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# Imposition of English in India and Its Complexities

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**Abstract:** *Owing to Britain's colonization and American globalization, English has become the most common medium of communication among most Indians. Since India's independence in 1947, English has been staying as the language of an elite class, a medium of higher education especially legal terms, and technical terminology. English acts as a lingua franca in the Indian multilingual society. Since India's Independence, British English has had a perennial effect on the Indian education system. Moreover, international pop culture has exerted an American influence on youngsters' English accents tremendously. By incorporating the information regarding the differences and similarities between British and Indian English; American and Indian English from distinctive research papers, a few books, and a Qualitative method has been used aiming at the thorough investigation of the intricacies of Indian English as well as the in-depth variations of accents and influences. Above all, the paper concentrates on the characteristics of Indian English and its evolution by discussing the influences of British and American accents and a comparative study of various phonemes in three distinct accents (Indian, British, and American phonetics). Subsequently, the main focus is how English has upsurged in India over the years. To recapitulate, the research has resulted in emphasizing that British English is far more pragmatic than American English.*

**Keywords:** *Phonetics, British accent, American accent, Indian English, Phonemes*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Colonization by Britishers revolutionized English as an international language and it dominated the mental space of people virtually all over the world. In India, there were more than 600 dialects causing perplexity for Indians, hence, the need for a standard comprehensive language was realized. Consequently, English has established an upper edge for Indians as a language of academicians as well as administrators. Over the last century, English has gained major relevance in India due to the growing importance of language in international communication. Since the past few decades, English has been emerging as the second language of India for more than four centuries. The article will also highlight how English, the language used for official purposes became a status symbol and an academic requirement in most parts of the country.

"Hindi held the status of a second language in regional states, but English has replaced the language by relegating it to become the third language in Indian states." (R Meganathan, April 2020). Today, English has been adopted by Indians as the language of awareness and understanding, and education and literary expression as a crucial way of communication with different people of varied religions. "Individuals, in a way, used English as a medium to demonstrate something to people who ridiculed others for learning the language of colonists." (An English made in India).

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Considering the objective, the study in hand evaluates different research papers and books. Qualitative research methods have been utilized to collect non-numerical data regarding the influences on Indian English. The above-mentioned method includes gathering information in the form of texts, audio, videos, etc. to have an in-depth understanding of the impacts. The results achieved from this practice are descriptive which makes it easier to draw inferences from the information gathered. A record-keeping method, qualitative observation case study, and ethnographic research are the main features of the qualitative practice that are involved in the following study.

Historical research has played a crucial role in the paper as chronological order has been followed in depicting the ways Indian English has evolved over the last few centuries. The paper extracts from six different research papers that are already mentioned in the list of references and the books that have been taken into consideration are: English after RP by Geoff Lindsey in 2019 which discusses how British accent speech today differs from the m ancient upper-class accent, Speaking American (A History of English in the United States) by Richard W. Bailey in 2012 that provides information on the complications of English in the United States, and An English made in India (How a foreign language became local) by Kalpana Mohan in 2019 in which the author presents English in various forms- as a language of urban class, as a colonial bequest, and those who strive to achieve the status of the f elite class.

### III. THE ADVENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE ORIENTAL WORLD

In the 15th century, India was a territory yet to be explored. It was the Portuguese empire that discovered India and the very first explorer to sail India was Vasco De Gama in 1498. The Portuguese traders established their base in Goa (a small island in India). At the same time, the ruler of the United Kingdom, Elizabeth I granted a charter to the East India Company which allowed them to trade with the East which later led the company to establish their business in India.

But, it was not until the early 17th century that the British arrived to deal with trade, political, and military affairs. Gradually, the British established their trading posts in India which happened to be the first ever contact between English and the Indian languages.

#### A. *Ancient British English Versus Contemporary British English*

British accent then and British accent now has a huge difference from changes in intonation pattern, pitch, and rhythm to differences in the articulation of vowels and consonants. In fact, the British accent has undergone a lot more changes than the American accent over the last few centuries.

In the United Kingdom alone, there are more than 40 British dialects ranging from a high level of rhoticity to none at all. In many cases, the use of spellings and word structure differ as well. For instance, Newcastle people speak a dialect named Geordie which is one of the strongest accents in Britain in which they use a glottal stop in a strange manner, unlike most British accents. A unique glottal stop is the main feature of the accent. A glottal stop can be used after /p,t,k/ which makes it possible to pronounce the three consonants simultaneously before weaker vowels and at a closed syllable. Geordie accent also has its own set of vocabularies, for example, Aye for Yes, Neet for Night, Hinny for Female, Clamming for Hungry, and the list goes on. Another distinctive accent is Yorkshire which changes all rules of the Standard British accent and skips the letter H at the initial position of a word such as Hungry becomes 'ungry', Happy becomes 'appy'. They also enunciate a 't' sound in the place of 'the' and 'to' such as 'I love the weather' is 'I love't weather'. This accent can generally be found in York and Sheffield. When it comes to a myriad of dialects, England is a lot like India considering the 22 regional languages which are acknowledged by the government and over 600 dialects that are spoken by people dwelling in different parts of the country.

In the early 17th century, when the Brits came to India, they spoke English with an accent more akin to Shakespeare than today's accents. They had a rhotic accent where the letter 'r' is pronounced strongly and what the world refers to as the 'regional accent of Britain'. However, it was not regional in the 17th century and was rather considered a Standard accent all over the world. The early British colonists who migrated to America left an impression of their accent in certain colonies which is why a modern American today speaks with a similar level of rhoticity as a Brit did in the 17th and 18th centuries.

But, gradually the Brits transformed their accent from rhotic to what the world refers to today as a 'Received Pronunciation (RP) which is acknowledged as the proper British accent. "A greater diversity of accents was witnessed by the socialites of Britain before the instigation of Received Pronunciation. But, soon, the capital city drastically emerged as reputable or received." (English after RP). This accent emerged in the 19th century as a standardization of the English language that was spoken at the time among the upper-class and middle-class people living in the South of England. As a result, it was taught in schools to make children speak in a proper and posh manner. "The first Professor of Phonetics at UCL, Daniel Jones in 1918 quoted RP as the accent of 'Southern British who were taught at reputable boarding schools.'" (P.4, English after RP). Meanwhile, there are places in Britain where regional accents still thrive that differ drastically from the Standard Received Pronunciation for instance, in RP, the word 'World' is pronounced /wɜ:(r)ld/ in the present scenario while, in the 17th century, the letter 'r' was pronounced.

The southern colonies of America still sound like British people sounded at the time of the American Revolution. Now, this traditional 'American accent' has evolved to some extent since the American Revolution.

#### B. *Bolstering Of English Language In India*

Before the 17th century, more than 600 Indian languages and dialects were thriving under the rule of Hindu and Mughal rulers.

The British merely came to trade, however, they established a British colony in the country which led to the imposition of the English language. It became the language of Administrative, Political, and Social events. Learning English became mandatory for Indians who aspired to acquire higher jobs and positions. To make the English language an official requirement, British historian and politician Thomas Babington Macaulay presented his new rules on the Indian Education system that imparted English education to Indian natives. Lord Macaulay wanted to build a whole new class of people when he introduced 'Minutes on Indian Education' whose ultimate objective was to educate Indians on the English language and provided the following reason why it was necessary to teach English to Indians:

‘We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern- a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, morals, and intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.’

Moderately, the English missionaries who came to India set up Christian schools and colleges whose medium of instruction was English. With this, English became the official academic language of the country. Just like Received Pronunciation became the accent of the upper class in the United Kingdom, English became the language of affluent Indians and the case remains unchanged till date. ‘English linguistically united the country, and the pre-eminence of English became a self-fulfilling prophecy among the educated classes. As more people with lower income aspired to have their children educated in ‘English-medium’ systems, English reinforced its position as the cornerstone for advancement’ (An English made in India). English-speaking Indians are given extra credit in almost every academic field of the country. For local traditional people, English still remains the language of a rich and urban population, and just like few American colonies had a proper British accent (now evolved to American), English-speaking Indians' accent was almost indistinguishable from the British.

### C. Following Are A Few Similarities Between British And Indian English Now

The Education Policy followed in India at present is almost similar to the one presented by Lord Macaulay. Not only the schools are in English medium but also the country's constitution written in English. The relevance of English, since the British left, has grown more as English is the only permissible language for higher studies yet. The education system ignores the aspiration in teaching the pronunciation of English. Some examples of similarities between the two accents follow:

#### 1) Articulation of R

In Received Pronunciation, the letter 'r' is omitted at many positions. Similar is the case with Indian English. The majority of urban speakers are taught to drop their R's at the end of a word and after a vowel. For example, the 'r' in the word 'SIR' is not pronounced in both accents. The phonetic transcription in British is /'sɜ:(ɪ)/ and in the Indian accent is /'sə(ɪ)/.

The only difference is that in RP, an aspirated sound is produced in place of R, whereas, in the Indian accent, we move on to the next word without any aspiration. For instance, the word 'WATER' is pronounced the same way in both accents except in British, an aspiration is added i.e. /'wɔ:tə(r)/ while in the Indian accent, there is no aspiration. We can also refer to the word 'letter' as an example whose pronunciation rule is also the same as the other two words. In both accents, R is skipped with aspiration and no aspiration.

#### 2) T's Pronunciation

In both British and Indian accents, the letter 't' is pronounced with clarity, unlike other major accents where it is skipped or is pronounced like a 'd'.

Although, there are many regional accents in Britain where 't' is not pronounced at all. People in urban cities have also started skipping 't' which now makes them sound more British. But in Standard Received Pronunciation, 't' is pronounced. The only difference between the pronunciation of 't' in both accents is the level of stress. In Indian English, the letter 't' is emphasized a lot, however in the British accent, it is uttered softly as compared to the Indian accent. The extra stress on 't' makes the Indian accent sound rougher than RP. For example, in the following words, T is pronounced in both accents but with different stress levels.

Literally-	/'lt(ə)rəli/
Negative-	/'negətɪv/
Bottle-	/'bɒt(ə)l/
Native-	/'netɪv/
Motive-	/'məʊtɪv/
Matter-	/'mætə(r)/

#### 3) Similarities in Vocabulary in both accents

As the Indian education system follows British rules, few words are pronounced and spelled the same in both accents whereas the vocabulary for these words is different in other accents. Following are some of those daily life words:

*Timetable:* /'tɪm, teɪb(ə)l/, a list of times to do a certain chorus

*Cashier:* /kæ 'ʃɪə(r)/, a person who takes and receives money in an institution of any sort

*Floor:* /flɔ:(r)/, the levels in a building

*Holiday:* /'hɒlɪdeɪ/, a period to enjoy

*Football:* /'fʊt, bɔ:l/, a game where players kick a ball to score goals

*Staff:* /stɑ:f/, the people that work for any sort of organization

*Waistcoat:* /'weɪs(t), kəʊt/, a piece of clothing

*Sofa:* /'səʊfə/, a large comfortable seat for 2 or more than 2 people

*Curtain:* /'kɜ:(r)t(ə)n/, a large piece of clothing that covers a window

*Taxi:* /'tæksi/, a car with a paid driver to take one to places

*Film:* /fɪlm/, a series of moving photos

*Biscuit:* /'bɪskɪt/, an eatable that is dry, round, and sweet

*Maths:* /mæθs/, a subject including numbers

*Torch:* /tɔ:(r)tʃ/, a small electric light that is easy to carry around

But, most of these words are gradually evolving in American accent due to American media influence. These words will be discussed in section E) 3).

#### D. *The influence of American English on Indian English*

##### 1) *How American English evolved from British English*

Up until 1776, America was also one of the countries that were under British rule. The custom of the English language in the US was a result of British colonization due to immigrants coming in the 18th and 19th centuries. Gradually, the American accent emerged into new dialects due to the influence of British colonizers and immigrants from different parts of the world.

“No Standard English ever arose to render the other kinds of English “mere dialects.” Instead, a cluster of different kinds of English gained prestige and lost it, leaving behind a residue of usage that was subject to ridicule: the Brahmins of Boston, the belles of South Carolina, and the burghers of old New York are now all forgotten and ignored” (Speaking American). 'Native' Americans did not have an accent of their own, it was the British accent that flowed in the country until the 17th century. Following is the British impact on American English:

##### 2) *Ancient American Pronunciation*

Considering the amount of ascendance British colonizers had on America, the American accent had hardly any distinction from British English in the 17th century. “American English is one of the variants of British English whose history closely resembles British English that evolved in the 17-18 century English accent.” (Chunming Gao and Lili Sun, 2014). The rhotic accent is one of the salient features of both accents. The regional British accent today used to be the accent that colonizers spoke. It was a 'Rhotic' accent which refers to the pronunciation of the letter 'r' with a very strong accent. Both accents were largely rhotic.

But, during the American Revolution, wealthy-class British came up with non-rhotic to distinguish themselves from other commoners during the Industrial Revolution. In order to demonstrate their new status, they started using non-rhotic pronunciation. For instance, “the word ‘after’ was produced with a broad sound and without the r at the end. In America, however, the utterance of *a* and final *r* was maintained the traditional way.” (English after RP). After gaining independence, the United States had a new wave of immigrants arriving from all over the world with their traditional accents. Every group of immigrants introduced their accents which later became the base of the American accent from Germany's adaptation of nasal tones to African American vernacular English. Traditional British accent's rhotic speech remained in America which the immigrants started to grasp. American English vocabulary is also a variety of sets of words brought by different groups of migrants that settled in the US.

##### E. *Contemporary American Pronunciation*

Till the 18th century, the American accent was including words from different groups of foreign settlers. Then, in the 20th century, the US witnessed a technological advancement that brought in new distinctive phrases and idioms to traditional American English. In the present scenario, the American accent is perceived to be free of regional characteristics. Today's American accent lacks clarity and non-rhotic utterance of words. The standardized form of the American accent now is the Midwestern accent which has been received by their current generation of kids through the impact of mass, social, and cartoons. Many regional American accents are on the verge of extinction due to the heavy influence of mainstream media. The same influence is also upon Indian English and the following are the ways how it impacted: The Indian education system is still modeled on the British template. But, due to the influence of mainstream pop culture and American media, American pronunciation is weighing down the traditional British English

pronunciation. Today, the use of American slang can be heard in upper-middle-class Indian cities. The new generation of India is being exposed to all varieties of English but the one that had a major influence is American English.

Following are some key similarities between both accents:

### 1) Rhotic accent

Indian students might be taught to skip their R's and millennial people are still following the same rule they were taught and pronounce their R's with no rhoticity. But, as the influence of American shows and series grew, so did the impact of accents. One of the major sounds in American English is the letter R. Americans pronounce 'r' at almost every position of a word while curling the tip of their tongue upwards a little and so do the Indian GenZ now, without curling their tongue. The Indian 'r' is stressed in words without curling the tongue. While pronouncing 'r', Indians generally touch the tip of their tongue to the roof of the upper palate. Following are some words containing the letter 'r' with the same phonetic transcriptions (suggesting 'r' is pronounced in both accents).

Car-	/kar/
Origin-	/'ɔrədʒɪn/
Rank-	/ræŋk/
Word-	/wɜrd/
Teacher-	/'titʃər/
World-	/wɜrld/

### 2) American Slangs

India has more than 22 languages but English is not one of them. So, it's obvious that most English slang phrases that are used in India are taken from English-speaking countries. It's common in India for people to use American slang and phrases in their daily lives. Using American slang phrases seems cool to non-native English speakers. It's the growing influence of American Netflix shows which people tend to watch all over the country which leads them to use the language they hear. A research depicted how due to the excessive use of slang in daily conversation has a negative consequence on students' academic vocabulary as they seem to be using slang in essays, articles, research, etc. Following are some American slangs that are used in Indian English:

Dude-	Guy
Drip-	One's style or fashion
I can't even-	Used when overwhelmed
Bro-	Friend
Dope-	Cool
YOLO-	Abbreviation for 'you only live once'
ASAP-	Abbreviation for 'as soon as possible'
Bestie-	Best friend
Swag-	Style or attitude
Kudos-	Alternative for 'great job'

### 3) Similarities in Vocabulary in both accents

Just like there are the same words for different things in both British and American accents. There are words in American English that Indians tend to use or have started using recently:

Sweater-	/'swetər/, a warm piece of clothing
Shorts (recent)-	/ʃɔrts/, pants that end at knees
French fries-	/frentʃfraɪz/, pieces of potato cooked in oil
Chips-	/tʃɪps/, type of snacks
Diaper-	/'daɪ(ə)pər/, a piece of clothing for babies
Truck-	/trʌk/, a vehicle used for carrying goods
Parking lot-	/'pɑrkɪŋlɑt/, an area used to park vehicles
Highway-	/'haɪ weɪ/, a road built to travel from towns and cities
Angry-	/'æŋɡri/, someone who is extremely annoyed

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Indian accent is not just Indian. It is a mixed hybrid of one's regional accent, a tad bit of Bollywood, British accent, and American accent. The influence of both accents is noticeable in the Indian English accent while maintaining its own syllable timings, word stress, loudness, and flow. There are words in Indian English that are used in both American and British ways. For an instance, some people say 'film' while some say 'movie', the same goes for the words 'lift' & 'elevator', 'last name' & 'surname', 'mum' & 'mom', etc. The phonetic transcription of Indian English resembles both American and British accents. Indians inadvertently use English words while talking in a regional language. To conclude, Indians have developed their own set of phonetic sounds, intonation, pitch, rhythm, distinctive accents, etc. which, in the present scenario, is widely known as Hinglish (a combination of Hindi and English) where people speak English with a Hindi accent.

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