as a route to language democratization (Pandey, 2011). Ironically, the leader of this particular social initiative, Chandra Bhan, wanted the temple to the English Goddess to be inaugurated on Macaulay's birthday, showing how the debates once initiated by Gandhi and Tagore about English in India remain vitally important today.



To conclude, we live in the world that is interlinked as never before but is, by the same token, increasingly diverse. English, in its capacity as the world's lingua franca, is an apt metaphor for this interlinked and ever-morphing diversity. In the Indian case, this essay has tried to show that it has gone from being modestly conceptualized as a 'link' and 'library' language to a language of 'liberation' - symbolizing access to power, glamour and money even amongst the most deprived sections of society. The time therefore seems ripe for academics everywhere to take on the daunting task of discussing the changing attitudes towards the English language that we encounter today - and understanding the interconnections between them. I quoted E.M. Forster earlier in this essay criticizing the Indian use of English and I will end now by recalling another of his cryptic insights. What people needed to do, Forster said, was 'only connect' in order to make the world a more democratic place. I believe that this task of making connections is being attempted today in many imaginative ways and that it is precisely at these multilingual crossroads that hope lies for bringing a truly revitalized English into 21st century.

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