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*Language Contact and  
Change, Paper 3*

**Rise and Decline of Languages: A Struggle for  
Survival**

Sai Chandra Mouli Timiri  
*Osmania University, India*

# Rise and Decline of Languages: A Struggle for Survival

Sai Chandra Mouli Timiri<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Osmania University, India*

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## Abstract

Shifts in language presence are often predicated on the political and economic power of its users, where power level correlates with the longevity of the language. Further, during language contact, any resistance between the communities may lead to political and social conflict. The dominant language usually prevails, subjugating the weaker speech communities to the point where they adapt in various ways, processes which effect hegemonies. Language contact also motivates bilingualism, which takes effect over years.

This paper suggests that, observing colonization through certain Asian countries, and centrally India, phonological influences have become conspicuous. Postcolonial contexts have selected language identities to assert local linguistic and sociocultural identities through specifying phonetic uniqueness. The study notes that economic trends alter this process, as do political factors. The study investigates how the role of English as an official language and lingua franca in India predicates the selection of certain phonetic patterns so as to legitimize identities of language communities. As such, Indian Englishes have developed their own unique varieties of language, through this process.

**Keywords:** Language, contact, conflict, lingua franca, multilingualism

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## Introduction

Monolingualism hastens the decline and extinction of a language, where the limits of a language reflect the limits of one's own world, thus curtailing the longevity of the community and its speech system. Mobility is manifest in diverse contexts. Conflict assists to extend one's domain and control over larger masses, where trade and commerce assist in the spread of a language and in the acquisition of new speech systems.

The introduction of a language as a medium of instruction becomes the first step in efforts to strengthen and impose a language. Resistance frequently appears initially, to which, people gradually become accustomed and hence the language gradually entrenches itself in a society. In newly liberated colonies, the struggle for linguistic supremacy is central, after which, a lingua franca eases tensions and restores normalcy. In order to acquire lingua franca status, a language must transcend its ethnic base, and must appeal to third-party listeners. The process of transcending must occur through trepidation. Elitism distances people from the spoken version of their speech system. This, in turn, adversely impacts use and purpose of a language. Adaptation, accommodation, flexibility in usage as well as augmenting vocabulary all immensely enrich a language. English is an example showcasing the suppleness with which a language can function. Elitism offers a weak point in the profile of a language. Regional and National fervours make

or mar a language and impact its significance. Diglossia is also an interesting aspect in the study of a language which helps in assessment of socio-economic-cultural back grounds of the speakers.

## Lingua Francas of the Past

**Latent:** 550--150 BC. [More than four centuries]

Persian is represented through document written in other languages [Elamite, Aramaic].

Monumental inscriptions are in real language. There is rapid change in the substance of the language.

**Emergent:** 150 BC--AD650. [More than eight centuries]

A period of transition from Aramaic to explicit Persian in writing. Dominant in Iran and spread as lingua franca in the Indian Ocean.

**Islamised:** 650--1000. [More than three centuries]

Arabic replaces Persian in literary works and administrative usage. Borrowing from Arabic heavily, Persian becomes the cultural language of Iran.

**Resurgent:** 1000--1250. [More than two centuries]

Turkish dynasties adopt Persian for administration purposes, which spread through West, Central and Southern Asia.

**Cultural:** 1250--1850. [Six centuries]

Post Mongol conquest, Persian continues as a language of culture through its traditional zones.

**National:** 1850—Present. [Two Centuries]

Persian was displaced in Turkey and India, but continues as the official language in Afghanistan, Iran and Tajikistan. Along with Pashto, there is a diglossia in Afghanistan and Russian in much of Central Asia.”

(Ostler 2011: 68)

In postcolonial contexts, European languages continue to be in use, though there is much resistance in many countries. In Brunei, Malay is medium of instruction in school education, but English is medium of study of Maths, Science and Engineering. In Malaysia, Malay [Bahasa] is the official language though English, Chinese and Tamil enjoy patronage from people and the government. In Malaysia people state that “Bahasa jiwa Bangsa” [Language is the soul of the Nation], yet the language has its roots in Sanskrit. As per Sanskrit origin: Bhasha Jiiwanam Vamsah [Language ---Life---Stock/Society]. Though the Philippines was a Spanish colony, English is its official language along with Tagalog. Singapore adopted English to neutralize Chinese, which faces resistance from Tamil and Malay.

In India, English is an associate language. Hindi is the Raj Bhasha [Official Language]. Many scheduled languages are used as official languages in different states. The three language formula is adhered to within the country. Indian English is a variety of English, a number of factors contribute to the growth and its present status in India. The poet Kamala Das, in ‘An Introduction,’ presents the status of English in India:

The language I speak becomes mine,  
Its distortions, its queerness all mine,  
It is half English, half Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest.

Raja Rao, a pioneer of Indian Writing in English, discusses the same idea of Indianisation in the Preface to his novel, *Kanthapura*:

English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up – like Sanskrit or Persian was before – .... We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians (...).

Indianisation of English is perceived at several levels, that is, domains, relationships, choice of address terms, greetings and language of self humbling. Choice of address terms become predicated on power semantics, social stratification, age, context, kinship and target person or group. Indian writing in English celebrates the catholicity of the language in all its hues. Its peculiar usage, essentially in India, lends a rare aura to expression. Arundathi Roy's *The God of Small Things* abounds in telescoped words to reflect localized forms of English among the not so educated people of the place she is narrating:

Pleasetommetyou, Finethankyou and Bluegreybloue.

Salman Rushdie enjoys 'Chutnification' of English in his novels.

Anita Rau Badami's narrative style in her maiden novel *Tamarind Mem* is marked by use of words from different languages as under:

**Telugu words:**

Dandakaranya forest; pettis[boxes]; juttu [tuft of hair];

**Tamil words:**

Kanmani, Kattamarans; Shikakai; Kannaadi face [sporting glasses].

**Kannada words:**

Ajji; putti; Cobri mithai; Padri for fadari, Pujari, Soopa, Akshathey, Pretha, Yo-yo-Rama-deva, Shani, Payasa, Hucchi, Rakshasi, Dhوتي, Deva –deva.

**Hindi words:**

Kishmish, Gad-bad, Pallav, Lehenga, Angrezi, Hubshi(black); in Arabic= ugly. [Habshiguda in Hyderabad.], Pakodas, Billey, Besharam, Khusur-phasur, Dhobhi, Khaini, Pooja, Dal, Sooji-halwah, Puri-aloo dum, Phulkas, Pakora, Kheer, Samosa, Tikkas, Jamoon, Choorodar, Darbar hall, Begum, Hai Ram, Burkha, Salwar-kameez, Dupatta, Choli, Neem, Bhooth.

**Compound words:**

Raddhi-man [old newspaper buyer], Jing-bhang lot[all and sundry], Badmash –girl, Sabji-wali-gully.

**Reduplication:**

[so common in Indian languages] Rama-Rama, Baap -re- Baap , Boring old bak-bak, Ting-tong bells, Big-big, Oh! No-no. Deva –deva.

**Diglossia:**

[English spoken by Lynda ayah, the Anglo-Indian, is different from educated Englishman's language] *Sooparb* for superb, Afreeka for Africa.

"come on, Baby –missy, my kanmani, don't you want to grow big-big?" Linda says.

"She thinks I am magician. Make puri, make aloo-dum! All in ten minutes if you please!" Linda grumbles.

“My-Jesus-child! “cried Linda. “What a tomboy. Come here you puppy, why you hitting all the children in the colony?”

“Oil gave it (halwa) a shop taste.”

**Social aspects:**

“Aparna my son’s daughter” [ preference for male child and his children]

Lizard on the wall going tchuk-tchuk-tchuk. [ assertion or to say it will happen]

Dadda gives a rupee to the girl and says, “Give that rupee to the river. She will be pleased with you.”

[General practice of offerings made to rivers while crossing them]

**General ideas about Anglos:**

“Anglo women were spiders who waited to trap decent Hindu boys unto marriage. They were shameless things, showing their legs in their little frocks. They might as well walk around naked and save money on clothes!” (96)

**Place names:**

Guntoor, Sanghli, Ranchi, Waltair station, Mandya [near Mysore], Kalka, Howrah.

**Autobiographical Elements:**

“Bengali in this place, Assamese there, Gujarati somewhere?...You want them to go crazy or what?”Maa says. [About frequent transfers of Rly officials]

“They won’t go crazy.” Insisted Dadda.” They will be true Indians”

The desire to remain true Indian, though settled abroad is an inherent, secret desire of all Diaspora writers.

Mother questions father why he did not take entire family when he went on line.

Father says it is against rules. Mother taunts” Satya Harishchandra! Talking of always rule, rules, rules.”

[General complaints of wives]

Hindi melodies from Mukhesh movies streamed out of bathroom. [Nostalgia]

“Railway memsaheb’s order. Phata-pahat.” [Shows how officers’ wives bossed over others.]

“The club reaffirmed the identity of the officers. They could relax here, be among peers, talk politics etc.” [The club has been the hub of all activities of the Railway officials and their wives during the Raj and now also]

“At the club, the officers could call the shop-floor workers ‘idiot’ or ‘silly buggers’

“you bloody very well shut up!” [“Bloody” is a common word used with utmost ease.]

It is true that English in India became a ‘network of varieties’ resulting from an extraordinary and complex linguistic situation in the country. The net work comprises regional and occupation dialects of English. Social English is a kind of English spoken in all states of India. People with diverse mother tongues managed and manipulated English to suit their convenience. Hence, widely recognized varieties are there, such as:

**Hinglish** ... Spoken in Hindi dominated areas

**Binglish** .... English with Bengali accent, words

**Kinglish** ... Used in spoken in Kannada dominated areas.

**Pinglish** ... Impact of Punjabi on English noticeable.

With passage of time some varieties in expression emerged, such as:

Rubber – Eraser

Flat – Apartment

Out of station	–	Out of Head Quarters
Carrying	–	In family way
Stepney	–	Spare tyre
Cover	–	Envelope
Hold on	–	Stop
Keep	–	Concubine
Family	–	Wife
Sound	–	Volume, wealthy
Solid	–	Impressive
Would	–	Fiancé/ Fiancée
Prepone	–	Advance
Marketing	–	Shopping
Compulsory	–	Definitely
Surf	–	Any washing powder
Xerox	–	Photocopy
Hotel	–	Any eatery, a restaurant
Where is your family –		Where is your wife/husband?
Godman	–	Religious guru
Gone case	–	Something (a person, more often) that cannot be salvaged
Catch	–	Hold
Settlement	–	Compensation/ Resolution in most parts of India
Personality	–	Physique
Tension	–	Annoyance
Posh	–	Hip
Fresher	–	Novice

Apart from the examples cited above, the use of some expressions among others lend flavour to Indian English. These do not appear as strange or different ways of communicating in English to Indians. Indians comprehend the meaning of a variety of communicative English. Further, the impact of primary discourses becomes so conspicuous in the pronunciation of some words, that regional variants leave their mark emphatically. The use of English in expressions as shown below renders Indian English unique and adorable to Indians.

What is your good name?  
 Revert back to me  
 Do the needful  
 Updation  
 Boarding/lodging  
 Cousin sister/brother  
 Co-brother

## The Contribution of Indian languages

Indian languages have contributed to enrichment of vocabulary of English.

Eg: Mulligatawny Soup [Tamil Miligu tanni i.e, Pepper water ...Rasam]  
 Curry [Tamil... curry] from this Curry leaves.

Bandicoot [Telugu... 'Pandikokku']  
Hindi: Rajah, Nawab, Coolie, Tahsildar, Zamindar, Subedar, Havaladar.  
[suffix 'dar' means 'holder' came into English via Urdu through Persian from Turkic]

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