

English in the 21st Century: The Indian Context

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Abstract

In today's fast growing technology driven globalized culture with global economy, English is the global language of 'international contact and relations' to have travelled across cultures and communities, 'bounds and borders' to pierce through the remotest corner of the earth and touch the outer most parts of the sky with all its glory to enjoy heyday of power. English in India has for itself established strong links of trust between locals at the deepest level and the people across the globe in the broadest sense. Taking into account the socio-linguistic aspects of language-mixing/ code-mixing in ads, songs, movies, media and in the daily discourse mechanism of any Indian speaker, let us make a comprehensive analysis of these aspects and their effect in relation to the attitude, mode, culture, behavior, taste of locals along with citizens across the cultures around the globe. The paper explores the way English mixes and interacts with regional varieties of Indian languages to capture the essence of Indian spirit and sensibility. The paper analyses how identity of 'English' in India has to be reconsidered in the perspectives of the recent trends in its usage in digital platforms, internet, social networking sites, movies, business and corporate market. The paper also suggests some innovations in teaching methodologies to be adopted in the language classrooms to make the students practice writing for online transactions enabling them to develop written abilities for further career prospects and growth of business.

Keywords: digital platforms, social networking sites, language innovations, socio-linguistic concerns, code-mixed English usage, work place competency

INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-growing technology-driven globalized culture with global economy, English is the global language of 'international contact and relations' to have travelled across cultures and communities, 'bounds and borders' to pierce through the remotest corner of the earth and touch the outermost parts of the sky with all its glory to enjoy heyday of power. English in India has for itself established strong links of trust between locals at the deepest level and the people across the globe in the broadest sense. **English in India caters to the 'socio-linguistic concerns' (see Kachru 1990) and its soulful amalgamation with Hindi reflects the country's cultural and social values.** English in India meets the local desires of local rural communities and counters global challenges of intelligibility.

Language in cultural contexts, acquires cultural traits, meets socio-cultural needs and in the process, we find expressions of literary and linguistic creativity. English in Indian setting represents the Indian way of speaking English, welded, moulded, and adapted to the country's cultural shades and intellectual hues coloured by its traits, tradition, culture, cuisine, culinary practices, and habits all being a part of that great Indian reality.

Barnali Chetiah in (Code-Switching and Mixing in Communication – A Study on Language Contact in Indian Media, 2017) analyses the way modern technology in India has enabled 'code-mixed and switched utterances' to find a place in advertisements, media, and movies and furthered the arenas of 'culture, language and communication'.

English in the Indian Context

Language in contact, language mixing, or code-mixing is a regular feature in our day-to-day conversation where charm of Hindi combined with wit of English gives a magical touch to enliven an Indian's belief. Language mixing or code-mixing urges people to come together as a community. The 'home spun Indian version of English' resonates with our lifestyle. The 'English-Hindi remix' in movies, films, media depict 'shared cultures' having 'shared values and ideas' to depict our universal culture. It is for Indian advertisements, movies, and film songs that English today shares the dearest part of our popular culture. Loaded with cultural overtones, the language impresses customers, represents the country with unique experiences.

Taking into account the socio-linguistic aspects of language-mixing/ code-mixing in daily discourse mechanism of any Indian speaker, let us make a comprehensive analysis of these aspects and their effect in relation to the attitude, mode, culture, behavior, taste of locals along with citizens across the cultures around the globe. Let us explore the way English mixes and interacts with regional varieties of Indian language to capture the essence of Indian spirit and sensibility.

Though challenging questions of global intelligibility, language appropriateness, grammatical accuracy confront the legitimacy of code-mixed English usage, such expressions cannot be relegated to the background as long as they satisfy 'an artists' creative urge' (Meenakshi Mukherjee, 1971, cited in Kachru 1983, pp-42,77) for 'aesthetic needs' and fulfill society's desires for language use in culturally appropriate contexts. The status of code-mixed English expressions lies at the altar of temple as puja offerings to God. The status of code-mixed utterances lies at the core of India's travel and tourism sector where Hindi vocabulary with English meets a traveller's desire. The status of 'code-mixed linguistic utterances' lies at the center of India's cultural heritage where culture-specific words, lexis sing the saga of India's cultural past and fulfill country's needs. The culturally loaded expressions represent India's pilgrimage centres where chanting/incantations of veda, mantra, raga, yoga, rasa dhvani/echo through sages and seers mingled with the English words of wisdom to reverberate to the land of unknown. The status lies in the midst of innumerable religious festivities and marriage celebrations where culturally abound expressions reveal a country's ethnic and traditional values. Code mixed Hindi-English lingo lies at the centre of film industry as part of 'spicy talk' and enjoys yet a coveted position in the marketing sector.

The foreign language, English is no longer in India 'as a guest' or an unwelcome visitor 'but our own, (Raja Rao 1978, Caste of English in Awakened Conscience cited in Kachru, 1983 pp-2), our own sweet bride adorned in new lexis and vocabulary, steeped in Indian background, to perform varied roles for occasions of 'aashirwad', 'nikah', 'haldi ceremony', 'bridal bath', 'mehendi' or 'roka'. The extended use of English with Hindi vocabulary in various platforms and festive occasions like 'Id' and 'Diwali' with words of 'sherwani', 'shehnai', 'dawat', 'seviyaan', 'biryani' and 'clay diyas', 'sparkling patakas', 'colourful rangoli' exhibit

compatibility and trust between both the languages. Addition of these new words extends the scope of English and enriches the language with extended meaning. Sometimes English language accommodates Hindi inflexions to ensure deeper philosophical and religious experience with 'prayer thali', 'puja mats', 'chandan', 'sindoor', and 'dhoop sticks', while sometimes the mixed lingo represents social values attached to any celebration.

Thanks to the process of language amalgamation, a natural process to embrace diversity and multiple voices from varied cultures.

Digital language, Networking sites & popularity of code-mixed English

Today e-mail marketing has revolutionized e-Commerce businesses and the credit goes to written skills in texting, tweeting, web posts, WhatsApp to send appealing 'code-mixed language utterances'/messages to reach customers and clients within minutes to enable business to be in touch with common crowd. What an economic way to greet and make someone happy within seconds! This innovative use of combined English & Hindi lingo is definitely a new way to embrace ethnicity. The catchy slogans, rhythmic language, emotional features reverberate with the latest style, trends, and tradition.

English has offered an easy shopping experience to rural customers through e-commerce platforms and social media networking sites. The language, English has a '**social responsibility**' (see Kachru 1990) in India. The language has the responsibility to reflect India's culture, cuisine, food, and music and represent all of the many people who make up the larger consciousness, India, with its magic and mysticism, reality and myth, intellect and passion. It is quite visible that 'every moment a new story is woven around the intellect of English and imagination of Hindi'. The ads appear to be the fusion of two cultures but having a common shared experience. If India today witnesses 'English usage' that has greatest cultural and economic impact on the people, society, and globe, it is due to its innovative use in social media, films, and movie songs getting widespread recognition through digital platforms, television, radio and wide use of mobiles. Owing to the potentialities of language and its amicable nature, English has percolated deep into all strata of Indian existence representing all groups of people in the country's social fabric. Widespread use of English has made the language shine 'as a mark of respect' among the sophisticated gentry, find itself 'an enviable place' in the daily conversation of middle class gentry, and yet a 'mark of pride' in commoners' use of the language.

Thus identity of 'English' in India has to be reconsidered in the perspectives of the recent trends in its usage in social networking, media, industries, movies, business, and corporate market.

Language Classrooms, Writing for Social Media/Digital Platforms & Employment Opportunities

English today is viewed as the source 'of economic advantage, investment and key to economic activities to accelerate progress.' (Daniel Brooker 2018)

(<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/539681-perspectives-english-for-development.pdf>)

English presents a huge opportunity to Indians. Let us utilize this subject for the youngsters who find it easy to communicate through tweeting, texting, chatting, text messaging, etc. English teaching in India must see a revolutionary change to meet the demands of the upcoming generation. **The language must not only be taught as a 'second language' or as 'a foreign language' but 'English for Social Purpose' must definitely find a place in the course curriculum. The role of English in India must be discussed from sociolinguistic perspectives and teaching the language for societal needs shall definitely meet the demands of students from all classes.**

Today's global workplace necessitates communication in the form of e-mails, online messages, tweeting, texting, chatting, sending emojis, blog posts, pod casts, face-book posts to function and share information. These modern trends of global communication made possible with the fewest possible use of words shall definitely help enhance the capacity of students for communication, boost career prospects, develop new relationships, and further business for growth. Owing to these modern trends of delivering short messages, today Code-mixing as a linguistic phenomenon has gained widespread popularity. These modern trends of written communication are definite appliances to support innovation, language experiments, and language amalgamation procedure to fulfill social desires and accomplish financial requirements. Let us empower our students with these modern ways of written communication for occupational/workplace competency. Let us provide the students learning experiences in 'workplace simulated situations' as Social Media marketing manager to reach new customers, advertise new product, make conscious use of 'code-mixed English' to attract new customers, reach new audience, interact with local artisans, and showcase their talent.

Fascinated by the modern trends of language use in internet and the way these trends have redefined the process of digital communication, David Crystal welcomes text messaging phenomenon as positive move for 'language innovation and linguistic creativity' (for details refer Crystal David, (2008) (Texting: The Gr8 Db8). So language classrooms must provide platforms to ensure digital literacy. Students must be made to practice business writing for online interactions and digital platforms in 'workplace simulated situations' inside the language classrooms. Writing e-mails, texting, tweeting, sending emoticons, making facebook posts, blog posts must find a place in the course curriculum meant for students.

'Business writing, must, at the present time, conform to the requirements of a globalized and 'high speed' business culture.' (B.K.Das, K. Samantray, Mohanty Saveeta, Pani Susmita, Nayak Rath 2009, An Introduction to Professional English & Soft Skills, p315) Language teachers must endeavour to refine written abilities of students for professional communication. Teaching 'online writing' must be a conscious effort on the part of language teachers to acquaint students with cyber ethics and make them aware of the digital world and modern trends of language use.

'Good communication skills shall make you valuable assets of the company and enhance productivity, potentiality, performance of the workplace whereas miscommunication in workplace shall lead to unpredictable work environment, workplace conflicts, overburden companies and even lead to industrial hazards', said Omkar Nath Mohanty, VC, BPUT, Odisha(inaugural speech on the occasion of opening of Vikash College of Engineering for women, Bargarh, Odisha, 2009, also see foreword, Omkar Nath Mohanty in B.K.Das, K. Samantray, Mohanty Saveeta, Pani Susmita, Nayak Rath 2009, An Introduction to Professional English & Soft Skills)

Linguists like Braj Kachru, Kathpalia, Ong, and Tej Bhatia have carried the scope of 'Code-mixed English' further. While Kachru (1983,pp-188) finds the need of 'variety-oriented dictionaries of English to study the linguistic manifestation of English' in new contexts, Kathpalia, S.S & Wee Ong Kenneth (2015) see the possibility of 'linguistic hybridity' in code-mixing, Bhatia (2020) goes bit further to discuss the 'challenges and possibilities of teaching Code-mixed English'.

From linguistic perspectives, language mixing/code-mixing in India, owing to its usage and social acceptance have implications for further research to study English etymology as a tool for social identity, developing social skills, opening avenues for translation studies, and furthering business prospects.

English usage has definitely opened national economy to global capital flows, determined international relations across the world. Let us celebrate these possibilities of avenues, openings made available to us by English, and allow the students to embrace diversity, embrace new ways of speaking, learn global trends of conversation, and be a part of global work culture for international discussion.

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