English in India: Possibilities of non-native Englishes for inter-Asian Communication

Tetsuya ENOKIZONO
Kobe City College of Technology

I. Introduction

There is no accurate survey of the number of speakers of English in India. In 1999 the population of India has reached a billion. It is said that in the subcontinent the middle class people, particularly in the urban areas, are said to have a sufficient command of English. It is estimated that 10-20 percent of the population in India is classified into the middle class. Therefore it is possible to estimate that there are 100-200 million fluent speakers of English in India. Including the number of imperfect speakers of English who can manage to communicate through English, the total number of the speakers of English may reach 300-400 million. Moreover, if we add the number of speakers of English in the subcontinent, the total number of speakers of English must be more than that by far. It really is a figure that cannot be ignored.

In this paper we describe Indian English and discuss how English is and has been used in the Indian subcontinent. First, we would like to take up some typical examples of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar of Indian English. Later, we would like to examine the possibilities of non-native Englishes for international communication particularly in Asia.

II. The Language Situation and the Language Policy in India

There is a general misunderstanding that India has more than 18 official languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. They are, however, merely languages designated by the Constitution of India as languages to be promoted officially.

According to the Constitution, the official languages of the Union are Hindi and English. On the other hand, most of the 18 languages mentioned above are adopted as an official language of their original regions. They are regional languages except Sanskrit (a India's classical language), Sindhi (its original place is not in India but in Pakistan), and Urdu (the Pan-Islamic common language in the subcontinent). Hindi in the Devanagari script is the official language of India. However, English continues to be the official working language. For not a few

educated Indians, English is virtually their first language. For a great number of educated multi-lingual Indians, it is the second one.

The Constitution also identifies 18 regional languages mentioned above as "languages of India". According to a recent survey, there are around 325 languages spoken in India. With around 325 languages and more than 700 dialects, the only language that educated Indians from different regions have in common is not Hindi but English, a language from outside by the British during their two-hundred-year occupation.

States of India are called "linguistic states" because the country has been distributed in 25 states, 6 Union Territories and a National Capital Territory, Delhi, on the basis of the languages mostly used in the region. The country has a wide variety of local languages and, in many cases, the State boundaries have been drawn on linguistic lines. Therefore, the state language of a state, to the majority of the residents, is their mother tongue as well as the most representative local language of the region.

Some Indian languages have evolved from the Indo-European group of languages. This set is known as the Indic group or the Indo-Aryan one. Another set of languages is the Dravidian group and is native to South India, though a distinct influence of Sanskrit and Hindi is evident in these languages. Most of the Indian languages have their own script and rich literature.

Interestingly, many non-Hindi speakers complain that the government is forcing Hindi on them while many Hindi speakers say that the government is promoting English, neglecting Hindi and the other indigenous Indian languages. To the present author's eyes, however, both claims seem to be true. But it seems that English is gaining more popularity, at least, among the urban educated Indians.

III. Three-Language Formula

As is mentioned above, India enjoys too many languages to choose a sole official/common language. However, any nation needs (more than) one common language to communicate one another and to unite the nation. Of course, in terms of efficiency and economically it is better for a nation to have the least number of languages as an official language. "The Three-Language Formula", India's most representative language policy, is a compromise between different linguistic groups in India. Though the term "the Three-Language Formula" is seldom used by the government of India in official documents, the term is widely accepted and used.

The Three-Language Formula was worked out as a way of accommodating the interest of each linguistic group. The formula is a policy to encourage them to choose and learn three languages at school. The first one of the three languages, in most cases, is speaker's mother tongue/regional language while the second one is Hindi (a language of national pride and unity). And the last one is English (a language of administrative efficiency, technological progress and international communication).

According to the Formula, children are required to study a regional language (in most cases [about 74% of the Indian children], their mother tongue) at the lower primary stage (1st-4th grades). They are required to learn two languages such as a regional language (mother tongue) and English at the higher primary level (5th-7th grades). Moreover, they are supposed to study three languages like a regional language, English and Hindi in non-Hindi regions (or a modern Indian language in Hindi regions though, in fact, a classical language like Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic is chosen) at the lower secondary level (8th-10th grades). Generally, English is preferred to Hindi by children though either of them can be chosen at the higher primary level.

IV. The Role of "English-Medium Schools" in India

It is necessary to know about "English-medium schools" in India so that we can understand how English in India has been produced. "English-medium schools" are educational institutions where English is used as a medium of instruction. "English-medium schools" vary from school to school. Some have poor facilities and some are well equipped. Some English-medium boarding schools called "public schools" have deluxe facilities as well as well-trained/highly qualified teachers and gather children only from the upper class families. Such "public schools" in India can be regarded as an imitation of public schools in Britain.

At "English-medium schools", all the subjects except Indian languages like Hindi are supposed to be taught through English. At boarding schools called "public schools", students have to use English all day long. At some "public schools", students are punished if they use their mother tongue. Naturally, students become good at English simply because they are forcibly exposed to English and cannot help using it.

Generally speaking, the higher the course is, the more frequently English is used as a medium of instruction. Almost all colleges and universities in India prepare courses whose medium of instruction is English while most municipal elementary schools in India are supposed to use the regional language as a medium. However, there are such elementary schools and even kindergartens, mostly private, adopt English as the medium. In such schools and kindergartens, very small children with a still insufficient command of their own mother tongues are forced to use English. Consequently, not a few children feel English the most comfortable. Consequently, some children speak English instead of their mother tongue even when they talk with their family at home.

"English-medium schools" are virtually producing the elite of the country. Naturally, those with upward mobility want to send their children to "English-medium schools" as long as their finances allow. English, in many aspects, is one of the most important keys to make a success in life in India. Even though they forget their mother tongue as a result of learning at "English-medium schools", they rush to such schools to receive education through English. Apart from whether it is

right or wrong, English can be said to be the most important language to educated Indians and is indispensable to Indian society.

V. Language Contact and Code-Switching/Mixing

Most Indians living in a multi-lingual setting use more than one language. If educated, they use English as well as their mother tongue (the regional language in most cases). If living in areas where Hindi is a lingua franca, most of them use Hindi in addition to their mother tongue. Indians in a multi-lingual setting often switch from one language to another. The switching occurs not only at a passage/sentence level   (code-switching) but also at a phrase/word level (code-mixing). The switching and the mixing seem to be done in order to make communication smoother between the speakers or to make a conversation more effective. Indians seem to do the switching and the mixing consciously at some times and unconsciously at other times.

The reason why many Indians often change, switch and mix one language to/with another is that India is a multi-lingual nation and more than one language is complementarily used particularly in the urban areas where people from different places get together. Therefore, one language is not at all enough for urban Indians' communication. Even when talking with one person about one topic, many Indians prefer changing one language to another. It seems that they speak more than one language so that they feel the conversation more comfortable and effective.

VI. Pronunciation

As a result of the long contact and mixture with other Indian languages, English in India has been Indianized in many aspects. Naturally, the pronunciation of speakers' mother tongue has influenced that of their English. For example, English by Hindi/Urdu speakers shows strong characteristics of Hindi/Urdu. The following are some of the typical characteristics of English by Hindi/Urdu speakers.

Vowels			
Standard English > Indian English		Standard English > Indian English	
æ	ɛː	uə	uː
ə	a	ei	eː
ɔ	aː	ɛə	ɛː
əː	aj	ou	oː
ɔː	aː	ɔi	uːaːi
ɑː	aː	aiə	aːija
ai	aːi	auə	aːʋa
au	aːu / ɔ	eiə	eːja
iə	ija	ɔiə	aːoka

Consonants			
Standard English > Indian English		Standard English > Indian English	
Dentals t, d	Retroflex t, d	Fricatives ž	Affricates dž
Interdental θ	Stops th	Bilabial Glide w	Bilabial υ
Interdental δ	D	Labiodental v	Bilabial υ
z	d ž	f	ph

Spelling Pronunciation can be found in Indian English very often (e.g. Wednesday [vednesde:]). "r" in the spelling is pronounced in most cases. Kachru (1983) mentions that syllable-timed rhythm in Indian English often makes it difficult to be understood. Another distinct characteristic of Indian English is the fact that there is almost no distinction between week forms and strong forms (Nihalani, Tongue & Hosali 1979).

VII. Vocabulary

In order to describe things typical of India, it is convenient to loan words from Indian languages and mix them into English. Particularly in a conversation exclusively among Indians, it seems that they feel it more comfortable to speak English in such ways. And when they use English, big words are preferred because Indians are exposed much more to written English. Besides, as a result of putting a special emphasis on written English, complicated, old-fashioned and bureaucratic expressions such as "do the needful", "I invite your kind reference to my letter." are still frequently used. The following are the typical examples of words in Indian English.

Lok Sabha (Lower House of the central parliament), Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the central parliament), chamchagiri (flattering), rasta aur rel roko (stoppage of the traffic in a general strike), bandh (stoppage of work), dal (lentil, lentil soup), roti (cf. dal-roti=bread and butter = bread), sabzi, sabji (vegetable, vegetable curry), paneer (cottage cheese), pandit, pundit (brahmin), paan (betal leaf. It is chewed with tobacco, lime, nuts and so on. *hotel: restaurant), mandi (wholesale vegetable market), bazaar (marketplace), mess (hostel dining hall. a system in a hostel where the residents arrange to have meals prepared), ...wallah (person doing ..., person doing ... as his/her occupation [e.g. rickshaw wallah (rickshaw driver), tonga wallah (tonga driver, driver of a two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle), doodh wallah (milk seller)]), peon cf. chaprasi, bearer (office attendant, office messenger boy), ayah (child nurse, maid servant), mali (gardener), jawan (soldier), Akashvani (indigenous name

of All India Radio), **Doordarshan** (television, usually used to mean India's national television), **guru** (teacher. Traditional spiritual master), **.. ji** [e.g. Verma ji, guru ji (equivalent to Mr/Ms. Used with familiarity), **... sahib** (sahiba) **Sri ..., Srimati ...**(equivalent to Mr/Ms. Originally for Muslims, but now used to address the superior), **autorickshaw** (auto- three-wheeled vehicle with a engine. Usually used as a taxi or a lorry), **hill station** e.g. **Ootacamund** (seasonal holiday resort in the hill area), **masala film** (the most popular type of Indian film with fights, songs, dance, jokes and romance), **Bollywood** ([=Bombay + Hollywood], Bombay's film industry), **good name** (used when asking a name. Polite usage), **lakh** (a hundred thousand), **crore** (ten million), **dowry** (wife's present to her husband when they get married), **goonda** (rowdy), **SC** (=Scheduled Caste cf. untouchable: non-twice-born Hindus who are considered out of caste and discriminated), **Lathi-charge** (v, for the police to use lathi [stave] to break up a mob), **NRI** (non-resident Indians, overseas Indians), **disvestment** (withdrawal of investment cf. Divestment).

VIII. Grammar

It is natural that non-native Englishes get grammatically and syntactically influenced by speakers' mother tongue. English in India, likewise, shows a great influence of Indian languages. The following are examples of grammatical characteristics commonly found in English in India.

Articles

Most Indian languages have no articles. Therefore, articles of Indian English are not used so strictly as those of native English.

Examples: He is best player. I have an urgent business.

Countable/Uncountable Nouns

Indian languages have no distinction between countable nouns and uncountable ones. So, it is natural that Indians often do not distinguish countable nouns and uncountable ones when they use English. Also, in Indian English, plural nouns sometimes come after "every" and "each."

Examples: I have lost my furnitures. Much efforts bring their reward.. Every people know this.

Prepositions

In Indian English postpositions different from those of native one are sometimes used on the analogy of the equivalents of Indian languages (postpositions in most Indian languages).

> Examples: They mentioned about their plans. Search it! (There is no for after "search".)

Tag Questions

"isn't it?", "..., correct?", "..., no?" and "..., hai na?" are uttered after a sentence to show that the sentence is a sentence with a tag question.

> You are from Japan, isn't it?
> This is made in Japan, no?
> You are not married, correct?
> This is correct, hai na?

Tense/Narrative/ Aspects

The tense and narrative aspects of Indian English are not so strict as those of native English. In most cases, the phenomena happen because of the influence of the speaker's mother tongue. The tense and narrative aspects of most Indian languages are much freer than those of native English.

> I have read the book yesterday.
> An American couple had adopted an orphan yesterday.
> I had already told you that the meeting will be on Friday.
> Since no serious effort had been made, we'll have to start the programme.
> We had now finalized the constitution of the Association.
> The applicant is having 15 years' experience in grape cultivation. (The present perfect instead of the simple present)
> He is knowing Sunita.
> He said I am making bread.

Inversion

As inversion of interrogatives or auxiliary verbs seldom occurs in most Indian languages, so the inversion of those is sometimes neglected in English by speakers of Indian languages.

> Examples:
> What Raju is doing?
> You want what?
> Bramaiah gaaru is working well?

Others
"There" often comes last in "there is/are…" sentences. For example,
we can see such a sentence as:
A young boy was there.

IX. English for Inter-Asian Communication

Not a few people are using English as a second language or a foreign language in Asian countries for inter-Asian communication. Taking into account the fact that the population of Asia is nearly half of that of the world, we cannot disregard the communication with and among Asian people. As has been known, English has been functioning as a common language or an official language in many countries and organizations in Asia. Therefore, English is virtually the most accepted language for inter-Asian communication.

As various people in various countries and regions use English, its forms vary from people to people as well as from place to place. To be specific, Englishes in many places get influenced by the local languages and, consequently, develop their own local and original features. So, in case you are not familiar with the features, you may feel it a little difficult to understand the local English until you get accustomed to it.

However, such local and original features are trivial once we get accustomed to them. As we have more opportunities to be exposed to Englishes of different countries, we can get accustomed to each local variety. As we know more about them, we can know more about their English(es). In other words, we have to communicate much oftener to communicate better.

X. Conclusion

It is estimated that India's population is approximately 16 percent of world's population. Including the population of the other South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives, the total population of South Asia is going to exceed 1.4 billion, which is almost a quarter of world's population. That is, if we go to international places where people from other countries get together, then we are likely to meet and talk with more than two South Asians out of eight persons. Besides, considering roughly 20-30 percent of them speak English to some extent, the number of speakers/users of English in South Asia is supposed to be too vast to be neglected. In that sense it is and will be more important to know about English in India.

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