# Why Not Indian English as an Alternative to British English for Pedagogical Purposes?

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### ABSTRACT

*For colonial and historical reasons, Indian academia has been following British English since Independence. Though American English has become the norm internationally due to the global status that it currently enjoys, Indian academia has not yet recognized this new emergent phenomenon. Of course, Indian learners of English are increasingly exposed to American English outside of the curriculum. Meanwhile, Indian English has evolved as a distinct, literary and non-native, national variety over a period of 400 years because of its peaceful co-existence with Indian languages and cultures. Code-mixing and code-switching, phonological and morphological mix and syntactic and grammatical features have made Indian English a distinct variety. It is high time that Indian academia focussed its attention on Indian English as an alternative to British English. This paper focuses its attention on the description of Indian English as a distinct variety and the feasibility of exploring possibilities to make it prescriptive for teaching-learning-testing purposes.*

**Key terms:** Standard British English, Standard American English, Indian English, Code-mixing/-switching, National Standards of English, Native & Non-Native English

## Background of the Study

Indian English is not taught officially even though it has established itself as an entity and a variety in creative writing in English. On the other hand, British English has been taught and tested curriculum-wise for the past four hundred years, yet it has not been 'mastered.' American English is not taught either, yet it has been influencing the twenty first century tech-savvy educated youths and researchers, and the workforce. Of course, technology has been proactive in promoting this native, national variety. Here is a piquant situation: A variety which is not taught has evolved within the academia and recognized in society, but a variety which is taught at the state and institutional expenses, yet it is not internalized. Above all, it is Indian English that gives educated Indians a linguistic and ethnic identity. It appears to be the cementing force among the educated with a variety of regional, linguistic influences across cultures. Interestingly, it receives condemnation from among the academics in general and literati in particular. In spite of the fact that Standard British English is preferred for

pedagogical purposes, Indian English that is characterized as a deviant form has tenacity to socially survive successfully for the past four hundred years and the same has been approved either derisively or admiringly in literature written in English. The question in hand is "why can't Indian English be taught and tested?"

## Survey of Literature

Paroo Nihalani, R.K. Tongue, and Priya Hosali (1979) declare that the Received Pronunciation is unsuitable to a large majority of Indian users of English and have furnished a list of two thousand words with Indian accent. They also have provided one thousand words found in Indian English and they are distinctly different from British English. Balbir Singh (2004) has included a chapter in his book that compares General Indian English with British and American English in terms of pronunciation. R.K. Bansal (1983) is the first Indian phonetician to describe Indian English accent. T. Balasubramanian (1981) also describes Indian English accent and the same has been treated as a textbook at the postgraduate level. J. Sethi (2011) has created a corpus of 'Indianisms' 'Indian Coinages' 'Idioms' and 'Archaisms.'

## Research Questions

The questions that were addressed during the course of the present investigation are as follows:

1. Is there a linguistic entity called "Indian English"? If yes, what are its features?

2. Can it be described and prescribed? If yes, what is English language teachers' stand?

3. How does the untaught "Indian English" spread?

4. Why is the taught "British English" not followed?

## Objective of the Study

Indian English can be tried pedagogically if systematic research attempts at phonological, lexical, and discourse levels are patronized by governments through appropriate language policies and documented by research universities and public and private institutions like English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, and leading private universities in the country.

## Research Design & Method

Any innovation starts with teachers. What they think about the present issue naturally assumes importance. Informal conversations with a cross section of English teachers working in Madurai city colleges were used as a launching pad for the present investigation. Reflecting over the possibility of employing Indian English as an alternative for pedagogical purposes like materials production, teaching, and testing, many of them expressed three issues that are seen as problems.

1. British English cannot be done away with. It has been validated by time over four hundred years.

2. As teachers, they do not know how to go

about replacing British English by Indian English.

3. The capacity of Indian English to achieve international intelligibility is not known

On the basis of these views and the available literatures in the field, a questionnaire was prepared and administered among randomly chosen fifteen faculty members who work in Arts and Science Colleges and Engineering Colleges. Fifteen statements on different aspects of Indian English were framed on a five point Likert scale like 'Yes' 'No' 'Written' 'Spoken' and 'Both.'

| S.No | Question | Y% | N% | W | S% | B |
|------|----------|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1 | Is there anything called 'Indian English'? | 100 | | | | |
| 2 | Is it written, spoken, or both? | 87 | | | 13 | |
| 3 | Can Indian English be taught & tested? | 33 | 67 | | | |
| 4 | Should it aim at international intelligibility? | 73 | 27 | | | |
| 5 | Can mixing of words & phrases in Indian languages be permitted? | 80 | 13 | | 1 | |
| 6 | Can Indian English have their own vocabulary? | 67 | 20 | | 2 | |
| 7 | Is the untaught Indian English used? | 80 | 1 | | 1 | |
| 8 | Is the taught British English unused? | 53 | 40 | | 1 | |
| 9 | Do you think the influence of Indian languages on English is inevitable? | 100 | | | | |
| 10 | Has Indian English evolved socially through teachers & the media? | 87 | 1 | | 1 | |
| 11 | Has Indian English evolved as a necessity? | 80 | 20 | | | |
| 12 | Are there Indian Englishes? | 87 | 13 | | | |
| 13 | Is English ours (Indians')? | 47 | 53 | | | |
| 14 | Have you read any book or article on Indian English? | 67 | 5 | | | |
| 15 | Does the use of English enjoy prestige in India? | 93 | 1 | | | |

Though English teachers take cognizance of the ubiquitous presence of Indian English, 13% believe that it is only the spoken variety that can be considered Indian. 76% teachers are emphatic that Indian English does not enjoy any pedagogical value. 53% of them accept that British English is not used by Indians though it is taught whereas 80% accept that Indian English is patronized though it is not considered for teaching and testing. Though all teachers agree that the influence of

Indian languages on English is inevitable, only 80% of them recognize the bilingual phenomenon of code-mixing and code-switching. Again, it is quite revealingly ironical that while 80% agree that Indian English has evolved socially, 53% affirm that English is NOT Indian. It is gladdening to learn that 67% claim that they have read articles on Indian English though teachers are hesitant to use Indian English for pedagogical purposes. The same percentage of teachers thinks that Indian English can have its own vocabulary.

**Theoretical Discussion and Reflection**

English has stayed with Indians for more than four centuries. It is in the DNA of every Indian irrespective of levels of education, religion, region, caste, and community. It has done so much to them as they have done to it. India has adopted English in its family of languages and English has successfully learnt to co-exist with them. Such a mutually respecting multilingual reality has caused the birth of a new variety called "Indian English" and new linguistic phenomena like code-mixing and code-switching. These features characterize languages in a typical multilingual society where pure languages cannot strive to thrive. Mutual and friendly influence on each other is not only biologically natural but ontologically inevitable. For instance, Raja Rao, a noted Indian writer in English, predicts the emergence of Indian English in his foreword to Kanthapura (1963: vii-viii):

*We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American…. After language the next problem is that of style. 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 and tumble and run on.*

Of course, Raja Rao is not the sole voice in pleading for the Indian variety of English. P. Lal, a poet and a critic (1996: 30) developed an argument that was seen as controversial then when he affirmed that "English is one of the Indian languages, or putting it differently, a recent and very much alive and kicking adoption in the Indian family of vernaculars."

Indian English need not be perceived to be derogatory. It is a legitimate national variety in its own right. It may or may not have any comparable national variety used elsewhere. At the same time, Indians who clone British or American accent are perceived to be unnatural Indians with marked affected accent. However, deviations (from the norm set by the British and the American English) are not to be considered 'errors' but 'innovations' that enrich English globally. Deviations can be described at phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. English is learnt either as foreign or as second language all over the world not necessarily to communicate

with the English speaking world but with the world that does not know each other's language. Indian English is best suited to the Indian setting and therefore it is correct. It need not parrot or clone either British or American English. Even if some Indians speak like the British or the Americans, it shows their harmonious relationship with the latter rather than a faithful imitation.

However, Indian English does not mean that it is monolithic. In fact, its variation (deviation) ranges from national educated variety to multifarious, unintelligible, uneducated varieties that could be on par with Old English dialects spoken in the seven Kingdoms into which England had been divided. Indian English seems to be dialectal in its birth in India. India is a country with one thousand six hundred and fifty two languages according to the 1971 Census. The Constitution has recognized 22 major languages as scheduled languages plus English. It is divided into 29 states and 7 union territories with their own cultures and languages. All of them add flavour to Indian English varieties. In the words of Hans R Dua (1991: 105), India is a big

*sociolinguistic giant [that] presents complex language problems, involving official language policy and national multilingualism, language education policy and modernization, mass media planning, mass media planning and communication networks, language development, socio-political mobilization, and integration.*

As a result, English has become virtually and literally the link language of India. It is the only pan-Indian written language that is used by the educated Indians who are scattered culturally and geographically, and it is characterized by 'deviation'/innovations both in spoken and written varieties. But they are not yet taught though they have evolved in this multilingual lab.

W.D. Shaw (1981) reports that the variety of English spoken by the educated in India includes 27.4% of British English, 3.2% American, and 50.6% Indian English. The last variety keeps increasing in spite of the exposure to American English in the globalized technological era. Indian users of English feel happy, secured, satisfied, and good about their English. They are proud of being rightful owners of their variety because it gives them the much needed international address. No one can speak/ use Indian English other than Indians. Thousands of youths who, after having attended courses on neutral accent, sojourn in the English speaking countries and non-English speaking counties for professional and occupation purposes and return to India without any affection in their accent. They remain Indian in their English variety because it gives them their identity globally as Indian users of English. English is the language of prestige in India and everyone would not miss an opportunity to admit that they know English. According to 1991 Census, 178,598 claim that English is their mother tongue and it has increased to 226449 in 2011.

There is no exact number of Indians who use English. According to the 2011 Census,

74% are declared as literates with 93% enrolled for primary education 69% for secondary education while 25% have enrolled for post-secondary education. They are all introduced to English formally and they do have some working knowledge of English at least at the lexical level. Even the remaining **26%** of the so-called illiterates do code-mix in Indian English of some sort involuntarily and effortlessly.

All English language teachers honestly attempt to teach British English accent, but miserably fail due to lack of a live model that could be imitated. Moreover, it is (appears to be) unrealistic goal. But Indian English has evolved diachronically through use in print and visual media, literature, and all formal and informal social discourses. There is a need to identify pan-Indian variety since India is a multilingual country and it has created a unique phenomenon of code-mixing and code-switching and its impact on Indian English.

It is not a pedagogically sound proposition to teach British English in India since it is not being used in all domains. Indians have a rich linguistic repertoire to choose from a galaxy of languages and their varieties for different purposes. Indians are different and they use English differently. Teachers are divided in their opinion on the pedagogical value of Indian English. They find it difficult to teach it and test it. Perhaps, they entertain the fear of the unknown. They are unable to predict the outcome of teaching and testing Indian English. Is this fear symptomatic of their colonial conditioning?

Socio-psychologically, English teachers might still feel the colonial hangover in the sense that they are unable to recognize the evolution of Indian English as part of World Englishes by decentring British English, the chief weapon of the colonial masters. Their attitudes toward Indian English reveal a kind of dilemma they are acutely experiencing in according the status that it deserves. Of course, they discuss postcolonial theories and literatures in a different domain, but they do so only through British English which is further reinforced through the curriculum of English studies that is British literature-biased. The bias toward British English language and literature and prejudice against Indian English language and literature stand in the way of a critical assessment of the evolution and recognition of Indian English. The stark reality is that English spoken and written by educated Indians are marked in several ways, but English teachers refuse to accept it. It is after all Indian English that gives identity to Indian users of English. There is no cause for a sense of incompatibility or shame in recognizing it for ordinary communication purposes. They cannot afford to be unreasonable in their expectation and wishful thinking that they are monolinguals in English against the socio-cultural-linguistic realities that are basically pluri-lingual and multi-cultural. This feature enables Indians to code-mix and code-switch effortlessly domain-wise.

British English cannot bear the burden of Indian cultural experiences and therefore

there has been a natural evolution of their own Englishes. India being the nation of minority languages has naturally adopted English as its permanent guest and it does have certain roles to socially perform which other Indian languages without the help of Indian English cannot accomplish. It is these multicultural and pluri-lingual contexts that have enabled Indian English to evolve its own grammar at all levels. Literary texts from Indian Writing English written at different points of time can be exploited through comparison and contrast so that people's attitude toward Indian English can be detected. For instance, Nissim Ezekiel's "Soap" that was written in the early post-colonial period can be contrasted with Meena Kandasamy's "Mulligatawny Dream" written in the early twenty first century. While the former elicits how Indians laughed at Indian English brand (because it is non-Standard), the latter is serious in appropriating English to talk about the economically strong India.

## Feature of Indian English

Indian English enjoy exclusive features at phonological, lexical, grammatical, and syntactical levels. It also has an inbuilt feature of code-mixing and code-switching.

## Phonological features

Indian English is characterized by its own phonological system. There are several variations in vowels and consonants between British English and Indian languages and they are reflected in Indian English. Indian English either substitutes certain English sounds with those found in Indian languages, or has phonologically different sounds that are not available in British English. For instance, most Indian languages do not have several English diphthongs and certain monophthongs.

## Lack of aspiration

There is no provision for aspiration in Indian English. As a result, speakers of Indian English do not distinguish between [ph] as in the initial sound of the word 'paper' and [p] as the medial sound in it. The same is the case with any voiceless plosive that occurs at the initial position of the stressed syllable.

## Retroflexion in the place of alveolar constants

Indian English replaces alveolar plosives /t d/ with retroflex wherein the tip of the tongue gets curled upwards. No one is taught to replace like this, but all Indian tongues replace them!

## Absence of interdental fricatives

Indian English does not have interdental sounds and it leads to these sounds becoming alveolar plosives. Its users pronounce expressions like 'thank you' or 'thick' or 'that' using alveolar plosive substitutes. Many Indian users of English replace the voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/ with the voiceless bilabial /p/ as in 'fail' pronounced 'pail.' This is due to the non-availability of fricatives in Indian languages.

## Lack of syllabization

Most Indian languages equate a letter and

a syllable and this leads to Indian English not following syllable division rules when words are pronounced as entities. Indian users of English tend to either lengthen the word as in 'college' or shorten as in 'superend' instead of 'superintendent.' Moreover, Indian English does not have syllabic consonant feature. Here, its users insert a vowel in between final consonants as in 'sudd(e)n' or 'butt(o)n' or 'litt(i)l' or 'fountain' or 'mountain, 'plantain.'

**Absence of word-stress**

Indian English is characterized by the absence of word-accent. Indian languages do not have this feature. While words are not pronounced syllable-wise, rules of word-accent are not followed as well. As a result, grammatical and structural function of word accent is not realized in Indian English. For instance, it is common to hear 'economics' without stress on the third syllable, or 'content' both as noun and verb.

**Stressed-timed rhythm replaced with syllable-timed rhythm**

Indian English is spoken like a typical Indian language that is syllable-timed. In other words, all syllables are given equal importance against the occurrence of stressed syllables at regular intervals of time with time taken for the production of one stressed syllable being the same as any number of unstressed syllables that come between two stressed syllables.

**Grammar features**

Indian English is innovative not only in oral features but also in written language with well defined grammatical features. These features are not deliberately taught in curriculum but learnt collectively in society through the media and academic community. Indian English has evolved a new grammar that would have been or not been influenced by Indian languages. It has gone through the grammaticalization process. For instance, it prefers the adverb at the beginning of the sentence whereas it comes at the end of the sentence in British English as in "Yesterday I saw you" instead of "I saw you yesterday." It is linguistically called the 'transfer phenomenon.'

**Reduplication**

In English some words simply repeat themselves in the sense that the second part is identical with the first as in 'bye bye' 'haha' 'pooh-pooh' or the first part repeats with a change in its vowel as in 'flip flop' 'sing-song' 'ping-pong' or of consonant as in 'walky-talky' 'hotchpotch' 'hocus-pocus.' Indian English has invented a few expressions like 'small small (problems)/disturbances/favour' 'one one time'

**Conversion of non-counts into count nouns**

Indian English treats non-count nouns as count nouns. It is quite common to hear and see in spoken and written discourses expressions like 'furnitures' 'equipments' 'luggages' 'baggages' 'fishes' 'acommodations' "sceneries" and words denoting quantities like 'hundreds, thousands, billions, millions.'

## Lack of distinction between similar looking phrases

Indian English makes no distinction between the following pairs of expression: 'few vs. a few' 'little vs. a little' 'beside vs. besides' 'in spite of vs. despite [of]' 'consist of vs. comprise [of] 'a lot of vs. lots of' 'and vs. as well as' 'loose vs. lose'

## Neologism

Indian English has coined a number of new expressions whose meanings are unknown to the native speakers. For example, Tip-top, cousin brother/sister, co-brother/sister, rascal (dishonest person), eve-teasing, double-income family [two-career family/two-career household, house owner [land lady/lord], prepone [advance], pin code, bed-coffee, cut piece centre, dearness allowance, America-/foreign-returned, goondas, hypothecated to [mortgage], Plate meals, shoebeat, shoebites, and pindrop silence.

## Lexis & Lexeme

Indian English has evolved a set of lexical and grammatical expressions out of necessity or influence.

## New Grammar

Indians "discuss about," "can come after [in] ten minutes," ask "Why hair cut not cut?", assert that "There is no wind in the football," wonder "I talk, he talk, why you middle middle talk?" and warn "I will give you slap," report that "the bus-driver was absconding since yesterday," admire "for someone's character," [strength of character] rule that "someone is was age-barred from promotion to a more senior post," observe that "students wrote a few alphabets on the blackboard," declare that "good in [at] Maths as well as English," ask "Is that fine with you? [Is that all right/OK with you?]" wonder "If supposing he asks us, what shall we answer?" and query "when did you return back?" They also teat certain adverbs as nouns and they appear in prepositional phrases. For example, 'abroad' is used as 'in abroad, as in "He is in abroad."

It is quite a strange phenomenon that Indian English spreads silently but steadily. Nothing could prevent it for the past four hundred years. It has matured enough to challenge the creative writers from the native speaker countries. Thousands of engineering youths go to English speaking countries for higher studies and for occupation purposes and survive there without any language crisis in communication. While they continue to live in such countries, they have not lost their Indian English identity. In fact, they are proud of it. The same is the case with Indian users of English in India particularly with Indian teachers of English language and literature. One source of Indian English spread is the English language and literature teachers themselves. They not only influence students but also subject teachers. It is further reiterated by the media (both print and electronic). There is a vast chasm between English used on the Indian channels and native English channels like English channels like BBC and HBO. Though youths are addicted to

English channels, their native variety has not affected them at all. Their written and spoken English is reflected in young adult fiction by youth writers like Chetan Bhagat, Ravinder Singh, and Preeti Shenoy.

## Recommendations

The following thoughts can be investigated empirically and attitude study can be conducted with a view to exploring the feasibility to treat Indian English as an alternative for pedagogical purposes:

1. Codification of Indian English in its entirety by Indian scholars can be undertaken even though several attempts are being taken in the West.

2. Pedagogic grammar needs to be written

3. Theories about English language teaching in terms of methods, materials, and testing can be tried.

4. Variation studies in terms of inter-speaker and intra-speaker can be recorded in an attempt to giving direction to ELT.

5. English language teachers at the tertiary level need to be committed researchers undertaking action research periodically.

6. Textbooks can be written in Indian English.

7. A comparative study of British, American, and Indian varieties can be carried out with cultural backgrounds of these societies.

## Conclusions

Indian English should eventually gain pedagogical status within the curriculum. India cannot afford to follow British English for ever since it presents an unrealistic goal. Indian English has evolved socially and spreads uniformly across different geographic regions and segments of Indian society on its own and its own right without any institutional support. Its features have also been internalized without any explicit teaching. They are reinforced by socially powerful and respectable institutions like educational resources and the media. It is therefore imperative for English language teachers and researchers to identify mechanism and methods for codifying the features of Indian English, so that it can be made both descriptive and prescriptive. It can aim at both national and international intelligibility since World Englishes are both national and international ontologically and functionally.

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