

The Encroachment of American English and the Challenges Faced by the users of English in India

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Abstract:

There is no denying that the hegemonic diffusion of American soft power and linguistic imperialism across the globe have exerted a formidable influence in the last few decades. American English has become a global vernacular. This phenomenon has precipitated profound socio-linguistic transformations and challenges across diverse linguistic landscapes. While India continues to bear the historical legacy of the colonial variety of British English, the pervasive infiltration of American English into the realm of pragmatic usages is beyond anyone's doubt. This incursion is fuelled by the persuasive linguistic styles embedded in digital platforms, pop culture, social media, imperatives of prosaic communication in the corporate world, software interfaces, and the broader internet discourse, which collectively channelize for (rather 'impose') the dissemination of American linguistic norms and cultural paradigms. It has redefined linguistic preferences, particularly among younger generations who are more exposed to globalized social media and prioritize proficiency in American English. It also has introduced a palpable tension and a cognitive dissonance between the deep-rooted British linguistic traditions and the emerging Americanized linguistic norms.

This paper investigates the socio-cultural and linguistic colonization of American English over Indian English during the last twenty-five years, resulting in the linguistic transformation, identity crisis and dilemmas in English use. Ultimately, the Indian English users are in a hangout whether to preserve the Indian English or adopt American English as a status symbol of modernity and to take advantage of and be a part of the digital revolution. The paper also examines the stylistic changes like lexical, phonological, grammatical and syntactic shifting in Indian English resulting from linguistic aggression of the American counterpart, and the socio-cultural implications of this transformation. It will focus on the distinctive nature of American English from vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and idiomatic perspectives and how it has permeated the younger generation, urban, and digitally conscious people. Through the analysis of these dynamics, the study foregrounds the challenging issues arising to the Indian English teachers and learners in balancing this linguistic duality.

Keywords: American English, encroachment, British English, linguistic transformation, digital media, colonization.

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Introduction:

English as a language has had a vital importance in India as well as the globe in the linguistic and socio-cultural arena for over the last two hundred years. Indian English (IE) was formulated by British colonizers and introduced at the very commemoration of colonial rule. Since then, it has become the official language for administration, law and education. After India's independence some Indian Education commissions like Radhakrishnan commission (1948), Mudaliar commission (1952-1953), Kothari commission (1964-66) certified that English will continue to be used here for its pragmatic applicability to linguistically connect with diverse nations. British English (BrE) has been adopted as the variety in India, following formal communication style, for academic purposes, and in government policies. With the passage of time, India developed its distinct variety of English, by blending British norms with indigenous linguistic influences (Mehrotra, 1998). However, with the advancement of globalisation and the emergence of the United States of America as the global superpower, American English (AmE) has technically encroached within the Indian variety of English through mass media, technologies, education, and business. This shifting raises linguistic, educational, and socio-cultural challenges for users of English in India, by affecting communication, identity, and professional spheres (Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 2005). This domain of the American English in India is observed in multiple dimensions including media, technology, corporates, and education, Hollywood movies, various television shows, and almost all social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter heavily expose the Indian audiences to the American vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and even slang. Likewise, technology companies, predominantly from the United States, promote the popularity of American English (AmE) as the language of software, diverse applications, and ultra-modern artificial intelligence systems. The outcomes affect the younger generations largely and corporate professionals of multinational companies are often obliged to adopt American styles in expression by surrendering British English styles which have been learned from pre-primary schools in India.

The American linguistic influences create several challenges for British English users in India. Basically, the lack of English language education standard in India outputs the dilemma in its usages. Most textbooks in academic institutions in India still use British styles, learners while get American English in the online learning resources and standardized tests like GMAT, TOEFL and research publications, they ultimately confused which one is to be prioritized. Employees in IT and customer service sectors are often required to use American English due to the prevalence of American clients. Beside these pragmatic challenges, there is also the cultural and identity crisis. Indian British English with a unique variety owes its identical styles with the influence of regional languages. Linguists are in hangout whether Indians should use British English norms or cultivate American English for its global market or rise Indian English as a unique variety.

The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of American English on Indian English users, foregrounding the stylistic and practical linguistic shifts observed in different perspectives. Using the practical stylistic approach, this study examined and analyses the real-world examples from the media, business, education, and technology to make realize how American English trespasses within the Indian English. It also examines the practical challenges presented by these linguistic interactions and proposes possible solutions to address the evolving English landscape in India while preserving linguistic heritage and socio-cultural identity.

Literature Review:

The issues related to the encroachment of American English on the Indian English users has become a great concern for linguists when we are globalized, and the influence of digital media is enormous. Language scholars are trying to explore the historical past of English in India with the influence of American English, and the linguistic challenges emerged. This part of the study reviews the key literature on these matters,



emphasizing the gradual shifting in linguistic choices along with the lack of a balanced approach in the use of English in India. This literature review examines existing research on the influence of American English in India and the challenges faced by Indian English users in navigating this linguistic shift. Braj B. Kachru (1983) in his book *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India* describes the “Indianization” of English with the historical evolution of English in India where he has argued that Indian English has been developed with its unique phonological, lexical, and syntactic features. From the very beginning of colonial rule, BrE was primarily used in education and administration, but later globalization has developed AmE as the competing standard.

The book *Indian English: Towards a New Paradigm* (2011) by R. K. Agnihotri and Rajendra Singh discussed that millions of educated people in India use English in various domains, but what Indian English exactly is? How is this English best described and understood? The authors examined the status and the structure of Indian English with its position in the language ecology of India. Their insightful analysis of all these issues raised the question of dichotomy native with non-native varieties of English. Agnihotri and Singh have in their book introduced the fresh ground in the use of English, especially in the study of post-colonial varieties like Indian English. The research work by Rakesh Bhatt on Sociolinguistic Impact on Indian English Users (2001) presents that the Indian youths are increasingly prefer AmE due to media exposure, creating a hybridized form of English. However, this language shift leads to the damage of the socio-linguistic and cultural uniqueness of IE.

David Crystal (2003) in his book *English as a Global Language* argues that the influence of AmE is the outcome of economic and cultural dominance of the United States and it has been popularized through Hollywood, digital mass media, software and multinational companies. Phillipson (1992) critiques this as “linguistic imperialism,” where dominant variety of languages marginalize the local ones. Trudgill & Hannah’s (2017) book *International English: A Guide to Varieties of English Around the World* is an illustrative overview of the various Englishes, along with Indian English, and emphasizes on the sharp contradiction in their pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. Notable examples including the difference in spelling like “colour” vs. “color”, in pronunciation like rhotic vs. non-rhotic accents and in vocabulary like “lift” vs. “elevator,” “boot” vs. “trunk” etc. These major variations create challenges to the Indian users of the same language in formal and informal discourse.

D.K. Thussu’s (2018) book *International Communication: Continuity and Change* is a comprehensive discussion on the gradual pace of American English through diverse digital media, Hollywood films, popular television shows, and the internet. Almost all the Indian schools and universities traditionally promote British English, but learners are increasingly going to consume American media, leading to inconsistencies in its usages. Jenkins, (2007) in the book *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity* argues that the dominance of the American tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and Apple and the growing popularity of the American pop culture have greatly accelerated this linguistic shift. Sailaja, P. (2009) in the book *Indian English: Dialects of English* published by Edinburgh University Press advocates that younger Indians, especially from urban areas, are more embraced the American vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling. Pankaj Kumar (2015) in his work attests that in multinational corporations, American English is the default, which creates difficulties for the employees mostly trained in British English.

The eBook by Alsagoff, L and Rani Radby (2014). eds. *The Global-Local Interface and Hybridity*. Kindle e-textbook seek to bring the hybrid language practices about English as a global language. They demonstrated in the book how the local linguistic resources and its practices are involved for refashioning the identities in a wide variety of the cross-cultural and the geographical contexts and demonstrates hybridity as creativity. Showing various disciplines and the ideological perspectives, the authors portray contexts like social media, Bollywood films, workplaces and kindergartens to unveil the ways in which English has become a part of



everyday life. Graddol, David's (2010) work *English Next India: The Future of English in India* also holds the comprehensive discussion on the dominance of the American English to the Indian users. He says that world dominating technological companies from the United States like Google, Microsoft, and Apple, promote the American English through their default language settings in various software, applications and artificial intelligence.

Srivastava & Gupta, (2021) in their work *Introduction to Multimedia Systems* presents the challenges faced by Indian users of English. According to them, the gradual rise of American English causes linguistic inconsistencies in Indian education and professional settings. Indian education systems are basically based on British English, but the digital learning resources and international competitive exams use American English, resulting in confusion among learners. Suresh Canagarajah (1999) in *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching* advocates that in corporate sectors, employees are bound to switch between the British or American English according to client requirements, making linguistic habituation a very necessary skill. Barbara Seidlhofer (2013) in *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca* argues that besides practical challenges, the scholars also have concerns about cultural identity. The regular use of American English has raised questions regarding the identity of so long used Indian English and the confusion whether it should be conserved as our independent variety of English. This blending of American influences paves the way to an evolving English language landscape where the Indian English users must have to navigate multiple linguistic norms.

Methodology: Practical Stylistic Approach:

The practical stylistic approach has been used to examine and analyze the encroachment of American English and the effects of it on Indian English users. Stylistics is the linguistic discipline. Its scopes are wide ranging from the discussion on the language variations used in different perspectives in verbal communication. The practical stylistic approach foregrounds the daily life of linguistic usage avoiding merely theoretical discussion. This practical stylistic approach is the pragmatic application of the stylistic choices emphasizes on the clarity, purpose, and engagement purely for the aesthetic appeal. Contrary to the theoretical stylistics, which focus deeply on the language styles i.e. language ornaments for their literary and linguistic effects, the practical stylistic approach focussed much on the language styles for effective and meaningful discourse in the real-world situations like writing and speaking. Here, style is not merely an ornament but a tool or vehicle for bearing a contextual meaning. Language users choose suitable words, form sentences, tones, and formats keeping in mind the requirements as in a formal report writing it uses concise, modified language to convey the concerned authority while the advertisement should use picturesque imagery and rhetorical tools to persuade and catch the attention.

The practical stylistic approach has some unique features including purpose-driven selection of language as we use different language styles to serve the communicative function like to inform, persuade, entertain, or to instruct. This approach also reinforced the clarity and coherence to ensure the intended message is easily conveyed, logically structured, and free from complexities. Here style is being adjusted according to the medium of expression i.e. spoken or written, digital and situation i.e. academic, professional, casual. Hence, the practical stylistic approach bridges the gap between theory and practice, boosting speakers' communicative competence by making deliberate adoption of stylistic devices that can enhance the effectiveness in private and professional discourses. This approach is much helpful in literary, business communication, advertisements, academic writing, and daily communication as the choice of words influence the tone and meaning. It is basically the approach to focus and adjust the linguistic styles based on context.

In short, a practical stylistic approach focuses on ensuring effective and meaningful communication by adopting language choices based on purpose, audience, and context. Through the fitting diction, syntax,

figurative language, and coherence, writers as well as speakers can make an appropriate message about what the situation demands. Through this methodology the study will analyze the influence of mass media and popular culture to examine how American English words, phrases, spellings, grammar and pronunciations encroach in Indian news channels, television shows, films, and in the social media platforms.

It will also take into observation of digital communications by investigating the linguistic styles in emails, messages, and the online content used in American English. The method will examine the corporate languages, advertisements, and the IT industry interactions with the international clients. Through the review of how American English influences the writing of Indian leaders and learners, exam preparation, and the research publications in India also, the study will also analyze the academic and educational impacts. With these practical observations and analysis, the paper reinforced the stylistic and linguistic shifts in the Indian variety of English, showing how the users are struggling to adapt the American English norms. The outcome of the paper expected to show insights into the linguistic consistency, academic challenges, and the challenges in workplaces in India.

Discussion:

The consistent encroachment of American English over Indian English results in a complex linguistic arena where the legacy of British English is increasingly overpowered by the American counterparts through their lexical, phonological, and grammatical dominance. This linguistic shift is promoted by globalization, internet, mass media, and commercial bonding with America, and it raises significant and crucial challenges for the Indian users of English, who are bearing British English legacy by birth and have been educated following British English norms. This discussion of the paper presents the key factors of American influence and the differences between them. The Americanization of Indian English is going on in the following ways:

1) Influence of Media and American Pop Culture

American TV shows, Hollywood films, and popular social media platforms are the agents to glorify American spellings, pronunciations, and slang languages into our everyday discourses. The young Indian generation especially feels embraced with these American trends as status symbols to the knowledge of language of the powerful country and adopt these American linguistic conventions often unconsciously over traditional British ones (Graddol, 2010).

2) Influence through tech giants and the Internet

The American super technological inventions lure every Indian to become a part of the technological revolution. The world's most popular tech giants like Google, Microsoft, and Apple set the standards of the digital world. American English is the default language in auto settings, software interfaces, and AI-driven communication. This powerful encroachment affects the Indian users' spelling and grammatical preferences over time (Bolton & Bacon- Shone, 2020).

3) Influence of the IT and corporate sector

The Multinational companies, especially in the sectors like IT, customer care service, and financial broking, it is mandatory for the employees to conform to the American English accent and conventions with the knowledge of American customs to maintain uniformity in international communication. These major shifting shapes the professional writing styles, pronunciation, and official communication (Bhatia, 2017).

4) Influence of the Academic and Research Publications

Most reputed and prestigious international journals and publishers deliberately follow American English styles. Indian academicians, researchers as well as students aiming to publish their research works there for

global recognition and securing a position here as a great scholar, have no alternatives but to adopt their writing style, accordingly, creating a clear divide between the academic and everyday informal English usage in India (Canagarajah, 2002).

The major differences between American versus British/Indian English and the challenges it brings:

The most striking differences between British versus American English are observed in the variations in spelling (colour vs. color), in vocabulary (lift vs. elevator), pronunciation (tomato as /tə'mɑ:təʊ/ vs. /tə'meitəʊ/), and grammar (have got vs. have gotten). This uniqueness is deep rooted from historical, cultural, and the geographical impacts, shapes the English tongue and how it is used in countries like the UK, USA, and other countries.

1) Lexical Differences and Challenges it presents:

The most common difference between British and American English is observed in vocabulary. Indian English, traditionally following the British conventions often used the terms like “lorry” in AmE “truck”, “boot” in AmE “trunk of a car”, “flat” in AmE “apartment”, and “trousers” (in AmE “pants” etc. But due to the recurring influence of American English, the Indian speakers gradually adopt American terms like “elevator” in BrE “lift”, “sidewalk” in BrE “pavement”, “gas” in BrE “petrol” “hood” in BrE “hood” “cookie” in BrE “biscuit” etc.

These lexical shifts result in confusion in formal and academic situations. For example, Indian learners who have learned in British English may confuse the style of American spellings and terms while going through the online study materials leading to misconceptions in their written work. The language tests like the TOEFL follow American style and IELTS accepts both but prioritising British style complicates the language skills assessments for Indian evaluators.

2) Variations in spelling:

The differences in spelling between British and American English poses another challenge. Conventionally British English follows French-influence in spellings as in “colour,” in AmE “color,” “centre” in AmE “center” and “defence,” in AmE “defense”. In BrE “cancelled” spells as “cancel” in AmE. The same distinction could be found in “jeweller”, “marvellous”, “appetiser”, “familiarise”, “organise” etc. spells as “jeweler”, “marvelous”, “appetizer”, “familiarize”, “organize” in AmE. Indian educational institutions traditionally stooped to the British spelling style. The dominance of the American based digital platforms like Google, Microsoft, Apple and social media often auto-corrects the British spellings in writing to American ones due to their global markets, leading to unintentional errors in the academic and professional writing. Some Indian book publishers and most examination boards retain British English, others, but in technical and the IT-related field adopt American styles to hold global markets.

3) Distinctions in Pronunciation and Phonological field creates dilemma:

The phonological differences between British English and American English also mislead Indian users. The British RP (Received Pronunciation) drops the “r” sound in words like “car” or “hard” where there are no immediate vowel sounds; contrarily American English pronounce it. Indian English, by following British norms, is non-rhotic but exposure to the American media creates a hybrid accent style among the younger generations. Similarly, the vowel shifting as in the American pronunciation of the word “dance” (/dæns/) versus the British (/dɑ:ns/) - create confusions in spoken English. Indian users, mostly in urban areas, feel comfortable adopting American pronunciations for the popularity of the Hollywood movies, YouTube, and other digital platforms. This phenomenon can lead to miscommunication in formal settings.



4) Grammatical Distinctions and Syntactic Confusion

The grammatical variations between British and American English complicate the utility of English for Indian users. The notable differences include:

- a) **Subject-Verb Agreement:** American English commonly uses singular verbs with the collective nouns as in the sentence “The crew is on the way to the airport”, while British English often uses the plural verbs - “The crew are on the way to the airport”.
- b) **Use of prepositions:** Americans mostly say, “on the weekend,” while the Britons say “at the weekend.”
- c) **Past Tense Forms:** British English prioritises irregular verb forms like “learnt,” “burnt”, on the other hand, American English prefers regularized “-ed” endings - “learned,” “burned”.
- d) **Present perfect and past simple:** In British English, we use the present perfect tense to talk about the past actions that are considered relevant to the present. The present perfect tense can be used in American English, but mostly they use the past simple tense when the action is finished. This is most common with the adverbs like ‘already’, ‘just’ and ‘yet’. For example, the sentence in BrE “Have you done your homework yet?”, is expressed in AmE in the way “Did you do your homework yet?”
- e) **Subjunctive:** The subjunctive mood is more common in colloquial American English than in colloquial British English.

These grammatical variations result in uncertainty, especially in writing. Indian English users traditionally followed British grammar, but now observed an influx of the American structures, leading to the variations in usage in newspapers, official communication, and even in classroom instruction.

Influence of Media and Technology in Americanization:

The encroachment of American English in India is largely promoted by digital platforms and entertainment media. Netflix, YouTube, and social media sites like Facebook, twitter etc. heavily featured in American content, alluring the Indian English users to use American idioms, the slangs, and pronunciation. The IT and the business process outsourcing (BPO) sectors also contribute largely to this process. While this linguistic adoption is financially profitable, it negotiates the traditional British linguistic framework in India.

Educational Challenges Presents through Americanization of English:

For the Indian educational institutions, it is the time to mitigate the challenges posed by the American influences who have predominantly relied on British English styles and conventions for a long time. Textbooks of various competitive exams like UPSC and university curricula blindly follow the British conventions, but learners consistently consume American English styles through digital technologies. This contradiction between learning and practical application leads to confusion in examinations, pupils may lose marks for writing American spellings in British-oriented tests. This may also create gaps in teacher training. Many teachers trained in British English find it challenging to address students’ American-influenced usage. Due to the lack of standard and clear guidelines, institutions often fluctuate between accepting both variants or enforcing one over the other.

Sociolinguistic Challenges:

Language is the bearer of cultural identity and embracing American English concerns about linguistic legacy in India. British English with its colonial origins, has also been indigenized over many centuries, produces



several uniquely Indian expressions as “prepone,” “do the needful” etc. The growth of American English here risks adopting these local expressions, producing a homogenized global vernacular that lacks the regional flavour.

A Hybrid Linguistic landscape in India:

The encroachment of American English in India is a dilemma whether we as Indian users should well adopt it or reject it. In the globalized world there is no way out to overcome this confusion. We can't fully avoid American English due to its prevalence in all spheres of our lives. Whenever we adopt it, it introduces challenges in education, professional life and cultural identity. Hence, in the given circumstances we should become flexible regarding language Policies. Educational Institutions should acknowledge both the variants while reinforcing consistency in the formal contexts. We should encourage the learners should encourage to understand both the varieties without following rigid conventions which can help Indian users to switch between language registers effectively.

Practical solutions:

Acknowledging and legitimizing Indianisms only can maintain linguistic diversities amidst globalization. While Americanization of Indian English is undeniable in the globalized world as it promotes international communication, it also risks identifying the distinctiveness of Indian English. However, Indian English absorbs American terms without fully abandoning our British foundations. The future may observe a hybrid form of English, by blending global vernacular with the local flavour. Training should be conducted to equip professionals with skills to switch between styles as required (Crystal, 2008).

Indian English users should not be too rigid to use either British or American English, they should prepare for contextual adaptability— use the appropriate style depending upon the audience and purpose. Academicians and professionals should encourage this pragmatic approach (Seidlhofer, 2011).

To retain the Indian English styles conventions should be modified in dictionaries, academics and official usage which can establish it as a distinct linguistic variety. Promoting Indian English in literary writings, in social media, and in formal communication may help in balancing American influences while retaining linguistic identity. (Srivastava & Gupta, 2021).

Conclusion:

The encroachment of American English in India is the unavoidable outcome of globalization, technological advancements, and socio-cultural exchange. While this linguistic shift poses challenges, only the balanced approach, inculcating awareness, flexibility in adaptability, and preservation of Indian English - can manage this hybrid linguistic evolution skilfully. Rather than orthodox in resisting change, India English users can adopt a practical and more flexible approach in English usages, ensuring meaningful communication with the preservation of India's unique linguistic heritage.

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