

INTER-UNIVERSITY CENTRE: NOTES

Indian English

Commenting on the re-issue of *Hobson-Jobson*, the well known dictionary of British India by Routledge, Salman Rushdie noted:

I thought, too, that a modern appendix might usefully be commissioned, to include the many English words which have taken on, in independent India, new 'Hinglish' meanings. In India today, the prisoner in the dock is the *undertrial*; a boss is often an *incharge*; and, in a sinister euphemism, those who perish at the hands of law enforcement officers are held to have died in a '*police encounter*' (*Imaginary Homelands* 1991: 83).

The Indian English Supplement to the 5th edition of *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* (OALD, 1996) compiled by Indira Choudhury Sengupta fits the bill. With 2,300 Indian English headwords, 2,593 definitions, 775 examples and 1,700 cross-references, the dictionary has not only updated the non-native variants of English in India, but also legitimised these lexical formations ranging from *Appa* to *Zulm*. These words, spoken and written in India, are no longer 'outlandish guests' as described by Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, when they compiled the *Hobson-Jobson* glossary in 1886. With the passage of time a regional variety of English has emerged and a large number of words of Indian provenance have gained currency in the present context. While the supplement is not aimed at English speakers in the UK, USA, Australia or Canada, it will certainly help them in understanding Indian English literature and other texts on Indian subjects in which such words are being increasingly used.

Attempts to compile such supplements were made earlier by R.E. Hawkins in the *Little Oxford Dictionary* (1984), Ivor Lewis in *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs: A dictionary of the words of Anglo-India* (1991), and Nigel Hankin in *Hanklyn-Janklyn* (1992). But the OALD section on Indian English stands out as a fairly comprehensive and reader-friendly supplement as well as a novel work of reference. It serves as a measure of deviance and defines the variety of English with distinct flavour and stamp. For instance: while 'abscond' is defined in the main section of the dictionary, the supplement gives its meaning in the Indian context: 'to go away suddenly and secretly, particularly to

avoid arrest'. Indians also frequently drop the preposition after this verb, unlike the standard British usage. Words like *amma*, *bakwas*, *chalu*, *chamcha*, *Ayaram*, *Gayaram* etc., are used in English conversations between Indians, and as such these have been included with grammatical and syntactical descriptions, example sentences, usage notes and cline varieties to describe their current semantic implications and contextual appropriateness. Words from Indian languages that describe particular Indian objects, encyclopaedic items, and kinship terms have also been compiled for the benefit of cross linguistic users of English, both Indian and foreign.

Explaining the principal purpose of her project, the compiler points out:

The English we encounter in our daily lives as Indians is spiced with words that would not be understood by the English speakers in the UK. This is true not only of words current in British English that are used in a different sense here. We often *shift* house unlike the British who *move*. Or we pack things in the *dickey* and not the 'boot' of the car in which we might have a *stepney* instead of a 'spare wheel'. Hybrids like *rail-roko* and *double-roti* are peculiar to our vocabulary as are compounds like *eveteaser*, *native place* or *ceasework*. In our colourful idiomatic way we might *eat somebody's head*, *use our jack* or, better still, *make chutney out of somebody*. The Indian English supplement to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* attempts to describe this unique vocabulary and provide a ready reference for Indian English (*The Telegraph*, Calcutta).

While socio-linguists differ in their opinion regarding the status of English in India whether it is a dialect, a pidgin or a creole, or a non-native variety of English, at the lexico-semantic, syntactic and phonological levels, the fact remains that it has consolidated its position as a contact and resource language as well as a complementary code of speech. In a plural language situation like ours, English is bound to be substantially marked by local colours and dictionaries will have to face factoids in the shape of new context-bound word and idiom formations, like the ones in the *OALD* supplement. In the process the normative English is likely to be broken, fractured and fashioned anew to suit the needs of the speaker in his own situation. As S. Gopal rightly says,

India is not a country with a large community of British settlers who might have resisted the influence of the local context. Nor is English in India, as in the Caribbean, the sole means of

communication. The languages of India have a history which in most cases goes back over 1,000 years; and just as English has influenced them during the last 100 years, they now influence English. They give it an indigenous flavour and promote a new idiom (*Encounter*, July-August 1989: 18).

Clearly, the gallimaufry of English has allowed unparalleled linguistic kedgeriee by way of nativization and acculturation. But without the intermingling of English and Indian languages the diverse socio-cultural patterns of the subcontinent could not have been captured and rendered in signifying transactions. Confident and daring innovations by recent Indian writers exemplify the linguistic features of Indianization through a productive process of code-mixing, borrowing of single lexical items and hybridized formations. Even though these writers of 'the youngest upwardly mobile literature' have access 'only to gods of small things', they seem to have imbibed the medium like Dante's poetry into Eliot's blood.

In the end, one feels the compiler should have picked out the indigenized variety of English idioms from contemporary Indian literature in English to demonstrate the quality of judgements that our writers make with respect to linguistic structures. Also, the supplement should have covered pronunciation—howsoever widely different it is—because language is basically a spoken medium. The institutional variety of Indian English will acquire authority and autonomy only when its lexical, semantic, grammatical and phonological features get standardized. Of course, in the dominant Indian context English is not a rooted blossomer. It is a language of formal discourse and the pace of the Indianization of English should not be forced. Nonetheless, the *OALD* Indian English supplement is a useful compilation and has rightly wrested the native nod for a decolonised—one may say desi too—variety of English.

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Theatre Performance Theory and Social Sciences

It may be worthwhile to try to establish, in a systematic way, a continuum between theatre performance and social sciences. To attempt to show, in other words, that performance is a kind of