

The English Language in India: From Racial-Colonial to Democratic

Asima Ranjan Parhi

Department of English, Utkal University, Odisha, India

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ABSTRACT

In India and the other countries of the global south, a non-native variety of English Language has been serving the interest of the socio-cultural needs. Such a variety suits to the interest of the young learners since they have already mastered the tools of communication from outside the class room. Even the seasoned writers and columnists have developed a tendency to experiment further and develop suitable material for language teaching which was previously dependent on prescriptive grammar and lexical structures. This calls for an investigation into the nature of a shift within the very core of this language in India. This Paper tries to draw a graph on the course of this shift by examining data collected from mass media and situate this fresh use of language at a democratic space unlike the monolith of language as practiced in past. The news entries are trendy and user friendly, contain morphological and syntactic novelty that provides suitable methods to support pedagogy. It is fascinating to see how such data holds a promise of huge curricular implications providing a pragmatic road map for the teaching of theory, literature, and English language in India rather than development of mere skills as done in past.

1. Introduction

The English language as an unavoidable medium of instruction has resulted in an adequate exposure to the English language. The need for diversification of our tools, techniques of learning and mastering the language of English thus becomes inevitable. The different categories of students of science, commerce and humanities require suitable changes in teaching methods and language material. English print and electronic media have plenty of material which is more suitable for classroom teaching of English than that of the mechanical procedures prescribed in the grammar books as it serves as the familiar context for the Indian learners of English.

It is worthwhile to look at the language in question to be a methodological tool for the market lending an adaptability to empower everyone rather than an elite few. All 19th century linguists; from Humboldt to Sapir and Whorf emphasized upon linguistic relativity leading to bilingualism. Noam Chomsky spoke of linguistic creativity too. This romantic view against any positivist, essentialist linguistic determinism paves way for a valid method (Richards, 1986).

Different language commissions in India have emphasized on the nature of English language in the country to serve our faculty of comprehension, understanding specialized knowledge in any field, looking for wide exposure by making it a library language, bringing the provincial knowledge to a common platform of communication and so on (Parhi, 2008). The way English fared in a former colony like India in the initial days of its initiation is nothing short of an imbalanced power equation between its place of origin and where it was implanted. The partially literate people would translate some content words and start communicating the sense in their local, vernacular contexts. Here the emphasis is undoubtedly on the lexical sphere:

* Corresponding author E-mail address: asim.parhi@gmail.com

- a. You of evil stars
- b. Pig's daughter
- c. May the vessel of life float in the sea of existence

1.1. Hypothesis

My argument relating to the global is accommodative and hybridized. Rather than focusing on the debate over globalization as a promotion of choice in trade, consumer opportunity, platform for socio-economic progress, I direct my attention to its essential tool; the language of *the world as market* and *world as a common heritage* (my formulation and emphasis). So English language as a tool, an instrument (please stop reading it to be the weapon of marginalizing, pushing a certain group to periphery) has been an essential challenge, a hidden power center for each and every one at stake.

2. Methods in the new Corpus and Language Education

The text of Advertisement is a technique manifest in language; that of defamiliarization referred to by Viktor Shklovsky. This Russian formalist critic in his essay 'Art as Technique' cites instances of literary writing using defamiliarization as a method to sharpen our perception of the everyday, habitual objects (Shklovsky, 2009). In fact, this is not something absolutely new. Wordsworth and Coleridge in their critical essays developed this technique of defamiliarization too by the modifying colours of imagination (Wordsworth, 1800). The use of language in advertisements and promotional campaigns apply the same in order to put the object in its abstract form than as an object in itself. The new users of language keep on experimenting in order to diversify and add multiple and new meanings the way Shklovsky's idea of defamiliarization works.

For example, the cola drink company Slice advertises in its three versions trying to defamiliarize the object, i.e. mango juice and makes an attempt to make us perceive it as a regal, sensuous and erotic experience. So many factors are involved in such a text which in order to move us by our instinct takes a route of infinite discourses that refers to a woman's fantasy of:

- a) Sensuality
- b) Aesthetic appreciation of all such symbols of love
- c) Vision of approximating the historical, royal (queen) and so on.

This paper here cites innumerable examples with analyses ascertaining the above assertion:

- a. While going on a train journey a common man unaware of the intricacies of the English language often uses it and gets exposed to it. The vendor shouts 'Time pass', the people around go on gossiping, 'crossing' 'halting' 'A.C. Coach', 'signal', 'RAC', 'waiting list', 'engine failure' and scores of related terms.
- b. The advertising world presents a wide range of products through which the mass is exposed to the language used in various ways. Everywhere one finds hoardings, banners, clippings that speak of the trendy world of Englishes. Through that the common men with a little knowledge of the basics of the language learn the stylistics of usage, poetic and imperative models of the language.

A list of some common ads below would explain the way the copywriter views the world of objects, interests and customer sensibility.

- (i) Thumbs up – Taste the Thunder (alliteration)
- (ii) Eat Cricket, Sleep cricket, Drink Pepsi (metaphor)
- (iii) Raymonds – The complete Man (Idea of personality)
- (iv) Tide detergent washing powder-Tide in, Dirt out (poetic)
- (v) IICE Vodka - i'mas hot as ice (antithetical in nature)

- (vi) Suzuki – The ‘No Problem’ bike (persuasive, literary language)
- (vii) Matiz car – The big small Car (Oxymoron)
- (viii) Wills – Made for each other (Poetic, Proverbial)
- (ix) Hero Honda – Fill it, shut it, and forget it. (witty and creative use of language)

Such data concludes:

- i. The above things and many such clips are also frequently reaching the mass eye through multimedia, print media and so on. Apart from that the electronic media through its different programmes acquaint the viewer of structures that are common like ‘good night’, ‘good day’ ‘Thank you’, ‘Pardon me’, etc. which give a sense about functional English and English patterns of politeness, address etc.
- ii. In places where English studies are not discouraged, especially in some of the North Eastern States of the Indian sub-continent, the use of English has been an easy-going affair. The common illiterate business man, milk man, barber and labourer may shock us with an apt use of the language pattern! In other words, English studies have been assimilated in the cultural ethos of the place concerned giving it an identity with validity. In order to make English familiar and easy this approach has to be taken seriously.
- iii. English in globalised India cannot afford to remain elitist and strictly academic. It is very much an available, familiar medium for us; with all local coinage, new words borrowed from specific cultures and social ceremonies to make it appear user friendly. Even they have a market value like commodities; saleable and catchy for popularity.
- iv. In ethnically rich societies of India, the varieties of English used in different parts can be seriously thought of rather than imposing a strict British or American stamp over it. A language has to be firmly attached to a culture within which it operates to develop comprehensively. And English can achieve a status of mass friendly language in this respect. The chief reason behind it is the approach towards the language. It is a rich heritage, not alien and foreign. This has to be the motto behind the very effort of English teaching in India.
- v. The English that we meet around us, through the advertisements, street banners and so on have to be a major content of the teaching curriculum. At the primary stage the basics of language can be taught. Later on, such words and structures which a person is frequently watching, listening or using need to be the data for analysis. Many such usages like the English poetic usage, rhyme, rhetorical and figurative use, commands, imperative/polite approach, address etc. can very easily be taught to young learners without any rigorous practice of the stereotype rules of the language. There has been a perceivable benefit towards language study by the rapid growth of information technology. So, in order to make the teaching of a subject communicative, career oriented, effective, a package has to be prepared on the all the items of the language teaching apparatus.

Gradually the English language has gained a democratic space by editors, feature writers and advertisement copy writers with a shift of power to use it the way they find it suitable in order to cater to the readers, entrepreneurs, corporate houses or other professionals. Whether linguists like David Crystal, John Holloway and others or the editors of the *Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary*, there has been a wide acceptance of the new use of the language from all section of the academia (Crystal, 2004).

Every language gets benefitted by inclusion, experimentation and thus slowly becomes hybridized as a natural process of language change. That is why we do not shy away from approving of Englishes all around rather than a monopolized tongue. What once appeared to be a servile and convenient step has become a tool of empowerment, identity and advantage.

Today Indian English can be perceived as a *desi*, next-door variety of English. Linguists such as Adrian Holliday (1994) and Martha Pennington (1995) also have had models catering to multi-cultural contexts (Pennington, 1995).

Teaching poetry in universities always relied on prescribed literary terms and the fixed, cited examples therein. The newspapers, journals, magazines in India today come with instances of language material built by novelty of expression and brevity in presentation. This is certainly a democratic space, local yet competitive by the standards of communication. We may further see structures of advertisements that acculturate, contextualise and advance a certain ideological, political correctness.

1. “Very very hot. Very very sexy.” (Television advertisement for *Setwet* hair gel). It is a mixture of English and Hindi and grammatically incorrect. The word ‘very’ cannot be used twice consecutively.
2. “Kiss me. Close your eyes. I can lead your lips on your fingertips and happiness in your eyes.” (Television advertisement for *Dairy milk* chocolate). Language used to promote a food product creates a story telling effect (Parhi, 2019).
3. “Because noise should be seen. Not heard.” (Advertisement for *Fenesta Windows*, *The Week*, 25 November 2012). This example doesn’t carry the literal meaning yet draws attention to its aesthetic appeal.
4. “Men will be men.” (Television advertisement for an alcohol brand Imperial Blue). It is an instance of a gender stereotype.
5. “Say yes to less.” (Television advertisement for Panasonic)
Here ‘yes’ and ‘less’ serve as examples of alliteration.
6. “Make the world a stylish place.” (Television advertisement for a liquor brand Blenders’ Pride). The language creates an illusion of a fashionable habit.
7. *Hero Maestro: A Boy Thing* (explains a further discourse on gender issues, empowerment and identity).

Post globalization, the Indian national print media has gone for a huge morpho-syntactic logical change. Use of words like lathicharge, gherao, saffronisation, unbeautiful, misunderestimating prove its scant care for colonial English. The print and electronic media have come of age with linguistic improvisation busting the myth of Standard English.

The following data serve for a brilliant mixture of language and pictures. In all cases the language is suggestive of multiple meaning. This creative use of the language appeals the attention of the reader/ onlooker refining our conventional taste of the term (Parhi, 2006).

Saaf is the Hindi equivalent of cleanliness and echoes the English word safe (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Amul Advertisement

Retrieved from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/mar/04/better-saaf-than-sorry-amul-doodle-raises-awareness-about-coronavirus-prevention-2112037.html>

The nutrients value of the cereal results in perfect health (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Kellogg's Special Cereal

Retrieved from <http://newsactivist.com/en/articles/gendered-world-views-fall-2016-section-9/advertisement-will-make-you-look-again>



Figure 3 (a). Drill and Repair Advertisement

Retrieved from <https://images.app.goo.gl/m3tZUhRy4s5TLWRD9>

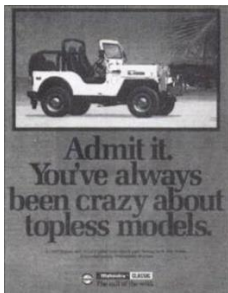


Figure 3 (b). Advertisement of New Jeep

Retrieved from <https://www.cuttingthechai.com/2008/10/119/topless-model-in-indian-print-ad/>

Both the pictures above (Figure 3 (a & b) are sexually suggestive.



Figure 4. Amul Advertisement

Retrieved from <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/324048135680950597/>

The former chief minister of Tamil Nadu (a state of India) is addressed as "Amma" (Amma stands for mother) by the people. The Amul advertisement has intelligently coined the term using it and her massive electoral victory (Figure 4).



Figure 5. Slice Advertisement
Retrieved from <http://aamsutra.blogspot.com/>

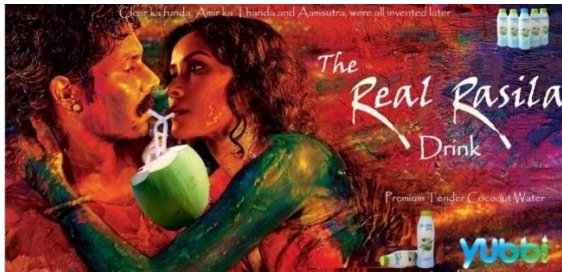


Figure 6. Coconut Drink Advertisement
Retrieved from <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/440297301044250549/>

The two ads (Figure 5 & 6) display summer drinks evoking a taste for the mouth while suggesting sensual relish. The word 'aamsutra' (Aam is mango and sutra is formula) echoes the classic text of *Kamasutra* (The art/formula of love making). Similarly, the latter coconut advertisement makes use of the term 'rasila', which is juicy ordinarily but stands for a bliss associated with different forms of art.

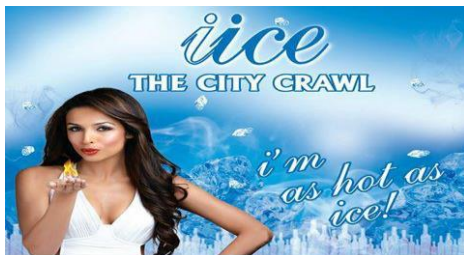


Figure 7. Vodka Advertisement
Retrieved from <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/510314201497217343/>

By putting contrary ideas, the language in this picture attends to the onlooker's sensibility.



Figure 8. Burger King Advertisement
Retrieved from <https://nataliecupac.wordpress.com/2014/03/21/burger-kings-super-seven-incher-itll-blow-your-mind-away-this-ad-definitely-does-but-for-all-the-wrong-reasons/>

The language is highly suggestive representing erotic fantasy (see Figure 8).



Figure 9. Magnum Ice-cream Advertisement

Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrUR0BujaLE>

“Pleasure” here refers to multiple forms of satisfaction (Figure 9).



Figure 10. Godiva Chocolate Advertisement

Retrieved from <https://chocolateclass.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/women-sexuality-and-body-image-in-chocolate-advertising/>

The copywriter has intelligently merged the idea of a woman to be God and Diva thereby generating a new term (Figure 10).

3. Discussion

We may perceive that gradually material building in language has shifted from an earlier text book approach to the contemporary platform of mass media. Thus, this flexible field becomes a modern text of language education. We can further this argument on the basis of the above conviction below.

The syntactic pattern in most news stories has been effectively modelled in the form of a literary, persuasive narrative. This helps language gaining a wider reach by shedding its earlier elite status. The art of teaching literature today no longer rests on formulaic grammar lessons and rhetorical devices taught prescriptively. The columns represent the subjective status of the readers who are the target groups and carry forward their expectations in the form of a resurgent mode of writing with ample flexibility.

4. Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that the language of English had a gradual shift from a mere symbol of power to a power of the mass. In this perspective we can perceive how the language itself has shed its racial nature and become a catalyst facilitating multiple identities, with diverse stake holders. This is a democratic procedure. It is produced for the mass catering to aspirations of a larger body of language users than only those in a formal sector thereby justifying its democratic status.

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