

Exploring Vocabulary Innovations as a Tool in Select Indian Writings in English

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ABSTRACT

Innovations in vocabulary germinate from a creative writer's keenness to draw readers' attention. Different writers, writing in different genres, do that differently. Some use neologisms, others use code-mixing, and native writers like Shakespeare introduce new words. This paper analyses code-mixing and vocabulary variation as a tool used in select Indian writings in English (of Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie) and its relevance in English Language Teaching. Historically speaking, Indian Writing in English (IWE) has had an important tendency towards code-mixing as it attempts to cater to non-native, mostly bilingual readers. Vocabulary innovations have significantly generated interest among Indian readers as they can contextualize their respective cultural traditions. Native readers of IWE can get an insight into several local cultural signifiers rooted in India. It is viewed as a significant literary device to domesticate English so that it continues to have a cultural connection. The paper explores the significance of code-mixing and code-switching in teaching fictional works on Indian Writing in English.

Keywords: Vocabulary Variations, Code-switching, Code-mixing, English Language Teaching, Indian Writing in English.

Introduction

When using two or more language codes or varieties, bilingual or multilingual users should be aware of code-mixing and code-switching. A sophisticated form of borrowing called "code-mixing" or "switching" is employed to bridge any lexical gaps in a particular language. Even in cases where there are counterparts in both languages, the phenomenon can be observed. Furthermore, code-mixed parts may not always become naturally incorporated into the destination language through language change regularly, unlike borrowings. B.B. Kachru talks about code-mixing's formal elements. According to him, it entails, at the very least, functioning inside two systems; as a result, code-switching and

generating a new language code that blends formal elements from two or more codes. Kachru studies the many linguistic processes involved in code-mixing (Hindi-English). (Kachru 1975)

The socio-linguistic phenomenon of code-mixing can be understood through the following examples: Unit Insertion, Unit Hybridization, Sentence insertion, Idiom insertion, and re-duplication. Unit insertion refers to introducing a verb or noun from another language, Unit hybridization refers to code-mixing within a unit, Sentence and Idiom insertion refers to including a complete sentence and an idiom from another language, respectively, and re-duplication. Kachru argues that Unit Hybridization mixes Indian and

non-Indian languages (ex. English) and creates ‘compound verbs’ and ‘conjunct verbs’. Their examples will include phrases such as “satisfy karna” (to satisfy) and “permission dena” (to grant permission), respectively. The other aspects of code-mixing refer to sentence and idiom insertion, where prominent English idioms and sayings are directly incorporated into Indian languages.

Introduction to Code-mixing

According to Hoffman, code-mixing can be categorized into three categories, Intra-sentential (occurs within a phrase, a clause, or a sentence boundary), Intra-lexical code-mixing (code-mixing which occurs within a specific word), and involving a change of pronunciation (code-mixing at the phonological level).

The narratives analysed in the paper mainly engage with the Intra-sentential form of code-mixing. There are several cases of the text interspersed with sentences that include words and phrases from Urdu such; as “Razia spent her days feeding pigeons on the roof and steering all conversations towards a secret, unutilized scheme (*dao-pech*, she called it)” (Roy, 2018, p.25), “We’re jackals who feed off other people’s happiness, we’re Happiness Hunters. *khushikhhor* was the phrase used.” (Roy, 2018, p.28), and other culture-specific words such as *khwabgah* (Place of dreams), *hijras*, *chamars* and *badtameez* (uncouth) along with their equivalents in English to highlight the exact word or phrase used in the native language by the character. The word *manzoor* or consent as a central edict of the place *khwabgah* is mentioned several times in sentences such as, “In the Khwabgah, nothing happened without *manzoori*.” (Roy, 2018, p.57)

According to Hoffman (1991), there are several

reasons for a bilingual or multilingual person to mix their languages. Those are:

1. Individuals sometimes prefer to talk about a certain topic in one language rather than in another. Sometimes, a speaker feels free and more comfortable to express their subjective emotional state in a language that is not their everyday language. The narrative serves a dual purpose as it adds a tinge of realism to the bilingual characters when they utter certain words or phrases in Hindi or Urdu, it emphasizes more on their impact on the readers. For instance, a character from the text uses the sentence; “But I suppose one additional murderer won’t harm the reputation of our “*badnaam qoam*”, our name is mud already.”

2. Quoting someone else: The speaker breaks the ice by quoting a well-known figure’s proverb, saying, or renowned statement. Only the words that the speaker claims the quoted individual uttered are switched. It makes it possible for bilingual readers to place any literary work or story inside a particular sociocultural setting. The following verses of the seventeenth-century Urdu poet Wali Dakhani are included in the narrative;

“*jiseyishq ka tirkhaarilage*

Usey zindagikyunnabharilage

For one struck down by Cupid’s bow

Life becomes burdensome, isn’t that so? (Roy 48)

3. To express strong emotions: When an individual is speaking in a language that is not their native language and wishes to express extremely strong emotions, they voluntarily or involuntarily mix from the second language to the first, or vice versa.

“On Independence Day they sold toy machine

guns and tiny national flags mounted on stands that said Mera Bharat Mahan, My India is Great!

Down below on the pavement, on the edge of Jantar Mantar, the old observatory!...He electrified Hindu chauvinists with their controversial old war cry, Vande Mataram! Salute the Mother..." (Roy 100-103)

"He said, 'Tanzeehi Farhati Jamia ul Noor Mewat'. I said, 'Die, Kafir!' and I pushed him over" (Roy 169)

Indian Writing in English and ELT

It could be argued that the history of Contemporary Indian Writing in English combines tradition and modernity in the production of literary art. Using two languages in conversation becomes a common phenomenon in the context of IWE since it is primarily located in bilingual Indian societies. The term used to define this shifting in the Indian context from the mother tongue to a foreign language (or vice versa) is called Interference and it results in code-mixing and code-switching in oral and written communication. In a multicultural and multilingual society such as India, authors use multiple languages to depict the social realities and it is reflected in the writings through the use of several vocabulary variations which include code-mixing and code-switching. The phenomenon of IWE is rooted in the cultural and linguistic bilingualism that is prevalent in most regions of the country and it is reflected in the literary practices and as a result, in the teaching of English language and literature.

IWE evolved as a distinct literary tradition over several decades after the independence of the country. It could be traced through the literary approaches taken up by various authors. The Indian English Novel in the 1980s went through a major transformation. Jon Mee in the essay

"After Midnight" included in A.K. Mehrotra's *Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English* argues that the novels of the 1980s saw a turn in their relationship with Indian regional languages. He cites the example of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as a text that rewrote "English in dialogue with those languages" (Mee, 2005, p.318). The characters in these novels as well as the readers have English as their second language with a degree of bilingual competence and therefore the frequent switch in language. The paper engages with select IWE to understand the use of vocabulary variations such as code-mixing and code-switching and how it enables the process of teaching the language to non-native speakers as it liberates the readers and trainers from the linguistic and cultural complexities of British English.

There is an argument that the use of English language in contemporary IWE texts with hybridization as they fuse English with vernacular languages. Neelam Srivastava in her essay "Languages of the Nation in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*" explores the critical tendency to view IWE as "cosmopolitan and elitist". (Srivastava, 2005, p.1). In this argument, English is seen as a language that subsumes the vernacular or as a language that is nativized by the vernacular and the code-mixed English of IWE has a significant role to play in stimulating an in-depth study of the said narratives.

Roy frequently uses vocabulary variation strategies such as CM and CS strategies in her fictional writings such as *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* to highlight the prevalent political and social conflicts in the respective narratives. There are several ELT strategies involved in the context of IWE, according to K.C. Mishra's study on teaching English at the UG level, there is a need

to establish a shared cultural understanding in the teaching of Western/European literary texts and Indian Literature. (Mishra 1996)

Arundhati Roy is renowned for her Booker prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) and her literary activism that followed with several non-fictional writings over the next two decades critiquing global political events. From the perspective of English Language Teaching, a literary text such as *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* can be used to acquaint the learners with the dynamics of modern English language use which focuses on variations such as code-mixing. The novel frequently employs strategies such as code-mixing in the narrative which allows the Indian readers to contextualize and relate to the characters as well as to the setting of the narrative.

The novel begins with a conversation between the central character Anjum and a “man who knew English” where the former uses the term *khichdi* to refer to the interpretation of Romeo and Juliet as Laila and Majnu. The term *khichdi* is fairly symbolic of the state of hotchpotch or chaos that the dish represents and its reflection in contemporary IWE interspersed with mixing and switching. The author is acutely aware of the bilingual interplay between English and Hindustani (a combination of Urdu and Hindi).

Roy’s novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* constantly engages with this combination of Hindi/Urdu spoken by the residents of Old Delhi with the area near the graveyard where the characters dwell referred to as the *khwabgah* (domain of dreams) and code-switching with idioms such as *sachkhudahai*, *khuda hi sachhai* (Truth is God. God is truth). For readers with limited English proficiency to engage with the novel, these examples play a significant role in acquainting them with the English language without isolating

it from the local milieu. The term chutnification coined by Salman Rushdie in the novel *Midnight’s Children* represents the adoption of Indian elements in the English language. For young Indian students engaging with the English language through these narratives, the “transformation of English having an additional connotation of making the language used in the novel tangy and more flavoursome and exciting.”(Krishnamurthy, 2010,p.1)

The paper aims to analyze the various CM strategies used by the author in the context of ELT, as discussed above. B.N. Patnaik evaluates the Indian scene by emphasizing the two main goals of language planning in our nation which are (a) the enhancement of Hindi to make it capable of carrying out its role as the nation’s only official language; and (b) the swift growth of regional languages to enable their usage in as many contexts as feasible. As a result, Indians, except a very small minority, often speak English in very few contexts in daily life. This needs to be taken into account in this nation’s English language education curriculum.(Patnaik 1991).

In this context, Gambhir (1991) has observed the ability to learn or assimilate rules regarding what different structures may mean in different social situations in a given language is the most important thing for second language learners.”once more: “...the classroom and instructional materials must, to the greatest extent feasible, mirror natural sociolinguistic circumstances that an individual is likely to encounter in the target society. Less emphasis should be placed on the traditional academic setting of the classroom when pupils are expected to take notes as the teacher explains how a language functions or drills important language structures. Instead of emphasising pattern rehearsal, a language classroom should focus on

actions that occur in real-life communication.

The English used in Roy's novel has a strange ambivalence to it; although it is identified as an alien language that is undermining India's linguistic plurality, English also acts as a literary and linguistic bridge that allows various Indian languages to come into contact with one another in the first place. From an ELT perspective, the use of various code-mixing techniques in IWE fosters the creation of a vocabulary and linguistic bridge between English and regional languages like Hindi, Urdu, and Hindi. The paper contends that through code-mixing and code-switching, the novel's uneasy multilingualism negotiates the possibilities (and impossibilities) of creating literature that promotes excentric and tiny worlds in the hyper-central language of English. Additionally, the same can be utilised in both literature and language teaching to talk about stylistics and language variation.

Conclusion

The paper argues the significance of code-mixing in teaching English Literature as it enables the readers and learners to connect aspects of the English language with idioms and phrases deeply rooted in their respective cultural and linguistic psyche. In this context, vocabulary variations such as code-mixing in Indian English literary writings allow the learners to make sense of the specific socio-cultural situations in a given literary text. Apart from adding literary value or flavour to the text, as discussed in the paper, their significance includes liberating the readers from the complexities of British English and simplifying the study of the English language.

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