Features of Indian English

Indian English is any of the forms of English characteristic of the Indian subcontinent. English has slowly become the lingua franca of India, and is the language of their cultural and political elites, offering significant economic, political and social advantage to fluent speakers.

Though English is one of modern India's twenty-two official languages, only a few hundred thousand Indians have English as their first language. According to the 2005 India Human Development Survey, of the 41,554 surveyed households reported that 72 percent of men (29,918) did not speak any English, 28 percent (11,635) spoke some English, and 5 percent (2,077) spoke fluent English. Among women, the corresponding percentages were 83 percent (34,489) speaking no English, 17 percent (7,064) speaking some English, and 3 percent (1,246) speaking English fluently. According to statistics of District Information System for Education (DISE) of National University of Educational Planning and Administration under Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, enrolment in English-medium schools increased by 50% between 2008-09 and 2013-14. The number of English-medium schools students in India increased from over 1.5 crore in 2008-09 to 2.9 crore by 2013-14.

Indian English generally uses the Indian numbering system. Idiomatic forms derived from Indian literary languages and vernaculars have been absorbed into Indian English. Nevertheless, there remains general homogeneity in phonetics, vocabulary, and phraseology between variants of the Indian English dialect.

History:

English language public instruction began in India in the 1830s during the rule of the East India Company (India was then, and is today, one of the most linguistically diverse regions of the world). In 1837, English replaced Persian as the official language of the Company. Lord Macaulay played a major role in introducing English and western concepts to education in India. He supported the replacement of Persian by English as the official language, the use of English as the medium of instruction in all schools, and the training of English-speaking Indians as teachers. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, primary- middle- and high schools were opened in many districts of British India, with most high schools offering English language instruction in some subjects. In 1857, just before the end of Company rule, universities modelled on the University of London and using English as the medium of instruction were established in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. During subsequent Crown Rule in India, or the British Raj, lasting from 1858 to 1947, English language penetration increased throughout India. This was driven in part by the gradually increasing hiring of Indians in the civil services. At the time of India's independence in 1947, English was the only functional lingua franca in the country.

After Indian Independence in 1947, Hindi was declared the first official language, and attempts were made to declare Hindi the sole national language of India. Due to protests from Tamil Nadu and other non-Hindi-speaking states, it was decided to temporarily retain English for official purposes until at least 1965. By the end of this period, however, opposition from non-Hindi states was still too strong to have Hindi declared the sole language. With this in mind, the English Language Amendment Bill declared English to be an associate language "until such time as all non-Hindi States had agreed to its being dropped." This has never occurred, as English is now reckoned as all but indispensable. For instance, it is the only reliable means of day-to-day communication between the central government and the non-Hindi states.

The spread of the English language in India has led it to become adapted to suit the local dialects. Due to the large diversity in Indian languages and cultures, there can be instances where the same English word can mean different things to different people in different parts of India. There are three different stages of English Language in India i.e. **Cultivated**, closely approximating Received Pronunciation and associated with younger generation of urban and sub-urban regions of metropolitan cities of the country; **Standard**, a social indicator of the higher education, and **Regional**, associated with the general population, and closely approximating the second-language Vernacular-English variety. They met each other.

Despite the assumption that English is readily available in India, available studies show that its usage is actually restricted to an elite, by providing inadequate education to large parts of the Indian population. The employment of outdated teaching methods and the poor grasp of English exhibited by the authors of the guidebooks, serve to disadvantage students who rely on these books.

What is Indian English?

The English spoken on the Indian subcontinent has some distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other international varieties of English such as RP (Received Pronunciation) and GA (General American).These differences arose as a result of a long period during which English was in constant contact with languages spoken natively in India. As a result, the variety of English spoken on the subcontinent is frequently called Indian English.

Vocabulary differences:

When it comes to words, English spoken in India has been under the dominant influences of the native languages of the subcontinent, which is reflected in its lexicon. Many words from Indian native languages have been introduced into the global English language spoken worldwide; some notable examples being jungle, bungalow, punch, shawl, and veranda.

What is more, there are some words which are unique to speakers from India and instances of misunderstanding are not uncommon. Such words are air dash which is used for someone who is in a hurry, or badmash which denotes a hooligan.

Sometimes, speakers of English in India add a new level of meaning existing words. For instance, if a person wears a hi-tech outfit, it does not mean that they are equipped with the latest digital gadgets. Instead, a hi-tech outfit stands for fashionable and modern, following the latest trends. It often happens that a word from Hindi replaces an English word. If you hear *achchaa* in the middle of conversation led in English, do not be surprised. It only means *good*.

Differences in Pronunciation:

Differences in vocabulary are not the only characteristics that make common communication more difficult. Certain differences in pronunciation are also distinguishable.

For instance, the speakers of English in India do not make any difference when it comes to the sound /v/, which is produced using one's lower lips and top teeth; and sound /w/ in the production of which both lips are used. Also, the two sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are usually replaced by /d/ and /t/.

The reason for this replacement is because these sounds do not exist in Indian languages and therefore, they are harder to master. Also, central vowels are /ə/ and /ʌ/ most commonly disregarded and replaced by the vowel /a/.

Another characteristic of the sounds used by speakers of English in India is the replacement of two adjacent vowels by a single long vowel followed by /r/sound. So beer becomes /bir/ and pear is pronounced as /per/.

Following all this, there is no doubt that the English language spoken on the subcontinent bears its own special traits. It is vibrant and follows its own rules of development.

However, in order to maintain proper communication and transmit the message in a correct manner, I believe that every speaker should try following the rules of the target language at least when it comes to pronunciation. There is no doubt that today's latest trends in digital technology can help us be better language learners and master our pronunciation skills.

Some More Features of Indian English:

English has a special status in India. Apart from having a place in the public institutions of the country, in parliament, the law courts, broadcasting, the press and the education system English has spread in our daily life. English plays a key role in professional relationships between foreign and Indian companies. English permeated symbolizes in Indian minds better education, better culture and higher intellect. Actually 4% of Indian use English. Thus India ranks third in the world after USA and the UK to use English as spoken language. Indian English comprises several dialects or varieties of English spoken primarily in India. This dialect evolved due to British colonial rule of India for nearly two hundred years. English is the co-official language of India, which has the world's largest English-speaking population.

After Hindi English is the most commonly spoken language in India. But usually Indians mingle English with Indian languages. Stylistic influence of Indian local languages is a particular feature of Indian literature in English. Indian English speakers often mix Hindi and other languages with English. Indians will often ask, "What is your good name?" which is translation of Hindi "Apka Shubh naam kya hai?" Shub means auspicious or good, and it is basically used as a polite way of asking someone's name. Similarly

Indians say "Today morning" (aaj Subha) or "Yesterday night" (kal raat) to mean this morning last night. Indians use shut up (chup bhait) which is generally used more causally in Hindi but it is offending tern in America. Indians commonly use "you people" when they want to address more than one person. It is a simple translation of "aap log" or "tum log" but they do not realize that it carries with it racial connotation. Some expressions such as "general mai" (in general) and "ek minute" (one minute) are prevalent in Indian English.

Variations in the pronunciation of several phonemes are affected by the regional tongues. Several idiomatic forms crossing over from Indian literary and vernacular language also have made their way into the English used by the masses. Given India's diversity, however, there is indeed a general homogeneity in syntax and vocabulary that can be found among speakers across South Asia. In upper-class families, English is typically very close to Received Pronunciation, while still retaining hints of a uniquely Indian flavour. The form of English that Indians are taught in schools is essentially British English, Indian English had established itself as an audibly distinct dialect with its own quirks and specific phrases. However, due to the growing influence of American culture in recent decades, American English has begun challenging traditional British English as the model for English in the Indian subcontinent. The American English is spreading among Indian youth. American English spellings are also widely prevalent in scientific and technical publications while British English spellings are used in other media.

British English or American English is the more practical dialect for emigrating Indians to adopt. It must be stressed, however, that British English retains its hold on the majority of Indians, particularly those of the older generation and the younger generation in smaller cities and towns.

The distinct evolution of regional variations in contemporary usage has led to terms such as Hinglish (Hindi + English), Tanglish (Tamil + English) and Minglish (Marathi + English).

Indian accents vary greatly from those leaning more towards a purist British to those leaning more towards a more 'vernacular' (Indian language)

• Use of yaar, machaa, abey, arey in an English conversation between Indians, mainly by people of native Hindi-speaking origin; 'da', 'machaa' is more frequently used in the South.

• The progressive tense in stative verbs: I am understanding it. She is knowing the answer; an influence of traditional Hindi grammar, it is more common in northern states.

• Use of "off it" and "on it" instead of "switch it off" and "switch it on."

• Use of "current went" and "current came" for "The power went out" and "The power came back" Use of word "wallah" to denote occupation or 'doing of/involvement in doing' something, as in "The taxi-wallah overcharged me."

• Use of "Can you drop me?" and "We will drop her first" instead of "Can you drop me off?" and "We will drop her off first"

• "Out of station" to mean "out of town". This phrase has its origins in the posting of army officers to particular 'stations' during the days of the East India Company.

• "Tell me": used when answering the phone, meaning "How can I help you?"

• "order for food" instead of "order food", as in "Let's order for sandwiches". Titles (of respect; formal)

• Referring to elders, strangers or anyone meriting respect as "'jee'"/"'ji'" (suffix) as in "Please call a taxi for Gupta-ji" (North, West and East India)

• Use of prefixes "Shree"/"Shri" (Mr) or "Shreemati"/"Shrimati" (Ms/Mrs): Shri Ravi Shankar or Shreemati Das Gupta.

• As with Shree/Shreemati, use of suffixes "Saahib/Sāhab" (Mr) and "Begum" (Mrs) (Urdu) as in "Welcome to India, Smith-saahib." or "Begum Sahib would like some tea."

• Use of "Mr" and "Mrs" as common nouns. For example, "Jyoti's Mr stopped by yesterday" or "My Mrs is not feeling well".

• Use of "Ms" with first name. For example, Swathi Ashok Kumar might be addressed as "Ms Swathi" instead of "Ms Kumar". This is logical and perhaps the only possible correct usage in South India, especially in Tamil Nadu, where most people don't use a surname.

• Use of the English words 'uncle' and 'aunty' as suffixes when addressing people such as distant relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, even total strangers (like shopkeepers) who are significantly older than

oneself. E.g., "Hello, Swathi aunty!" In fact, in Indian culture, children or teenagers addressing their friend's parents as Mr Patel or Mrs Patel (etc.) is considered unacceptable, perhaps even offensive—a substitution of Sir/Ma'am is also not suitable except for teachers. On the contrary, if a person is really one's uncle or aunt, he/she will usually not be addressed as "uncle"/"auntie", but with the name of the relation in the vernacular Indian language, even while conversing in English. It is interesting to observe that calling one's friends' parents auntie and uncle was also very common in Great Britain in the 1960s and 70s but has is much rarer today. For example, if a woman is one's mother's sister, she would not be addressed (by a Hindi speaker) as "auntie" but as Mausi (Hindi).

• Use of Respected Sir while starting a formal letter instead of Dear Sir. Again, such letters are ended with non-standard greetings, such as "Yours respectfully", or "Yours obediently", rather than the standard "Yours sincerely/faithfully/truly".

• Use of "Baba" (father) while referring to an elderly male, such as "No Baba, just try and understand, I cannot come today".

• Use of interjections Arey! And acchha! to express a wide range of emotions, usually positive though occasionally not, as in "Arey! What a good job you did!", "Accha, so that's your plan." or "Arey, what bad luck, yaar!"

• Use of the word "chal" (Hindi for the verb "walk") to mean the interjection "Ok", as in "Chal, I gotta go now" at the end of a phone call.

• Use of T-K in place of O.K. when answering a question, as in "Would you like to come to the movie?"

-- "T-K, I'll meet you there later." ("theek hai", literally "fine is", meaning "okay")

• Use of oof! to show distress or frustration, as in "Oof! The baby's crying again!"

• Use of "Wah" to express admiration, especially in musical settings, as in "Wah! Wah! You play the sitar so well!"

• "Paining" used when "hurting" would be more common in Standard American and British: "My head is paining."

These are some of the special features of Indian English which are accepted in India.

Supra-segmental features:

English is a stress-timed language, and both syllable stress and word stress, where only certain words in a sentence or phrase are stressed, are important features of Received Pronunciation. Indian native languages are actually syllable-timed languages, like Latin and French. Indian-English speakers usually speak with a syllabic rhythm. Further, in some Indian languages, stress is associated with a low pitch, whereas in most English dialects, stressed syllables are generally pronounced with a higher pitch. Thus, when some Indian speakers speak, they appear to put the stress accents at the wrong syllables, or accentuate all the syllables of a long English word. Certain Indian accents are of a "sing-song" nature, a feature seen in a few English dialects in Britain, such as Scouse and Welsh English.

Numbering system:

The Indian numbering system is preferred for digit grouping. When written in words, or when spoken, numbers less than 100,000/100 000 are expressed just as they are in Standard English. Numbers including and beyond 100,000 / 100 000 are expressed in a subset of the Indian numbering system. Thus, the following scale is used:

In digits(International system)	In digits (Indian system)	In words (long and short scales)	In words (Indian system)
10		Ten	
100		one hundred	
1,000		one thousand	
10,000		ten thousand	
100,000	1,00,000	one hundred thousand	one lakh
1,000,000	10,00,000	one million	ten lakh
10,000,000	1,00,00,000	ten million	one crore

Larger numbers are generally expressed as multiples of the above.