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**What is Indian in Indian English? Markers of
Indianness in Hindi-Speaking Users' Social Media
Communication**

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Abstract

Public communication in the contemporary world constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon. The Internet offers unlimited possibilities of contact and public expression, locally and globally, yet exerts its power, inducing use of the Internet lingo, loosening language norms, and encourages the use of a lingua franca, English in particular. This leads to linguistic choices that are liberating for some and difficult for others on ideological grounds, due to the norms of the discourse community, or simply because of insufficient language skills and linguistic means available.

Such choices appear to particularly characterise post-colonial states, in which the co-existence of multiple local tongues with the language once imperially imposed and now owned by local users makes the web of repertoires especially complex. Such a case is no doubt India, where the use of English alongside the nationally encouraged Hindi and state languages stems not only from its historical past, but especially its present position enhanced not only by its local prestige, but also by its global status too, and also as the primary language of Online communication. The Internet, however, has also been recognised as a medium that encourages, and even revitalises, the use of local tongues, and which may manifest itself through the choice of a given language as the main medium of communication, or only a symbolic one, indicated by certain lexical or grammatical features as identity markers. It is therefore of particular interest to investigate how members of such a multilingual community, represented here by Hindi users, convey their cultural identity when interacting with friends and the general public Online, on social media sites. This study is motivated by Kachru's (1983) classical study, and, among others, a recent discussion concerning the use of Hinglish (Kothari and Snell, eds., 2011).

This paper analyses posts by Hindi users on Facebook (private profiles and fanpages) and Twitter, where personalities of users are largely known, and on YouTube, where they are often hidden, in order to identify how the users mark their Indian identity. Investigated will be Hindi lexical items, grammatical aspects and word order, cases of code-switching, and locally coloured uses of English words and spelling conventions, with an aim to establish, also from the point of view of gender preferences, the most dominating linguistic patterns found Online.

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Introduction

The English language has, since the end of the colonial era, grown roots in many parts of the world. The complexity of its character is very hard to grasp due to the varying cultural and political contexts in which it has been used and due to the position it is given in various societies. No doubt, one of the places where English has assumed a particularly distinct role, both due to its long colonial past and its current powerful political and social status, is India. While its position there is not free from controversies both in the approach of its Indian users and scholars attempting to define its character there side by side with the numerous indigenous languages, it has in practical terms been embraced by vast numbers of local users as one of their tongues, even as a native tongue in view of many. Nevertheless, the use of English by its Indian speakers is not identical with that of English in the countries where it is used as a native language, and this concerns not only phonological differences, which may be most noticeable to native speakers. Interestingly, even when Indian users, including those who are very proficient in this tongue, choose to write in English, in informal and semi-formal contexts, they may, consciously, or possibly subconsciously, mark the language with certain local features visible in its grammatical and most often its lexical layer. Studies concerning distinctive features of English in India have already investigated the differences in a number of contexts, e.g. in literature, the press, speech, etc. (cf. Pingali 2009). The electronic medium, however, due to its relative novelty does not seem to have attracted much attention to the use of Indian English as yet (cf. Sedlatschek 2009; Dąbrowska 2012a). The present overview of the use of spontaneous informal English that Indian users, notably those from the northern belt of India, where the official tongue, beside English, is Hindi, utilise in posts in social media offers interesting results, however, as far as differences are concerned. Many clearly indicate in which semantic fields communication on social networking sites (SNSs) bears markers of Indianness, or in other words, reflects Indian, or more precisely Hindi-speaking northern Indian identity of the users.

The following analysis will demonstrate that there are some areas of social co-existence and social norms in India that Indian users, even in spontaneous, personal communication via SNSs, will adhere to. In order to investigate the subject more thoroughly, the discussion below will cover a theoretical presentation of English as a world language, and its diversity depending on its status, with special focus on features of English used in India and on the discussion of the concept of identity, its typology, and markers. The practical analysis of the material will focus on posts from four types of SNSs, the analysis of which will demonstrate the most typical markers of Indian identity that their authors utilise when communicating informally Online.

English in the World

We need to view the use of English in India in the context of its diversity in the contemporary world. Even a visual representation of English today is difficult and is raising controversies among scholars. Traditional models like those offered by Strevens (1992), which utilise the family tree structure, have now been substituted by more graphic and complex structures, due to the fact that the traditional ones do not account for some less prototypical varieties, e.g. pidgins and creoles with the English substrate (cf. Jenkins 2014). The more abstract models attempt to account for the degree of nativeness that the particular varieties demonstrate, placing the native ones in the centre and placing the second- and foreign-language users further away

from it (e.g. Görlach 1988; McArthur 1998). Kachru's (1992) model of concentric circles, with the Inner, Outer and Expanding circle for users of English as a first, second and foreign language, respectively, also belongs to this tradition. This was followed by more contemporary models, e.g. Modiano (1999a, b) and Graddol (2006), who attempted to reflect not just on the status of English in a given country and the numbers of its users, but rather more broadly on the common core for all varieties of English and what it involves in the language system itself, the universal aspects of its use, or its degree of familiarity with English. None of these has been fully satisfying, much like Kachru's model. It is the latter one, however, that has gained greatest recognition, despite its imperfection and simplification of the picture (a major criticism being that the numbers provided for particular countries reflect the number of the entire population there, not the actual number of users of English alone). The model also informs the present discussion, according to which Indian English is to be classified as English as a second language.

A helpful addition to the classification of Englishes in the modern world, notably the varieties that have come into being as a result of the colonial era, is the model offered by Schneider (2007), called the Dynamic Model. This constitutes a welcome innovation in that it attempts to diversify the local varieties in terms of what stage of development and nativisation they are at, providing that scholars agree on the principle of pluricentrism of English, i.e. on the fact that it is not necessarily a British nor American variety that needs to constitute the model against which to measure the correctness of the English language use worldwide. This view was expressed by Kachru back in 1991 in response to Quirk's paper (1990) regarding ownership of English in today's world (the English Today debate). The five stages that Schneider (2007) proposes are respectively foundation, exonormative stabilisation, nativisation, endonormative stabilisation and differentiation. These are to be viewed from the point of view of both the indigenous population and the English-speaking settlers, and account for extralinguistic factors and socio-political context, identity construction of both groups of users, sociolinguistic conditions of the contact situation, as well as the effects of the contact seen in the language itself. It can be assumed, following the long years of history of English in India and the differences that will be broadly presented below, that Indian English is at present at the stage of endonormative stabilisation (cf. Lambert 2014), with its features becoming stabilised and standardised. The below discussion will also constitute an argument for this.

As mentioned above, the Indian variety of English has attracted the attention of scholars for a number of decades as a variety with a long history outside of countries where it is the native tongue, and has been as a result fairly well described. It is worth remembering that the first contact of English with the Indian subcontinent dates back to as early as 1600 and the establishment of the East India Company (Kachru 1994). Subsequently, its use was reinforced during the time of the rule of the British Raj introduced in 1858, a result of which, English-medium education was initiated (Macaulay's Minute), side by side with the Hindi medium. The situation has been maintained after India's gaining of independence in 1947, which, together with the growing international position of the UK and the USA, and consequently the position of the English language worldwide, has resulted in the high status of English and English-medium education in India today. Despite the initial plans of the newly established state to promote indigenous tongues and notably Hindi as the state language, the English language has remained as a neutral variant for inter-state communication, in view of ensuing defiance of the imposition of Hindi in the southern, Dravidian-speaking states (cf. Das Gupta 1970), which has contributed to its role and visibility. No doubt, the position of English has been additionally

strengthened by the Indian film industry, where its use has evolved from a position lying outside the sphere of Indianness in the middle of the 20th c., to the perception towards the end of the 20th c. that it is both global and Indian (cf. Kothari 2011, 113).

Indian English has been described as one of the New Englishes resulting from the colonial past, and as such, sharing features with other Asian and African indigenised varieties of English (cf. Kirkpatrick 2007; Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008; Jenkins 2014). These are primarily visible in departures from Standard British English phonology and grammar. However, as the former will not be the subject of analysis in the paper, which focuses on written communication, it will not be discussed here due to space limitation. As regards to the most typical features of grammar of Indian English, in turn, scholars enumerate, e.g. omission or non-standard use of articles, non-standard ways of comparison of adjectives/adverbs, the SOV word order, much as in the Hindi model; a non-standard use of tenses and aspects as well as a non-standard use of the 3rd person singular/plural verbal endings, the use of *only/itself* at the end of the utterance, mostly for emphatic purposes, lack of inversion in questions, the use of different prepositions to Standard English, which are often, after the model of Hindi, put in the postposition (cf. Kachru 1983; Mesthrie and Bhatt 2008; Jenkins 2014; Pingali 2009; Sedlatscheck 2011; Sharma 2011; Dąbrowska 2012). Equally, if not more importantly for discussing features of Indian English, is its vocabulary, which can be divided into a number of subcategories as far as its source is concerned. These include the use of indigenised vocabulary, some well-known items of which are e.g. numerals *lakh* ('100 thousand') and *crore* ('10 million'), *chai* ('tea'), *yaar* ('man, buddy'), *accha* ('good'), *didi* ('older sister'), *desi* ('native'). They also utilise some English-based expressions whose meaning differs from the standard BrE/AmE understanding of the words, e.g. *biodata* ('CV'), *uncle/auntie* ('a respectful form of address used to any older stranger or family acquaintance'), *timepass* ('pastime'), *eve-teasing* ('sexual harassment'), and are also characterised by frequent use of clippings and acronyms, e.g. *arbit* ('arbitrary'), *subsidi* ('subsidiary'), *POA* ('plan of action'), *AC* ('air-condition'), etc. (cf. Dąbrowska 2012).

An important area where differences can be seen, though are possibly not as often analysed as the above features, is that of style and pragmatics. First broadly commented on by Kachru (1983), the differences point to a much higher use of polite language forms visible in the use of honorifics, choice of verb forms and other vocabulary items that mark the more formal style, e.g. *intimate me* for *tell me*, which, as scholars (Mesthrie 2000) claim, goes back to colonial times and interaction with or education by persons from upper social strata. As an extensive research of a variety of the Online genres undertaken by my M.A. student Klaudia Łojas (2018) has demonstrated, these features still not only linger on, but in fact dominate in various forms of Online communication.

The end this short overview of features that characterize Indian English one needs to stress that the knowledge of English is not as widespread in India as it might appear from academic accounts – recent sources (e.g. Graddol 2010) claim that the degree of knowledge varies depending on whether we mean those who speak (ca. 16%) or those who only read it (35%). It is therefore important to stress the diversification of Indian English in terms of its social distribution. Mesthrie (2000) does postulate the distribution according to the *acrolect-mesolect-basilect* variants, which can be made use of depending on the situation and the type of interlocutor, even by the same speaker. This stratification makes the description of English in India particularly difficult, not only due to the geographical diversification but also the social and contextual background of its users. Additionally, when it comes to the written sources in

the largely anonymous social media on the Internet, the analysis must be viewed only as a broad tendency.

Identity and language

The analysis of users' comments made on social media Online, especially in a multilingual country like India, where the use of certain languages, notably English, is expected, may be highlighted by Widdowson's words, who as early as 1997 claimed that "English, the virtual language, has spread as an international language; through the development of autonomous registers which guarantee specialist communication within global expert communities" (1997, 44). At that time, he referred to more specialist communication in primarily professional contexts, yet the reference to English as a virtual language is noteworthy (cf. Graddol 2006). In contemporary times, English is used with high frequency also in private communication Online, and its choice by members of multilingual communities, where English is one of the tongues, is typical (cf. Dąbrowska 2013). It may be assumed that when interacting in an international or in multilingual communities of friends or communities of practice/virtual communities Online, it is easier not to betray one's ethnicity faster than in spoken interaction, yet also here, as will be demonstrated, users will often make such linguistic choices that will index their native culture in different, often subtle ways. This, however, as will also be discussed below, is done by different means in different kinds of social networking sites, whereby it can be deduced that users adapt their linguistic behavior in certain ways when communicating by means of different genres and registers, thereby adhering to their purpose (cf. Dąbrowska 2018).

Identity studies can in general terms be divided into a number of approaches which have evolved over the past few decades; the variationist approach, the socio-psychological paradigm, and the poststructuralist paradigm (e.g. Ochs 1993; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Edwards 2009; Block 2009; De Fina 2011; Blommaert 2015). This demonstrates a growing complexity in the understating of the concept, from a fairly straightforward one that would be rather automatically induced by one's geographical location, through the influence of one's group membership on one's identity up to the current approach that stresses the fluid character of the notion that is constructed during interaction. This can be seen in the definitions of the concept. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004, 19), for instance, view identities as "social, discursive and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals and groups of individuals appeal in an attempt to self-name, self-characterise and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives," a view that stresses the volitional element in one's identity construction processes. Block (2009, 32) largely repeats the aspects of performativity and fluidity of identity when defining it as "socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in dress, bodily movements, actions and language," and adds what is important for the present discussion, namely that "[i]dentity work occurs in a company of others – either face-to-face or in an electronically mediated mode – with whom to a varying degree individuals share beliefs, motives, values, activities and practices." Both definitions stress the element of sharing beliefs, values, prerogatives and practices, etc., with others and the necessity to be in the company of other(s) when showing one's identity. One can thereby assume that depending on how close one is to their interlocutors and how important the others are to them, the manifestation of identity will surface itself to a varying degree, which is also the case in the Online world. The first definition also stresses the role of time and place in manifestations

of identity, whose importance is also underlined by Blommaert (2015) and Blommaert and De Fina (2017). They refer to Bakhtin's concept of chronotopic identities, where words stress the inseparable units of time and place that, in turn, evoke certain identity choices in people. These are no doubt related to different traditional demographic categories such as ethnicity, race, nationality, migration, gender, social class and language. Manifestations of identity often do point to the above factors in a direct way, in which case they can be described as indexical of one's ethnicity, gender, class, etc. In a contemporary world, however, which is marked both by mobility and frequent and facile contact with groups often physically and demographically quite distant, what often surfaces is symbolic identity, when one chooses to liaise mentally and in terms of behavior with such groups (cf. Danesi 2016). This may be, but certainly not exclusively is, linked with one's Online persona, which offers a lot of flexibility in one's behavioural patterns, often quite distant from offline reality (cf. Deumert 2014).

Language is among the primary carriers of one's identity, whether indicated subconsciously or by choice. The use of language can be viewed as an act of identity, by which Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) understand utterances that index the speaker's identity. The process of indexing is multidimensional in that it emerges from such factors as ethnicity, nationality, gender, and social class, and it is simultaneous in the reflection of these. Nowadays, linguists often speak about language identity (previously referred to as ethnolinguistic identity due to a more direct link between the two), which is a "relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication (a language, a dialect or a sociolect)" (Block 2009, 46). Leung et al. (1997) point out that the relationship may be of different character. It may be a marker of language expertise (i.e., how proficient one is in a given tongue and consequently how accepted the speaker is by its other users), language affiliation (which points to one's identification with a given language) as well as language inheritance (i.e., being born into a family or a community that uses a given tongue). Language identity may be considered with regard to either one's adherence to the normatively constructed standard of a given state or the actual use of language forms in specific groups (Blommaert 2006), which stresses complexity of the concept and hints at the variety of choices one can make. The element of volition is also seen in the fact that membership in a given language community, and thus a given language identity, may be either ascribed (e.g. by birth) or achieved/inhabited, when one consciously embraces a given tongue as one's own and learns to follow its rules (Blommaert 2005).

An interesting view of identity is offered by Block (2009, 48), who speaks about identity as multimodality. He defines it as "a momentary or ongoing achievement of particular subject positions by individuals," which, in the context of Online communication, notably in multilingual communities, may be achieved by the use of a language that connotes such a position, for instance English in India. He argues that communication is not only linguistic, but multisensory. In his view therefore, language identity does not only co-exist, but may in fact be substituted by multimodal identity. This, no doubt, may in bi-/multilingual communities be realized also by a given language choice, the way it is pronounced, written, etc.

Multilingual language choices will naturally be defined not only by an individual's personal decisions, but also the type of multilingualism that they function in. According to Stavans and Hoffmann (2015), these can be divided into communities that either result from living in a majority-minority situation, that are a product of the contemporary language spread and globalization, or multilingualism as a lifestyle. It appears that India would fit the last category best now that it has successfully emerged from the colonial, British-dominated past, though

no doubt the elements of the second category could be identified there too. Language choice for a multilingual person is certainly a complex process, as it is defined by at least five different dimensions; speaker, addressee, context/situation, content/topic and purpose. The scholars (2015, 199) claim that, although the choices are made by individuals based on their personal attitudes or preferences, they may, however, subconsciously result from “contextual considerations that ultimately reflect wider social attitudes as well.” Stavans and Hoffmann (2015) conclude that many multilingual choices are driven by two primal social needs; group inclusion and identity, and this, no doubt, motivates the choices made in Online communication too.

Research Assumptions and Data

Following on from the above discussion concerning the question of identity, notably identity in the multilingual context of India, especially in its northern belt, the research concerning markers of (northern) Indian identity in the Online context on social networking sites will demonstrate that despite infrequently displaying one’s high proficiency in English, the quality and character of the English language used there will carry markers of Indian, especially Hindi-based identity. In particular, the assumptions are as follows:

- Due to its status in India and the world English will be the dominant language of communication for Indian users on SNSs
- Despite the hegemonic position of English its use on SNSs will be indexical of the users’ ethnicity
- The degree of indexicality will vary depending on the character of the site and addressees of the posts

In order to demonstrate the above, three types of SNSs, with one further subdivision have been selected as the sources of data, on the assumption that despite the fact that they are all SNSs, and as such they serve an exchange of friendly views and maintenance of contacts, each of them has a more specific purpose that will also reflect itself in the language of the respective posts. Facebook-private is the most private use of the four in character and focuses on users’ private profiles and their comments on friends’ posts. Naturally the users are then mostly known, typically by their name and via a photo. The other Facebook option, Facebook-public, on the other hand, has been identified as a more public, semi-formal platform on which public events are discussed in a company of strangers. It is in many ways comparable to YouTube, the third site discussed here, with the difference that most users of the former can be identified by name and photo. YouTube, on the other hand, is specifically devised for sharing visual materials and commenting on them, in which it may be similar to Facebook-public, but users are often anonymous, use nicknames, and behave more at ease as the chance of recognizing them is slimmer than on Facebook. Finally, Twitter is different from the other three, its main purpose being to inform others, notably one’s fans and followers, about major public and/or private events, views, etc. in a message of restricted length. It may therefore be assumed that, in keeping with the character of each site, determined by its objective and the audience, the form and character of communication will vary in certain subtle ways, which will allow us not only to identify markers of Indian identity in the posts, but also demonstrate differences in them depending on the site.

The total number of posts analysed in the study is 701, which is equivalent to 10277 words. They were excerpted from profiles of 28 FB friends, individuals who are known to me personally, 28 Twitter profiles of Indian celebrities (movie stars, singers, sportsmen, journalists), topics concerning Bollywood films *Zero*, *Thugs of Hindostan*, *Dear Zindagi* and *Fan*, debated on by users on YouTube, as well as discussions tackling the same films on FB public fan pages, augmented by topics dealing with issues concerning the social position of women, political tensions in India, university education, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. The data below specify the name of each site, the number of posts investigated from each of these, the number of words in these, and the average length of the posts in each. An attempt was made to analyse a parallel number of posts and of words from each, yet, as can be seen, the absolute comparison is impossible, as posts on private Facebook profiles tend to be very short, almost twice as short as those on YouTube, so the figures visible below are to some extent a compromise as regards to all the variables here:

- Facebook-private - 200/2364 (11.82)
- Facebook-public - 168/2141 (12.74)
- YouTube - 165/3088 (18.71)
- Twitter - 168/2684 (15.97)

The objective of the discussion below is in the first place to focus on the English used on the SNSs and to detect its non-standard features that would be linked with the Indian identity of the authors. Yet, at least for the sake of order, a very brief mention must be made about the use of Hindi instead of or beside English too, so that the impression the analysis will give is not that users always wrote in English only. Admittedly, there were indeed some posts formulated only in Hindi, and there was a fair amount of code-switching in the collected material. The former was found in 45 posts out of 701, which indicates that 6.41% of the posts were written in Hindi alone, where the latter, similarly, was found in 45 posts, and this constitutes 6.48% posts in all. Due to the limitation of space, the issue of Hindi-only posts and code-switching will not be analysed here.

Grammar

Grammatical differences, as indicated above, have been studied for a number of decades. The analysis of the material collected here is to firstly verify whether those differences appear on SNSs in contemporary times, and if so, we ask which are those typically found here. The issue of grammar can be illustrated by the following examples from each site:

- 46 items in 701 posts (6.56%)
- FB-priv – 6 (3%), FB-pub – 13 (7%), YT – 24 (14.5%), TW- 3 (1.7%)
- FB-priv - I have turned mad since one week; Love your shoes...red red; Wer u now; i sing this song in honor of these three women who has contributed a lot in my life and also in our Society
- FB-pub - Ali Zafar he is Amezing; We Indians always proud of you; think she respect who she is as a girl. Boys always thinks about themselves; How much money this fellow has got from across the Broder?
- YT - deepika is the highly paid than ranveer; both of them so lovely couple; Why here is not Kajol and Ajay; Srk look like the king; one of a best movie in India; there are still many countries who knows only SRK but hardly knows TOM; who is watching fantastic trailer in October also ??; Amazing work we have ever seen in Bollywood

- TW - 12th years has gone but you are still in our hearts. You departs from this earth but are still alive in our hearts; Madhuri mam is only looking beautiful,

Based on the overview, it may be concluded that particularly frequent among the examples are instances of a non-standard use of articles, subject-verb agreement, question non-inversion, non-standard comparison of adjectives, the non-standard position of *only* and *also*, loss of copula *be*, non-standard past tense forms, reduplication and copy pronouns. This shows that the departures from BrE and AmE that were identified a few decades ago have not disappeared from the language of Indian speakers even under the influence of the audiovisual and Online media or the English-medium education, the access to which is, after all, much easier and frequent now than 20-30 years back. This, in turn, proves that Indian users who utilize these features either do not see the difference or that they show preference for the local variants. The presence of these in view of access to the standard BrE/AmE norm is certainly telling.

Additionally, the investigation of the distribution of the grammatical markers of Indian English shows meaningful differences too. The highest number of grammatical markers is to be found on YT, much as was the case with code-switching. This number is half as high on FB-public and hardly visible on private FB profiles and Twitter. We may conclude that grammatical departures are an indication of lower proficiency of users in English, which, after all, enjoys high status in India – it may therefore be that an incorrect knowledge and use of English indirectly lowers the status of the user in the eyes of the public. Lack of attention to correctness may thus be more allowed on YT, where one is seldom recognized by other users, either because they are strangers or because one is anonymous. To some extent, this applies to FB-public too, where one does not interact with friends and acquaintances, whereas writing posts to friends, or putting up a post when one is a public figure seems to make one more aware of correctness and to make more efforts to maintain one's face as an educated English user as far as grammar is concerned. This, however, as will be demonstrated, is not necessarily corroborated by users' lexical choices.

Vocabulary

The analysis of lexical items that bear features typical of Indian English and at the same time distinct from BrE/AmE either in form or distribution of use will be divided into four semantic categories, which will include religion, interjections, idiomatic items, and terms of address. Additionally, in the last two of these there will be two sections; one containing indigenous vocabulary incorporated into the local use of English from, predominantly Hindi or other local tongues, and the other consisting of English items which, however, have a different meaning in BrE/AmE or are used in different stylistic or register variants. As regards to this broad subdivision, the overall number of items identified in all the posts as marking Indian identity is 246 (i.e. found in 35% of all 701 posts), out of which Hindi/local words were 137 in all (19.5%) and English were 109 (15.5%). Before the analysis, it needs to be clarified that although some may want to view the following examples as instances of code-switching, I will argue against it. Indeed, the distinction between code-switching and indigenized vocabulary is difficult and no doubt depends on a given community and context (cf. Myers-Scotton 2002). For the sake of the present analysis, however, I have assigned the below items to the category of borrowings on the basis of their repetitiveness and often international recognition, not infrequently without straightforward English counterparts, while instances of code-switching would be chance, one-

off formulations.

The overall distribution of the collected vocabulary in terms of the four SNSs presents itself as follows:

FB-priv – H 77 (38.5%) / E 52 (26%)

FB-pub - H 25 (14%) / E 9 (5.3%)

YT – H 21 (12.7%) / E 42 (25.4%)

TW – H 14 (8.4%) / E 6 (3.5%)

The above percentages indicate a different distribution of vocabulary identity markers than that of grammar. As it seems, it is in the most intimate type of communication, which includes the Online, that users choose to communicate in the way that stresses their close ties most, by means of lexical items that are shared by the users and that reveal their local roots. This may be viewed as being expected of friends and acquaintances in private communication, unlike the use of English in more public contexts, such as YouTube. When we look at the share of Hindi-based words on YT, they are not particularly frequent there (contrary to code-switching, though), yet, English words in their nativised sense are as frequent on YT as they are on private FB accounts. FB public is marked with those local symbols of identity rather infrequently, and, as may have been assumed, Twitter, the most “worldly” site of all, shows the use of nativised lexical items the least.

Religion

26 instances in 701 posts (3.7%):

FB-priv 22 (11%), FB-pub 1 (0.5%), YT 2 (1.2%), TW 1 (0.5%)

FB-priv – Happy Holi; Happy Diwali to you all, Om shanty; and happy Dussehra; rip uncle ji waheguru ji; When the conch is blown with controlled breath, the primordial sound of “Om” emanates from it. This eternal sound is the origin of all Vedas; looking forward to meeting you soon Insha’Allah; Jazak Allah Baba uncle.. we haven’t reached yet.. (...) Keep us in your duas. Allah hafiz!; Aameen; Masha Allah;

FB-pub - I wish all the best also may diety bless this occassions that will be taking place on 19/ november/2018.

YT - InshaAllah #Zero will be biggest blockbuster of Indian cinema; Maza aagya king khan sahab gr8 song fub camestry love you allha bless you

TW - Happy Holi!

The first category of vocabulary items that I have decided to identify is that of religious items. This appears to be a semantic field that is most definitely culture-bound and therefore its items are arduously substituted by English words, mainly because those might simply not exist. This is especially true of items that are linked with the Hindu or Sikh religions, typically illustrated by names of religious festivals, like Holi, Diwali, Dussehra, names of persons or symbols associated with them, e.g. om, Vedas, waheguru, etc. The situation is a little different with regard to the Muslim religion, which is far more widespread and closer in its principles to Christianity, and therefore some words are better known also in English, e.g. Allah, aameen. Moreover, the entire Islamic world shares a number of fixed expressions related to religious rites, such as InshaAllah, Masha Allah, Allah hafiz, Jazak, and are consequently also used outside India. These may have easier counterparts in English, yet their more universal character certainly prevails in the Indian

context too. In any case, religion appears to be a stronghold as far as the use of local language markers is concerned. The distribution of religious items, however, appears to be very unevenly spread, and not surprisingly, the greatest number of the respective items is found in private FB communication, while the other three platforms feature a maximum of two items. Needless to say, these items are all in local languages, i.e. Sanskrit-based, primarily Hindi, or Persian-based, notably Urdu. Religion-related vocabulary is certainly a very important identity marker, yet, unsurprisingly, its visibility in public Online communication is rather low – the fact, however, that it is there nevertheless stresses the importance of religion and consequently, also ethnicity, for the Indian users.

Interjections

Based on my personal observations, I assumed prior to the current investigation that Indian SNS users would make frequent use of native interjections, which one can often hear, e.g. in Indian movies, and e.g., notably, na, yaar, arrey, wah. It is not very risky to resort to these in spoken communication as they do not violate the sentence/utterance grammar, standing outside of it. It is possibly the actual mode of communication that we are dealing with here, the writing, however, that has diminished the use of these on all four SNSs analysed here, to a minimum. Only 9 items have been recorded within 701 posts (i.e. were found in 1.2% of posts), and the largest representation of these was 4 items on FB-private and also 4 items on YT, while FB public had one item, and Twitter had none. The results are not surprising, as the interjections are typically used in spontaneous interaction, as a reaction to someone else's words or behavior. While such interaction is fairly typical of FB-private and can be found on YT too when commenting on someone's post in an emotional way, the other two sites are not conducive to such behaviour. The respective results, with a distribution among the four sites, are found below, evidencing that CMC is not particularly encouraging as regards to these elements of communication.

FB-priv 4 (4.5%), FB-pub 1 (0.5%), YT 4 (2.4%), TW – 0 (0%)

FB priv – Waah; Arre i have clicked better snaps of u Taps, havent i?; Looking Fab Yaar!!; Arrey wah!! Double Delight

FB pub - Nice yr

YT Owsn Voice Yaaar, What a song Yaar; Yaar ye kaisa song hai chii. what happened to ur magical songs SRK; Movie bhot zabardas thi yaar

Indigenous/idiomatic vocabulary

Contrary to the above, other items that I have broadly grouped as indigenous and/or idiomatic fall into Hindi or English categories, and their numerical distribution is quite similar, with 43 for Hindi and 53 for English. Here the distribution across the four platforms is not as diverse as was the case above, with a visible exception of Twitter, where both the Hindi and the English items are marked minimally. The largest number, on the other hand, is to be found on FB-private, unsurprisingly. Interestingly, though, a visible bias is for the idiomatic use of English words. The detailed distribution of the two sets of words in the analysed posts is illustrated below:

96 items in 701 posts (13.7%) – Hindi 43, English 53

FB-priv H-17 (8.5%), E-29 (14.5%), FB-pub H-12 (7.1%), E-6 (3.5%), YT H-8 (6.8%), E-15 (9%), TW H-6 (3.5%), E-3 (1.7%)

Hindi - 43 (6.1%)

FB-priv – jai ho, mithi, desi Tom Cruise, chalo Hong Kong, mera pranam, subho vijaya, mubarak ho, mast, purana pic, saree, ye zindagi na milegi dobara; inbox me na

FB-pub – lakh, loksabha, biryani, jhatak, jhtka, jihadi(s)/zeehadi, dalit, raja sabha

YT - Romance Ka Badshaah; jodi; biryani; Deepveer, Srkians, bhoot, masala movie, pakora naak,

TW - Twitter-jaans, mantra, raasta

As regards to Hindi words, the overview of the above shows a variety of topics. There are, expectedly, names of food, e.g. masala, mithi, biryani, pakora, but these are not the most frequent items. The other are harder to classify, but one can find there references to the cinema, e.g. masala movie, romance ka Badshaah, Srkians, Deepveer, desi [Tom Cruise], and a film title ye zindagi na milegi dobara. There are also items reflecting political and social issues, such as loksabha, raja sabha, dalit, jai ho, jhtka, jihadi/zeehadi, as well as some fixed cultural concepts, such as jodi, raasta, lakh, mast, purana, pakora naak, mantra, mera pranaam, expressions used on various festive occasions, like subho vijaya, mubarak ho, chalo, or the nominal formant – jaans. The selection shows which concepts or images appear to be deeply ingrained in Indian minds, and why these items are better interpreted as borrowings in Indian English than as examples of code-switching.

English – 53 (7.5%)

FB priv – best of luck, bestest, super adorable, super super cute, cuteness overloaded, cutie, cho sweet, shoooo cute, sweetness defined, hottie, superlike; awesomely awesome, bestie, inbox me, msg me, PM me

FB pub - awesome; owsome

YT - best of luck, bestest, awesome, osm, owsm, bloody hell;

TW- super excited; best of luck

The selection of localized English items, although larger numerically, actually appears to be less diverse in terms of their meanings and functions than the indigenous Hindi words. They are, indeed, more visible on FB-private accounts, which shows their intimate, more informal character, and as the overview shows, also rather emotionally marked. It seems that Indian users fall back on locally coloured, but originally English, affective markers, especially those conveying positive emotions, like the well known best of luck, awesome/osm/owsm, super (-like, -excited, -adorable, -cute), cutie, bestest, etc. A risky conclusion might be taken in suggesting that English in this case serves the purpose of reinforcing the meaning, and strengthening the expression of positive emotions, and hence, carries positive associations in the users' minds. As they mark affective states, they are more naturally found in private communication, and thus on FB-private in the first place. They are also visible, but half as frequently on YT, which, on the other hand, is a site of frequent heated disputes between users, sometimes anonymous too, hence the more marked visibility of such vocabulary there than on FB-public and on Twitter.

Terms of address / titles

The numerical values listed below in reference to the last category, those of terms of address or references to persons, show clearly that this is the largest group of those discussed here, with 115 items in all (i.e. found in 16.04% of all the posts), with an almost equal subdivision of these into indigenous Hindi words and a nativised use of English words.

115 items in 701 posts – 16.04% (Hindi 59 – 8.4%, English 56 – 7.9%)

FB priv H-34 (17%) E-23 (11.5%); FB pub H-11 (6.5%), E-3 (1.7%); YT H-7 (4.2%) E-27 (16.3%); TW H-7 (4.1%), E-3 (1.7%)

Hindi FB priv H-34 (17%); FB pub H-11 (6.5%); YT H-7 (4.2%) TW H-7 (4.1%)

FB-priv - I think of Kushalji as she was always pampered by Gurpreet Ji; rip uncle ji; as quoted by almost all the religious books including The Guru Granth Sahib ji; Happy GURPURAB Sir ji; Thank you Sarla Ben; Thank you Rajesh bhai; Thanks a lot Rajiv bhaiya; bhai ji; Thanks Ilyas bai; Thanks Mami; Ilias sb;

FB-pub - i like you atal bihari ji prime minister; Don't worry Aish next one is your Sasur jii; Happy Birthday Bapu; Gandhiji's quotes are deeply touching

YT - performance of AAMIR SIR AND AMITABH BACHHAN JI; the legend actor amir Khan and amitab g; Saif ali khan is looking like baba ram rahim; luvvv ewwww jaaneman Shah Rukh Khan; Love u jaan; shahruk ji, What song Yaar; OwsM Voice Yaaar

TW – Rani ji, super... beta, well done, Abbasbhai Mastanbhai and Hussainbhai my love to you.

As far as the use of native vocabulary is concerned, it represents a variety of terms of address pointing to the type and degree of relationship within and outside of family, e.g. beta, mami, baba, bhai as well as titles, e.g. sahib, sab, ben and terms of endearment, such as jaan, used when addressing friends, neighbours and strangers. As it appears, communication in the Hindi-speaking context, even when written Online, assumes the use of terms of address for the sake of clarity or as a sign of respect. The latter is especially important, as the most dominant element here is the honorific particle *ji*, either attached to the name or standing beside it, and what is notable is that it may be found when addressing someone directly or when it is used as a reference to the third party. Not surprisingly, such elements are found predominantly, as those above, in private communication, as on FB-private. *Ji* is also the most visible item on YouTube and on Twitter. There, however, the titles are altogether rare. The use of the term *bhai* 'brother' is also notable, as it points to the closeness between interlocutors, even though there is no actual relationship between the writer and the addressee. In conclusion, titles and terms of reference are certainly the most powerful and pronounced markers of Indian identity still largely expressed in otherwise mostly all-English contexts.

English FB-priv E-23 (11.5%); FB-pub E-3 (1.7%); YT E-27 (16.3%); TW E-3 (1.7%)

FB-priv - Happy birthday sir; Sorry for your loss Punita maam; rip uncle ji; Thinking of all of you especially Kushal aunty; Thanks Kiran uncle; Krishna Aunty may you rest in peace,;!; Nice pic sir

FB-pub - Congratulation sir, very nice sir, This work is a Tribute to "Dr. A.P.J. Abdul kalam sir;

I forgot what Mr.khan said when kaira sat on the chair;
 YT - Love you Shahrukh sir; RESPECT AMIR sir and AMITHAB sir; Madhuri mam; when srk sir; Shah rukh sir you are great; Superbbbbbbb sirrrrrrr I loved it so much; Love U sir...
 TW – Thank you uncle; Sir, that is the biggest compliment I have received, Thank you sir.

The distribution and character of items of English origin found in the category of titles to a large extent confirms the above findings concerning the Hindi based items. Also here, FB-private demonstrates the largest visibility of the English titles adapted by users to the local context. The overview of the items from FB-private accounts demonstrates there are items such as uncle, aunty, which, contrary to the English sense, do not imply a family relationship at all – they are used as a term of respect towards acquaintances, where the most frequent title is sir (there is also maam/mam, yet the use of the female title is much more limited). All these options are found on the other sites too, and it needs to be stressed that this time they are even more frequent on YT, contrary to the Hindi equivalents. YT seems to be the medium where native vocabulary is fairly reduced compared to the other sites, yet as it seems the use of an English word, if there is a suitable equivalent there, fulfills the need for marking local identity rather well. While all these words are used by native speakers in BrE and AmE too, the overview of the samples shows that the frequency of these items, especially of sir, is much higher than in native English, where the use is marked by very formal contexts, whereas here both the medium of communication, especially Facebook, and the tone of communication, indicate that the relationship is much closer, balanced and not so power marked. It certainly conveys a lack of close acquaintance, yet high formality and the original lack of equality are not there, as some YT examples indicate with their emotional quality or non-standard spelling, viz. Love U sir, Superbbbbbbb sirrrrrrr. The title then certainly does not reflect its original native distribution but is a calque of the Indian titles like sab, sahab, sri etc., and especially the honorific ji. The high frequency of these titles in the Hindi, but primarily in the English, version evidences that Indian users cannot easily function without knowing and expressing in speech, even in informal writing, who they are interacting with. It therefore may be concluded that Indian identity shows itself also in the English-only discourse, and marking the type of relationship between oneself and the interlocutor or the third party defines Indian identity particularly strongly.

Concluding remarks

In summary of the above findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Out of the collected material only 6.41% of the posts contained sentences fully composed in Hindi. Those were particularly frequent on Facebook-private (28 – 14% of all posts there), while code-switching dominated on YouTube (33 – 20% of all analysed posts there)
- The remaining markers of Indianness were to be detected in the grammatical features of the posts (in 6.56% of the posts) and, predominantly, vocabulary (in 35% of the posts).
- Grammatical aspects (e.g. the non-standard use of articles, word order, non-standard use of comparative and superlative forms, non-standard use of verbal endings in singular and plural present tense form, reduplication, copula be omission, etc.) were particularly visible on YouTube (24 instances - 14.5%)
- Vocabulary markers, unsurprisingly, primarily concerned such aspects as personal and

- social relationships, religion, film, food, social and political issues, certain interjections/exclamations and tags. These meanings were expressed by means of borrowings from Hindi (137 items – 19.5% of all) which, in some cases, have found a wider circulation in English also outside of India. The SNS which particularly encouraged the use of such vocabulary was Facebook-private, with 129 items found there out of 246 in all (52.4% of all the indigenous vocabulary items)
- Another group of locally coloured vocabulary consisted of English items (109 instances – 47.6% of all the vocabulary examples). They frequently expressed positive emotions and impressions evoked by another person, an item or an event (a child, a friend, a nice person, a film), or conveyed a particularly strong positive sentiment, e.g. a wish or admiration. This might be an indication of the fact that English connotes not only power, but also beauty and optimism for its Indian users
 - The most frequent category of vocabulary items which indexically point to the Indian origin of their use were titles and terms of address used to or about another person. This feature was noticeable both in the group of Hindi and English terms. They were to be found most frequently on Facebook private (58 items out of 115 – 57.6%), followed by YouTube (34 – 29.5%).
 - The Hindi items predominantly defined relationships within a family or a community or were terms of endearment and interjections, e.g. bhai/bhaya/bai, mami, sab/sahab, ben, jaan, jaaneman, yaar, and, most of all, the honorific ji.
 - Facebook-private as well as YouTube were also the sites with the highest use of coloured English terms of address, with the predominant use of the word sir, less frequently maam, as well as uncle and aunty. There are 23 (20%) such items used on Facebook-private and 27 (23.4%) on YouTube. These constitute the most interesting example of the multilingual, multimodal identity markers found on the analysed sites which attempt to combine both the local and the global facets of Indian identity.
 - A valuable observation which points to the chronotopic use of items marking ethnic and language (ethnolinguistic) identity also in Online communication are the visible differences in the frequency of use of all the above mentioned items on the four sites. The site that appears to encourage the use of indexically marked language items most is Facebook-private, where interaction is most personally directed, even if it is not entirely intimate. 171 items linked with Indian identity in a variety of ways (vocabulary, Hindi-only posts, code-switching, etc.) were recorded there (44.4% of all), and they were followed, contrary to the original assumptions, not by Facebook-public (with 52 items – 13.5%), but by YouTube (with 133 items – 34.5%), even though this website certainly invites a more impersonal participation than is the case of Facebook-public due to its greater anonymity – this in fact may be the factor that encourages a more relaxed expression than Facebook-public, however. The last site, Twitter, featured only 29 (7.5%) items of indexical value altogether, with the highest representation of vocabulary items among those (14 Hindi based items – 48.2% - and 6 English words – 20.6% of the marked items here). This points to the obvious influence of the context of communication, also on the Internet, on the users' choice of language, showing that Indian Twitter users, notably celebrities, symbolically associate the site with English as a language of public communication and higher social status attached to it, contrary to Facebook-private, and less so YouTube, which appears to mirror more closely the private, less standard,

communication routines that are found in the offline world. This evidences the original assumption of the paper that Online SNS interaction reflects the Indian, here northern Indian, identity of users to a considerable extent, yet the users select the identity markers differently depending on the function and character of each site.

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