

Summary

Indian English has its own colorful history and presence in global communication. This lecture focuses on the following seven aspects of Indian English: (1) Origin and development; (2) Salient structural properties; (3) Discourse features (Indian ways of speaking); (4) Acceptability and intelligibility; (5) Indian Accent; (6) Non-Verbal communication; and (7) Tips for cross-cultural communication.

The introduction of English to the Indian linguistic landscape opened with the dawn of the British colonial era, English began to develop roots in Indian education. A blueprint for India's educational policy was laid down in Lord Macaulay's *Minute* (Feb. 2, 1835). Macaulay stated that the mission for the British Raj to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect." More than one and a half centuries later, English has overcome its status as merely the language of the colonial power and has become an integral part of the Indian linguistic mosaic. Contrary to the most popular pre-independence consensus, that Hindi would dethrone the English language after independence, English has not only continued to flourish in the educational and official network of India but has also become one of the official languages of the nation and thus continues to enjoy the patronage of the Indian elite.

English is used extensively in education, law, government, media, science, and technology. It has undergone significant changes locally to carry much of the communicative burden of Indian society. The following remarks of Raja Rao, an internationally renowned author in English, are instructive in this regard:

“After language, the next problem is that of Style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our India expression...We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on”

Indian expression makes Indian English different from either American or British English, exactly in the same fashion, that American English did not choose to be a clone of British English. It would be a mistake to view such differences as “errors.” On the contrary, they are “innovations” enriching English in terms of creating its global appeal.

The Indian attitude toward Indian English is very positive. They consider their English as the “correct” English best suited to the Indian setting. Even though some Indians might report that “they speak British English,” it is a more accurate expression of their harmonious relationship with the British than a faithful reporting of their actual verbal performance. For a variety of reasons, some Indians do speak English with a British rather than with an Indian accent. However, such Indians are usually perceived as “pompous” “full of air” by most Indians.

English usage in India ranges from more or less uniform (national variety) to mutually unintelligible varieties. A number of surveys show that Indians prefer to use and learn Indian English. They consider their English as “good” and “proper.” Also, empirical evidence shows that in North America, Indian English is more readily understood than even the BBC or British varieties.

Five notable phonetic and phonological features of Indian English are as follows: (1) Lack of aspiration in the word-initial position: Words such as pin and Kanpur (name of city) are pronounced as pin and kanpur; not as phin and khanpur, respectively; (2) Retroflexion. Alveolar consonants: t, and d are replaced by their corresponding Retroflex consonants (T, D). Therefore, alveolar t and d in the name of the months such as October, September and December are pronounced as OcTober, SepTember, and December; (3) Lack of Interdentals: Words such as thanks and that are pronounced with corresponding unvoiced and voiced alveolar stops, respectively; (4) Some Fricatives are replaced by bilabials (fail is pronounced as phail); and (5) Pronunciation: Indian English pronunciation is a relatively close approximation to the written form.

The stress and intonation system of Indian English is also different from British or American English. Observe the pronunciation of words such as engineer and development in the lecture. The rhythm of Indian English is based on long and short syllables rather than on stressed syllables. Therefore, Indian English is a ‘Syllable-timed’ language with ‘sing-song’ characteristics.

The following grammatical features distinguish Indian English either from American or British English: (1) Reduplication: a small small favor; (2) Countability of Non-Counts: words such as furniture and luggage become furnitures and luggages, respectively. (3) Addition of Prepositions/particles: observe the addition of the particle off in: ‘Everyone is dismissing off my proposal.’

Indian way of speaking is also different from either British or American English. Its discourse style can best be characterized as 'indirect'. Rather than using the offensive word, rape, Indians would phrase it as: outraging the modesty of girls. As Kachru points out "Directness in presenting the point, very little stylistic ornamentation, and emphasis on the information content" is not a prerequisite of Indian English. Furthermore, Indians code-mix with Indian languages (e.g. Hindi) very frequently.

Differences pointed out in the preceding four paragraphs above contribute to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. What is interesting is that some times the cross-cultural misunderstandings can emerge on very simple grounds such as failure to understand 'how to say 'yes'' in Indian English. The use of 'yes' in Indian English has multiple meanings. Similarly, the non-verbal conventions of expressing 'yes' is different in Indian English and they can be a potential source of miscommunication between the speakers of the native varieties of English and Indian English.

In addition to presenting some interesting facts about the contribution of Indian English to the native varieties of English, the lecture presents practical tips--the 'Do's and Don't'--for communicating with Indians through English.

India is undoubtedly an emerging economic giant in the 21st century. Therefore, it is not surprising that Indian English is asserting itself in the area of global communication. Linguists, language teachers, business leaders, global marketers, communication experts, and researchers in intercultural/international communication will benefit from this lecture.