

Variation in use of English in India: Indian English



Literature

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ABSTRACT

The role of English within the complex multilingual society of India is far from straightforward. It is used across the country, by speakers with various degrees of proficiency; the grammar and phraseology may mimic that of the speaker's first language. While Indian speakers of English use idioms peculiar to their homeland, often literal translations of words and phrases from their native languages, this is far less common in proficient speakers. Indian English is a "network of varieties", resulting from an extraordinarily complex linguistic situation in the country. This network comprises both regional and occupational dialects of English. The paper focuses on some observations made in terms of use of pronunciation and meanings (in their own contexts) practiced by English language users in various parts of India.

Introduction

Indian English has developed a number of dialects, distinct from the General/Standard Indian English that educators have attempted to establish and institutionalize, and it is possible to distinguish a person's sociolinguistic background from the dialect that they employ. These dialects are influenced by the different languages that different sections of the country also speak, side by side with English. The dialects can differ markedly in their phonology, to the point that two speakers using two different dialects can find each others' accents mutually unintelligible.

Idiomatic forms derived from Indian literary and vernacular language have become assimilated into Indian English in differing ways according to the native language of speakers. Nevertheless, there remains general homogeneity in phonetics, vocabulary, and phraseology between variants of the Indian English dialect. Phonologically, Indian accents vary greatly. Some Indians speak English with an accent very close to a Standard British (Received Pronunciation) accent (though not the same); others lean toward a more 'vernacular', native-tinted, accent for their English speech. Given below are some observations made in terms of pronunciation practiced by English language users in various parts of India.

Variation in Spelling Pronunciation

A number of distinctive features of Indian English are due to "the vagaries of English spelling"^[6] Most Indian languages, unlike English, have a nearly phonetic pronunciation with respect to their script, so the spelling of a word is a highly reliable guide to its modern pronunciation. Indians' tendency to pronounce English phonetically as well can cause divergence from Western English. For example, "jewellery" is pronounced "dʒʊələri:" and "jewel" as "dʒʊəl" where Western Anglophones might omit the final e, pronouncing them as "dʒʊəlri:" and "dʒʊl".

- In words where the digraph <gh> represents a voiced velar plosive (/g/) in other accents, some Indian English speakers supply a murmured version [g^h], for example <ghost> [g^ho:st]. No other accent of English admits this voiced aspiration.
- Similarly, the digraph <wh> may be aspirated as [w^h] or [w^ʰ], resulting in realizations such as <which> [w^hitʃ], found in no other English accent (except in certain parts of Scotland).
- In unstressed syllables, Indian English would use the spelling vowel, making <sanity> sound as [ˈsæn.i.ti] instead of [ˈsæn.ə.ti]. Similarly, <above> and <ago> can be heard as [eˈbʌv] and [eˈgo] instead of [əˈbʌv] and [əˈgo].
- English words ending in grapheme <a> almost always have the <a> being pronounced as schwa /ə/ in native varieties (exceptions include words such as <spa>). But in Indian English, the ending <a> is pronounced as the long open central unrounded vowel /a:/ (as in <spa>) instead of schwa. So, <India> is pronounced as /ˈm.dɪ.a:/ instead of /ˈm.dɪ.ə/, and <sofa> as /ˈso:fa:/ instead of /ˈsou.fə/.

- The word "of" is usually pronounced with a /f/ instead of a /v/ as in most other accents.
- Use of [d] instead of [t] for the "-ed" ending of the past tense after voiceless consonants, for example "developed" may be [ˈdɛvələpɪd] instead of RP /dɪˈvɛləpt/.
- Use of [s] instead of [z] for the "-s" ending of the plural after voiced consonants, for example <dogs> may be [dɒgz] instead of [dɒgz̩].
- Pronunciation of <house> as [haʊz] in both the noun and the verb, instead of [haus] as noun and [haʊz] as verb.
- The digraph <tz> is pronounced as [tʃ] or [tʃz] instead of [ts] (voicing may be assimilated in the stop too), making <Switzerland> sound like [ˈswɪt.zər.lænd] instead of [ˈswɪt.sə.lænd].
- All consonants are distinctly doubled (lengthened) in General Indian English wherever the spelling suggests so. e.g., <drilling> /ˈdrɪl.lɪŋ/.
- English pronunciation of the grapheme <i> varies from [ɪ] to [aɪ] depending upon the dialect or accent. Indian English will invariably use the British dialect for it. Thus, <tensile> would be pronounced as [ˈten.səl] like the British, rather than [ˈten.sɪl] like the American; <anti> would be pronounced as [ˈæn.tɪ] like the British, rather than [ˈæn.taɪ] like American.
- Many Gujaratis, for example, seem to believe that the word *lady* does not exist, but that *ladies* does. In other words, a single woman is not a *lady* but a *ladies* – you might hear a Guju say: "I didn't go to that bookstall because the shopkeeper was a ladies". You might wonder what, then, is the plural of "*ladies*"? Well, it is *ladieso* (written and pronounced as "*ledizo*"). With a mere addition of the suffix 'o' most of the commonly-used English nouns in Gujarati become plural. For instance, a *school* and *twoschoolo*, a *bus* and two *buso*, and so on. Take this example: "Ghani **trucko na drivero** aaje hadtal par chhe"; literally translated, it means: "Drivers of many trucks are on strike today". Notice the plural forms of *truck* and *driver* in the Gujarati sentence.

Grammar

- "The progressive in 'static' [*also called 'stative'*] verbs: 'I am understanding it.' 'She is knowing the answer.'
- Variations in noun number and determiners: 'He performed many charities.' 'She loves to pull your legs.'
- Prepositions: 'pay attention on, discuss about, convey him my greetings'
- Tag questions: 'You're going, isn't it?' 'He's here, no?'
- Word order: 'Who you have come for?' 'They're late always.' 'My all friends are waiting.'
- 'Yes' and 'no' agreeing to the form of a question, not just its content -
A: 'You didn't come on the bus?'
B: 'Yes, I didn't.'"

Lexical Variation

- *cousin-brother* (male cousin)
- *crore* (ten million)
- *lakh* (hundred thousand)

[and they use 'crore' and 'lakh' as often as we use 'million', which they **don't** use; very disconcerting at first]

- *Eve-teasing* (harassment of women)
- *godown* (warehouse)
- *Himalayan blunder* (grave mistake)
- *opticals* (eyeglasses)
- *nose-screw* (woman's nose ornament)

These are just a few examples of the odd manner in which English is sometimes used in India. Indian languages and its users may appear strange or amusing to those well-versed in English but, make no mistake, it is a very sweet language with its own rich literature.

A glossary of the latest lingo as spoken on the streets of India

- Dear sir - with reference to your above see my below - popular opening line in official letters.
- Teachress - a female teacher.
- Timepass - a trivial activity that passes the time.
- She freaked out last night - she had a good time.
- Your lyrical missive has enveloped me in the sweet fragrance of our love - from a book advising lovers on how to write to girlfriends.
- How often do you take sex? - question from doctor to patient.
- Pritam Singh has left for his heavenly above - a death notice.
- Hue and Cry notice - title of police missing person newspaper advertisement.
- Don't do nuisance in public - government admonition against urinating in public
- Issueless couples - those without children

- Marketing -Housemaids on their way to buy vegetables tell their employers they are going “
- “What is your good name - direct translation from the mother tongue-Hindi (*Aapka Shubh Naam Kya Hei?*)
- ‘preponing’- (bringing forward) meetings

If spoken English can be curious, the written form is even more so. In railway offices, a standard opening line in correspondence is: “Dear Sir, with reference to your above see my below.” Some employers complain that the standard of English is so abysmal that recruits cannot write a sentence without three grammatical mistakes. One call centre executive in Bombay said a new recruit wrote an email that began:

‘I am in well here and hope you are also in the same well.’

Despite the changes, English has enjoyed phenomenal popularity over the past few decades. Good English can transform the lives of the impoverished - leading to a better job, a rich spouse, a more exciting social life, and social superiority. Couples who live on less than 25p a day will skip a meal to pay for their children to attend a school where they will be taught in English. The English-teaching industry is estimated to be worth £150 million. For the better off, fluent English and a “good” accent convey status faster than titles, names, addresses or offshore bank accounts.

Everyone is breaking the rules and being creative about how to use English. It is finally being claimed by Indians as their own, instead of a relic of the *Raj*. The pride in Indian English also stemmed from the success of writers such as Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie. These writers have used English to portray Indian reality and it has given people the confidence to try out new words and play around with the language without being scared about whether they are correct.

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