



Development of The English Language in Parallel with the Changing Socio-Cultural Trends in India

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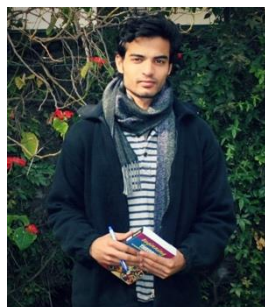
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Abstract: This paper explores several political and historical events intersected with concepts from sociology to examine the growth and development of the English language in India during the pre-Independence and after independence eras. This development is viewed in parallel with the changing societal setup by utilising concepts like westernisation and modernisation that helped facilitate education and promote social equality among the people by shrinking the persisting barrier of caste system to a profound extent and diminishing the role of indigenous concepts of social upliftment like Sanskritisation. After foreseeing the number of speakers of English that gives rise to the standard variety of English in India, i.e., Indian English, its potential in a socio-cultural context, and the interest among subsequent learners of the language, the paper concludes that the growth prospects for English appear to be vital, and it will continue to emerge as an essential language in the coming generations in India.

Keywords: English in India, Indian English, caste system, British rule, post-colonial.

About the Author



Pranav finished his BA Programme from University of Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir, India) and later earned his MA in English Language and Linguistics from University of Essex (U.K). He is a certified translator in Hindi to English and vice-versa. In the field of linguistics, he specialises in Phonetics and Phonology of Modern Indo-Aryan languages, and in analysing acoustic speech data using quantitative methods through software like Audacity, Praat and RStudio. He is currently indulged in freelance projects concerning TESOL. Apart from academics, he has been interviewed in newspapers and radio, and has recently been published in an anthology of poems called, A Touch of Cinnamon.

1. Introduction

The English language has always been the language of vantage, facility, and primacy, both within social context as well in professional setting in India. Despite the fact that very few use it by the highest standards, while most use it for convenience and for communication purposes across and outside the country, and the remaining use it with low proficiency, English is practiced by people of all strata. The most recent census reports around 122 million speakers of English in India (Census, 2011).

There are several factors that draw the motivation to learn the English language among the citizens of India. For instance, in order to use the language in form of lingua franca mostly within the country to serve as a link language among speakers of different languages (Mallikarjun, 2020). English also symbolises with prestige, a better intellect, and a better education in the society, to name a few (Vijayalakshmi and Babu, 2014). In terms of distribution of English speakers based on a rural-urban distinction, Kohli (2017) identifies an increase in the concentration of English speakers in the urban centres in comparison to rural setting in the last six decades. The interest to embrace the English language in urban centres is so intense that two journalists identify an emerging generation of children



in Bangalore who are monolingual in English with no working knowledge of a second language (Rai, 2012; Pai, 2018). Pai (2018), for example, reports such group that exhibits advanced English skills, and is "affluent, urban, highly-educated, and these English monolinguals are usually found in inter-caste or inter-religious unions." Such trend also evidence of the fact that the English language is no more considered as an outsider's language in India today. In fact, even in the remotest parts where English is used with the lowest level of proficiency, the badge of being a "superior" language stapled to the English language and its importance, is realised as a genuine requirement for a successful life. Perhaps therefore, in the field of publishing newspapers and their readership, English newspaper industry in India stands at third place in the world, only after the U.S and the U.K.

Officially, English has received the status of an assistant language, however, it is widely used in court proceedings and official announcements. Even so, the diplomacy at the international level utilises the language in propagating the nation's foreign policy efficiently and in conducting fair business and trade with the rest of the world. Also, the prowess in disseminating scholarly knowledge and technological advancement with other countries would have been lesser if embracing English as the chief medium of instruction in higher education would not be there.

This paper tries to measure the diachronic progress of the English language by analysing the arrival of the language in first few sections while latter sections examine the emergence of a distinct variety and the role of the language in influencing the socio-cultural construct of the nation. The structure of the paper is as follows.

Within section 2, sub-section 2.1 discusses about various events during the India's Pre-Independence era are discussed in acquiesce with Phase 1 and Phase 2 of Schneider's Dynamic model of post-colonial Englishes (Schneider, 2007). Phase 1 presents evidence of a complete distinction between the settlers (STL) and the indigenous (IDG) at initial stage, where English language serves as a utilitarian purpose, and marginal bilingualism develops. In Phase 2 of the Dynamic model, the STL community is stabilised in the foreign land, and their language is established in the fields of administration, education, and legislation through political decisions, and through cultural appropriation like *anglicisation*. The positive language attitude for English (STL's language) among IDG is subsequently increased so that it is seen as an asset, thereby considering STL's language as "prestigious".

In sub-section 2.2, i.e., after the Indian independence, the language is discussed by concentrating on various socio-political decisions introduced by the new government. In terms of speech, the language among IDG is encountered with heavy lexical borrowing, is recognised by a marked local accent with a distinct phonetic and phonological character (cf. Phase 3 of the Dynamic model, i.e., nativisation). In Phase 4, i.e., post-nativisation, existence of new form of variety of English is recognised due to homogeneity of linguistic features among IDG speakers. In this phase, a sense of self-reliant identity is developed, and literary creativity is acknowledged within and outside the country indicating towards a 'stabilised' variety.

Section 3 focusses on the development of English as a lingua franca in India through neutralisation process under various pressures that gives rise to the "standard" variety of English in India, i.e., Indian English. The emerging variety of English spoken in India in contemporary times is analysed in terms of its prowess in influencing the changing socio-cultural setup of the nation.

Lastly, section 4 provides some concluding comments concerning the future of English in India and the growing base for English in terms of its readership, present users, and subsequent learners.

2. Advent and development of English language

2.1 Pre-Independence era

The arrival and development of English in post-colonial nations, according to many scholars, has passed through almost similar phases (Kachru, 1983a; Crystal, 2003; Mesthrie and Bhatt, 2008), however, the earlier phases of development of the English language in India are observed as rather slow, scattered, and non-uniform in nature. Crystal (2003) says that most of the historical development of non-native varieties of English language can be traced through the expeditions made by soldiers and sailors. Kachru (1983a) in this respect identifies three stages through which English was introduced in India: a missionary phase, government policy in favour of English, and diffusion. However, Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008) argue to include trade, and military expeditions as "prefatory stages" to the stages that are discussed by Kachru.



The widespread geography of India has had a great role in the historical spread and introduction of the English language. India was not one nation but an entity of over 500 political entities called as "princely" states that were ruled by independent kings who had formed treaty relations with the British. These states were small but well-guarded, and much of the exchange with the other states was through trade and cultural gatherings like marriages and festivals. English was introduced by wishful adoption at the mercy of the princes as the British had no direct control over them. In such situation, India, as a diverse collection of many kingdoms lacked uniformity in centralising any law or Act related to language, at least during the early settlement of the British (cf. Hock and Bashir, 2016).

(i) Early Language Contact

The earliest settlement of the English in form of traders, army and missionaries were primarily at the ports of Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras (now Chennai), Surat, and Bombay (now Mumbai) (Schneider, 2007). There occurred lexical borrowings through language contact in the earlier stages through trading activities between the traders of East India Company (EIC), and the local traders and producers (Crystal, 2003); though early expeditions made to India were by the speakers of English who spoke diverse accents (Nihalani *et al.*, 1979; Mesthrie and Bhatt, 2008; McGilvary, 2011). Thus, the natives of these port places received exposure to the English language much earlier than the rest of the regions of India from the speakers who spoke a range of dialects from within England.

After the 'India Act' was passed in the British Parliament in 1784, the British government took formal control over EIC land holdings, and over political matters related to India (Mukherjee, 2007), which led to a massive expansion of the Company under the British Empire. Out of 1500 native Indian languages, there was no official language of the country, therefore, one was urgently needed by the British to suit their trading and administrative needs. Though, there were a few Company officials including James Mill, who believed in teaching Indian masses in their native languages like Sanskrit and Persian, thus, with this objective in view, a *madarsa* in Calcutta, and Hindu College at Benaras was established in the years 1781 and 1791 respectively. A genuine interest for oriental languages of India also led to the foundation of Asiatic Society of Bengal, and of a journal, *Asiatick Researches*. To fulfil the communication needs of the English people in India, there are instances when English officials are themselves reported to learn oriental academic languages like Sanskrit and Persian; William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Nathaniel Halhed, to name a few. The adoption of Indian vernacular words had become common in the Company, probably because there was no native word in English before, or it was done simply to emphasise the effectiveness of the message in the conversation. Following Schneider's Dynamic English model, IE was at its initial stage of development then, i.e., in the foundation stage, where both STL and IDG communities maintained separate identity, limited to minimal word borrowings.

In the home and office domain, however, the British recruited a limited number of Indians who directly reported to the British. These subjects are considered among the first who received direct exposure to the English language. With a limited language competency in English and a limited function in the said domains, these varieties are considered "occupational" in nature, thus given the names like Butler English and Babu English (see Hosali and Aitchison, 1986; Kachru, 1994; Gargesh, 2006). The butlers belonged to the working-class, primarily as head servants and housemaids, whereas *Babus*, meaning, "gentleman" in Bengali, were primarily low-level clerks and pleaders who communicated with the British regarding tasks limited to offices (see Hosali, 2005 for excerpts of Butler English; see Bragg, 2006 for excerpts of Babu English).

Davydova (2012) admits that the development of English in India would not have been more than of a pidgin or a creole during this time. The butlers of the house, with a lesser degree of English language competence used semi pidgin or minimal pidgin version of English which is known for verbosity or "wordiness", excessively polite to the ear, and appears to be flattering in nature. Similarly, Babu English is reported to concentrate less on the message but more in how the message is being delivered. Both these earlier varieties of English spoken in India are known to have their "roots in the hierarchical relation of the dominant and the dominated" (Kortmann *et al.*, 2020). Since IE had no stable form in its earlier phase, it was considered as a denigrated form of English. In fact, Yule and Burnell (1996) recognise the variety of English spoken then as "[the] broken English spoken by native servants in the Madras Presidency, which is not very much better than the Pigeon-English of China".

Though, these pidgin varieties have their roots in the 17th and 18th centuries, these are still prevalent in the country according to a few scholars, the proficiency of which stands similar to what was during the British Raj (Hosali,



2005). The speakers of these varieties, especially Butler English, represent a social class that includes uneducated bilinguals who work for fixed hours in work-sphere domains, at fixed locals like hotels, clubs, and other recreation centres (Kortmann *et al.*, 2020).

(ii) Anglicization through education

Although EIC was established in 1600 A.D in India, it took no formal educational policy for nearly one hundred years of its existence in India (Nurullah & Naik, 1951). A few preliminary steps taken regarding educating Indians by the company was through opening a few oriental schools (madarsas and gurukuls) of learning, as mentioned in 2.1 (i). This indicates that initially, the British had the least interest in investing time and resources in the acculturation of the Indian masses through their language (Basu, 1982). There were however a few English-medium schools that were founded between 1770s and 1780s, but these were mainly started by Christian missionaries like Schwartz, Carey, Marshman, and Ward in Tanjore, and later in Ramnad and Shivaganga (Basu, 1982). The instructions at these institutions were given to a limited number of pupils (mostly Christians) by L2 (second language) or L3 (third language) speakers of English who were mostly illiterate (Krishnaswamy and Burde, 1998; Schneider, 2007). During the same time, there were also a few prominent newspapers/journals like the short-lived English weekly *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* or *the Original Calcutta General Advertiser* (1780-1782) in which several words of Anglo-Indian origin were freely used, but the readership primarily included English officials (Otis, 2018). There was a very limited change in language attitude for English among Indians until now, except for higher castes who were home taught, who later had the means and opportunity to receive higher education in England, or among those who served the British in the administration in places like Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras.

Ultimately, it was Thomas Babington Macaulay, who on 2nd February 1835, brought about a proposal to the then Governor-General Bentinck to institute an education policy in support of using English language in India. The proposal directly aimed to,

“...form a class who may be interpreters between us [the British] and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect ...”

(quoted in Basu, 1982 and Kachru, 1983a)

The suggested proposal was passed, and a new education policy was adopted that aimed to profess the English language as the sole medium to attain first world knowledge, by inculcating the knowledge of English literature, history, and science, so to “fill the gap between the two cultures” (Mukherjee, 2007). Macaulay’s idea that later came to be known as ‘Macaulay Minutes’ was actually a downward ‘infiltration theory’, that was based on the suggestion that knowledge provided in English-medium at secondary level would trickle down from upper-caste Indians to the masses, so that people would thrive for better employment opportunities while serving under the British on low wages. Though, vernacular languages did serve as the medium of instruction in teaching during the colonial period, but it was used only until the pupils had been through primary school. However, Macaulay Minutes’ policies subsequently led to the denigration of indigenous languages (Vijayalakshmi and Babu, 2014) in favour of English, thereby shutting doors of development for the traditional languages like Sanskrit and Persian that were then used in oriental institutes of learning like gurukuls and madarsas (Kachru 1983a). The popularity of English further increased after it replaced Persian as the official language in the courts in 1837. Basu (1982) finds that the English language managed to form its place firmly among Indians, especially after Lord Hardinge announced that a preference would be given to English-educated Indians in government appointments. After the suggestions made in Wood’s Despatch (1854) in favour of European learning through English language, by the year 1857, major port cities like Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras witnessed the opening of public universities that instructed mainly in English (Kachru, 1986). The favourable growth of the English language among Indians in the education sector paved its way to be chosen as the first language of the then government, of the social elite, and of the press. In order to enhance the chances of employability and to receive a recognition, a few educated Indian masses, particularly of higher castes found an opportunity to distinct themselves from the rest of the Indians. Bansal (1966) talks about the English language in India as spoken by the “educated” people in then India did not differ much from native British English in grammar and vocabulary.



While English had been enjoying the status of the chief language in higher secondary schools and universities, and as an official language in the administration, the European curriculum, at the same time, also made the masses familiar with the western ideas of democracy. The adoption of the English language eventually rebounded and resulted in an opposition to what Macaulay and other anglicists had planned so that the press began to contribute to the national freedom struggle, especially after The Revolt of 1857. The western model of the curriculum in the education sector pushed by the British administration was equally welcomed by prominent leaders of Indian dissent like Raja Mohun Roy who also published an English fortnightly, *Brahmanical Magazine* (1821) (Narayanrao, 2012). Later, several newspapers and journalists acted as the Fourth Estate and expressed their anguish towards the British government for its control over freedom of speech and expression; a few English-printed newspapers that served the national cause then are – *The Hindu* (1878), *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1868), and *Hindustan Times* (1924) (Narayanrao, 2012). There are also instances reported where the masses themselves demanded the opening of English-medium educational institutes from the public funds under British India at primary school level (Basu, 1982). As the readership and audience for language grew, many eminent Indians turned in favour of the English language because the language seemed appropriate to propagate and extend the voice of the Indian national freedom struggle to the world. This subsequently resulted in social and political integration of the Indian people that proved catalytic in India's struggle for independence (Kirkpatrick, 2020).

2.2 After-Independence era

Indian independence in 1947 did not only bring individual freedom but also social, economic, and political freedom in the country. Bolton (2008) says, "[the] major spread of English in the region occurred not in the colonial period, but in the latter half of the twentieth century", especially after witnessing the changes in education policy in many Asian countries tilting in favour of English. Even though, by the time of independence, English was already taught in a few institutes of higher learning (Agnihotri and Khanna, 1997), most parts of the population was still devoid of English. As the literacy rate of India recorded in the year stood at 12%, reforms were needed in the education sector to procure for a better situation. Until before India's independence, only a particular class of the Indian society that included English-educated Indian princes, upper caste people in the administration, eminent political leaders, and journalists had received exposure to the language, which was mostly through education acquired in various institutes of learning.

After the independence, the foreign language status of English slowly acquired the status of a second language or third language of the people. In the administration, it is then that English language (alongside Hindi) began to be considered one of the languages to be used for proceedings of the new parliament. Several newly formed states also considered English as a compulsory language in their respective education system. Such positive attitude in the administration and governance towards English equally affected the socio-economic plane among the people so that the language began to be recognised as a "passport" for better employment opportunities to attain financial stability and viewing it as a symbol of "prestige" to gain respect in the society.

(i) Adoption of English as a co-official language

Soon after the Indian independence, the idea of a mixed economy was adopted, and Five-year plans under the Planning Commission were initiated to overcome rampant poverty due to high unemployment and overdependence on agriculture. The newly formed government in the new India had a vision of growth and prosperity for the nation by industrialising the agrarian sector (which was the chief occupation of most Indians then), and by educating the masses. It appeared that the intention of the then Indian political leaders was to get rid of the English rule but not of English language as they aspired to connect with the economy of the world through trade, and that they had seen the power of the English language during the Indian freedom struggle. Even the private schools chose to deliver education to students in English-medium.

In the administration, concerning changes in the language policy, which was a challenging task, English was kept as a temporary co-official language along with Hindi until 1965, after which Hindi would replace English (Fasold, 1984). The decision was however soon followed by resentment from the south-Indian states (mainly Karnataka and Tamilnadu) who raised a concern about the use of a viable language for communication with the south and the rest of India (see Hardgrave, 1965 for a political view; Kachru B, 2005). The political upheavals and protests that came



from southern (Dravidian) states were apparently against Hindi, but not English. Since there was no absolute link to establish uniform communication across the country (because of the Indo-Dravidian lingual divide), English seemed the most plausible choice amongst all. This positive language attitude towards English among the people of South India served as a prophylactic function against the domination of Hindi among Dravidian speakers (Schiffman, 2003). Thus, in 1967, through an amendment in The Official Languages Act, English was chosen to act as a linking language for an indefinite time period between the central government and the states that catered to different languages (see Patra, 1968). Since 1998, The Constitution of India recognises Hindi in Devanagari script as the official language of India, as mentioned in the Article 346, and English as a provisional official sub-language of the country (Mehrotra, 1998).

In order to further improve inter-state communication because of the absence of a common language that clearly affected the governance and administrative efficiency in the previous years, Three Language Formula (3LF) was adopted in 1968 as enunciated in National Policy Resolution. It was enacted to affirm national unity, and to uprear the future generation that would be devoid of problems of language intelligibility. Bhattacharya and Chandrasekhar (2020) say that "[3LF]...was an instrument for achieving the objective of a multilingual India". 3LF advocated teaching three languages to pupils at schools: regional language – Hindi (or in Hindi belt, another Indian language) – any European language, which was visibly English (Melchers and Shaw, 2003; Biswas, 2004; Amritavalli and Jayaseelan, 2007). With the exception of Tamilnadu state that preferred a two-language policy, all other states followed the 3LF. However, the purpose of 3LF could not altogether reached to its success, yet, English had officially arced its way into the Indian education system, both at the primary and higher education level.

While at the ground level, English language was still seen as the language of the "educated" among the socio-economically downtrodden as there was a group of people that was linguistically more competent in English than the rest. However, during the same decade, Green revolution (1967-68) and White Revolution (1970) were introduced in the country. Green Revolution directed towards forming an industrial system for an extensive production of crops and food items to abolish malnutrition through the use of modern methods of irrigation and fertilizers (Hardin, 2008). Similarly, White Revolution aimed to create a nationwide milk grid to create a stable supply chain, and for the financial development of the milk providers in the rural India. Resultingly, due to modernisation in the agriculture and in the milk production sector, the masses, especially in rural India, were now able to send their children to English-medium schools, who were earlier unable to do so, either because of a disinterest towards education or because of financial restraints (Graddol, 2010). The Second Education Policy 1986 under NPE (National Policy on Education) scheme further emphasised on "[the] removal of disparities and to equalise educational opportunity" on the grounds of gender disparities, caste differences, economic status, regional imbalances, and physiological differences (National Policy on Education, 1986). Since the English language had already made a distinct place in the Indian education system since the introduction of 3LF, scholars like Pandey (1981); Balasubramanian (2009); and Mesthrie (2015) observe a drastic decline in the speakers of British English after independence, which indicates towards the development of a confident and a distinct form of identity among English-knowing Indians. This development is visibly reflected in the writings of a few prominent post-colonial writers and in their works like *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, that evidence of writing about post-colonial and post-modern transition in a distinctive style of expression. Many other similar writers like Arundhati Roy and Vikram Seth have since equally received appreciation and readership among the elite within India, and outside the country (Mukherjee, 2007).

(ii) Adoption of LPG model

As the English language had slid into the independent India's educational system after the introduction of 3LF and educational policies under NPE, the readership for English grew among people so that English daily newspapers that are reported to be merely 44 in number during the 1950s had risen to a soaring number of 209 in the 1990s (Narayanrao, 2012). Also, with an aim to expand the Indian economy, especially after the initiation of Five-year Plans and Green and White Revolution, India continued to follow the progressive model of LPG, i.e., Liberalisation – Privatisation – Globalisation. Under LPG, the idea of economic reforms, and expansion of the services sector were presented in the 1991 Budget by Dr Manmohan Singh. The then government shifted to a decentralised economy by welcoming foreign investment in order to globalise the Indian market (Puri, 2013). Due to various structural adjustments in the Indian economy, the exports rose from 3.6% in 1992-93 to 22.2% in 1993-94.



The idea of reforming the Indian economy through LPG seemed to acquiescently blend in favour of the development of English. It is so because as foreign companies entered into the Indian market, there occurred an exponential growth in private media, banking sector, health care, science and technology, sports, and BPO industry (Schaeffer, 2005). These sectors required heavy employment of native Indians who had the knowledge of English for intranational as well as transnational purposes to connect with the rest of the world. Not only there occurred an exchange of skills, technology, and goods and services during the period, but also of societies and cultures through the flow of a worldwide network of exchange in communication. English, which was earlier introduced by British as a medium of anglicization, was now seen not only as a symbol of prestige and advancement but also a genuine requirement for a successful life.¹ The development of English language which was earlier mediated primarily through government initiatives was now being anticipated by Indians themselves (Farrell and Giri, 2011).

The BPO industry, and in particular, the customer service jobs at call centres, opened new job opportunities to fulfil the youth temptation who earlier only had traditional options in the public sector. In order to acquire employees at cheaper wages, besides hiring urban English speakers, the multinational companies equally looked for prospective candidates in the rural part of India, thus encompassing all population and housing types (Bolton *et al.*, 2011). The trend can be assessed through 350,000 call centre workers that are reported to be employed in India in 2015 (White, 2015). English emerging as a crucial language to attain financial stability is evident in Chakraborty and Bakshi (2016) (quoted in Bhattacharya and Chandrasekhar, 2020) who find that a 10 per cent lower probability of learning English in primary classes leads to a decline in weekly wages by 8 per cent in the Indian labour market.

The economic reforms and the prospect for a better life in terms of 'class' equally affected the socio-cultural norms of the family setting. This is to say that, due to the expansion of the economy through urbanisation and industrialisation, there occurred internal migration and immigration of people that led to a transition from joint family towards nuclear family, thereby dissecting the prospective employees from the traditional Indian family system. It is argued in the literature that education, if it stressed Western values, could lead to such divergence in family institution (Goode, 1968), which, in case of India, connectedly brought changes in behaviour, living standards, and in the lifestyle of the younger generation. Also, the introduction of western media channels that adapted to Indian conditions through use of Hindi/English bilingual medium proved to be vital in changing social attitudes and promoting flexibility in language choice among the middle class. This was not the case when the only state-controlled T.V network, Doordarshan was aired (also see Thussu, 2000 for role of private media in language hybridisation in India).

Though post-colonial theories had been helpful in knowing and repairing the psychological, cultural, and economic trauma of the pre-independence era, however, wide exposure to English language post-90s could be viewed as a system that is since based on demand and supply system. There is this eager younger generation to provide services to the IT and outsourcing industry, and equally, there is a system to cater to the thriving needs of the generation. During the transition from postcolonialism to postmodernism, and subsequently to cosmopolitanism, the post-colonial tag now weighs lesser among the minds of the employed young men and women because they can cautiously switch to the British/American identity at the workplace and can revert back to the Indian setting after the job, which was not the case during the earlier stages of the introduction of English in India.

3. English spoken in India today

Indian English (Glottocode: *indi1255*) has evolved into one of the largest spoken varieties in the world today. Since the early form of semi-pidgin, i.e., Butler English in domestic sphere, or Babu English in the office domain, for example, that were disparaged for being full of errors or mistakes (cf. Goffin, 1934; Parasher, 1991; Yule and Brunell, 1996), English language spoken in India has since developed into a variety which is noted for its innovative features distinct from the inner circle varieties in terms of phonology, lexis, and grammar.

¹ English emerging as a prestigious language in the society, and the language of the "elite" can be attested through an old attitudinal study by Parasher (1980) who finds that English served as the dominant language at the workplace, and in situations like bargaining at shops, ordering at restaurants, asking for directions, and making conversations with strangers. The participants who were interviewed during the study admit that they were heard in a more serious and attentive manner when they conversed in English.



The difference between the English spoken during the colonial era and now is that today, the English language is introduced to the learners (students) before their L1 (first language) is completely established. This is to say that during the British era, the masses received their primary education in their respective L1 and that, it was only during the secondary education level they received exposure to English (after the introduction of Macaulay Minutes). However, today, the boundary between their L1 and English has become penetrable for most speakers so that English (coinages, loanwords, nonce words, or phrases) is fluidly used and absorbed in their mental lexicon since the early acquisition of either of the languages through phenomena like code-switching and code-mixing in speech, and through cinemas, advertisements, street hoardings etc. (see [Nandi, 2013](#) for examples). Thus, both, L1 and English language have developed into a "hybrid" of each other that has resulted in a competence that spans the two languages. English, though, does not belong to either Indo-Aryan, or Dravidian language family, or any other language sub-group yet the language has a long past in the country. Even those who have minimal knowledge of the English language use it in some workable form to facilitate communication with those who have a good proficiency level of English. [Gargesh \(2006\)](#) thus calls English as a "vehicular language" which is visibly used by taxi-drivers and tourist guides across India who are generally uneducated.

3.1 The emergence of pan-Indian variety of English spoken in India

In the course to standardise and institutionalise the variety of English spoken in India by the educated, terms like Indian English (henceforth IE), Standard Indian English (henceforth SIE) and General Indian English (henceforth GIE) have been employed synonymously. The evidence is that GIE is a "target" variety which is the phonology of Indians who are proficient in English. It is a description of "a socially acceptable pronunciation devoid of regional peculiarities that may impair communication with speakers from within and outside the country" ([Pandey 1981](#)). In order to establish the variety firmly, GIE is "the de facto norm" used for pedagogic purposes at CIEFL university ([CIEFL, 1972](#)). In fact, the concept of GIE is based on homogeneity of features found among its speakers, which [Nihalani et al. \(2005\)](#), in *Indian and British English: A Handbook of usage and pronunciation*, find around 1000 of them (see [Bansal and Harrison, 1972](#); [CIEFL, 1972](#); [Bansal, 1976](#); [Kachru, 1983a](#); [Pandey, 1994](#) for an impressionistic view on the variety).

Concerning the development and recognition of the pan-Indian variety of English, i.e., IE, it is to be comprehended that because of social, educational, and historical factors, one variety of a language over the years comes to be recognised, codified, and accepted as a "prestigious" or "standard" form and that the variety having a highly structured system may exhibit systematic deviations from inner circle varieties (RP or GA). The development of IE as the lingua franca in India can be assessed in three major steps that are explained below and as displayed in Figure 1.

- (i) During the initial stage, speakers with different proficiency levels (due to language learning, educational level, exposure, and its use) contribute as the sum input of speakers of English in India. The proficiency range comprises from simple form like pidgin (spoken in hotels, restaurants, and by clerks; cf. [Hosali, 2005](#)), to portmanteau and code-mix/code-switch dialects like Hinglish, and extend to regional varieties. The regional varieties are a gamut of many vernacular dialects of English like Punjabi English, Bengali English, Marathi English etc. that have developed in localised conditions due to language interference from mother tongue.
- (ii) These speakers in the second stage undergo neutralisation process under two pressures: one of RP or GA, and second, a larger influence of major regional varieties of IE induced by vernacular languages. The former arises out of historical factors (post-colonial status) and through pedagogic/teaching methods at higher educational level ([CIEFL, 1972](#)), and the latter due to exposure through exchange with speakers of other L1 Indian languages in different socio-cultural contexts (migration, business, offices, shared geography etc.) that leads to diffusion of local features. In this stage, there also occurs rectification of deviations by elimination of smaller regional features and through replacement or adoption (sometimes through imitation that leads to hypercorrection) of features of the inner varieties.²

² Not only for English but the process of neutralisation is clearly evident for Hindi. It is observed that in north India, L1 Hindi users in fact speak Hindustani that can be considered as a continuum between Hindi and Urdu. Also, it would not be incorrect



- (iii) After neutralisation under various pressures causing internal developments, the subsequent outcome is GIE or SIE that serves as lingua franca in India. This can be analogously understood from the concept that, just like any town, there is a central place, a boulevard where all the roads in the town merge, this is what forms the pan-Indian variety of English. The proficiency level of the standard variety would still vary from zero – central – ambilingual point (see [Kachru, 1965](#) for cline of bilingualism in India), however, the central point defines the standard variety which is spoken by the educated class.

Also, as advised by some scholars, a safer way probably would be to call IE as Educated IE, to avoid disagreement arising out of confusion regarding its range and uniformity ([Parashar, 1979](#); [Verma, 1978](#)). [Verma \(1978\)](#), while explaining the cline of English proficiency, believes that bilingualism (mother-tongue and English) extends from non-educated varieties of English at one end to an internationally accepted standard form at the other. He suggests that the form of speech that lies in between these two ends is called Educated IE or Standard IE. [Parasher \(1979\)](#) also supports Verma's notion by saying that, "[Educated IE] is that variety of English which is used by educated Indians who have at least a university degree". He argues by quoting [Stephenson \(1977\)](#) who defines American English as "the usage of best educated and most prominent members of the speech community".

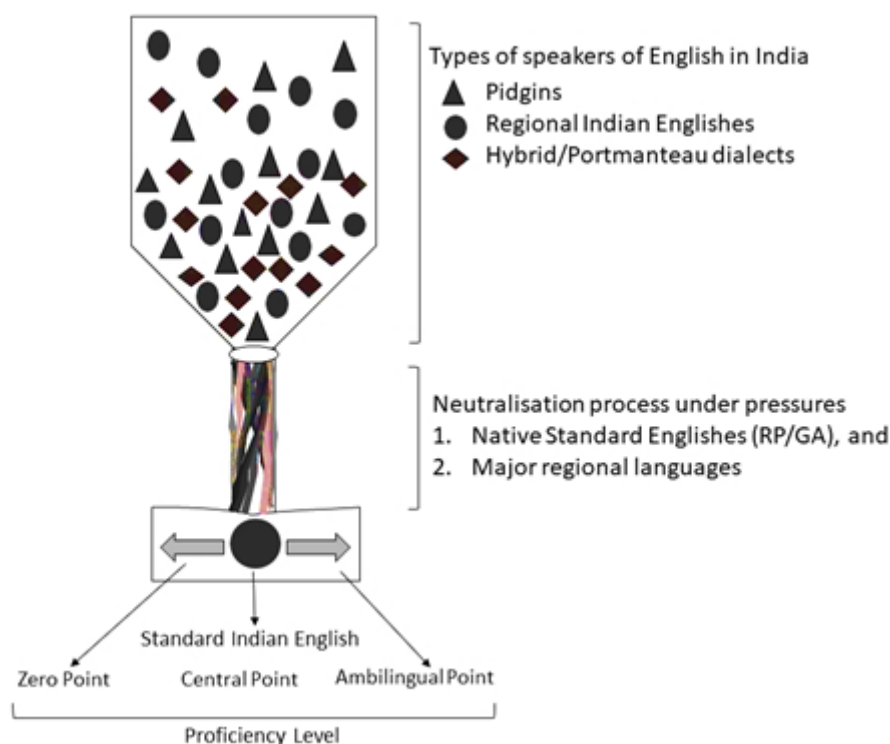


Figure 1 Development of GIE or SIE as a lingua franca in India.

3.2 English language influencing the socio-cultural construct of India

The phases of the development of English in India that are discussed at great length in earlier section (cf. section 2), the English language has indeed traversed an interesting journey. Especially after the start of the 21st century, the number of L2 users of English have witnessed an overall sharp increase. This is primarily due to the adoption of the LPG model in the 1990s, that has offered world trade, technological advancement, and overall, an opportunity to develop as a nation at par with the rest of the world (see [Chand, 2010](#); [Kohli, 2017](#)). At individual

to say that the modern generation in India prefers to use English words in their spoken variety of Hindustani which indicates the variety that is an amalgam of Hindi, Urdu, and English.

More recently, a preference towards a more diluted version of formal Hindi in the private sector as well as government public offices can be attested through a government circular (dated 26 September 2011 quoted in Schiffman, 2005) that directs civil servants and clerks to write their files in simplified Hindi, i.e. Hindi with English words rather than "tatsam" (pure Hindi or Sanskrit) words.

level, exposure to private media, internet, international recruitment, and employee immigration in work domain, have brought changes in social setting and social mobility for the people.

Concerning the social set up of India, which was earlier determined on the ground of one’s caste, and where the chances of upliftment in the social hierarchy was only through traditional modes like *Sanskritisation*, the lower castes, due to their ‘denigrated’ social status had a lesser chance to alleviate their social status because of the rigidity and inflexibility in the Indian caste system.³ The same is reflected in the education sector, especially before independence, where caste hierarchy permitted only the rich and higher caste people to receive education, whereas lower castes were mostly remained barred from having opportunities of learning English language or receiving education, in general. The acquisition of English among the poor (and low castes) was only through a minimum degree of language contact who served the British at in-home setting (Butler English and Kitchen English, for example), whereas the employees appointed in the administration were mostly higher castes Brahmins who were engaged in official tasks (Babu English, for example; also see *Macaulay Minutes, 1835*). There is an equal role of the British to belittle lower castes by introducing imported goods, and by installing factories in India that led to many caste-linked crafts being closed down (*Bouglé, 1971*).

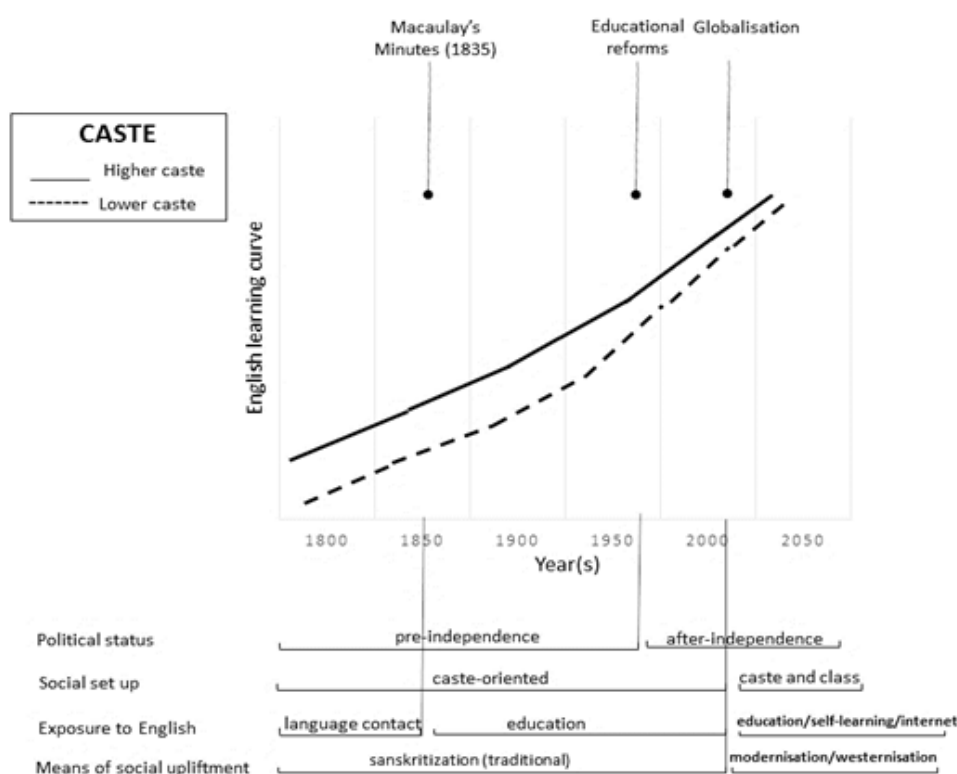


Figure 2 Development of English and changing societal set up across timeline of various historical events⁴

However, between the era of educational reforms after the independence (cf. 2.2 (i)) and the era of LPG (cf. 2.2. (ii)), the transition of belief from *sacred* to *secular* led to a gradual shift from traditional concepts of social mobility like Sanskritisation to western-based ideas like modernisation. Similarly, the influence of westernisation led

³ Sanskritisation is a concept propagated by M.N Srinivas that involves a process through which lower castes seek upward mobility to overcome their status in the caste hierarchy. In this process, lower castes attempt to replace their own customs, ideology, rituals, and practices by introducing changes in their food habits, deity worship etc. in favour of those that are followed by relatively higher castes (see Srinivas, 1962; Jayapalan, 2001 on Sanskritisation).

⁴ Using caste system as the parameter to present English language learning curve and education, in general, is essential because of the social set up of the country, especially before the 21st century, where mainly upper castes contributed to the nation’s literacy rate. Caste system also provides a vital insight in knowing about the changing mode of social mobility among the people (cf. 2.2 (ii)). While caste hierarchy is primarily identified with Hindu religion, it is in fact a deep-rooted concept that is equally followed by other religions in India like Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (see Ballhatchet, 1998; Mills, 2002; Natarajan, 2010).



to the introduction of class from the relatively rigid categorisation of caste-based system to caste-class oriented social system. As English language has had long become the leading language of discourse at the international level, and as the lingua franca at professional level, there appears a vital role of the education policies that have played a great role in narrowing the gap between the two caste types. Such trends and developments of social change can be assessed through Figure 2.

The lower castes today view English language as a marker of 'higher' culture and as a tool of liberation against the social oppressive notion of them being considered as "untouchables". The lower caste intellectuals believe that English serves as a medium to raise their opinion directly to the international public which earlier needed to be mediated through higher caste people (Pandey, 2011; Graddol, 2009, cited in Bolton *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, the impact of adopting the model of the global economy is also witnessed by an overall literacy growth rate in India. A newspaper report states, "In contrast with.....11.32 % [literacy] increase between 1901 and 1951, the crude literacy rate rose by 48.2 % between 1951 and 2011, with the 1991-2001 decade registering the highest growth (11.67 %)" (The Hindu, 04 April 2011).

4. Discussion and Concluding remarks

The use of English in education has played a vital role not only in promoting overall literacy among the masses but at the same time, as an agent in diminishing the exploitative concept of caste system at social level. Also, it is no more considered as a foreign language but one of the Indian languages except in the remote areas, which is perhaps due to a lesser exposure to the language in comparison to the mainland. Today, English in India serves the role of chief language in the administration, in most public and private schools (Bhattacharya and Chandrasekhar, 2020), and is the preferred language in office domain (Parasher, 1979). It serves as a link language and lingua franca between north and south India, for the L1 speakers of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages (see Kachru, 1976). Among many bilinguals in the north, English serves as a role of an embedded language in portmanteau dialects like Hinglish, among both proficient as well as the uneducated/semi-educated (see Sailaja, 2011 for Hinglish).

The data on speakers of IE reveal that 230,000 report English as their first language, whereas 86 million list it as their second language, and another 39 million consider it as their third language (India Census, 2010 cited in Bolton *et al.*, 2011). It is believed that English serves as an ENL for the least (Sailaja, 2009), while it is used as ESL for the most, and then, there are a few who use it sparingly as EFL (Kandiah, 1993).

Recently, there has also been a clear shift in preference among parents in enrolling their children in private English-medium schools in India, with a hope to receive better education and for a better exposure to the English language in comparison to the government schools (Goyal and Pandey, 2009; Central Square Foundation). However, due to plurilingual character of the nation that leads to intelligibility issues among the speakers of IE, not enough stress is laid on the pronunciation part. Subsequently, speakers of IE who have different mother tongues often face difficulties in understanding each other due to their distinct accents (Schneider, 2007). In this direction, besides confining to the grammar, vocabulary, and writing expression, phonetics-based training classrooms are anticipated to overcome the issues of intelligibility among students and teachers (cf. Nadimpalli, 2014).

Concerning readership, about 28,000 books are published in English every year, which makes the country the third-largest publisher of English titles in the world (Sailaja, 2009). A recent survey report of 2018 by Statista shows that out of a total of 430 million certified newspaper publications printed in different languages in India, where English is ranked second, with around 53 million prints (Statista, 2021). Furthermore, in the electronic media, 57 percent of TV advertisements are aired in English, whereas only 20 percent in Hindi (Mehrotra 1998). Such evidence suggest that English will continue to emerge as an essential language in the coming generations in India (Bhattacharya and Chandrasekhar, 2020) purportedly representing "better education, better culture and higher intellect" (Vijayalakshmi & Babu, 2014).

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