

Extended Essay

**Topic: The Changing Nature of the Use and Structure of English in
Modern India**

*Research question: How did the English in India change from the time of the
British Raj to the Indian English that is spoken today?*

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Abstract

The establishment of a global language in the world today is evident to us all. However; English used in different locations around the world today is not the same English that was spread by the British, rather have their been a creation of local varieties with their own characteristics. India is a perfect example of such a place, and I therefore chose to research about the changing nature of the use and structure of English in modern India.

I conducted my research my topic by first searching for different sources in libraries, on the world wide web and in newspaper archives, and I read and choice sources from a variety of places and different kind of sources. I chose the research question how did the English in India change from the time of the British Raj to the Indian English that is spoken today. And my thesis was that the presence of the language in the country and at the same time English establishing and growing as a global language led to the change of English in India.

As a result of my research, I found that due to it's colonial legacy, there was already a strong foundation of knowledge of the language in India, and it was therefore convenient to continue using the language, especially because the diversity of languages in India meant that English was the only language in which, at least the elite could communicate with each other across the country. I also found that the attitudes towards English in India is effected by the colonial legacy, but not at all to that extent as had expected, instead it is greatly affected of the use of English

internationally and the emerge of English as a global language, in which knowledge of the language provide various opportunities and is therefore desirable to know.

The Changing Nature of the use and structure of English in modern India

English (Group 2)

How did the English in India change from the time of the British Raj to the Indian English that is spoken today?

Introduction:

“The aspiration of us colonials had been to speak English like Englishmen”

Ved Mehta, *The stolen light*¹

This statement might have been true during the time of colonization, but it is questionable whether it is so any more. 50 years after Independence India has managed to make English into their own, an English with own characteristics.

English was introduced to India as part of the colonization of the country and for almost 200 years it was part of the Raj, and used to control and administrate the colony. However, it was British English that was used and not the kind of English that is spoken in India today. When the British ruled in India there were only a small amount of the Indian elite were mastering the language and the rest, were almost or entirely excluded from any knowledge and influence by it.

When struggling for independence, the problems with English was recognised as clearly pointed out by Mohandas K Gandhi, the most well known and credited freedom fighters of India. For him freedom meant

“freedom from the shackles of the English language, as much as social, economic and political freedom.”²

¹ Krishnaswami, N and Burde, Archana (1988) The Politics of Indian's English Oxford University press: Delhi Page 1

² Krishna, Sumi (1991) India's living languages. Allied Publishers limited: Mayapuri, New Delhi Page 47

However, English was not abolished in India and today English is spoken by 4% of India's population, which adds up to around 40 million people and makes India the third largest English speaking population in the world after the United States and the United Kingdom³. The numbers includes everyone who speaks it as either a first language or as a supplementary language. But the numbers are rising rapidly and there is a constant demand for new English medium schools. English has become one of the dominant languages in all forms of culture one example is that of literature, 45% of the literature published in India is in English.⁴

Although English still is the language of the elite, it is now more spread across boundaries of class. This can be seen by listening to commercial radio or watching commercial TV in India where the English language is often present, and usually in a mix with native languages.

English in India, popularly referred to as Indian English has a lot of influence from native languages and many characteristics which separates it from the English spoken in other countries.

My aim with this essay is to investigate how this change came about, how was the English that was introduced in India, what was it used for, and how did the uses and the characteristics of the language change into what it is today.

I would like to argue that the emergence of English as a global language around the world played a big part as it created a need to use English in business, international politics and through that, popular culture with English as a means of communication has emerged which influences countries around the world. These two reasons made

people ignore the national feeling of abolishing language due to its colonial legacy, and as India, due to colonization already had a foundation of English knowledge, it has absorbed this global change and made it part of the nation. At the same time, the strong and rich popular culture as well as the history of hybridise of languages in India have created a new kind of English, Indian English. This has changed the nature of English in India from being the language of the oppressor, with colonial connotations to the popular and everywhere present language that it is today.

Pre independence political changes influencing the use of English

If it weren't for the British colonization of India, English would not be as rooted in India as it is. The way the British imposed English in India created the natural use of English in the government even after the British left and they left behind a class of people with English as a first language.

During the period of British sovereignty (the Raj) from 1765 until independence, English gradually became the medium of administration and education. As Indians were needed for jobs such as government clerks and they were taught English.⁵

A recognised turning – point was Lord William Benticks acceptance of a minute on education written by Thomas Macaulay in 1835, which proposed the introduction of an English education system in India.⁵

Crystal, David (1997) English as a global language Cambridge University press: Cambridge, United Kingdom Page.42

⁴ Karchru, Braj South Asian English: Structure, Use and Users Oxford University press: Delhi Page 25

⁵ McCrum, Robert(1986) The story of English Faber & Faber limited: London Page 325

Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) lived in Calcutta between 1834 and 1838 and served on the British Supreme Council for India. He is credited the most influential individual in the language question. He In his speech he said that he wanted to create

“A class of persons who were Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”⁶

As a result of his suggestions on education in India, English medium universities were set up in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857 and by the end of the century with many more universities and colleges were established.⁷ A substantial amount of Indian’s also went to UK to study, and soon, established elite of Indian’s was created, who shared many of the characteristics of the class of persons that McCauley was talking about in his minute on education. This laid down a foundation of people that knew English as a strong second language, Karchu argues that,

“ The historical role of England as a colonial power, the political power naturally attributed power to the language of the Raj (called the linguistic elitism strategy), and it also became a symbol of political power.”⁸

This made knowledge of the English language something desirable, but it was British English that were spoken, with a few exceptions of native words that later came to be included in the English dictionaries.

⁶ McCauley, Thomas (1835) McCauley’s minute on Indian education

⁷ Krishna, Sumi (1991) India’s living languages. Allied Publishers limited: Mayapuri, New Delhi Page 79

English had become the prestige language of India. It was now the language of the elite, who spoke it mainly as a strong second language but gradually a small class of Indians with English as their first or most competent language. To be able to get a government job and be able to influence the society to that limited extent that the British allowed Indians to do, you had to know English. Thus knowing English opened up many doors and allowed you to rise in the class hierarchy.

Eventually, English was used against the British, their roles and intentions as it became the language of resurgence of nationalism and political awakening: the medium ironically, was the alien language. For instance Mohandas K. Gandhi, the most credited freedom fighter expressed his message to the elite in English as well as Hindi. He believed that a country couldn't be truly free until its people gives up the use of foreign language and adopt its own at least within the borders of its own states. When eventually gaining independence at the 15 of August 1947, the question of language was ever present.

The language politics and attitudes after Independence

The administration of India had so far been in English and that was the purpose of the use of the language, but at independence, national feeling encouraged the new leaders of the independent countries to look inside the country for a national language, Krishna writes that:

³ Karchru, Braj South Asian English: Structure, Use and Users Oxford University press: Delhi Page 9

“The search for a single language as a symbol of unity is typical of most modern nation states; almost the first task that a newly emerging multilingual nation faces is to choose its national language.”⁹

However, a national language is not easy to decide upon in a country with such diversity of languages. In India, there was no language that united the whole population, that was during this time around 300 million. According to the 1961 census, India has 1653 mother tongues. Out of them, two hundred are recognized languages which mean that they have 10 000 or more speakers. There are two major language groups in India, one is the Indo-Aryan languages which most of the languages in the north of India descends from. The other one is the Dravidian languages which the main four languages of the south descends from. According to the Central Institute of Indian languages, Mysore, 1973, the most spoken main language in the households of India was Hindi, with 133 435360 speakers, but this was only 30.37% of the entire population. The second biggest language was Bengali with 33888939 speakers and 7.72% of the population¹⁰ (see appendix A)

To solve the problem on which native language to chose as an official language, it was suggested to keep English for official and other purposes, but this raised both practical question and an emotional question. The practical question concerned international communication and the technology for which none of the Indian languages were fully prepared, either in the availability of translated texts or in

⁹ Krishna, Sumi (1991) India's living languages. Allied Publishers limited: Mayapuri, New Delhi Page 44

¹⁰ Krishna, Sumi (1991) India's living languages. Allied Publishers limited: Mayapuri, New Delhi Page 13

vocabulary. Therefore it was argued that English should be retained at least for a transitional period, but there was an emotional argument that said that, an independent country could not be truly free until its people gave up the use of foreign language and adopted its own at least within the borders of its own states.¹¹

The only other language that could make a claim as an official language was Hindi, but it was heavily opposed by the south in which almost no one spoke Hindi. However, this did not stop Hindi from becoming the official language of the union. English was supposed to be used for a transitional period until 1965, when Hindi alone would be the official language. (The difference between a national language and an official language is that an official language is generally used for government administration and the courts of law, in the media and as one of the languages of education. Whereas a National language is a language that is considered representative of a nation or nationality.)¹² Many of the supporters of Hindi wanted Hindi to become the official language, but Nehru decided to be more diplomatic because India has such a diversity of languages and Hindi was not chosen as the sole national language but instead 18 national languages were chosen those were: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Maharati, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telegu and urdu.¹³

In January 1965 there were massive riots in Tamil Nadu in southern India because the inhabitants of the non Hindi speaking areas were afraid that Hindi would block

¹¹ Brass, Paul (1994) The politics of India since independence Cambridge University press: Daryaganj, New Delhi Page 160

¹² Hortendal, Annika (2001) English in India, Attitudes and loyalties, available from World Wide Web <http://www.englishinindia.com/annika>, Page 12

opportunities for government employment and other status jobs as all job interviews and examinations were to be held in Hindi.¹⁴

Some compromises were made, the non-Hindi speaking states were assured that Hindi would never be imposed upon them and that English would be retained as an associate additional official language¹⁵ In the Official Languages Act of 1967 it was stated that English as well as Hindi could be used in the parliament and Hindi should be used as the language of communication between the centre and the Hindi speaking areas and English should be used between the centre and the non Hindi speaking states¹⁶ every state chooses its own official language for inter state communication and out of those 4 states chose English, those were Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura¹⁷

Thus, at this time the role of English in India had changed, it was no longer the exclusive language of administration, rather it was only suppose to be used as a lingua franca. However, the change that occurred in the use of English in politics did not change the mainstream people's desire to want to learn and use the language, which therefore shows that the political agenda did not influence peoples attitudes.

Although it was still only the people in the top that could speak English, but things were to change as educational reforms were being carried out.

¹³ Ibid Page 13

¹⁴ Krishna opcit Page 61

¹⁵ Brass opcit Page 166

¹⁶ Brass opcit Page 165

¹⁷ Crystal, David (1997) English as a global language Cambridge University press: Cambridge, United Kingdom Page 43

4. Post independent education

To be able to communicate between, as well as within states more efficient, some adjustments had to be made concerning the education, a 'three language formula was made, and it was adopted as National Education Policy in 1968. The formula consisted of the first language taught was the mother tongue or the regional language, the second language was the official language of the union (Hindi or English) and the third on a modern Indian or foreign language not covered under the first or second language and other than the language used as the medium of instruction¹⁸ Both Hindi and English were to be introduced early in the school years, Hindi, because it was needed to promote its role as a link between different states and English for international use and, for the growth of modern industry, technology and science. However, because of a lack of educated teachers as well as interest to learn these languages, the tree language formula is said to have failed in states other than Maharashtra and Gujarat¹⁹ English language education were increasing through out the country, both in terms of number of English medium schools (mainly private schools) and English as a second language subject in schools with other mediums. (see appendix B)

Global change of the use of English information changing the use of English in India

More importantly than the internal adjustments of the use of English were the changes that occurred globally concerning English. English was the language that served as a

¹⁸ Krishna, Sumi (1991) India's living languages Allied Publishers limited: Mayapuri, New Delhi, Page 89

window to the world. During this time, the attitudes towards the language through out the world changed as the United States of America and the United Kingdom were dominating the world politics and its economy, especially after the fall of the Soviet union in 1991. English therefore overtook the power of languages such as French, Russian and Arabic. More and more people around the world learned English as a second language to be able to cope with the changes and to be able to have access to global information and technology, Professor Anil Sarwal is describing this:

“English is the language in which nearly all contemporary knowledge is accessible. It is the language of development. Obviously then, for healthy development in all fields of our national life, our scientists, technologists, doctors, engineers, agriculturists, economists and experts in numerous fields must have access to the international professional literature in their respective fields, be able to contribute to it and exchange their views on important issues with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Most of these functions can, at present , be performed only through the medium of English.”²⁰

This helped moulding the new attitudes towards English in India, as the English became more accessible and played a greater part in the global community, so did the cultures of English speaking countries such as the U.S.A. English was kept as a window to the world for India, and also an opportunity for Indians who knew English to get out to the world and make a career, which many people did, and this culture

¹⁹ Brass, Paul (1994) The politics of India since independence Cambridge University press: Daryaganj, New Delhi Page 165

²⁰ Sarwal, Anil (2002) English in India: Its present and the future available at the World Wide Web <<http://www.religiousunity.org/newsart/engind.com>>

that the N.R.I's (Non Resident Indians) brought back to India influenced the attitudes as well.

Like professor Anil Sarwal also argues:

“In a global perspective it is, indeed beneficial if at least part of the population of country knows English, and especially because India, at least after the 1990's aspires to be part of the global economy in the era of globalization, it attracts foreign investments as communication is easier as well as tourism, This means that companies will demand english speaking staff, and often consider them more valuable. So knowing English makes someone more attractive on the jobmarket, which encourages private as well as public education institutions to offer English, either as a medium of instruction or as an additional language.”²¹

On a more local employment level, there has also been a huge benefit in knowing English, especially as inter-state migration has increased, Krishna writes that

“Migration to other states and work situations also requires the use of different languages. So, a Malayali officer working in Mysore, might use English in the office, Malayalam at home, Kannada outside the home, Sanskrit for religious purposes and Hindi to talk to a traveller”²²

And hence: Although many politicians wanted India to be abolished or used as little as possible in India, the people wanted differently, economic reasons came to dominate the attitudes towards English, but this has led to an evolution of English in India. The language has rarely kept itself parallel to the native languages in India,

²¹ Ibid

instead there is a major culture of with hybrid influences of both English and Hindi or other Indian languages, An Indian English has been created.

6. Indian English

The English mainly spoken in India, popularly defined as Indian English, was created because, as McCrum writes that there were infinite gradations of Indian English created as a result from the Raj ranging from the less-educated varieties to educated or standard Indian English, often very scholarly and bookish²³ Today some common characteristics that have been created of these varieties and spread out and is now classified as Indian English, few example of Indian English is sentences such as 'I am doing' instead of I (constantly) do, 'you will do this' instead of 'will you please do this, and the hybrid mix of Indian languages in India such as the use of Walla (sales man) for example newspaper walla and milk walla. Some Idioms has also been translated directly from Indian languages, for example, as may the fire ovens consume you, a crocodile in a loin-cloth. Indian languages have also given loanwords to English such as Brahmin, calico, curry, coolie, juggernaut, veranda, monsoon, pyjamas and Bungalow.²⁴

In 1886, Henry Yule and AC Burnell published the Hobson-Johnson Anglo – Indian Dictionary, on the back of it says that it

²² Krishna, Sumi (1991) India's living languages Allied Publishers limited: Mayapuri, New Delhi Page 21

²³ McCrum, Robert(1986) The story of English Faber & Faber limited: London Page 328

²⁴ McCrum, Robert(1986) The story of English Faber & Faber limited: London Page 329

“is shorehand for the assimilation of foreign words to the sound pattern of the adopting lanugage.”²⁵

This was the first recognition of the result of the mixing of the different languages and the change of the languages that was occurring.

Not only is the words used in Indian English different, the way it is spoken is also different Raja Rao explains that Indian English is reflected by the Indian way of living “The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move, we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush & tumble and run on”²⁶

There are people who argue that the Indianization of English is not a good thing, for example professor P. Lal who argues that

“You’ll always have Indians who speak very good and correct English. But in fifteen or twenty years, we might have evolved a language which is so truly and richly and uniquely and indigenously our own, that you will have to carry a tourist guide, with footnotes, as to what these words mean. This will be a language written for Indians by Indians, with no other audience in mind”²⁷

²⁵ Yule, Henry and Burnell, AC (1886) The Hobson-Johnson Anglo-Indian Dictionary Wordsworth Edition Ltd: Hertfordshire Page 1

²⁶ McCrum opcit Page 331

²⁷ McCrum opcit Page 333

Dr Jain agrees, and is arguing that this is a big threat for the use of English as a window to the world,

“There is another aspect where we are using English as a window to the world of knowledge. Then it has to be in line with standard English. Now it is that aspect which is a bit disturbing. There are occasions when Indians are not understood. This is what Mrs Gandhi complained about when she was unable to understand the contribution of an Indian delegate to an International meeting – and the delegate spoke in English”²⁸

But there are also those who argues that there is no problem with Indian English, that all though it has its own characteristics, it is not a threat to the communication with other English speaking people. These people also argues that there are many positive benefits with Indian English, and the fact that it has been recognized as a developed and good English. These people see the commercial value of Indian English.

India has lately started to export English education to countries where English is not well known,

“The unique place of Indian English in the spectrum of English today makes it an attractive alternative to many third world students for whom training in Britain or the United States is either too expensive or politically unacceptable. H.C Narang, of the centre for linguistics and English at Nehru University, New Delhi, has taught students from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Laos, Kampuchea, and Vietnam and believes that “some of these countries feel closes to us, and politically closer too” there is also the feeling

²⁸ McCrum, Robert (1986) The story of English Faber & Faber limited: London Page 335

that “at the academic level, there will not be much harm if they come and learn their English in India,, English has been with us for almost two hundred years”

This shows that English not only have become a popular part of India, it has also become an economic benefit, which might indeed, help to increase the popularity of the language even more.

The popularity and characteristics of Indian English can also be recognized in many authors who write in English, a few examples would be Anita Desai, R.K Narayan & Arundhati Roy. English (Indian English) is the means of communication, sometimes as English as the only language, and sometimes, especially on radio, there is a constant mix between English and Hindi, this can for example be heard at radio Mirchi 93.9 FM, a commercial radio station in Pune, India

Conclusion

We are living in a world where the emerge of one global language is becoming more and more evident everyday, English, with it's around 2 billion speakers²⁹ is becoming the language of global information and communication. India has embraced this change. Although, only available to a small part of the population, the number of speakers are increasing day to day. Because of the foundation of English which was left as a colonial legacy, English also stayed and increased its present in popular culture, although decreased in politics. But due to the influence of the native languages and the encouragement to speak the native languages that were made during the independence struggle and when India was a free, the English got many

original characteristics and today it is no longer the language that the British introduced. This can be seen in many former British Colonies. All around the world, local varieties of English is present. The global language that is appearing is therefore not only one language, but many languages questions concerning the future is for example, will the trend of the spread of English continue? Will the whole of India within a few generations now how to speak in English? What effect will this have to other languages?

Dr Talgery is explaining the structure and the use of English in India today as

“English is not the cause of cultural insecurity or ethnic prejudice in India. It is no longer the foreign oppressors language, nor is it the exclusive possession of the elitist: it has become the common property of millions of ordinary citizens!”³⁰

English has therefore, due to the politics that the British imposed on the Indian’s language use and education and the feelings that this brought about which were expressed during the independence struggle and later expressed through political legislation and acts, tried to be discourage to be used in India. But the global culture of English use was to strong to resist and the foundation of English use as a means of education, culture and business was already there to be used. English therefore continued as a popular language and even increased in popularity. But it was also influenced by local varieties which made it in to a different English, Indian English!

Word count: 3963

²⁹ Crystal, David (1997) English as a global language Cambridge University press: Cambridge, United Kingdom Page 60

³⁰ Author not mentioned,(Oct 2001) Indian English ready for export Guardian weekly

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TABLE 1(a): Scheduled languages, 1961 and 1971

Language	1961		1971		Decennial increase/decrease in percentage
	Total number of speakers	Percentage to total	Total number of speakers	Percentage to total	
1. Assamese	68,03,465	1.55	89,58,977	1.63	+0.08
2. Bengali	3,38,88,939	7.72	4,47,92,722	8.17	+0.45
3. Gujarati	2,03,04,464	4.63	2,58,75,252	4.72	+0.10
4. Hindi	13,34,35,360	30.37	16,25,77,612	29.67	-0.70
5. Kannada	1,74,15,827	3.97	2,17,07,918	3.96	-0.01
6. Kashmiri	19,56,115	0.45	24,38,360	0.44	-0.01
7. Malayalam	1,70,15,782	3.87	2,19,38,231	4.00	+0.13
8. Marathi	3,32,86,771	7.58	4,22,51,207	7.71	+0.13
9. Oriya	1,57,19,398	3.58	1,98,55,450	3.62	+0.04
10. Punjabi	1,09,50,826	2.49	1,64,49,573	3.00	+0.51
11. Sanskrit	2,544	Negligible	2,212	Negligible	..
12. Sindhi	13,71,932	0.31	16,76,728	0.31	..
13. Tamil	3,05,62,706	6.96	3,76,90,020	6.88	-0.08
14. Telugu	3,76,68,132	8.58	4,47,52,926	8.17	-0.41
15. Urdu	2,33,23,518	5.31	2,86,07,874	5.22	-0.09
16. Others	5,55,28,992	12.64	6,83,74,747	12.50	-0.14
Total	43,92,34,771		54,79,49,809		

Source: *Distribution of Languages in India in States and Union Territories*, Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, 1973.

secondary school, and this exclusion from the education system in its home State sets it apart from other regional languages which have come into their own as media of education.

On the other hand, languages such as Manipuri and Mizo/Lushai, which have not been included in the Eighth Schedule, have developed through their use in the secondary school system (Table 10).

TABLE 10: Languages used as media beyond the primary stage

Language	Number of States/ Union Territories	Number of schools			
		Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary
1. English	29	2,711	2,045	2,224	715
2. Hindi	25	265,323	44,084	10,221	5,709
3. Bengali	14	51,878	8,131	4,719	2,096
4. Urdu	14	8,590	1,484	526	133
5. Tamil	11	26,979	5,875	2,136	13
6. Gujarati	11	23,212	334	2,640	10
7. Telugu	10	40,661	6,723	3,294	223
8. Marathi	8	47,659	20,653	5,166	517
9. Malayalam	7	8,709	3,575	1,328	2
10. Punjabi	7	11,354	2,789	1,500	255
11. Kannada	6	30,315	10,317	2,065	1
12. Oriya	4	32,626	5,393	2,007	9
13. Sindhi	3	153	49	42	6
14. Assamese	3	16,727	3,147	1,294	56
15. Nepali	3	170	6	1	—
16. Arabic	3	1	13	14	—
17. Khasi	2	2,853	326	—	—
18. Manipuri	2	3,182	556	191	27
19. Mizo/Lushai	2	454	2	203	—
20. Sanskrit	2	2	—	65	21
21. Tibetan	2	7	10	3	3
22. Bodo	1	840	67	32	1
23. Chakma	1	8	1	—	—
24. French	1	4	6	5	—
25. Garo	1	172	20	5	—
26. Konkani	1	895	151	43	—
27. Himar	1	18	1	—	—
28. Santali	1	193	32	—	—

Source: Adapted from *Third All-India Educational Survey: Languages and Media of Instruction in Indian Schools*, M.G. Chaturvedi and Savir Singh, N.C.E.R.T., 1981.