

Grammar Guru 3

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Be Indian, Buy Indian. But beware of speaking Indian English! A friend of mine recently asked an Englishman, “What is your good name, please?” With a puzzled look, the Briton asked, “Do Indians have a good name and a bad name? We don’t. We only have a Christian name and a surname!” The literal translation of the culture-specific Hindi idiom “Aap ka shubh naam kya hai?” led to this disaster.

In India, we have developed our own brand of English – Indian English – with its idiosyncrasies of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. This is perfectly intelligible all over India, but in the context of globalization we often find ourselves misunderstood or not understood at all. We have hundreds of kinship terms in our mother tongue. However, they sound rather strange to native English ears when translated into English. We are very close to our ‘co-sisters’ and ‘co-brothers’, but there is only one term *brother-in-law* in English, whether it be your wife’s brother or husband’s brother or wife’s sister’s husband or husband’s sister’s husband! English seems to be a much simpler language, doesn’t it?

Indian English has developed its own grammar, which violates the rules of Standard English. Most often even good speakers of Indian English are not aware of such aberrations. We have a universal tag question for all our sentences: *You are tired,*

isn’t it? Manish looks haughty, isn’t it? We don’t like this, isn’t it? This isn’t it? is a literal translation of our Tamil ‘*illaya?*’ or ‘*Hai, naa?*’ in Hindi, but the English would prefer different tags for different structures: *You are tired, aren’t you? Manish looks haughty, doesn’t he? We don’t like this, do we?*, and so on. Their rules for tags are quite simple:

- i. If the statement is in the affirmative, the tag is negative.
- ii. The auxiliary is shifted to the end of the sentence.
- iii. If there is no auxiliary, shift the main verb.
- iv. The subject of the main sentence is replaced by the appropriate pronoun.
- v. This pronoun is placed after the verb.

The rules are quite clear, aren’t they?

We also have a great fondness for using the Present Progressive tense anywhere and everywhere. Nissim Ezekiel highlights this in his ‘Very Indian poem in Indian English’:

I am standing for peace and non-violence.

Why world is fighting, fighting

Why all people of world

Are not allowing Mahatma Gandhi

I am simply not understanding.

Here are some Indian sentences in Indian

English. How would a native English speaker have uttered them?

1. You bought this gift, isn't it?
2. Are you loving her?
3. How old is your cousin brother?
4. What for do you earn money?
5. We enjoyed during the holidays.

The revised versions are given below.

1. You bought this gift, didn't you?
2. Do you love her?

3. How old is your cousin?

4. Why do you earn money?

5. We enjoyed the holidays. [**OR** "We enjoyed ourselves during the holidays."]

[Editor's Note: This is part of a series of articles contributed by the author and published earlier in The Times of India, Education Times from May 2008 to May 2013. We are thankful to the author to permit us to publish those articles in our journal.]

Checklist for Manuscript Review

1. Does this article present and/or discuss **issues that are important and relevant** to the teaching and learning of English in an ESL/EFL context?
2. Is the **title** clear, short and appropriate for the content of the article?
3. Is the **abstract** brief, clear, inclusive and consistent with the content of the article?
4. Is the **introduction** relevant, meaningful and purposeful?
5. Is the **literature review** relevant to the article and focussed?
6. Does the article establish a clear **rationale** for the study and state the **problem** clearly?
7. Are the **techniques and tools** used appropriate for the study?
8. Are the **results** clearly presented and discussed?
9. Are the **findings** based on a robust analysis of the data and clearly presented?
10. Are the **conclusions** appropriate and reasonable, and linked to other studies on the topic?
11. Are **implications** of the findings discussed in the article?
12. Are the **references** appropriate, current, sufficient and consistent with in-text citations?

[See 'Manuscript Submission Guidelines for Authors' on pages 46-47.]