Multilingualism Embedded in English of India

Elizabeth Eldho

Abstract

English language is evidently proliferating with the emergence of multitudes of varieties within itself; in other words, English is increasingly becoming multilingual. As a result of this, the idealization of 'one English for all' does not really find a place in multilingual contexts. This paper looks at the status of English in the multilingual and multicultural India and tries to argue that the so-called Indian English can be branched off to incorporate different varieties having distinct identities of their own. Moreover, the paper throws light on the implications of multilingualism within English in the field of language teaching.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Indian English, English of India, varieties, language teaching.

Every country is multilingual in nature following colonialism or migration driven by several socio-political, commercial or religious motives, resulting in people speaking more than one language. Multilingualism India, for instance, embodies a vast diversity in the number of languages spoken and the cultures that coexist within the nation. This linguistic heterogeneity or say, multilingualism is the very norm in the Indian subcontinent. The concept of monolingualism is a distant reality especially in a country like India and therefore, it is worth examining the nature of the coexistence of the languages spoken in India and how a social connectedness is sustained. Moreover, all languages are in a constant flux on a temporal continuum and in particular, Indian multilingualism, according to Annamalai (2003), is set apart from the multilingualism of other countries in terms of the

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'nature of society' and 'polity of the country'. The historical facts reveal the British domination in the Indian soil in the 1600s and attempts of imposing Western norms to the oriental culture such as proselytization and English education in the name of development and 'civilizing the natives' (Dasgupta 1993) so as to advance their trade interests in the country. The post-independence period witnessed the implementation of the three-language formula proposed by the Indian government in 1961 to satisfy the language pressure groups. As a result, currently Hindi serves as the official language and the language of unity, English as the associate official language of administration, and the regional languages for the non-Hindi speaking states. Taking a look at some of the historical facts concerning the English language, we find that English is identified to be a West-Germanic language and it was introduced in Britain in the 5th century AD through invasion by the Germanic tribes, namely the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Through years of invasions and colonization, the English language has undoubtedly attained an unsurpassed status across the globe unlike any other languages in the linguistic history could ever do, traversing the boundaries, cultures and in the process, it has spread all over and evolved and is still evolving. Today, 'English is lauded as the most 'successful' language ever, with 1,500 million speakers worldwide' (Crystal 1997). At present, in general, we have many different varieties of English(es) worldwide. There have been many attempts to describe the place of English in the world, for instance, the most noteworthy 'concentric circle model' developed by Braj B. Kachru in 1985 in which he identifies three circles, namely (i) the inner circle where English functions as a native language (ENL/ norm-providing), (ii) the outer circle where English is used as a second language (ESL/norm-dependent), and (iii) the expanding circle where English is used as a foreign language (EFL/norm-developing). With globalization and the increased use and function of English across the world, this division is found to be immaterial. To be more precise, in the outer and expanding circle, English has been nativized in their respective contexts with own norms, and it is of no matter to think of English as an alien language in those circles.

Here, we primarily focus on how English in India has undergone further pluralism in the linguistic landscape of India and how English *in* India has become English *of* India over time. Though English was introduced in India by the British, surprisingly, the end of the colonial rule could not

stop the language from emerging. Instead, it continues to grow and co-evolve with the indigenous languages. Though the number of varieties of English is on the rise, wholly natural and impregnable, earlier there has been a lack of articulation on the emerging varieties in the outer circle. English functions in multiple settings and each of them plays a crucial role in refining the language to suit the needs of the individual and the society. Therefore, the English that we speak in India is not the so-called 'standard', or 'native' American/British English instead, what we speak is Indian English marked with its own unique linguistic features. The notion of 'standard' is still arguable; what has debatably and traditionally been considered as the 'Standard English' is the Standard British English (UK English) and General American English (US English), since they have a codified grammar, dictionaries and manuals of usage. In view of those who were in support of the standard, 'it is the 'standard' language which is in danger of being diluted by these new varieties. By contrast, some scholars view the notion of Standard English as having something to do with ideological concerns than linguistic considerations' (Kachru and Nelson 2009). These opposing views (one view that sees disintegration of the standards and the other that advocates the indigenized Englishes) have been going on for over two decades now. For David Crystal, 'despite the impression that Standard English exists acting as a unifying force among the range of variations, a total uniform, regionally neutral, and unarguably prestigious variety does not yet exist worldwide' (Crystal 1994).

Much before, the concept of Indian English did not find itself a place in the linguistic history for it lacked a proper academic definition and was often stigmatized and disputed. However, Indian English has now created its own space over time in the linguistic ecology of India and it is no more a 'deviant' or 'non-native' variety, which some purists may deny. The purists always looked upon the so-called native varieties as the norm and generally considered any grammatical deviations from the native English as 'errors' through comparison. In M.A.K. Halliday's views on Indian English, he posits the notion of Indian English to which the speakers comply with instead of having a so-called standard model, thus accepting 'Educated Indian English' and even recognizes varieties within Indian English. According to Singh, 'the standard procedure of collecting performance data from L2 learners of English and having native speakers of English evaluate the grammaticality of the structures

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found in that data was like mixing oranges and apples' (Singh 1972). This is probably due to the less prestige attached to them as well as defining its correctness with reference to the 'codified' English in the inner circle as exemplars. In response, several scholars have come up with studies that legitimize the emerging varieties of English(es), which made available for further research. These scholars often provide descriptions of the grammar of the variety in question and for them, the deviations are 'features' and the variety is a rule-governed system. Singh has rightly stated that, 'we can legitimately speak of 'from English in India to Indian English' (Agnihotri and Singh 2012). This implies that it is time that we should talk about English of India instead of English in India. According to Annamalai (2008), English is the 'latest addition to the multilingual mosaic of India, which is noted for the linguistic behaviour of its communities to add languages to their linguistic repertoire and to use them complementarily in functional terms and synthetically in formal terms'. But, the general attitude is that the speakers are becoming more than mere admirers of the 'prestigious' RP and are sidelining the localized varieties for they are branded as 'unfinished', 'erroneous' products.

When we say Indian English, it shows certain linguistic behaviours that are distinctly its own. These linguistic features of Indian English are often manifested at all levels of linguistic analyses and they say quite a lot about an individual's identity of belonging to some part of India. For instance, at the level of phonology Indian English is distinct in terms of the use of retroflex consonants (eg. /ʈ/,/ɖ/) , lack of contrast between v and w, absence of dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, the use of unaspirated voiceless plosives (e.g. tin/ for /tʰin/) and so on. Similarly, the extensive use of reduplication (e.g. *hot hot coffee*), creative use of compounds (*key-bunch for bunch of keys*), use of hybrid compounds (*dhobi-washed*) and affixation (*police-wallah*) are some of the morphological features of Indian English. At the syntactic level, Indian English displays uniqueness in the formation of interrogative sentences without Sub-Aux inversion (e.g. *What you would like to eat?* instead of *What would you like to eat?),* use of stative verbs like *see, hear* in their progressive forms, etc. (Sailaja 2009). Furthermore, in an attempt to legitimize Indian English as a variety in its own right, the characteristic phonological features that uniquely define Indian English is systematized and documented in a monograph in 1972, and these features are found uniformly across India.

This is known as the 'General/Standard' Indian English modelled by the Indian English speakers for pedagogical needs. But, there seems to have paucity in the model (General Indian English) for not incorporating the regional differences. However, what is called Indian English raises certain issues; (i) primarily for the uniformity of features and the multitudes of languages and cultures that the nation encapsulates, (ii) for not capturing the geographical nuances, (iii) for setting up General Indian English as a reference point that the speakers should model on.

Schneider (2003) has described different phases (namely foundation phase *exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization* and *differentiation*) in the development of new Englishes which is known as Schneider's Dynamic Model of New Englishes. According to Schneider, the stage at which Indian English presently is the 'stage of dialect birth' that allows for 'internal diversification'. As he puts it, 'the identity construction at this phase drift away from national to the immediate community scale and the citizens of the country is seen as a composite of subgroups instead of a single entity, marked by own identity determined by sociolinguistic parameters such as age, gender, ethnicity, regional background, social status, and so on. Consequently, new varieties of the formerly new variety emerge as carriers of new group identities with the overall community; regional and social dialects and linguistic markers (accents, lexical expressions, and structural patterns), which carry a regionally or socially indicative function only within the new country, emerge. The expression of 'group identification and social categorization' becomes more important than the 'collective identity' of the previous stage' (Schneider 2003). Following this, it can be argued that Indian English is at the stage of differentiation that has to be carefully looked at so that the conventional General Indian English model can be modified.

English has substantially been affected by the linguistic and culturally diversity of India and one cannot think of English remaining homogeneous across the nation. Ofelia Garca (1992) points out that, in countries like India, and the Philippines that embrace multilingual policy officially, the linguistic heterogeneity is even more varied and complex. Now, the time has come that we should examine the heterogeneity that exists within Indian English for it is acculturated in different linguistic and sociolinguistic contexts within India. Contrary to the myth that Indian English is monolithic irrespective of its linguistically pluralistic

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bases, recent studies (Wiltshire 2005) have made possible that they can be differentiated within so as to incorporate multiple varieties geographically, especially based on phonology. Peter Trudgill and almost all anglophones foresaw that in a multilingual nation like India where English has the role of a lingua franca, English is likely to acquire a set of local norms which are widely adhered to even if they are not officially recognized (Trudgill, 2002). In fact, internal forms of English with local norms have developed in places where English is used as a second language (Trudgill and Hannah, 1982).

In their views,

> ...the endonormative varieties are precisely the ones which should be taught and used in the countries concerned: Indian English should be the norm in India, just as Australian English should be the norm in Australia, and Irish English in Ireland. (Trudgill and Hannah 1982).

Indian English variety exhibits a multilayered structure in which there are further divisions that could be geographically defined and also many more. For instance, there are differences in the way north Indians and south Indians speak and the differences are chiefly noticeable at the level of sounds. Similarly, the English of the north east Indians varies largely too. This means that geography could contribute much to the variation within Indian English. So, there could be something called South Indian English, North Indian English, etc. South Indian English (this term is not used in a derogatory sense) or the English spoken by the people in South India is often observed to have given a mocking tone in popular culture as well as in literature. This is because, there could possibly be some linguistic features that have contributed to identify the South Indianness in the utterance of the speakers. I believe that, this in a way gives them a unique identity of being a South Indian or belonging to some part of South India. Even when I say South Indian Indian English, there also lies the issue of homogeneity with the term. In such situations where the differentiation is so diverse, the question arises as to how to linguistically approach this situation of heterogeneity.

Several studies have drawn upon the regional varieties of Indian English. For instance, Prabhakar Babu in 1976 has done a study on the characteristic features of Telugu English spoken in South India, Sethi (1976) on the English of Punjabi speakers, but, all these studies are descriptive in nature and it is to be noted that these works are inadequate

in terms of systematicity in the data elicitation, and analytical methods employed. But, an extensive body of literature (Sahgal and Agnihotri 1988) fills this void by taking into account the socio-physiological dimensions that could provide an answer to the unique characteristics of the varieties of English in multiple settings. In the same line, Caroline R. Wiltshire studied the 'Indian English' of Tibeto-Burman speakers in which she intends to convey that the 'Indian English of the speakers whose L1 belongs to one of the four major language families in India (namely, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic which are) could also form a distinct variety of English'. In that case, we can have Dravidian English, Tibeto-Burman English, Austro-Asiatic English, Indo-Aryan English. She notes that the Tibeto-Burman speakers also shows distinctiveness in terms of a number of features such as 'the lack of retroflexion of coronal consonants, the devoicing of word-final obstruents, the simplification of consonant clusters, and the presence of post-vocalic [p], and the reduced set of vowel contrasts' (Wiltshire 2005).

The complex multilingual fabric of India creates a need for conducting studies on language in connection with the society. This is basically what the sociolinguists do wherein they investigate language with social relations. Before society was the concern for linguists, the study of the language, following Chomsky, had long been dictated by the doctrines of the school of thought known as 'structuralism'. In the research carried out on English in India, prescriptivism was the norm adopted till the phase was completely taken over with the systematic investigation of the social existence of language. It was quite hard for the prescriptivists who upheld an 'autonomous' line of argument, to reconcile themselves to associate language with the social affairs for they believe forever that drawing parallels between them would distort the basic principles of linguistic analysis. The very fact that makes language a 'language' is its unique nature of 'variability' and the freedom to exploit the variability is the very right of every individual of a speech community. This delimited the objectification of language that the linguists of prescriptivists' tradition find appropriate, which further opened up new paradigms of sociolinguistic research. In response, later research on varieties of English shifted their focus to descriptive studies, but relying hard on them also leaves out several rudimentary questions about language and society unanswered, resulting in unordered, unstructured, fragmentary, and impressionistic analyses.

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Most importantly and essentially, the traditional monolingual approach to English education should prioritize the multilingual reality that English is embedded in. Therefore, it is important to consider the teaching of English within the architecture of heterogeneity of English, for it is more than a lingua franca that it initially was. Once we begin to think of our nation as a mosaic of different ethno-linguistic groups, the problems of the monolithic views of English are suddenly recast in a different light. In addition, when the speakers feel a unique sense of self in the way they speak English, be it regionally or socially varied, they themselves become creators of the linguistic fragility. In the classrooms, the pedagogical obsession to benchmark the students' English to global standards is still found very common in India and this itself is problematic. Limiting oneself to such trends is not what the future generations would hope for, instead locate the self in the kind of English that we grew up exposed to. The evolution of the English language from being a lingua franca to a stage where it identifies itself as a system of its own needs a theorization in terms of its multilingual nature. When empirical research brought out evidence of fluidity in the structure of English language, notions such as structuralism, prescriptivism, and in some way descriptivism become subordinate. Considering a society like India, what works better and what should work better in teaching/learning of English is relying on the detailed social and linguistic background of the speakers. Furthermore, in any discussions concerning multilingualism, English, by default comes to the forefront and is inevitable. The contradiction lies at this point where English may not be central to such discussions all the time, but it is relevant all the time.

English language has increasingly been appropriated in multilingual contexts and in particular in India, for its advanced economic growth and increased career prospects, English has projected itself in a dominion. However, the conflicting pressures of Westernization seem to be exponential for the localized varieties to proliferate. The academic works that foster the emergence of local norms would help promote the development of local varieties and the speakers to identify themselves in the same. Moreover, RP cannot remain an idealized variety ever; such idealization poses a threat to the identity of the speakers of those multilingual countries where English functions in most of the domains.

Conclusion

The idea of linguistic homogenization of the English language is not viable for it is eclipsing all over the world. What we see is the disintegration of the same into series of varieties having their own linguistic norms. Moreover, every language changes over time and it is the speakers who change them without being aware of it. The very notion of Indian English has turned out be an abstraction and is progressing towards a rapid break-up. Ultimately, language is intertwined with society and in particular English language is embedded in several social contexts which in turn would promote more regional and social varieties to emerge. As a concluding remark, Indian English is not an alien language, instead we own it and it is time to talk about English *of* India. The terms like standard, non-native, erroneous must be obliterated for it would distort the very understanding of English language and its functions in different multilingual contexts. It is worthwhile to take a liberal stance in the teaching of English so as to provide a space for the emerging varieties to flourish in its distinctiveness. A unified entity being branched off into distinct sub-varieties in different sociolinguistic contexts also marks the identity of the community or the group. As long as diversity exists, a monocentric approach to the use of 'one English for all' fails and needs further restatement. What sums up is that it is unjust to have a monolingual principle to be adopted for English language worldwide, be it in teaching or learning.

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Elizabeth Eldho is a PhD Scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IITM). Her area of research specialization is sociolinguistics with special focus on language variations. She currently works on the sociolinguistic aspects of Indian English spoken in South India.

E-mail: elizabeth.eldho73@gmail.com