To Teach or Not to Teach Code-Mixed English?

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is four-folds: (1) to examine the unique multilingual context of English in India; (2) to examine Hinglish, one of the verbal outcomes of multilingual India; (3) to shed light on Code-Mixing and Code-Switching as bilingual phenomena distinct from other hybrid linguistic systems, and (4) to address the question of English language pedagogy in India with special reference to 'teach or not to teach the code-mixed' variety of English (Hinglish) in India. The paper argues that it is timely and urgent to address the legitimacy and challenges of teaching code-mixed English (e.g. Hinglish) in India. The theoretical underpinning of this paper is derived from the current research on World Englishes, psycholinguistics of multilingualism, language acquisition/ learnability, and classroom pedagogy.

Keywords: Indian multilingualism, sustainability, translanguaging, unconscious learning, code-mixed English, bilingual language modes, interlanguage.

Introduction

While English is often bestowed the unflattering title of 'the killer language' of linguistic diversity, nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that English is the single most important vehicle of global bilingualism and multilingualism. With the unprecedented global spread of English in the history of human communication, English came into contact with every major and minor language around the globe. As it is often the case, depending on the forces of individual, social and political bilingualism among others, language contact either leads to sustainable

bilingualism or transient bilingualism. While sustainable bilingualism brings about innovations and language vitality, transient bilingualism yields monolingualism or even language death. In other words, English is not a killer language as long as bilingualism is sustainable and not transient. The paper argues that the bilingual language mixing—code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS)— is one of the most evitable consequences of sustainable bilingualism, which has now reached its new heights in the history of Indian bilingualism/multilingualism. In this paper, I will use the term 'multilingualism' as a cover term for both bilingualism and multilingualism for the ease of exposition. Also, the term, Hinglish refers to the mixing of Hindi as an embedded language with English as a matrix language (see Bhatia and Ritchie 2009: 631).

The aim of this paper is four-fold: (1) to examine the unique multilingual context of English in India; (2) to examine Hinglish as one of the verbal outcomes of multilingual India; (3) to shed light on CM and CS as bilingual phenomena distinct from other hybrid linguistic systems, and (4) to address the question of English language pedagogy in India with special reference to 'teach or not teach code-mixed' variety of English (Hinglish) in India. The paper argues that it is timely and urgent to address the legitimacy and challenges of teaching code-mixed English (e.g. Hinglish) in India in section 4.0. Finally, conclusions are presented in 5.0.

In order to achieve the above goals, the theoretical underpinning of this paper is derived from the current research on World Englishes, psycholinguistics of multilingualism, language acquisition/learnability, classroom pedagogy.

Theoretical Underpinning

Following Kachru's Three Concentric Circles model of English users, it is important to point out that unlike the native varieties of English in the inner circle, Indian English, and other Englishes spoken in the outer circle (e.g. Singaporean or Nigerian English), did not evolve in a monolingual context. The multilingual context played a key role in shaping their distinct nature. Although introduction of English to the linguistic landscape of India during the British colonial era opened a new chapter in the prolonged colonial history of multilingualism in Dutch, Portuguese and French (Kachru 1997), the current state of

Indian bilingualism is neither a mere by-product of the colonial era nor is it shaped exclusively by the recent forces of economic and political globalization. A sustainable and prolonged history of 3,000 years of uninterrupted multilingualism is central to the distinct users and usage of English in contemporary India. In section 2, I will provide evidence to support the point I am making here.

Besides factors such as language contact and convergence, the role of multilingual brain is also instructive to shed light on the verbal behaviour of bilingual/multilingual brain to come to grips with the challenges of English language pedagogy in India.

Any attempt to characterize the bilingual brain must account for the following three natural aspects of bilingual verbal behaviour: (1) Depending upon the communicative circumstances, bilinguals swing between the monolingual and bilingual language modes; (2) Bilinguals have an ability to keep two or more languages separate whenever needed; and (3) More interestingly, they can also carry out an integration of two or more languages within a speech event.

Bilingual Language Modes: Language Activation

Bilinguals are like a sliding switch who can move between one or more language states/modes as required for the production, comprehension, and processing of verbal messages in a most cost-effective and efficient way. If bilinguals are placed in a predominantly monolingual setting, they are likely to activate only one language; while in a bilingual environment, they can easily shift into a bilingual mode to a differential degree. The activation or deactivation process is not time consuming. In a naturalistic bilingual environment, this process usually does not require bilinguals to take more than a few milliseconds to swing into a bilingual language mode and revert back to a monolingual mode with the same time efficiency. However, under unexpected circumstances (e.g. caught off-guard by a white Canadian speaking an African language in Canada) or under emotional trauma or cultural shock or in a formal classroom, the activation takes considerable time. In the longitudinal study of his daughter, Hildegard, reported that Hildegard, while in Germany, came to tears at one point when she could not activate her mother tongue, English (Leopard, 1939–1950). The failure to ensure natural conditions responsible for the activation of bilingual language

mode is a common methodological shortcoming of bilingual language testing, see Grosjean (2008, 2010); Bhatia (2018a). An in-depth review of processing cost involved in the language activation-deactivation process can be found in Meuter (2005). In other words, the potential of activation and deactivation of language modes—both monolingual and bilingual mode—hold an important key to bilingual's language use. Additionally, it has psycholinguistic implications for language processing (i.e. time taken by second language learners who are not exposed to language hybridization (aka translanguaging[1]) in classroom pedagogy.

Bilingual Language Separation and Language Integration

In addition to language activation or deactivation control phenomena, the other two salient characteristics of bilingual verbal behaviour are bilinguals' balanced competence and capacity to separate the two linguistic systems (i.e. language switching, or CS) and to integrate them within a sentence or a speech event (i.e. language mixing, or CM). CM is a far more complex cognitive ability than language separation (CS). Yet, it is also very natural to bilinguals. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe the emergence of mixed systems such as Hinglish, Spanglish, Germlish, and so on, around the globe. See section 3.0 for more details.

Super Diversity and Sustainability of Indian Multilingualism

Super-diversity is the defining feature of ancient as well as modern India. This region represents a microcosm of different languages, races, religions, and cultures that have blended and brought about a special unity in diversity. Foreign invaders looking for conquest and religious and political groups fleeing persecution in their native countries have both found a homeland in India. Consequently, India has been a fertile ground for contact and convergence of languages, religions, philosophies, and ideologies. Naturally then, multilingualism has not only existed prior to colonialism and globalization but thrived in India, Indian multilingualism represents more than 3,000 years of unbroken and sustainable multiple language use with a cultural memory that goes back to Vedic Sanskrit. Annamalai (2008: 223) sums up the exceptionalism of Indian multilingualism in the following words: 'At no time in the history of India have the changes (i.e. linguistic and/ or non-linguistic changes) led to monolingualism in any region of

the country.' Multilingualism flourished in Ancient India as Sanskrit enjoyed the status of being the link language of different geographical regions and religions, with intellectual appeal and high prestige. Thus, hybrid characteristics of Sanskrit began to evolve in contact with Pali and Prakrit together with languages/language varieties of eastern, central, western and southern areas. Large-scale diffusion of linguistic features across genetic and areal boundaries resulted in mutually-feeding relationships and reciprocity, which led Emeneau (1956) and others (e.g. Masica 1976; Kuiper 1967, 1991; and Thomason 2001: 114-117) to conceptualize the Indian subcontinent as a 'linguistic area' or 'Sprachbund,' where prolonged language contact between major and minor languages led to mutual structural borrowings resulting in a vast array of shared features. Nevertheless, this mutual influence on lexicon as well as grammar set the stage for dramatic convergence among the languages of India, whether they were genetically related or not.

During the Mughal period, Persian served yet another catalyst to Indian bilingualism. However, in spite of the prolonged period of language contact with Persian, bilingualism based in Persian could not reach its qualitative heights, as evident by the formation of a linguistic area owing to the multifaceted influence of Sanskrit, which is not confined to India alone. Even South East Asia could not resist its influence. Furthermore, Persian influence was derailed by English. Nevertheless, the influence of Persian is still present to this day (see Sachdev and Bhatia 2013).

English

The latest language to re-ignite the engine of multilingualism in South Asia is a product of British colonialism beginning in the late eighteenth century as the Mughal Empire began to crumble. The new high-prestige link language to be instituted in the linguistic landscape of India, English, added greatly to the hybridization of Indian languages. English began to develop roots in Indian education. A blueprint for India's educational policy was laid down in Lord Macaulay's famous *Minute* (February 2, 1835). Macaulay's stated mission for the British Raj of creating 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect' introduced English education to India. Ironically, the primary aim of his educational policies was not to introduce additive bilingual education (English +Indian languages) in India but to set the stage for subtractive bilingualism (monolingualism in English), which

was counter-intuitive to the traditional language ecology of India.

As it stands, English has become a permanent fixture in the linguistic landscape of India. Contrary to the most popular pre-independence consensus that Hindi would dethrone the colonial language after independence, unwittingly, English has become a member of the family of Indian languages. The key reason is that English found a new identity in the post-independence era by shedding the old colonial identity. The new identity marked English as a neutral pan-Indian language with no prior regional, ethnic or linguistic identity. Although the numerical incidence of bilingualism with English is still very low, English has acquired domains such as (higher) education, federal law, government, media, and science and technology, which once belonged to either Sanskrit in India or Persian in North India. The uses of English, parallel to its predecessor contact languages—Sanskrit and Persian— has led to the Englishization of Indian languages. On the other hand, English has undergone significant changes locally to carry much of the communicative burden of Indian society. The process of nativization of Indian English continues to this day (see the groundbreaking work of Kachru 1983; Bhatia 1982, among others).

Language Hybridization, Code-mixing (CM) and Code-switching (CS)

Based on the distinct nature of input-type (languages, language proficiency) and input-conditions (home, school etc.), languages in contact give rise to a wide variety of hybrid linguistic systems--ranging from linguistic borrowing, pidgin and creole languages, diaglossia to CS and CM. Although on qualitative grounds, it is critical to distinguish CM/CS, from other related phenomena, such a discussion is outside the scope of this paper due to space limitations (see Bhatia and Ritchie 2009: 629-635 for distinction between CS/CM and other mixed systems).

Before we proceed further it is important to define and distinguish between CS and CM. First and foremost, it is important to note that CS/CM alludes to the speech patterns of 'balanced' bilinguals. The term CS refers to the use of various linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses and sentences) primarily from two participating grammatical systems across sentence boundaries within a speech event. In other words, CS is intersentential and may be subject to discourse principles. It is motivated by social and psychological factors. CM, on the other

hand, refers to the mixing of various linguistic units (morphemes, words, modifiers, phrases, clauses and sentences) primarily from two participating grammatical systems within a sentence. In other words, CM is intrasentential and is constrained by grammatical principles and may also be motivated by social psychological motivations.

The distinction between CS and CM as described above is controversial with some scholars doubting the usefulness of the distinction (Hatch 1976: 202), while others find it important and useful (Kachru 1978, among others), particularly if the goal is to develop a grammar of language mixing. Yet others use the term CM/CS in a wider sense as a cover term to refer to other related phenomena such as borrowing, interference, transfer, or switching (McClaughlin 1984: 96-97). This paper uses the term in a narrow sense as defined in the immediately preceding paragraph.

Earlier research from the 1950s-70s concluded that CM is either a random or an unsystematic phenomenon. It was either without subject to formal syntactic constraints (Lance 1975) or is subject only to 'irregular mixture' (Labov 1971: 457). Such a view of CM/CS is obsolete since the late 20th century. Recent research shows that CM/CS is subject to formal, functional and attitudinal factors. Studies of formal factors in the occurrence of CM attempt to tap the unconscious knowledge of bilinguals about the internal structure of code-mixed sentences (for different approaches to the grammar of CM/CS, see Bhatia 2018). Our recent research on Hinglish reveals various facets of bilingual creativity through code mixing as it manifests itself in the emergence of grammatical and semantic innovations (Bhatia and Ritchie 2016, Bhatia 1999) together with the deeper linguistic, socio-and psychological motivations of CM/CS (Ritchie and Bhatia 2013). Needless to say, there is now a unanimous consensus among linguists and other scholars that CS/CM behaviour of bilingual is systematic but complex. Hinglish is no exception in this regard. More importantly, Hinglish constitutes a natural aspect of bilinguals' day-to-day verbal behaviour.

In India, language mixing has reached such a level that today multiple language-mixing is an absolute norm, whereas talking 'pure' languages (without mixing) has become an object of ridicule.

Language mixing is an attempt by the bi-/multilingual brain/mind to attain the optimal result from its input two or more than two linguistic

systems by the accommodation and augmentation of linguistic and socio-psychological meaning of the message, identities and ideologies (Bhatia 2011 for details). While there is no question that in the case of Hinglish such creative needs cannot be filled either by English or by Hindi and/or any other language alone, it is also important to realize that Hinglish is undergoing rapid and significant changes in both qualitative and quantitative terms as communicative needs of Indian speakers change. Bhatia and Ritchie (2018) show the emergence of new structures (e.g. serial/light verbs), which are not shared either monolingual Hindi or monolingual English grammar. Drawing data from the Filmi English *-ofy/ify* construction, Bhatia (2009), showed the emergence of a new code-mixed grammar of Hinglish (also see Bandi-Rao and den Dikken 2014: 175-76 for more details). More importantly, new social meaning is constantly being created by means of language mixing. For instance, Bhatia claims that Filmy Hinglish introduces a systematic dichotomy between formal and informal stems. Furthermore, use of pure English or pure Hindi runs counter to the unmarked verbal behaviour of bilinguals in India. A case in point is the language used by media, social media, advertising and day-to-day verbal interaction among Indians.

Although it is self-evident that complexity and multifaceted creativity underlie CM/CS in bilingual communication. Surprisingly though, the social evaluation of a mixed system is largely negative. Even more interestingly, bilinguals themselves do not have a positive view of language mixing. It is the widely-held belief on the part of the 'guardians' of language (including media) and puritans that any form of language mixing is a sign of unsystematic or a decadent form of communication. Bilinguals are often mocked for their 'bad' and 'irregular' linguistic behavior. They are often characterized as individuals who have difficulty expressing themselves. Other labels such as 'lazy' and 'careless' are bestowed upon them. Furthermore, they are often accused by the guardians of language of destroying their linguistic heritage. For these reasons, it is not surprising that even bilinguals themselves become apologetic about their verbal behaviour. They blame mixing on 'memory lapse' among other things and promise to correct their verbal behaviour, vowing not to mix languages. In spite of this, they cannot resist language mixing!

Table 1 illustrates the anomaly between the scientific reality of language mixing and its social perception. Social perception translates into the

negative evaluation of mixed speech.

Table 1: Language Mixing (CM/CS) Anomaly
(Adapted from Bhatia 2011: 48)

Natural Fact	Social Fact/Perception
Systematic behaviour	Unsystematic behaviour
Linguistic augmentation	Linguistic deficiency
Natural behaviour	Bad linguistic behaviour
Motivated by creative needs	Memory/recall problem, clumsiness
Language change	Language death
Optimization strategy	Wasteful and inefficient strategy

Backlash to mixing is not just restricted to societies and bilinguals; even governments get on the bandwagon. Some countries such as the newly-freed countries of the ex-Soviet Union and France regulate or even ban mixing either by appointing 'language police' or passing laws to wipe out the perceived negative effects of 'bad language' in the public domain. Asia is not an exception in this regard. A case in point is a recent article by Tan (2002) reporting that the Government of Singapore has banned the movie *Talk Cock* because it uses a mixed variety of English, called 'Singlish'. Linguistic prescriptivism clearly played a central role in the decision. Inspite of the near-universal negative evaluation associated with CM/CS, the benefits rendered by language mixing by far outweigh its negative perception, which in turn compels the unconscious mind of bilinguals to mix and switch in order to yield results which cannot be rendered by a single/puritan language use;

To Teach or Not to Teach Code-mixed English: Challenges and Opportunities

It is self-evident from the discussion in the above section (3.0), the teaching of Hinglish or code-mixed languages is urgent and timely. Hinglish is a sustainable hybrid system packed with wide-ranging linguistic innovations. Hinglish has to be freed from the clutches of linguistic-deficiency hypothesis. As it stands, the current practice of teaching English language in India and outside India in the native circle of World Englishes reflects an outmoded model of English language teaching. The forces of globalization and digital age, in addition to naturalistic and

language accommodation/hybrid models, require departure from the normative approach to a socially-realistic approach, as summed up in the UK's think tank, Devos, report below.

> The challenge that faces us is how we move beyond seeing such hybrid languages as *Chinglish, Hinglish, Singlish, Spanglish* and multiple others as amusing corruptions. We should see them as varieties, rather than 'interlanguages', which bring with them their own distinct culture and provide equally distinct means of understanding their users. (Jones and Bradwell 2007: 87)

The complex interplay of cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural factors (e.g. bilingual self-reporting, language accommodation, language identity, mechanism for identity construction, language attitudes, etc.) calls for a careful consideration that may bear on the new way of teaching English. However, I should hasten to add that a new mindset of English language pedagogy is not free from future challenges. Language pedagogy based in the teaching of hybrid languages/Hinglish has to come to grips with multi-dimensional challenges-- theoretical, methodological, attitudinal (teachers and learners), learnability (implicit and explicit learning), learners' processing time, authentic material preparation, classroom interactional pattern between teachers and students (aka *translanguaging* practices in classrooms), among others. In spite of these challenges, the new vision is set to open doors to new opportunities practically in every domain of language pedagogy and second language acquisition.

Conclusion

The study of bilingualism and language hybridization has posed and continues to pose serious challenges to the overall field of linguistics, language education and language policies. The conceptual and methodological challenges stemming from the divergent theories and research questions/methods are many, and can best be summed up by the following remarks from the eminent linguist Roman Jacobson made more than half a century ago (1953): 'Bilingualism is for me a fundamental problem of linguistics'. With growing linguistic diversity in classrooms worldwide, the research and practice of hybrid language learning and teaching is long overdue.

Language mixing reflects a natural and universal aspect of bilingual

verbal behaviour. Although remarkable progress has been registered in our understanding of bilinguals' language mixing over the past two decades, many challenges still need to be met. The long history of prescriptivism and foreign language teaching has resulted in the severe negative societal evaluation of this speech form, which is ironically capable of unlocking new dimensions of human linguistic creativity; therefore, its value in the study of language—ranging from theoretical linguistics to and educational linguistics—can hardly be overestimated. Furthermore, a phenomenon which was and in some circles is still seen as ad hoc, random, and inconsequential seems to have a natural and central role in studies of language contact in general, and language teaching in particular. Therefore, as regards English language teaching in India, it is important to underscore the urgency of literacy acquisition of Hinglish and other mixed systems, conceptually grounded in additive multilingualism, complex interactional practices of Indian multilingualism, and classroom management talk.

Note

Translanguaging is a new term within bilingual/multilingual education classroom management talk. Primarily, it refers to CS and CM. For details, see Canagarajah (2013).

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