



# The Arrival and Development of the English Language in India

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## Abstract

It is widely accepted that the English language is the most important international language in the world. It is because of its importance that there has been a worldwide spread of English. Due to the spread of English, numerous new varieties of English have been created. For instance, the interaction between the British and the Indians created a new variety of English called Indian English. In addressing the topic, this paper aims to deal with the arrival and development of the English language in India as well as its current status. For this purpose, a historical outline will be followed by the features of Indian English as well as the proficiency, ending with the most spoken languages in India.

Consequently, it is vital to highlight the importance of the English in India since English has been spoken in the country for four centuries, establishing itself as the second language for most Indians. India contains more than 600 languages despite not all of them are official. Hence, we will see how difficult it has been for Indians to establish a standard language in India. This essay will also give a brief description of the most important languages in the country, including a table in section 3.1 that will provide the number of users of each language. Still, despite the fact that English is extensively spoken, many of its speakers in India are not fully proficient, making English proficiency a big concern due to the fact that in this respect, the Chinese or Japanese are very much ahead of Indians. Finally, there is a debate whether English in India should be considered as a second or a foreign language. In order to handle this debate, we will focus on Kachru's *Three Circles of English*. Nevertheless, other models from different scholars will be mentioned as well.

Key words: English, second language, proficiency, India, variety.

## **Introduction**

Over the last four centuries, the English language has gained a major relevance in India, growing even faster in the last couple of centuries due to the importance of the language in international communication. The English language is considered as a fundamental tool not only for international communication but also for other areas like education. English has become the second most widely spoken language in India, overtaking the more than 600 languages spoken in the country, only behind Hindi. It is believed that the Standard Indian English is spoken by almost 130 million Indians, much more than in the UK.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the arrival, development and the current status of the English language in India. In doing that, we will focus on the sociolinguistic aspect of the use of English, providing essential data.

This paper will start with a historical outline in section 2, with mentioning the East India Company and their influence in the introduction of the English language in the country. In subsections 2.5, the focal point will be on the nativization of the English as well as debate on whether it is a second or a foreign language. Section 3 will discuss India today, beginning with a description of the main regional languages spoken in India. Subsections 3.2 and 3.3 will supply a description of the linguistic features of Standard Indian English as well as the situation of Indian English as an International Language. Section 3 will conclude with an analysis of the current situation regarding English proficiency. In this subsection (3.4), I will also make a comparison between the English level of the upper and lower social classes. Finally, the conclusion section will provide a summary of the paper as well as some thoughts of this student.

## 2. Historical Outline

### 2.1 *The beginning*

During the Age of Discovery, European powers began to explore the territories that were not discovered yet. The two dominant countries in the world in the 15<sup>th</sup> century were from the Iberian Peninsula: the Crown of Castile – nowadays known as Spain – and the Portuguese Empire – today's Portugal. It was the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 1494 when the *Treaty of Tordesillas* divided the entire world between the two countries previously mentioned. The lands to the east of the earth would belong to the Portuguese Empire whereas the lands to the west would belong to the Crown of Castile.

Not long after signing the *Treaty of Tordesillas*, the Portuguese Empire started exploring the lands of the East, India being one of the very first to be discovered. A ship led by Vasco da Gama was the first one to arrive in the country in 1498. However, it was not until 1505 when they established the first European trading centre at Kollam, Kerala (Wikipedia). Portuguese explorers were not the only ones occupying India; some years later, the Dutch East India Company established trading posts along the Indian coast as well. Nonetheless, the Dutch lost their relevancy later on owing to the fact that two major powers came to the land, and because the Dutch East Indies (currently known as Indonesia) became their priority.

The two major European powers that arrived in India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were England and France. As the aim of the present study is to analyse the arrival and settlement of the English in India, the only focus will be the history of the British Empire.

## *2.2 The East India Company*

The first arrival of the British did not come until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the English established their first trading posts in Madras<sup>1</sup> and Calcutta, which were supervised by the East India Company. After a century, the relevance obtained by the East India Company was so big that they were commanding most parts of India.

Inevitably, the growth of English in India had more to do with political events than with the linguistic properties of the language. Bentley describes the importance of the East India Company in the following way: (1858, cited in Landow, 2013)

The East India Company is, or rather was, an anomaly without a parallel in the history of the world. It originated from subscriptions, trifling in amount, of a few private individuals. It gradually became a commercial body with gigantic resources, and by the force of unforeseen circumstances assumed the form of a sovereign power, while those by whom its affairs were directed continued, in their individual capacities, to be without power or political influence.

The first stage of the East India Company happened in a traditional capitalist way: the one and only purpose was to make business with the natives. However, this did not last too long; in 1612 the Company switched to temporary joint stocks and finally to permanent joint stocks in 1657 (George P. Landow, 2013). Nevertheless, the East India Company made enemies, especially the natives who were not in favour of all these trades. Hence, the following situation required military help in order to govern the entire country; which would happen in the final years of the eighteenth century. However, the fact that the British Empire conquered the entire country meant that the power and influence of the Company lowered to the point that the East India Company became just

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<sup>1</sup> Today's Chennai

the government agency until the 1857 Indian Rebellion, when the Colonial Office took full control. The East India Company disappeared in 1873. (Landow, 2013)

During its heyday, the East India Company not only established trade through Asia and the Middle East but also effectively became the ruler of territories much larger than the United Kingdom itself. In addition, it also created, rather than conquered, colonies. Singapore, for example, was an island with very few Malay inhabitants in 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles purchased it for the Company from their ruler, the Sultan of Johor, and created what eventually became one of the world's greatest trans-shipment ports. (Landow, 2013)

### *2.3 The first steps of English in India*

The first steps of English in India were simple. The only way an Indian native could learn English was through the lessons of Christian missionaries – it is important to clarify that there were no official attempts to force the language on the masses (The British Library). Moreover, the British army attracted many Indian soldiers. It was in the army where the English language spread swiftly from the Settlers (STL) strand to the Indigenous Residents (IDG) strand. At this moment, there was an enormous cultural distance between the STL and the IDG. On the one hand, the British colonizers and their descendants felt absolutely British, whereas the IDG's considered English as a foreign language (Mukherjee, 2010: 168). In spite of this, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, English was solidly settled as the official language of administration; what is more, the most advanced Indian students demanded instruction in English in order to move up in society.

In fact, by the year 1857, Bombay<sup>2</sup>, Calcutta and Madras had opened their respective universities. The growth of English was so exponential that it became the first language of the government, the social elite and the national press.

#### *2.4 1835 English Education Act*

The nativization<sup>3</sup> of the English language in India had much to do with Thomas Babington Macaulay. The British politician was responsible for introducing the western ideas in the Asian country. In order to illustrate this point, *A Minute on Indian Education* (1835) should be considered as the starting point on the nativization of the English language in India. This essay was written as a defence against the council members who understood that Indian students had to learn in Sanskrit and Arabic as well as English. (Mukherjee, 2010: 170)

In an attempt to turn India into a 100% British colony, starting from eliminating its local languages and imposing English as the only one, Macaulay did not realize that an “Anglicist” education would also mean that Indians would become familiar with Western ideas and ideals like democracy, enlightenment and self-determination, which would later fuel the struggle for independence. (cf. Nehru 1946: 319 cited from Mukherjee, 2010: 170.)

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<sup>2</sup> Today’s Mumbai.

<sup>3</sup> The process by which a transplanted language become native to a people or place, either in addition to or in place of any language or languages already in use, as with English in India (Encyclopedia.com)



## 2.5 Nativization

### 2.5.1 Nativization Pre-Independence

The English language played a massive role in originating a pan-Indian freedom movement. The more than 600 local languages rose up against the imposition of English as the first language in the country. A group of Indian intellectuals that belonged to every political identity joined against the British rules. According to Rao (2003:1), ‘The English language contributed substantially in achieving national integration’.

Yet, from the perspective of the British people in India, the subcontinent was looking more Anglophone, so that they felt similarly than in England. Over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nativization process of the English language in India was entering in its final stages, especially with two major political events happening: the Great Revolt of 1857/1858 and the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India in 1877, with an untouchable governor commanding the British crown in India. In a sociolinguistic perspective, the mentioned events were the confirmation of the standing of English as the one and only dominant language in India. Consequently, the migration of the British to India was booming, making the British Empire part of the Indian identity. As the British population in the country was growing and the influence of English was getting bigger and bigger, the only way for the native Indians to access higher education like university was to learn English. Furthermore, the English language in India started to be used by well-educated IDG users, who began to change slowly but gradually towards an Indian variety in its own right, marked not only by heavy lexical borrowing but also by phraseological and grammatical innovations (i.e. forms not found in the British English input variety, e.g. *England-returned*, *blessings-message*) and phonological changes (e.g. monophthongization of diphthongs): thus, the late nineteenth century marks the beginning of the emergence of ‘educated’ Indian English, i.e. a standardizing form of Indian English (Mukherjee, 2010: 171). In section 3.1, we will describe some of the features of current Indian English.

According to various scholars like Kachru or Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy, the development of English in India has different stages. As reported by Kachru (1983: 19), there are three stages: ‘missionary’, ‘government policy’ and ‘diffusion’. The first stage consists in the initial capitalization of English for Education by the East India Company. The ‘government policies’ were linked with the approval of the ‘Anglicist Group<sup>4</sup>’ in regards to the Minute (1835) (see section 2.4 above). Finally, regarding ‘diffusion’, Kachru understands this phase with the increase of English to higher education, connecting it with the implementation of a government policy which validated English as the official and academic language of the country in 1854. On the other hand, for Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy (2006) the process is similar, but with five stages instead of three. In the interest of time, this topic will not be dealt with further in this paper.<sup>5</sup> (Omidvar, 2017: 2)

The previous paragraphs have been concerned in the analysis of the arrival and development of the English language in India in the first centuries after the British arrived in the South Asian country. However, after World War II, the social issues of the country were bigger than a language battle. An important process of independence was on its way, and the consequences for the English language would be huge.

There was a massive reaction from all the Indian states when the British government made the choice of revoking the state aid to higher education in English. Lord Curzon, The Viceroy of India, straightaway defeated the proposal by saying the following<sup>6</sup>:

It would be a place for the dissemination of knowledge and the encouragement of learning and it would further be a human smithy where character was forged in the furnace of experience, and beaten out on the anvil of truth.

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<sup>4</sup> A group of people that supported the English language and culture in India.

<sup>5</sup> For more information see “Omidvar and Ravindranath (2017).”

<sup>6</sup> The next two quotes are taken from “The Status of the English language in India”.

The previous quote is a brilliant explanation of the roles of educational institutions, beginning at preschool and continuing in higher education. Logically, the English-educated Indians, who belonged to the high social scale, requested their first language to be used as the medium of instruction. Not only were they demanding the use of their mother tongue as a medium of instruction but also associated with the Indian culture, as a language is part of the culture. Furthermore, the system of education faced an enormous opposition from notorious Indian intellectuals like Gokhale or Gandhi. In spite of the fact that the latter appreciated the importance of foreign languages such as English, Gandhi's position against the imposition of English was clear:

... English today is studied because of its commercial and so called political values. Our boys and girls think that without English they cannot get government services. Girls are taught English as a passport to marriage... I know families in which English is being made the mother-tongue. All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation.

### 2.5.2 Nativization Post-Independence

The nativization of the English language in India did not end once the country was independent. What is more, as the *New World Encyclopedia* asserts, even though English is not the official language of the central government in India, the Constitution of the Republic of India is written in English; and it was written in 1950, three years after India became independent. Moreover, with the aim of replacing English with Hindi (first language for one third of the population) the logical procedure would be to enter a process of fossilization<sup>7</sup>, as it has happened in many more countries like Uganda

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<sup>7</sup> The perseveration of ancient linguistic features which have lost their grammatical functions in language ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fossilization\\_\(linguistics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fossilization_(linguistics)))

or Ghana. On the contrary, English has been modified into an endonormatively stabilized<sup>8</sup> variety of English in the post-independence period. (Mukherjee, 2010: 172)

According to the well-known sociolinguist and language variation expert Edgar Schneider's dynamic model, in order to get into the phase of endonormative stabilization, it is essential to have an inner agreement in a speech community on the status and usefulness of the English language (Mukherjee, 2010: 171). However, such stage can only be acquired since the moment a country is decolonized.

In 1947, the government, with the leadership of Sri Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to eliminate English as the first language in favour of Hindi. The aim of this decision was to impose basic Hindi, with approximately 500 words, with borrowings from Urdu, English and other languages. This idea was to make it easy for people from the south to learn Hindi, as it was mostly spoken by the northern population. Nehru was also confident that Hindi could be used as a link language in India, with also a psychological effect owing to the fact that for the first time a language from India was official. The government decided that the learning of English had to be as a second language or as a link language – it was the second language for the vast majority. (Dr Gopal, 1998)

In the case of India, it is hard to determine the exact beginning of the endonormative stabilization stage. As stated by Schneider (2003, 2007), an 'Event X' often defines this moment. There is no doubt that the political events that happened in 1960 – the Jawaharlal Nehru administration and posterior death on 27 May 1964 and States reorganisation - were massively relevant. Therefore, as it is stated by the Indian Constitution, English was no longer the official first language of India. It was going to be replaced by Hindi, which was not spoken by half of the country but was the mother tongue of 35% of the population.

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<sup>8</sup> Endonormative stabilization: based on the way a country's second language is used by local speakers, rather than the way it is used in the country where it came from originally. (Oxford Learner's Dictionary).

The government, aware that these changes would take a while to be accepted, decided to maintain English as an official language until 1965. After suffering an independence period and a great number of cultural conflicts, it was clear that a linguistic transition would require patience. Likewise, Nehru believed that by that year, Hindi would be secured as a successful first language. Nevertheless, the decision of eliminating English in such a short period of time became a failure. Even though in the army the English vocabulary was replaced by Hindi, in most of the public services the English language stood its ground (Dr Gopal, 1998). Hence, in 1959 Nehru stated that there would not be any imposition of any language and that English would remain as a co-official language for an indefinite period. (Dr Gopal, 1998)

As a consequence, the early 60s were marked by a conflict between the north and the south part of the country. On the one hand, Hindi was spread as the only national language in the northern part of India whereas the southern parts declined the idea owing to the fact that it was a non-native language for them (Mukherjee, 2010: 172). The Indian government came to the conclusion that the English language had to be present in essential areas such as education or health service, so that the Official Languages Act, which was passed in 1963 and amended in 1967, laid down that English would continue to be used for official purposes alongside Hindi (Mukherjee, 2010: 172). In 1976, the government created the three-language formula, according to which both languages and the regional language were to be taught in every state (cf. Biswas, 2004). The three-language formula should benefit the diversification of the regional languages. For instance, if the mother tongue was Hindi, a south Indian regional language would be taught. There have been major problems and shortcomings with this initiative; the fact that Hindi was a traditional language in the northern part of the country created a disadvantage for the people from the south. Nevertheless, this formula has been at the heart of language policy in India in the education system over the past four decades. (cf. Krishnaswami and Sriraman, 1995 cited from Mukherjee, 2010: 172)

## *2.6 Status of the English language in India*

During the years that the British Empire had ruled India, as a result of the contact between English and the local languages, the English language suffered constant changes. Schneider's definition of New Englishes says (2003: 233) that New Englishes are distinct forms of English which have emerged in postcolonial settings and countries around the globe. There are plentiful New Englishes in the global context and researches on them give rise to new theoretical comprehensions (Chen Wenfang, 2011: 7). Fundamentally, the English varieties can be categorized into ESL<sup>9</sup> and EFL<sup>10</sup>. Adding the two categories to English as a national language (ENL), we come to a conclusion that there is a trinalism view of the world role of English. (Wenfang, 2011: 7)

At first sight, it is clear that English in India could be considered as either a foreign language or a second language. However, we face a clear ambiguity of these concepts. In agreement with some linguists, the second language is a language taught to immigrants in a country where it is the first language of its natives (Omidvar 4). Briefly explained, L2 learners acquire the language because of the necessity to communicate with the people who speak the language as a native tongue; and in this case, there is not a clearer example than India. Nevertheless, as it has been stated in this study before, India contains countless aboriginal languages that had been spoken in the country for ages, and their impact on the English language may be enough for many to not classify English as a second language, as is defined differently by some other scholars. (Omidvar, 2017: 5)

Yardi (1997) defines English as a "second language" where English is intentionally used for purposes of administration, education and a common link language (Omidvar, 2017: 5). According to him, we can only consider English as a

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<sup>9</sup> English as a Second Language.

<sup>10</sup> English as a Foreign Language.

foreign language when it is taught for particular objectives like scientific works or translation. Crystal (2012) classified English in India as a second language as well.

On the whole, there are four language models that explain both the spread and use of English in foreign countries: Stevrens, 1992; Kachru, 1992; Gortlach, 1987; McArthur, 1987. Each of them has its own way of representation. For instance, Stevrens is the only one that portrayed his model in an upside-down tree diagram, whereas the others opted for circle models (Omidvar 2017: 6). Because of time issues and owing to the fact that it is the most popular one, I am going to focus on Kachru's (1992) "Three Concentric Model" or "The Circles of English". Nevertheless, I will provide a brief explanation of the other three models as it is needed to understand the next section (2.7).

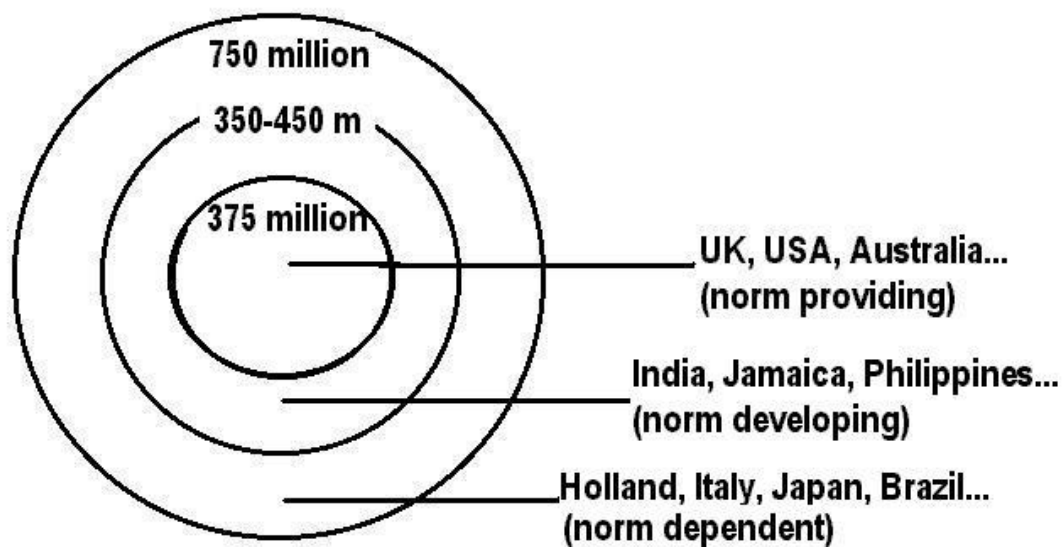
Stevens *A map-and-branch model (1980)* uses a map with a superimposed tree-diagram resembling the branching models of Indo-European languages. Stevens objective is to make a difference between the *British English Branch* and the *American English Branch* regarding the English language division (McArthur, 1998:95). McArthur opts for the use of a wheel with a hub, spokes and rim. The hub is used for World Englishes and is surrounded by regional languages which include standard and other forms such as *Irish English* and *Canadian English* among others (McArthur, 1998:95). Finally, Gortlach, as Kachru, gives a circle model that shows the status of varieties of English and related languages in the world, using the hub as *International languages* within an encircled band of regional languages like *African Englishes* and *United States Englishes* (McArthur, 1998: 98).

## 2.7 Todd Kachru's "Three Circles of English"

According to Kachru (1992: 356), English speaking countries are separated into three groups, called "Inner Circle", "Outer Circle" and "Expanding Circle" (see picture 1).

- The Inner Circle: the Inner Circle is formed by principles of English, and the speakers in it are the individuals putting up the norms. These countries are the places where the norms are born and from which they spread to other countries (other circles). The countries forming the Inner Circle are UK, USA, Canada, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.
- The Outer Circle: this circle portrays the countries where non-native varieties of English are spoken due to their colonial history. The language is developed by the speakers of these countries, who are the ones that challenge its original norms. These speakers learn English as a second language. The countries of The Outer Circle are India, Pakistan, Egypt, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, Jamaica and Philippines.
- The Expanding Circle: this circle is formed by the countries that learn English as a foreign language (EFL), and where it is not one of the most spoken languages in the nation. The main reason why English is learnt is because of academic qualification, and the speakers of the Expanding Circle have to follow the rules imposed by the countries of the Inner Circle. Countries like Japan, Russia, Israel, and the whole of Western Europe form the Expanding Circle.





*Picture 1. Kachru (1992)'s Three Circle Model.*

According to Kachru's "Three Circle Model", English in India is learnt as a second language rather than a foreign language due to the fact that it is norm developing rather than norm dependent. Hence, the language has suffered a few changes, both grammatically and lexically because of constant contact with numerous regional languages. The continuous changes suffered by the English language in India have given way to a new variety of English in the Pacific country. Section 3.2 describes some of the linguistic features specific of Indian English.

### **3. English in India today**

#### *3.1 Language diversity in India*

One of the main problems of Indian society is the difficulties to communicate among its population. The existence of hundreds of regional languages makes it impossible to have a central language for everyone. The aim of this section is to describe the most important languages of the country and analyse them by providing

evidence and official data. Information about the number of speakers of each language as a first, second and third language is provided in Table 2 below.



Picture 2. Map of languages in India.

To begin with, the most spoken language in India is Hindi. According to “Hindi: the language of songs”, Hindi is the mother tongue for more than the 43% of the population and it is mainly spoken in the northern part of the country. Hindi is a direct descendant of Sanskrit through Prakrit and Apabhramsha. It started to emerge as Apabhramsha in the seventh century and did not become stable until the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In

India, Hindi is spoken in these regions: Himachal, Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya, Bihar, Bombay and Hyderabad. Hindi is highly represented outside the country as well, with speakers in the USA, South Africa, Yemen or Uganda. Finally, this language has its own dialects<sup>11</sup> even though there is some controversy owing to the ambiguity of the term dialect.

Secondly, we are going to focus on Bengali<sup>12</sup>, the language with the greatest number of native speakers in India, though at a great distance from Hindi. The article “Languages of Bangladesh: Bengali” asserts that Bengali played a significant role in the independence conflict and the subsequent liberation from Pakistani power. It also drew inspiration from the fight by Bengalis to stop Urdu being declared the state language of Pakistan. As regards India, it is considered as one of the 23 official languages, and it is spoken by more than 10% of the Indian population.

With more than 80 million speakers, Marathi is considered as the most powerful language in the western state of Maharashtra and the surrounding states. It is another language which has its origins in Sanskrit and that is not only spoken in India but in Israel and Mauritius. The first signs of the language did not come until the 11<sup>th</sup> century in stones. There have been two different alphabets in their history: the Modi alphabet – 13<sup>th</sup> century until 20<sup>th</sup> century – and the Devanāgarī alphabet, which has been used since 1950.

Approximately 78 million of the population speak Telugu in India. “Omniglot: Marathi” reports that it is mainly spoken in south-eastern India, and it is considered as the official language of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana<sup>13</sup>. Created relatively early, the first written materials are from 575 BC. Telugu literature has its start in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, with a version of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* written by Nannaya Bhatta. As a result

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<sup>11</sup> Marwari, MAP Braj, Bundeli, Kanauji, Urdu, Chattisgarhi, Bagheli, Ayadhi, Bhojpuri.  
(<http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/hindiint.html>)

<sup>12</sup> Bengali is also the main language in Bangladesh.

<sup>13</sup> Two states of south-east India. See map 2.

of being a Dravidian language<sup>14</sup>, Telugu contains a series of retroflex consonants<sup>15</sup> (/ɖ/, /ɳ/, and /ʈ/) pronounced with the tip of the tongue curled back against the roof of the mouth. The repetition of words/syllables to create a new meaning is a typical feature. For instance, *pakapaka* ‘suddenly bursting out laughing,’ *garagara* ‘clean, neat, nice’. (Krishnamurti)

Going on with Dravidian languages, the Tamil language is also one of the official languages in India. Spoken by almost 70 million of the population, the states where Tamil is spoken are Tamil Nadu and Puducherry – this one is a Union Territory. Furthermore, it is an official language as well in Sri Lanka and Singapore, and spoken in Malaysia, Fiji, Mauritius and South Africa despite not being considered as an official language. Due to the fact that Tamil is a Dravidian language, its phonological characteristics are the same as those of Telugu, and it is a verb-final language that permits adaptability as regards the order of the subject and the object in a sentence. There are numerous variations of Tamil both in and outside India. Regional varieties of the language come together with varieties based on social class. Tamil is a great example of the importance of social class when it comes to language acquisition in India. (Krishnamurti)

Gujarati is the official language of Gujarat state. Situated on the west coast of India, it is bordered by three states – Rajasthan, Madhyapradesh and Maharashtra – and also by Pakistan. However, it is not the only language spoken in the state of Gujarat, as its inhabitants also speak Hindi, Marwari and Marathi. With over 55 million speakers in India, which is 5% of the country, it has a notable population out of the Republic of India since Gujarati speakers also reside in Pakistan, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa, UK, USA and Canada. Gujarati was the mother tongue of Mahatma Ghandi. (Suthar)

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<sup>14</sup> A family of some 70 languages spoken primarily in South Asia. The Dravidian languages are spoken by more than 215 million people in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dravidian-languages>)

<sup>15</sup> A consonant sound produced with the tip of the tongue curled back toward the hard-palate. (Britannica)

Last but not least, the Urdu language is a member of the Indo-Aryan<sup>16</sup>group. Even though it is spoken as a mother tongue by more than 70 million people in the world and by more than 100 as a second language, in India only 5.2% of the population speaks it. It is the official language of the Republic of India as well as Pakistan. Urdu is related to Hindi owing to the fact that it was originated and developed in India. Their phonology and grammar are nearly the same, at times causing ambiguity whether it is the same language or not. The main difference comes in the lexicon, as Urdu borrowings come from Arabic and Persian whereas Hindi borrowed from Sanskrit. Moreover, both languages have the same sounds with the exception of short vowel allophones. Lastly, regarding the Republic of India, Urdu is spoken in the north of the country, with a higher presence in the northwest. (Zeidan et al., 2019)

Language	First Language Speakers	First Language Speakers per cent of total pop.	Second Language Speakers (mill)	Third Language Speakers (mill)	Total Speakers (mill)	Total speakers per cent of total pop.
Hindi	528,347,193	43.63	139	24	692	57.10
English	259,678	0.02	83	46	129	10.60
Bengali	97,237,669	8.30	9	1	107	8.90
Marathi	83,026,680	7.09	13	3	99	8.20
Telugu	81,127,740	6.93	12	1	95	7.80
Tamil	69,026,881	5.89	7	1	77	6.30
Gujarati	55,492,554	4.74	4	1	60	5.00
Urdu	50,772,631	4.34	11	1	63	5.20
Kannada	43,706,512	3.73	14	1	59	4.94
Odia	37,521,324	3.20	5	0.03	43	3.56
Malayalam	34,838,819	2.97	0.05	0.02	36.0	3.28
Punjabi	33,124,726	2.83	0.03	0.003	36.6	3.56
Sanskrit	24,821	<0.000001	0.01	0.003	0.025	0.01

Table 1. First, second and third languages by number of speakers in India (2011 census,) from Wikipedia 'Languages of India'.

<sup>16</sup> Also called Indic languages, they are a subgroup of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

### 3.2 Current features of Indian English

In this section, the main focus will be on Standard Indian English. In spite of the fact that the biggest differences between British English (BrE) and Indian English (IndE) could be found in the vocabulary, we will start by analysing them. Moreover, we will later describe the changes in the grammatical areas that are worth to mentioning.

According to Nihalani *et al.*'s (1979/2004) dictionary *Indian and British English: A Handbook of Usage and Pronunciation (Oxford India Collection)*, there are some lexical items which are peculiar to Indian English. For instance, there is a notable presence of borrowings from the regional languages of India, e.g. *crore* (BrE *10 million*), *mela* (BrE *crowd*) or *swadeshi* (BrE *of one's own country*). (Mukherjee, 2010: 175)

In addition, there are lexical items relating to the lexicon shared by Indian English and other varieties of English that can be used in different forms in Indian English, both grammatically and semantically. For example, in the grammar area, *both* is admitted with the negative form of the verb in Indian English (Mukherjee, 2010: 175). There is also a difference from native varieties regarding morphology, such as extending the use of the suffix *-ee* (e.g. *affectee*, *awardee*, *recruitee*), the prefix *de-* (e.g. *de-confirm*, *de-friend*, *de-recognize*) and the zero-derivation of new verbs (e.g. *airline*, *public*, *slogan*). (Mukherjee, 2010: 175)

According to Joybrato Mukherjee, it has been demonstrated that the differences between British English and Indian English when it comes to the lexis and grammar are often quantitative; in fact, we could only explore the differences by analysing large amounts of natural data embraced in large machine-readable text corpora. Schilk (2006) explains by contrasting several 1-million-word corpora of British and Indian English

that specific collocations are often used in Indian English, whereas we can hardly see them in British English e.g. the word strings *illicit liquor, illicit den and illicit liquor den*. (Mukherjee, 2010: 175)

Likewise, despite the fact that there is not much deviation in syntax, there are still changes in Indian English if we compare it with British English. For instance, the use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns (BrE *a piece of chalk*..... IndE also *a chalk*), invariant tag questions (e.g. *He has left, hasn't he?*... IndE also *He has left, isn't it?/... , no?*), and the use of progressive forms with stative verbs (e.g. BrE *I simply don't understand*... IndE also *I am simply not understanding*). (Mukherjee, 2010: 175)

Vocabulary is a different strain. Due to the early colonization of the British Empire, Indian English contains a lot of loanwords from Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. We should also mention the use of multiple items from foreign languages like Portuguese, with which English has been in contact both in India and in the entire South Asia since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays, the ones that provide further lexical resources for Indian speakers of English are the indigenous languages of India. Kohli (1989: 1332) classifies them as a mixture of words that have entered the international common core of English lexis. (Sedlatschek, 2009: 51).

Additionally, a real debate has been created regarding the excessive use of the loanwords in Indian English. Shastri (1988a: 38) for example believes that borrowing has become “an important contributory factor in the process of Indianization” whereas other scholars like Dubey (1989) minimize the importance of it. According to him, other languages contain a lot of more loanwords than Indian English. This statement has the support of Görlach (1995) as he states that “the number of words from Indian languages contained in them is smaller than the number of English loanwords in German newspapers”. (Sedlatschek, 2009: 52)

Besides, in a selective conversation among Indians, they feel more comfortable when they use loanwords than when they speak with the Standard English vocabulary. Moreover, long words are more liked when Indians use English owing to the fact that they are disclosed much more to written English. Additionally, old-fashioned expressions like “do the needful” are still regularly used. The reason why this happens is because Indians put special emphasis on written English. The following words are some typical examples of words in Indian English (Enokizono, 2000: 33):

Indian English	British English
<b>Lok Sabha</b>	Lower House of the central parliament
<b>Rajya Sabha</b>	Upper House of the central parliament
<b>Mandi</b>	Wholesale vegetable market
<b>Bazaar</b>	Marketplace
<b>Guru</b>	Teacher. Traditional spiritual master
<b>Disvestment</b>	Withdrawal of investment. Divestment
<b>Crore</b>	Ten million

*Table 2. Indian English words, by Enokizono, 2000: 34*

Nevertheless, India is not the only country where loanwords are relevant. This strategy has become a tendency in almost every country of Asia, so that it is hard for Asian countries to establish international communication in English. However, English has been operating as an official language in some countries in the continent, and that makes English virtually the most accepted language for inter-Asian communication. (Enokizono 2000: 36)

Finally, arguably the clearest structural development of Indian English can be found in pronunciation. As stated by Shastri (1992: 263), the speech characteristics of these speakers are typically embedded in a syllable-timed rhythm with the full



realization of all stressed and unstressed syllables. There is a strong tendency of Indian English speakers to monophthongize diphthongs such as /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ (e.g. *late*, *home*) or to merge the consonants /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ into /ʒ/ (e.g. *casual*, *division*). (Murkhejee, 2010: 176)

### 3.3 *English as an International Language*

English is today considered as a global or international language<sup>17</sup>. In order to understand the meaning of this, we have to focus on more things than just the linguistic perspective. We can confirm that English today is a unique language, functionally and structurally quite different from other languages of the world. Functionally, English managed to spread among non-native speakers in Asia, especially in countries like Japan or India. Its success has been so big that nowadays it is a must for students to learn English, owing to the importance of this language at work. In view of the situation, students are learning English not only for job purposes, but also for wider communication. As a survey conducted by Japan's National Institute of Language in 1999 demonstrated, people around the world unanimously consider English as the most useful language when it comes to world-wide communication.

Essentially, non-native English speakers are taking advantage of the fact that English is bound to reflect a diversity of disparate cultures. What is more, these speakers examine new dimensions of the language usage in every field such as phonetically or semantically. Actually, a great example could be the use of the English language in non-Anglo-American cultural contexts as are countries like India, Singapore or African countries like Kenya or Nigeria. This demonstrates that the English language is independent from the British or US culture. In fact, it is unthinkable to imagine a context where a Ghanaian had to represent the British ways of behaviour.

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<sup>17</sup> The section 3.2 "English as an international language" is based on Honna (2005: 73-77)

The clearest context that demonstrates the fact that English is a multicultural language could be that Indians speak English in Indian ways, with their variations and their phonological changes. And the same happens with Nigerians, Jamaicans or Indonesians. For instance, if British English standards were imposed upon all users of English, the language would face rejection from every country which is not Britain, and would never become an international common language. As a consequence, English will only be a common language for international communication if its cultural diversity is approved.

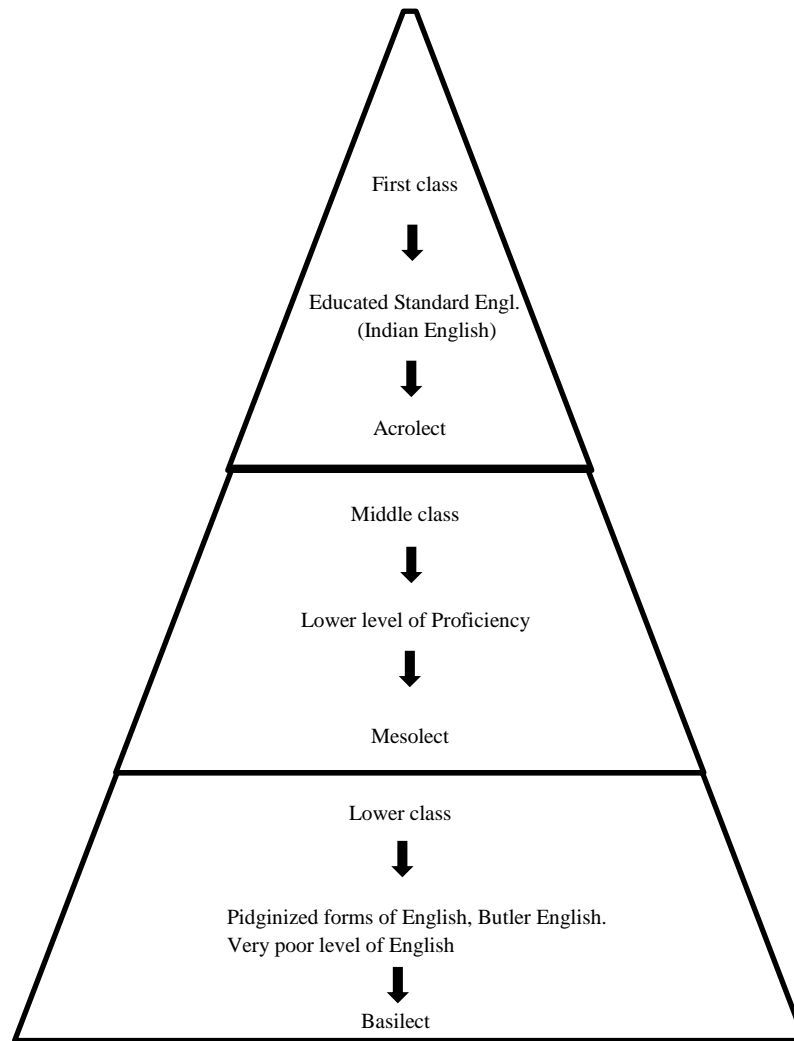
In fact, English today is one of the most powerful languages not only in India but in Asia. English has approximately 350 million speakers that use the language for different purposes in that continent, which is not too far of the total population of Great Britain and the United States combined, where they speak English as their first language. The growth of English has been so big that Asians do not consider the language as a colonial import. There is a feeling that English is part of their own culture. Gemino Abad, a Filipino poet, sums it up perfectly with the following quote: “The English language is now ours. We have colonized it, too” (Honna, 2005: 77). Moreover, Honna asserts that the important thing in intercultural communication is the capability and willingness of an individual to understand what the other has to say, not the imposition of one’s norms upon the other.

### *3.4 English Proficiency*

In India, only a relatively small part of the population in urban areas, from the upper and middle classes and with access to English medium schools and universities, use the educated standard variant of English.

Only a relatively small part of the inhabitants that live in the downtown have access to English medium schools and universities. Both the upper and middle classes use the educated standard variant of English (Mukherjee, 2010: 174). The pyramid in Figure 1. below, for which I have used Mukherjee's data, will show that English proficiency comes together with the social class. Mukherjee (2000: 174) describes variation within educated Indian English:

The most important factor that leads to variation within the educated variant of Indian English as the standard acrolectal variety is the regional background of the individual speaker, and, linked to it, his/her specific first language. As Indian English is a largely non-native variety and, thus, typically a speaker's additional second (or third) language, there may be transfer effects from his/her first language on to English, either due to general features of certain language families (e.g. Indo-European languages in the north vs Dravidian languages in the south) or due to specific language features of individual Indian languages (e.g. Hindi vs Tamil). Regional differences are most prominent at the level of pronunciation; Gargesh (2008) provides a succinct overview of them. For example, while the vowel in *foot* is usually realized with a weakly rounded [ʏ] in Indian English, in some regions in north India (e.g. Bengal, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) it is also frequently produced as a long back [u:].



*Figure 1: Proficiency in English and social class.*

When learning a new language like English, India had an advantage with other Asian countries like China or Japan. Due to their history, India has created a large pool of people with English language skills. Nevertheless, as the job competence grows, there have been concerns about the low proficiency that Indians have compared to Japanese or Chinese users. Additionally, English language proficiency is seen as a massive element and with only the 0.02% of the population speaking English as their mother tongue (see Table 2 below). Yet English proficiency levels are always really poor. In spite of English being the main language in higher education in India, most of the students communicate in Hindi, both on and off the classroom. The little focus of professional education on improving their proficiency in English has let them far from countries like China and Japan. (Agarwal, 2009: 224)

Besides, instead of eagerly encouraging learning English as a strategy for economic development like Japan does, English language instruction in India has been defeated because of chauvinism<sup>18</sup>. As a result, a few states like West Bengal abolished English at primary school level. (Agarwal, 2009: 224)

Still, on 20 October 2007, the prime minister of the country decides that teaching English as a first language should be introduced since Class I in school. A total of nine states – six of them northern states – and three Union Territories<sup>19</sup> have established English as an obligatory subject from Class I onwards. In addition, twelve states and three Union Territories have introduced English in different phases in primary school. In spite of these steps, the progression is slow and there is a big fear that the quality of the teachers is quite poor. (Agarwal, 2009: 224)

There is a major difference in how private schools teach English if we compare it with the public ones. On the one hand, private schools usually teach English both as a subject and a first language whereas public schools teach it as a third language. Therefore, it is very unlikely that a student from the public school will obtain a high proficiency in English. Consequently, several scholars evaluated Indians English proficiency, and the results were quite negative, as they classified it as ‘inadequate’ (Daswani, 1974 – cited from Omidvar, 2017: 7). What is more, as stated by Ramanathan (2008), 85% of secondary students who go to private schools have English as their first language. These factors show that affluent students will improve their proficiency whereas deprived students – which are the vast majority of the population – will continue struggling. (Omidvar, 2017: 7)

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<sup>18</sup> Chauvinism: the strong and unreasonable believe that your own country or race is the best or most important.

<sup>19</sup> Union Territory: type of administrative division in the Republic of India. Unlike the states of India, which have their own governments, union territories are federal territories ruled directly by the central government, hence the name “union territory”. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\\_territory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_territory))

## 4. Conclusion

Despite being colonised by the British Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which brought about the introduction of a new language before any other Asian country, Indians have not been able to acquire a high level of proficiency in English as China or Japan. A key factor has been the major social and economic difference between the upper class and the lower class, which is the vast majority of India. What is more, questionable decisions from the government like abolishing English in primary school have affected not only the advancement in acquiring English, but also by not improving the situation of regional languages. For instance, the situation with Sanskrit in India is critical as it has almost disappeared from daily usage. Besides, improving English proficiency should be a priority for the government as nowadays a good level of English is crucial in the world and would definitely improve the economic situation of the country.

With respect to the linguistic features of English in India, every language level<sup>20</sup> has its modifications comparing with Standard British English. Likewise, it is important to highlight the use of loanwords from other languages. Furthermore, according to Kachru's *Three Circles of English*, English in India is considered as part of the Outer Circle, so that demonstrates that the language is spoken as a second language in India, not as a foreign language.

To conclude, India is progressing in the acquisition of English. It is impossible to imagine now how India would be today had they rejected the English language in the post-independence period. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that the learning of an international language needs a good financial situation. Public schools teach basic things, and in order to improve the level extra classes and experiences abroad are essential. If India wants faster progress and a better level of English, they should start by creating some economic stability and reducing the massive difference between the upper and the lower class.

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<sup>20</sup> Syntax, morphology, vocabulary, phonology.

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