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Mumbai's Informal Economy

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NEGOTIATING (WITH) ENGLISH IN MUMBAI'S INFORMAL ECONOMY*

Swati Birla¹ and Amit Basole²

Abstract

English occupies a peculiar and contradictory position in India. Two centuries after its introduction into the country, the fraction of the population who speaks the language remains small (~10%), but this small elite exercises a substantial influence in the public sphere. English-speaking ability is indicative of a deeper structural divide between a *paschmikrit samaj* (westernized society) and a *bahishkrit samaj* (ostracized society). The former, constituting a small minority, is the part of Indian society that has found place in the modern institutions (universities, formal economy jobs) while the later is a much larger majority that has not. In the post-reform period, even as access to a good English education remains highly unequal, exposure to English has increased tremendously in other ways, predominantly through its presence in the public sphere and through the new information and communication technologies. A consequence of this exposure of the *bahishkrit samaj* to English is a thorough Indianization of the language. It is this manifestation of English, beyond the native speakers of Indian English that the present study explores through field observations, surveys, and interviews among street traders, taxi-drivers and other informal sector workers in Mumbai.

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Introduction

In 2010, India's biggest English language newspaper, The Times of India (TOI), carried an article titled "English is our 2nd language." (TOI Mach 14, 2010) The claim in the title was based on the 2001 Census, which enumerated 125.3 million people, roughly 10% of India's population, with English as either their first, second, or third language (only 2.5 lakh as first, the rest as second or third). This is second only to Hindi at 551.4 million speakers. Major regional languages such as Bengali, Marathi, Telugu, and so on accounted for less than 100 million speakers each. Another popular measure of the penetration of English in India is readership of English newspapers. According to the Indian Readership Survey (2012) the TOI has a readership of around 7 million while the top 10 English dailies together command a readership of around 19 million. By this measure, English registers a much smaller presence in the population than the Census numbers suggested. Noting that estimates as high as 30% are also found in the literature, Sedlatschek (2009) avers:

Numerical guesswork of this kind is interesting as it reflects the problems involved when trying to identify the group of English-using Indians, who differ in degrees of competence, regional and educational backgrounds, and the extent to which they employ English. If there is one appropriate generalization, it is that there is a strong association of the affluent and influential sections of Indian society with English, which also explains the high social prestige that Indian society at large attaches to this language these days.
(p. 2)

English thus occupies a peculiar and contradictory position in India, even two centuries after its introduction into the sub-continent on a large scale. As a fraction of the population, the number of people who speak the language remains small, but this small elite exercises a substantial influence in the public sphere, quite out of proportion with its numbers. The language enjoys a public presence, particularly in the larger cities, completely disproportionate to the percentage of

the population that can claim any competence in it. Although figures are not available, it may not be inaccurate to say that even in a city like Mumbai, only a small minority of citizens can be considered fluent in the language. This minority is nevertheless very visible and vocal, not to say dismissive of the “vernies,” those educated in “vernacular medium” schools. A recent article in Live Mint explores the persistent “English divide” in India, also citing among its sources, the present study (Jayaraman 2012).

Since the number of people reporting English as their first language remains miniscule, and English is spoken socially in a very small urban milieu, schooling remains the major site for acquiring English skills in India and jobs remain the principal motivation for learning the language. Thus the conversation about English is tightly linked to the conversation about India’s education system; for example the controversy over medium of education (English or the child’s mother tongue?). Six decades after independence, even as English remains an “official language,” the number of people who can claim an effective schooling in English remains very small. As we show here, even in a metro like Mumbai, the working class in the informal service economy is exposed to English, not principally in school, but rather in working life and as citizens navigating the city.

The 10% figure from the Census may be taken, not as a precise estimate of English penetration but as an indicator of a long-run, persistent divide in the country, the divide between those who can speak English and those who cannot. Language ability is itself indicative of a deeper structural divide. In this study we adopt the framework advanced by Sahasrabudhey (1991) and see Indian society as consisting of a *paschimikrit samaj* (westernized society) and a *bahishkrit samaj* (ostracized society). The former, constituting a small minority, is the part of Indian society that has found place in the modern institutions (universities, formal economy jobs) while the

later is a much larger majority that has not. At first glance, this may seem to be a crude set of categories. But they point to a crucial structural feature of India's political economy, as vital to understanding how India works as class, caste, religion, and gender. The *pashchimikrit-bahishkrit* divide is not the same as the rural-urban divide. Consider the fact that even after sixty years of Independent economic development, the so-called "informal sector" still exists in both rural and urban areas and accounts for 90% of the labor force nationally (Sengupta *et al* 2009). The informal sector consists of small and micro enterprises (including small farms) where the workforce is casual, precarious, and largely educated on the job (i.e. at most 10th or 12th pass). Indeed enrollment in higher education institutions is another metric by which the *pashchimikrit-bahishkrit* divide may be understood. Thorat (2006) presents a range of enrollment ratio estimates based on three sources. The all-India enrollment ratios (both gross and net) are around 13%. This is the percentage of college-age youth who are actually enrolled in college. Once again we approach the 10% figure we started with.

It is no coincidence that English speaking ability is strongly correlated with both a college-degree and a formal sector job. It is in the context of this monopoly over the good life created by English, that Rammanohar Lohia's *angrezi hatao* agitation of the 1960s has to be understood. However, many significant changes have taken place since the 1960s that impact the English question. One important factor is the rise of the lower castes to power (Jaffrelot 2003). The growing self-confidence of shudra and dalit castes holds profound implications for English in India. Accompanying this political empowerment and with the growing integration of India into the world economy, there is a demand for English education. Not *angrezi hatao* but *angrezi paDhao*. This is witnessed in the eagerness for an "English-medium" education across the country, no matter its quality.

One of the many paradoxes of English in India is that even as access to a good English education remains highly unequal, exposure to English has increased tremendously in other ways; predominantly through the presence of English in the public sphere and through the new information and communication technologies. A consequence of this exposure of the *bahishkrit samaj* to English is a thorough Indianization of the language. Thus one could assert that English is an Indian language not because a large proportion of Indians speak it fluently (the TOI argument), but because it has been Indianized in idiom, usage, and most importantly through hybridization with other Indian languages. This strategic and instrumental acquisition of English is similar in some respects to the acquisition of any informal skill outside the formal education system. This perspective also forces us to acknowledge that English impacts a much larger proportion of the population than the population that speaks it. It is this manifestation of English, beyond the speakers of Indian English that the present study explores. As we show in the next section, much of the socio-linguistic scholarship on Indian English has been concerned with the questions such as what makes Indian English specifically Indian, should speakers of English in India be considered “native” speakers, and so on. There is much less work on how those on the margins interact with the presence of the language in their lives.

Our field site is Mumbai’s street economy, its street traders and taxi-drivers. All our participants have been educated in non-English medium schools and none of them have acquired college-level education. We use field observations as well as interviews to explore three key questions: what types of English skills are found among the *bahishkrit samaj* in Mumbai, what are their attitudes towards English, and how is English present in their lives. We recognize that the Mumbai context is special. As India’s commercial capital, the city’s *bahishkrit samaj* could be

considered the most privileged section of this samaj as a whole. Thus we do not claim any “representativeness” on part of our study. Rather, it is a particular investigation of urban aspiration and urban experience in the Mumbai context.

The rest of this paper is divided in the following sections. Section 2 examines the current scholarship on English in India and also places English in the context of India’s multilingual history. Section 3 outlines the methods used in the study. Section 4 presents results and Section 5 concludes.

English in India beyond Indian English

Indian English

The story of English’s ascent from a foreign language spoken in a few trading outposts in Gujarat in the 17th century to the status of an administrative language in the 19th century to an Indian language in the 20th century has been told several times (see for e.g. Roy 1994, Sedlatschek 2009). Macaulay’s infamous 1834 Minute on Education is often taken to be a major turning point in the story, establishing a firm place for English in the Indian public sphere. For this, of course, Macaulay is a much-reviled figure among the Indian intelligentsia (ironically also the English speaking literati). Calling this hypocritical, Dalit activist Chandra Bhan Prasad has recently created a stir by celebrating Macaulay’s birthday. Prasad sees knowledge of English (as well as capitalism) as a modernizing and emancipating force for the oppressed castes and this view has a lineage in anti-caste activism going back to Savitribai Phule whose poem “Mother English” is often cited in this context.

Rule of Peshwa is gone
Mother English has come.

Forlorn and dark our hopelessness
Ominous fears of heaven and abyss.
In such a dismal time of ours
Come Mother English, this is your hour.
Brahman's rule is now in ashes
Under the English whips and lashes.
It is all for the good of the poor
Manu is dead at English Mother's door.
(Tr- Sunil Sardar, Victor Paul)

Perhaps in part to highlight how much the knowledge of English is associated with the “good life” in India Prasad has elevated the language to the level of a goddess, Angrezi Devi (Figure 1).

As Prasad notes:

With Goddess English, the baby will not grow to serve landlord
With Goddess English, the baby will not grow to skin dead animals
With Goddess English, the baby will not grow to enter drainages...

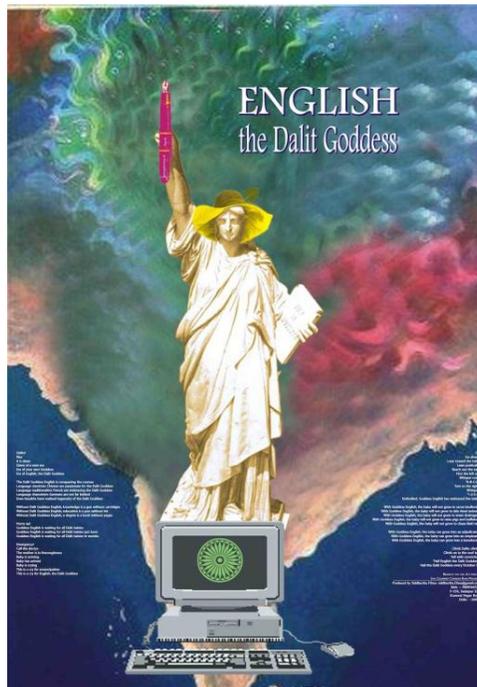


Figure 1: “English: the Dalit Goddess”

The glorification (indeed deification) of English and the particular visual representation (with obvious parallels to the Statue of Liberty, perched atop a computer) forms a crucial part of a self-avowedly market-friendly, neoliberal world-view that Prasad espouses. The message is clear: knowledge of English will open doors to well-paying jobs in the new global economy which in turn will break the bonds of traditional occupations. Although Prasad can be (and has been) accused of confusing language with knowledge/modernity, seeing how entrenched English is in India, and noting that English medium education and level of English language skills are strongly positively correlated with higher earnings (Munshi and Rosenziwg 2006, Azam, Chin and Prakash 2013), it is difficult to dismiss his case entirely.

Several studies have appeared recently studying English spoken by Indians, sometimes known as “Indian English” (IE) (see essays in an edited volume by Singh and Agnihotri 2012, also see Sedlatschek 2009). In addition to identifying the linguistic peculiarities of IE, a frequent concern in this literature is whether IE speakers are “native” or “non-native” speakers of English. In his target paper for an edited volume (Singh and Agnihotri 2012), Singh (2012) examines the status of “Indian English” defined as “the English of educated, bi- or multi-lingual speakers in India” vis-à-vis “native varieties” of English (i.e. American or Australian English). He concludes that there are no linguistic reasons for classifying IE as “non-native.” Most commentators on Singh’s target paper agree with this proposition while commenting on different aspects of IE. Indeed, a consensus seems to be growing among sociolinguists that Indian English, that is English spoken by educated, multilingual Indians, is both a legitimate variety of “world Englishes” (like

Canadian or Australian English) and is also an Indian language.

However, as S. Anand observes in the “miscellaneous comments” section of the same volume, this debate (native or non-native?) smacks to a degree of an “anxiety typical of the post-colonial Indian elite,” an elite that is anxious to prove that it can speak as well as its erstwhile masters. This debate does not concern us here either, because the present study is about English in India beyond Indian English, that is, English as it is acquired and used by Indians who have not been educated in English and have not learned it formally in school. The subjects of the study are thus, *not* speakers of IE. However, they do encounter English in their everyday life; it affects their life chances, earning potential and quality of life in general.

The effects of English exposure, learning etc. beyond IE speakers have been poorly studied. There are a few studies such as that of D’Souza (2001) that document the growing penetration of English vocabulary in the *bahishkrit samaj*. The author gives anecdotal examples of extensive English vocabulary among Gangoobai and Ashabai, a masseuse and a maid respectively, whose Marathi contains words such as injection, heart attack, bathroom, carrybag, tension, maintenance, problem, and so on. D’Souza also offers more linguistic data in the form of teen utterances of “Hinglish,” code-mixed advertisements and phrases unique to Indian English (such as “ever so often”) to suggest that English, far from being “independent” or “self-contained” “interacts both with other local languages and with world Englishes to give a synthesis that is unique and Indian.” (D’Souza, 2001: 148) She challenges the notion that English is an “auntie tongue” (as opposed to mother tongue) or that it is used strictly according to needs and kept separate from the speaker’s local identity and that it sits uneasily at best among Indian languages.

Multilingualism in Indian History and English

This study is also influenced by the perspective that sees English, not in isolation, but as “the latest addition to the multilingual mosaic of India,” a region known for communities that “add languages to their linguistic repertoire...and use them complementarily in functional terms and synthetically in formal terms.” (Singh, 2012: 17). Before English, Persian was the language of the elite, especially in the northern part of the subcontinent. Like English is today, Persian was, in this period, the language of international scholarship from Turkey to the India. Without stretching the parallel too far, some fruitful comparisons may be made between the way Persian interacted with Indian languages in the 13th-19th centuries and the way English does today. The mixing of Persian with local Hindi dialects (such as Khari Boli, Awadhi etc.) produced a “linguistic totem pole” described thus by Faruqi (1998):

Top: Iranian Persian, that is, Persian as written by Iranians who never came to India.

Upper Middle: Indo-Iranian Persian, that is, Persian written by Iranian-born writers who lived most or all of their creative life in India.

Lower Middle: Indian Persian, that is, Persian written by Indians, or close descendants of Iranians settled in India.

Just Above Bottom: Urdu, provided its Arabic/Persian component conformed to Arabic/Persian rules/idiom/semantics/ pronunciation.

The Bottom: Urdu, whose Arabic and Persian component did not conform to Arabic/Persian norms and format. (For the definitions of Arabic and Persian, see above.)

While this does not map directly onto contemporary language hierarchies in India, the parallels

are nonetheless striking and instructive. Replace Persian with English and we get a hierarchy where English spoken by Britons or Americans is at the top tier followed by “neutral” accented Indian English (upper middle), followed by English spoken with a regional (Marathi, Tamil etc.) accent (lower middle), followed by Hindi in which appropriate English words are used with “native” pronunciation. Those who spoke what Faruqi calls “the bottom” language are the equivalents of our population of interest here. One caveat is that the prestige enjoyed by Hinglish undermines the above hierarchy. It is a mixed tongue, but yet appears “fashionable” or “cool.” Countless examples may be advanced from the advertising industry to make this point (yehi hai right choice, baby; yeh dil mange more; taste mein best, Mummy aur Everest; etc).

A second reason for making a comparison with Persian is that it allows us to understand mixed language usage today in a historical context. Textual culture in the Indian sub-continent, both elite and popular, has been multilingual for centuries. North India’s crowning linguistic achievement in the 18th and 19th century, Urdu poetry is testament to this fact. Before it was (inaccurately) named “Urdu” (short for zaban-e-urdu-e-mu’alla or language of the royal camp), the language was known simply as “rekhta” (a Persian word meaning “interspersed” or “mixed” or “poured”). Persian was being “poured” into Indian languages (Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali). Urdu first grew in the shadow of Persian and early Urdu writers wrote in Persian (which was considered higher art). Eventually Urdu writers no longer knew Persian, and Persian/Arabic phrases become Indianized.

Urdu’s preeminent poets, Mir Taqi Mir and Mirza Ghalib, both referred to the language they wrote in, as rekhta and drew on both Indic (Sanskrit tatsama and tadbhav) as well as Perso-

Arabic vocabulary to good effect. But macaronic verse which experimented with two or more languages with distinct literary traditions within one text goes back even further, at least to Amir Khusro (d 1325) to whom is attributed the following famous macaronic poem (Persian words have been bolded):

(1)

Zehal-e miskin makun taghafal, duraye naina banaye batiyan;
ki taab-e hijran nadaram ay jaan, na leho kaahe lagaye chhatiyan.

Shaban-e hijran daraz chun zulf wa roz-e waslat cho umr kotah;
Sakhi piya ko jo main na dekhun to kaise kaatun andheri ratiyan.

Do not ignore my misery, blandishing eyes, telling tales;
I cannot bear the burning of separation, why don't you embrace me?

The night of separation are long like tresses, days of union short like life;
friend, if I don't see my piya, how will I pass the dark nights?

Bangha (2010) offers many more examples of mixed-language poetry over the centuries; such as the following Persian poem from the 16th century that uses the bolded Hindi words in the rhyme scheme (2) and a predominantly braj bhasha (Hindi) poem that uses a Persian phrase (3).

(2)

Aan pari rukhsaar chun shaana ba **choti** mikunad,
jaan daraaz-e-aashiqaan-raa umr-e-**chhoti** mikunad
Chun zanad khanjar ba jaanam khun zi janam michakad;
hamchu murg-e-neem bismil **lot-poti** mikunad.
- Sheikh Jamali Kamboh (d. 1536)

When that fairy-faced woman combs her hair,
she makes the long life of lovers short

She thrusts her dagger into my heart, blood drips from it
I roll about like a half-sacrificed bird.

(3)

chamke tere pat ota mein much roop ujiyara- jeevan se badli mein
bagzaar ki dar ru-e-to binim khuda ra- ab sooni gali mein.

[Under your veil your bright face shines like water in a cloud
Allow me to see God in your face- in an empty lane.]
- Shah Barkatuddin Marharvi “Pemi” (d. 1729)

Lest we think this type of hybrid verse was the domain of the elite, the court-poets, Bangha also presents examples of rekhta poetry (in Persian and Devanagari scripts) written by sants, fakir, Krishna-bhakts and so forth, both Hindu and Muslim. Incidentally, going beyond language per se, experimentation with script, English written in the nagari scripts and Hindi written in the roman script can also similarly be situated in the multi-script linguistic history. The mixed language of North India, examples of which were given above, were written over the course of centuries in both devanagari and nastaliq (modified Persian) scripts.

A very similar process is happening to English more rapidly in the past few decades, as Indians self-confidently incorporate English. The process has been aided by two developments of the past three decades, economic liberalization and the rise to power of the middle and lower castes. Paradoxically, it is the rise of leaders such as Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mayawati, and many others who speak non-English Indian languages with confidence in the public sphere that makes the appropriation /embrace of English *less fraught* with colonial baggage. This is because English is

now seen as less of a threat to other languages. Another point that could be made in support of this argument is the rapidly expanding circulation of Hindi dailies. Modern Hindi borrows freely from English, as it did in the past from Persian, Arabic, and Turkish. While this does create anxiety for Hindi's "purity" among Hindi enthusiasts (see Snell 2011), another way to see it is as the next phase in the life of the language.

It is instructive to note the varieties of rekhta enumerated by Mir (Faruqi 1998): Persian and Hindi lines alternating, the same line half in Persian and half in Hindi, the use of Persian verbs, prepositions and conjunctions within a Hindi line, and use of appropriate Persian phrases in Hindi. If "Persian" is replaced by "English," all the above varieties can be found in common speech, songs, advertisements etc. today. We offer some examples of this below. For instance, it is against the long history of macaronic verse alluded to above, that Bollywood's contemporary experiments with mixed-language poetry can be understood. For example consider the following three recent lyrics from Hindi movies. The English words are in bold.

(1)

Aashiqon main jis ka **title Titanic**
Muah kinara dikha kar ke dooba de gaya
Jhalla, mera aashiq jhalla wallah
[...]

Humne samjha tha **golden jublee** jise
Woh toh **matinee** dikha kar ke chuma le gaya
Jhalla mera aashiq jhalla wallah
[...]

Mehfil sajno ki **gentlemanon** ki
Bewada koi ho jaaye tu aaye mazaa

Jise **lover** ki khabar **paperon** main hai
Dil ki **breaking news** uss ko sunaaye koi
Kaise nazar ki kamar ka ratta lagey
Usko meri **geometry** dikhaaye koi

Kya bataayein..jis ko sanam maan kar
Shab bhar marre

Woh kameena subah hote phurr ho gaya
Jisko mohabbat ka **teacher** kehte rahe
Woh fatichar ik **lesson** mein **fail** ho gaya

Haan kaske **jean-pant gentleman** jo bane
Raat bhar payjame se ladta raha
Hum jagate rahe..dil jalate rahe
Woh jamai raazai mein lagata raha

-- Kausar Munir (Ishaqzaade)

(2)

Taar bijli se patle humaare piya
As thin as a wire, humaare piya

Ghar aate hain deri se, tutli hai **road**
Baba Saahib kathin kitna rasta diya
Jan Nayak re haalat kya khasta kiya

Riding donkeys my horse-rider piya
Getting tangled in web of spider piya

Taar bijli se patle humaare piya
As thin as a wire, humaare piya

My loveless and luck less and messed-up Piya

Aandhi maata bata tune yeh kya biya
Sau baras jeene waale re yeh kya kiya

Slipping out of my hand, humaare piya
Falling into quick-sand, humaare piya

Taar bijli se patle humaare piya
As thin as a wire, humaare piya

- Varun Grover (Gangs of Wasseypur)

(3)

Frustiyao nahi moora,
Nervousao nahi moora,
Any time moodwa ko,
Any time moodva ko,
Upsetao nahi moora..

Jo bhi **wrong-va** hai usay,
Set right-va karo ji,
Naahi **loosiye** ji **hope**,
Thoda **fight-va** karo ji..

Startay brainva re moora,
Chadh **trainva** re moora,

- Varun Grover (Gangs of Wasseypur)

Such examples may be multiplied, but these will suffice to make some crucial points. First, the lyrics (esp. Gover's two songs from Gangs of Wasseypur) are self-consciously in the language of the *bahishkrit samaj*. Actual language usage among members of this samaj forms the raw material which the artist uses. This is not the Hinglish of the college-educated urban youth. Rather it is its mirror-image. Indeed a construct like "frustiyana" (which Grover gets from Bihari usage, as in "*kahe frustiya rahe hain?*") is the exact English-in-Hindi cognate of a Hindi-in-English construct like "dhumkaoin" (an anglicization of the Hindi verb *dhamkana*, to threaten), a popular word among the pashchimikrit samaj (and indeed a word with a long Hobson-Jobson history, spelt as *dumbcowing* in the 19th century).

The various Bhojpuri forms of English words like *moodwa*, *wrongwa* etc. also draw on popular language usage in North India (other examples are *waterwa*, *mobiliya* etc). Interestingly, Indianizing a foreign word by adding the Bhojpuri diminutive "-wa" to it, is mentioned by Bangh in the context of Rahim's poetry (for e.g. *gumanwa* from the Persian *gumaan*). Coming to the lyrics from Isahqzaade, we see some clever wordplay suggesting that it is not merely English for the sake of English being used. *Golden jubilee* and *matinee* are both popularly known words describing movies that have lasting power and those that don't. Here they refer to a disappointing lover. The play between *paper* (itself Hindi-ized as *paperoN*) and "breaking news" is clever also. The heart is breaking in love, this news is breaking news, which papers usually report. Then there are the well-known contrasts between "teacher" and "fatichar" and "pant" and "pajama." Finally, there is brilliant (though of course problematic from the gender perspective) use of "geometry" to refer to the female body.

Methods

We use a combination of non-participant observation, surveys and interviews in the present study. Sampling is purposive and designed to capture a particular subset of Mumbai's working class, viz. people working in the informal service economy, who have not been formally trained in English. The geographical areas covered were South Mumbai (Flora Fountain, Fort, Colaba, CST, Fashion Street) Lower Parel, Linking Road, Andheri, and Thane. Our sample consists of 15 street vendors (clothes, CDs/DVDs, electronics, antiques, books), 5 taxi drivers, 7 Garage technicians, 2 travel guides, and 6 Mall salespersons. Among the 35 participants, the average age is 31 years, with 32 males and 3 females. 23 of the participants are Hindi, 9 are Muslim and 2 are Christian. Excluding mall salespersons, all participants are educated up to 12th std or below in either Hindi, Urdu or Marathi medium and report earning Rs. 15000 per month or less. All names have been changed in the interview accounts given below.

Findings of the Study

Mixed Language in Mumbai's Public Sphere

One claim of the present study is that English is now a fully Indian language because of the way it is deployed, creatively and functionally, across the class spectrum. The emergence of "Hinglish" has been widely celebrated as well as reviled (for e.g. see Snell and Kothari 2011), but the term does not do justice to the full spectrum of mixed-language usage. In fact, from the political economy perspective, there is much to understand in the way English interacts with other Indian languages. For example, code-mixing between Hindi and English can take two forms: Hindi vocabulary in an English grammatical base (Hindi-in-English), and English vocabulary in a Hindi grammatical base (English-in-Hindi). Of course, Hindi may be substituted

by Marathi or any other Indian language depending on the region being discussed. The former is the language used by college-going or college-educated urban individuals, predominantly, though by no means exclusively the youth. “Don’t be such a *kanjoos, yaar*” is an example of such usage.



Figure 2: Code-mixing in Mumbai’s public sphere. Left: A bus-stop hoarding at Andheri (West) station. Right: A board at Govandi Station.

Conversely, the examples shown in Figure 2 are of the latter kind: “*ab confidence se baat hogi, English mein*” and “*kya aap English Speaking seekhna chahte ho?*” Note that here code-mixing preserves the different scripts as well. This is an example of English-in-Hindi. Simplifying somewhat, English-in-Hindi is a stronger feature of language use among the *bahishkrit samaj*, while Hindi-in-English predominantly belongs to the *pashchimikrit samaj*. Perhaps not coincidentally, the most popular Hinglish advertising slogans are English-in-Hindi type, designed to appeal broadly to the *bahishkrit samaj*, including “*yeh dil mange more*” and “*yehi hai right choice, baby.*”

There is also a written (script) dimension to this divide. English-in-Hindi can also refer to

English words written in the devanagari script. This is a very common feature of the public space in smaller North Indian cities and towns (like Lucknow and Banaras) but can also be found in Mumbai. For example, see the three advertisements displayed in Figure 3. One is an ad for a course (displayed in a local train) and the other two are help-wanted ads. The ad in the centre panel says “Pick-up drop/delivery boy wanted for a shoe company. Training will be provided with salary.” The words for pick-up drop/delivery boy, company, salary, and training are English words written in the devanagari script. Similarly, the ad in the right panel includes the words air-conditioner, repairing, mechanic, and helper from English. The grammatical base consisting of postpositions (ke liye) conjunctions (aur) and verb (chahiye) are in Hindi. The ad for an Export-Import Management Program (left panel) contains the following English words simply transcribed into devanagari: export import management program, export import business opportunity, export procedure, documentation banking, finance, costing, international market shipping and logistic foreign trade policy, cargo insurance, central excise policy, import management.



Figure 3: English in devanagari alphabet. Local train advertisements in Mumbai.

Similarly, Hindi-in-English mixed usage refers not just to Hindi words in an English sentence, but also Hindi words (or even sentences) written in the roman alphabet. This is a common site in

the larger metro cities like Delhi and Mumbai. Figure 4 shows a public safety notice posted near Churchgate station in Mumbai. Here the entire sentence is in Hindi but written in the roman alphabet (it translates as: He keeps an eye over us all, but are you keeping an eye on security/safety?). Knowledge of the English alphabet is growing rapidly, even among those not formally educated in English. It is perhaps even growing more rapidly than knowledge of the language itself. In this case, the alphabet becomes another way to communicate Hindi to a wider audience.



Figure 4: Hindi in Roman alphabet (Churchgate Station)

An interesting example of use of roman alphabet in the public space is the word KGN which is often found written on trucks, tempos, and lorries in Mumbai. KGN stands for Khwaja Gharib Nawaz (the title of Moinuddin Chisti, the Sufi saint from Ajmer). Previously the saint's name used to be written in the Persian script but the roman script is possibly seen as being "safer,"

possibly because it blends seamlessly into the rest of the textual landscape in the city.

Language-like behavior

Going beyond the presence of English-in-Hindi in Mumbai's written landscape, the most obvious aural evidence of English penetration is what linguists refer to as "language-like behavior" (see Amritavalli 2012). Let us start with some recorded utterances from street vendors in Mumbai. Here is a man who sells maps near Kala Ghoda. He has no school education at all.

You want map?

You want more better one, I have more better one, plastic. Can I show you?

What's your name, bhaiyya?

--Amit

My name Ashish.

And your?

--Daniel

Nice to meet you Daniel.

Here is a girl on Juhu Beach, selling Henna blocks. She has no school education either.

Henna block, Sir.

For your wife.

For your sister. (when told interviewer didn't have a wife).

Like a tattoo.

On Linking Road, one of our respondents, Aleem (all names have been changed to protect identities) who is 8th std fail in Urdu medium and did not learn any English in school, solicited customers with the following: "Come in, have a look. Lots of designs." Such "bread-and-butter" English, where certain key phrases have been memorized, is not uncommon, particularly in those

areas of the city that regularly experience large foreign tourist traffic. As one taxi-driver put it as “yahaan kai logon ne angrezi yaad kar liya hai” (here, many people have memorized English).

One of our interviewees, Dinesh, is a guide at the Elephanta Caves off the coast of Mumbai, who hails from the local koli (fisherfolk) community on the Gharapuri island. He is 32 years old and has been in the guide trade for 10 years. He is educated in the Marathi medium and did not learn any English in school.

Here are some utterances from Dinesh:

D: see here this is the *lingum*.

A: yes, people still pray here...

D: *lingum* means penis. symbol of Shiva. One door two *dwarpals*, this is security guards. One door two guards, four doors eight guards. Every year a big festival here, *mahashivratri*. lot of people coming, Hindus, and worshipping.

D: see this necklace, skull necklace, skull. Shiva kill any demon, he takes skull and make necklace. Shiva kill only bad man, not good...Shiva is the supreme god.

This is how he explains his learning process:

Q. Did you learn guide-work from a master?

A. No, just listening to others. There are Government guides, I have some friends among them. I have some written notes as well, and some books from which I have learned some things by heart.

As we analyze in greater detail later, English speaking ability, like many other hard and soft skills in the informal economy, is informally acquired. This makes the acquisition process hard to describe for both the learner and the observer, because, in Dinesh’s words, “darroz cha saraav zalela aahey” (daily practice has helped him learn).

Aspirations and Resentment

Faizal, a 25-year old assistant in a clothes shop remarked that our research topic was relevant because more and more people were comfortable in English as compared to Hindi. His example was that when prices were quoted in Hindi (e.g DeD sau) customers did not understand and had to be told the price in English. He further expressed the opinion that being India's national language, customers should understand Hindi rather than him being expected to learn English. English speaking Indian customers annoy him because he thinks they do it to show status. "*hamein dikhane ki kya zaroorat hai?*" (why bother to display skills to us?) he says. However, he also said that most sales people picked up some English necessary to engage customers (the phrase "engage customers" was also used by other sales people also). He mentioned that many were uneducated or educated in vernacular mediums, only a few in English and also said that those who did know the language helped others out. The rest was picked up along the way, on the job. He agreed that English had grown in presence even among Indian customers.

Based on our interviews, the position of the *bahishkrit samaj* vis-à-vis English appears deeply conflicted. There is a strong aspirational drive to learn the language even as there is resentment against its dominance and hegemony. 28 year-old Ahmed, a salesman at a clock and curiosity shop on Colaba Causeway, presents a clear case of the aspirational component. Educated until class 4 in the Hindi medium, he ran away from home due to lack of interest in education. He now regrets lack of education, and thinks it would have opened up opportunities for him. After arriving in Mumbai he worked for about 5 years for a blind man in his mobile shop. This man taught him English, dealing with customers, tricks of the trade and how to survive in the city. Then he moved on and started work at the current shop where he gets monthly wages of 3000

rupees, and a sales commission of 10% per 100 pieces. He has worked in this place for 10 years. He feels the need for comprehension and speaking skills in English quite acutely, and feels stagnated.

People speak English around me all the time, it is very important for me to know the language in order to negotiate and also move up. Besides I need to handle phone calls from my foreign customers and ship parcels to them. I send stuff from India and need enough English to deal with them on phone. I know enough English to deal with customers on the street... Ticket conductors in AC coaches of trains, college students, customers all speak English. It's nice to know how to speak the language. In Colaba we see big players, stars, foreigners, *khiladi log*. We are connected with the world. One of my customers wants me to go to France, and is willing to get me a work permit if only I learn English. English is the lingua franca in the world... I have tried to learn conversational skills through two short term courses, but they teach basic skills. I want to learn how to speak well. There is a lady who asked me to learn computer skills but I did not go there, I feel its more important that I learn how to speak English.

In Mohd. Jameel's response below there is the common anxiety of not knowing the language, but notice in particular how the phrase "English talking" is employed. Jameel is a clothes-shop assistant in his early twenties who describes his skills thus: *thoDa bahut bol bhi lete hain, samajh lete hain, lekin forward nahi hain* (I can speak a little, understand a little, but I am not forward/confident).

Q. Angrezi naa aane ki wajah se appko kya pareshani hoto hai?

A. kabhi aisi jagah janaa paDta hai jahan pe english talking hai.

Q. jaise?

A. kahin bhi, jaise doston ke saath, ghoomne, jahan hi-fi log rahte hain. jaise restaurant mein gaye jahan sab English talking karte hain.

Q. What difficulties do you face not knowing English?

A. Sometimes if I have to go to a place where there is English talking.

Q. Such as?

A. Could they anywhere, for example going out with friend to place where there are hi-fi people, like restaurants where everyone does English talking.

The quote has been translated deliberately to preserve the phrase “English talking” which is used here very similarly to the way “English speaking” was used in the Figure 2. We heard these phrases often in sentences such as “yahaN to sab English talking karte hain.” English is of course seen not only as necessary for being among the “hi-fi” but also as necessary for formal sector jobs. Here is Aleem, who we met earlier, is 37 years old and has worked as a helper and cleaner at Metro Shoes before becoming a sales assistant at Linking Road. He speaks about his dissatisfaction with life on the street and the desire to work in a store.

A. yahan kuchh future nahi hai, aaj hai aur kal nahi. agar angrezi humlog to aati hoti to aaj humlog aisi jagah rahte job pe, yahan pe kuchh life nahi hai, aaj apun dikh rahe hai yahan pe, kal seth se kuchh char bateN agar ho gayi, to apne ko manaa kar dega to ghar pe baiThna padega.

Q: yani kuchh guarantee nahi hai

kuchh guaranti nahi, yeh sab road wala mamla hai. shop mein aadmi ki kuchh value hoti hai, lekin yahan pe kuchh value nahi.

A. There is no future here. We are here today, may be gone tomorrow. If I knew English I would not have been at such a place, where there is no life. You see me here today, tomorrow if there is a disagreement with the boss, I will be sitting at home.

Q. You mean there is no guarantee here?

A. There is no guarantee. This is how it is on the street. In a shop, a man has some value, but here he has no value.

In case of Aleem, resentment over the monopoly of English over “the good life” is mixed with an aspirational component expressed most clearly in the matter of his child’s education. While Aleem is of the opinion that English is not an Indian language, it comments that it has become unavoidable, largely due to government policy.

Q: kya aapko lagta hai ki angrezi Bhartiya bhasha hai?

A. Nahi, bhartiya bhasha nahi hai. lekin agar dekha jaaye to government ne itna yeh kar diya hai isko ki angrezi zaroori ho gayi hai. aaj kal har dharm ke logon ko dekho to bachhe ko English hi paDhaenge. koi bhi dharm ka ho koi bhi caste ka ho. koi yeh nahi bolega ki main apni matrubhasha paDhaaonga. Support karne ke liye aur English tuition bhi deta hai. theek hai aaj kal computerizing ka daur chal raha hai. aaj mere bachhon ko bhi main paDha raha hoon, English hi paDha rahaa hoon.

Q. Do you think English is an Indian language?

A. No, it is not in an Indian language. But the Government has acted such that English has become a necessity. These days, people from every faith are teaching their children English. Any faith, any caste, no one says I will teach [my child] in my mother tongue. To support the English education they even pay for extra tuition. Its fine, it is the computerizing age now. I am also educating my children in English.

Educating children in English was a near universal theme among all respondents. Here is a 32-year old local garage mechanic, educated till 7th class in the Urdu medium. He left school for lack of interest. He earns around Rs. 16,000 per month. He has a 4-year old daughter whom he plans to educate in the English medium.

main nahi paDha meri aulad paDhegi. main thoDa pachhtata hoon...kisi ke samne bolne ki jaroorat nahi paDe ki yeh SMS paDh ke batao.

I am not educated, but by child will be. I now regret it [not being educated]. One should not need to ask anyone, “please read this SMS for me.”

The reference to reading an SMS (text message) brings out the fact that English comprehension has become important beyond the immediate work context (such as interacting with customers or reading manuals). It has become a condition of life. This comes out clearly in the response of a taxi-driver, below:

English to ab kahan nahi zaroori hai, zindagi ka ek hissa ban gaya hai English. Jeena hai to English seekhna hai...koi bhi kaam hai to English mein hai. Hamara account hai, lekin agar account mein paisa Dalna hai to bhi English ki zaroorat hai...ek dawaa bhi lene jaayeN, ek tablet bhi, to bhi English mein likha hai. Agar hum English nahi jante to kab ki dawaa hai, kya expiry date hai, nahi paDh sakte. Hindi mein to nahi rahta na? to English hamare liye zaroori hai na? woh dawaa hai ki zahar hai kya maloom? Zindagi jeene se zyada keemti abhi English ho gayi hai.

Is there any place now where English is not needed? It has become a part of life. If you want to live, you have to learn English. Whatever work you may have, it involves English. I have a [bank] account, but to put money in it, I need English. If I go to buy just a medicine tablet, it has English written on it. If I don't know English I won't be able to tell the expiry date. So English is necessary isn't it? What do I know if its medicine or poison? English has become more precious than life itself!

The same taxi-driver quoted above also complained about not being able to get his daughter admitted into an English medium school of his choice. This was despite his willingness and ability to pay the fees. The reason was that parent's English speaking ability was a precondition for admission to the school. Such barriers perpetuate the class divide in the schooling system.

Referring to English, the Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar once said that we have mistaken language for knowledge. Awdhesh Yadav presents a clear picture of someone who feels this acutely and resents it. Awdhesh has been educated till class 12 in the Hindi medium, he comes

from Jaunpur district in eastern UP and has been selling books on the footpath in Mumbai for 15 years. He is an energetic and articulate man. Here he is commenting on types of readers who buy his books.

A. log kya paDhte hain, woh depend karta hai taste pe. Kuchh log modern fiction paDhte hain, kuchh log classics paDhte hain, woh modern much pasand hi nahi karte. Jaise Chetan Bhagat ko bahut se log gali dete hain.

Q. kyun?

A. kyunki unko nahi pasand hai, aur jo young generation hai woh yehi pasand karta hai. Unko agar Kafka paDhao, Sarte ya Camus paDhao to samajh ke baahar rahega. Kyunki woh us level tak jaa hi nahi paaenge.

Q. aapko kaise maloon ki Sarte aur Camus ka level high hai?

A. bahut high hai. Dekhiye, actually aap log khali English jaante ho. Agar woh language mujhe maloon hoti na, to main pataa nahi kya aapko express kar deta.

A. What people read depends on their taste. Some people prefer modern fiction, some read classics, they don't like anything modern. For example, many people abuse Chetan Bhagat.

Q. Why?

A. Because they don't like his work, while the young generation likes him only. If you give them Kafka, Sartre, or Camus, it will be beyond their understanding. They won't be able to reach that level.

Q. How do you know that Sartre or Camus' level is high?

A. Its very high. See, you people only know English [i.e. we may or may not know substantive knowledge]. If I knew that language, who knows how many things I could express.

A bit later in the conversation he says his schooling has not been proper. He adds, "dimaag to developed bahut hai, lekin usko express karne ki bhasha nahi aati, yehi baat hai." (My mind is very developed, but I don't have the language to express my thoughts). As an example he says

“kuchh bhi poochh lijiye Indian constitution ke baare mein main aapko bataaonga.” (Ask me anything about the Indian constitution, I can tell you).

Q: kya aap ko lagta hai ki log aap ko is nazar se dekhte hain ki yeh to sadak par kaam karte hain, yeh kya jaante honge?

A: haan, yeh sochte hain. apas mein English mein baat karte hain ki "they don't know anything about the book." uspe bahut gussa aata hai, lekin kuchh nahi bolta hoon.

...

A: lekin kabhi kabhi jhagDa bhi ho jata hai. [Gives an example of someone asking for a new edition of the Constitution.] naye edition se tumko kya milega? Constitution to wohi hai. bas amendment milega. samaj mein change aayega to badlav jaroori hai hi. samvidhaan mein aisi vyavastha kii gayi hai ki jaroorat paDne pe amendment hota hai.

Q: Do you think people look at you and think, he works on the street, what can he know?

A: yes, they do think that. They talk among themselves in English and say things like, "they don't know anything about the book." I feel a lot of anger, but I keep quiet.

...

A: Sometimes I do speak out. [Gives an example of someone asking for a new edition of the Constitution.] What will you get from a new edition? The Constitution is the same! Only a few amendments have been added. Since society changes, these changes are necessary. The Constitution provides for such changes.

He then goes on to talk about the importance of knowing the fundamentals of a topic. This is more important than newer case studies. So older editions are still fine for knowing the fundamentals. This can be understood as a sales pitch for older textbook editions which bookstores on the footpath usually carry.

Q: aapne bahut baar kahaa ki aap express nahi kar pate, kya aapko khatak ta hai?

A: bahut se log English mein bolte hain, express karte hain, mujhe bahut khatak ta hai.

mujhe bhi aataa to main bhi unse achha bolta. kahin achha salah deta. aisa nahi hai ki English aati hai to bahut achha express kar lete hain, kyunki unke andar vichar nahi rahenge to kahan se express karenge, language thoDi express karti hai. knowledge aur vichar bahut jaroori hai. mere paas vichar hain lekin express karne ki bhasha nahi.

Q. You have said many times that you cannot express yourself. Does this bother you?

A. Many people speak in English, they express themselves, I do feel bad. I feel, if I knew the language, I could speak better than them, give better advice. It is not that simply knowing English is enough to express yourself well, because if there are no thoughts inside your head, what will you express? Language doesn't express on its own, knowledge and thoughts are essential. I have thoughts, but no language to express them.

Awdhesh has also learned a lot of medical terminology (colon, small intestine, rectum, oesophagus, auto-immune system, bowel irritation, degenerative) to understand his chronic stomach illness. He says doctors get upset when he tries to discuss this with them. They are proud of their knowledge and they think, why is this guy trying to explain my job to me?

How English is learned: role of interactions and technology

Munnu bhai is 40 years old and an experienced hand on Linking Road. He was introduced to me as someone who speaks many languages. In front of me he spoke Hindi, English, and Gujarati. He is from Jharkhand and was educated in a Bengali medium school. The moment he heard about our project he said that language can be learned in two ways: paDh ke aur bol ke, by speaking or by formally learning. He and many others here have learned by speaking. Aslam bhai, an owner of 4 shops on Linking Road, added that workers learn English via proximity to each other. *Linking road school ban jataa hai* (becomes a school). Faizal describes the process thus:

rehte rehte habit ho gaya hai. baat karte barte. school se dasvi paDha hoon, lekin school mein itna nahi...idhar kya hai, baat karte karte ho jata hai. utna theory hum log ko aataa nahi hai. lekin hisaab ke liye bol leta hai.

Being here, we have formed a habit, speaking it. I have passed 10th class, but I didn't learn much in school. And here, you learn as you speak. We don't know that much theory, but we can speak as much as we need.

Aleem uses similar words to describe how he learned the English he knows:

dost logon se, dukandaron se, apas mein baat-cheet se. jaise aap ho gaye, aap paDhe-likhe hain, kuchh words aapne bataa diye Aleem aisa nahi aisa bolna hai. aur aaj kal to mobile aane se bahut zyada words...

From friends, other shopkeepers, talking amongst each other, for example, with you. You are educated. You may tell me a few words, Aleem, don't say this like this, say it like that. And these days, the mobile has brought a lot of words...

It is indeed quite difficult to describe the process of informal skill or knowledge acquisition any better. Official surveys, even when they attempt to identify the knowledge-basis of the informal economy, usually fail to give an informative picture. For example, the Third Census of Small Scale Industry in India (Government of India, 2004) asked firms about the sources of their technical knowledge. Table 2.1 shows that almost 90% of unregistered (i.e. informal) firms fell in the residual category of "no source." Since it is unlikely that a firm operates without any technical knowledge, one may reasonably guess that firms that report no source are relying on the "in-house" knowledge of their artisans and workers, their informal networks, and their ability to imitate or adapt formal sector knowledge to their needs. However this is not a recognized source of know-how, or rather it is so ubiquitous and obvious as to be unworthy of comment.

In a similar vein, when the 1993-94 NSS survey asked if respondents possessed one of 30 specific skills with the option of saying “other” or “no skill,” it found that only 10% of the population reported having any specific formal or informal skills. This despite the fact that “skill” was defined very broadly as

...any marketable expertise however acquired, irrespective of whether marketed or not, whether the intention is to market it or not. (Government of India, 1997: 9)

On the basis of the 1993 NSS skill data discussed above, the Sengupta Commission concluded that “nearly 90 per cent of the population above 15 years did not have any skills” (Sengupta et al., 2009: 191). In contrast to this, Basole (2012) suggests that the process of knowledge acquisition in the informal sector is such an integral part of working and earning a livelihood that respondents simply do not distinguish “working” from “training.” Questions specifically targeted towards training elicit negative responses because people have a particular image in their minds of what constitutes being trained. This may include “going to school,” receiving a certificate, or in general something to do with that untranslatable Hindi phrase *likha-paDhi* which implies written knowledge, books, etc.

The view that all knowledge is produced in work or via action is gaining currency in a wide variety of fields from science studies to the psychology of learning to the comparatively new field of knowledge management. Terms such as “situated learning” and “working knowledge” attempt to communicate this idea. The three claims of the working knowledge perspective outlined by Barnett (2000: 17), that work is a site of knowledge generation, knowledge is only authentic if it can be put to work and work is a means of testing knowledge.

Several informants underlined the role of technology in demanding greater familiarity with

English and thereby also increasing English vocabulary. Aleem mentioned that prior to mobile phones words such as “delete” or “format” were alien to him. In general the mobile phone has increased familiarity with English. As Hanif, another 38 year old shop assistant said: jabse mobile ke andar net chalu ho gaya hai, unpaDh admi bhi net khel rahaa hai (Now that the Internet has come to the mobile phone, even uneducated people are on the net). Faizal put the emphasis on reading bank files and bills, showing us his Axis bank bills on his mobile phone and pointing out that they have no language option.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the motivations behind this study, the large presence of English on signs, hoarding etc. in the city, also returns in an interesting way in Aleem’s interview:

Q: jab sheher mein aap ghoomte hain, to English sign-board paDh sakte hain?

A. woh sab paDh leta hoon. wohi wajah se main English words seekha hoon. wohi wajah se. yeh sab, Bandra Book Centrr hai, Navjivan Book Centre, spelling kar kar ke, main ne bahar seekha. school main nahi seekha.

Q. When you roam in the city can you read the signs in English?

A. Yes, I can read those. In fact, I have learned English words from them. All these, Bandra Book Centre, Navjivan Book Centre, by spelling them to myself, I have learned outside, not at school.

A link language

The role of English as a link language, as of course been understood for long:

English in India is used for communication not only with English speaking people outside India, as a foreign language would be, but also for communication among speakers of different Indian languages, as a second language would be. It shares the latter role with Hindi, but both languages are complementary in that English links the upwardly

mobile educated class and Hindi links the working class with itself and with the educated class. (Singh 2012: 17).

But if we pay attention to the kind of Hindi that is used in commercial transactions (or even everyday speech for other purposes) in Mumbai an interesting function of English emerges. We see that the neat division by class, referred to in the quote above, is not present. In fact, English does perform the role of a link language across the class spectrum, except that, within the *bahishkrit* samaj and in *pashchimikrit-bahiskhrit* interactions this is in the form of English vocabulary embedded in Hindi (or Marathi) sentences. Consider for example the following communications from Linking Road:

yeh top backless hai.

isi design mein koi aur color nahi hai?

Here crucial information is conveyed by English while the grammatical base is Hindi. Many similar instances can be found where the technical vocabulary such as size, color, design, fabric, computer, mobile, SIM, etc. is English. Snell (2011) argues that increase of English loan words in Hindi has to do with *shuddh* Hindi being identified with Sanskrit neologisms which sound stilted. But another factor seems crucial in a multilingual context such as Mumbai. The use of English for key words such as “fixed rate,” “quality,” and hundreds of others facilitates communication between individuals who may not speak each other’s language.

Here English-in-Hindi is the link language between people speaking different Indian languages, neither English nor Hindi by themselves would be able to do the job. Hindi on its own would have technical vocabulary that is not comprehensible to a large fraction of speakers who understand Hindi grammar, and English grammar would be difficult for a large fraction who understands key English technical vocabulary. We alluded to this phenomenon in an earlier section when

discussing job ads posted around the city. This common language is created out of necessity, as Rajagopalan (2001) notes:

...contrary to conventional wisdom, the availability of a common language is not a precondition for communication...it is the very sensation that one is somehow able to communicate with people around one, that prompts one to hypothesize a common language for the group (p. 18-29).

It is thus the *willingness or urge to communicate* that creates the common language. Commerce has, of course, long bred pidgin languages which are born out of the necessity of communication but whose vocabulary is similarly restricted by their context. Amitav Ghosh in his “opium trilogy” (Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke) has admirably recreated such tongues as were spoken in the India -China sea trade in the 19th century. Hindi spoken in the informal economy context in Mumbai may be less eclectic than Ghosh’s find, but can nonetheless be understood in the same framework. Here Americans, Europeans, Africans, people from the Middle East, not to mention South Indians, North Indians, and Marathi-speakers must communicate with each other for market transactions. Basic English, examples of which are given here suffices for Indian-Foreigner interactions (basic English may be substituted by basic French, Arabic or even Hebrew). For interactions between people from different parts of India, we argue that English-in-Hindi performs the role of the link language. Linguistically the matrix language may be considered “dominant” (see references in Bhatia 2011: 43), but economically the embed language in English-in-Hindi (which is English) performs the crucial communicative function as well as is the bearer of key meanings.

Conclusion: From angrezi hatao to angrezi paDhao?

A central claim of this study is that English in India needs to be seen in a *popular* (as opposed to elite) multilingual context. Notwithstanding its undemocratic access and its hegemonic history (as well as present) it seems nevertheless true that English is being “owned” as a language across the class spectrum in India. In part due to its being seen as a marker of education and higher

socio-economic status and in part due to its all-India spread which renders it a link language across the class spectrum. The highly Anglicized Hindi that one sees in the Mumbai public space is of course not typical of other Hindi-speaking areas of the country, but the rapid nature of technical change, particularly in the last ten years has introduced a wide-range of English vocabulary in Hindi, in addition to the substantial presence that English already had in that language. But once again, rather than seeing this as an onslaught on Hindi or the threat to “pure Hindi” the phenomenon needs to be understood as another chapter in Hindi’s multilingual history. As evidence of this we saw some recent attempts at creatively mixing the two languages. We also make, perhaps controversially, a connection with similar experiments with rekhta poetry of the 18th-19th centuries.

The failure of regional language-medium schools to deliver an adequate training in English has resulted in the growing popularity of English medium schools all over the country. Whether in the larger cities, smaller town, or even villages, parents who have been educated in their mother tongue (or not educated at all) are choosing to send their children to English medium schools if they can afford it. In the present study also, all respondents who had children were sending them to English medium schools. Instead of excellent English language instruction combined with teaching other subjects in the mother tongue (a potential “best-of-both-worlds” scenario) we have instead adopted a worst-of-both-worlds approach of a two-tier system in which one tier, catering to a tiny minority, produces individuals whose de facto first language is English (the English-medium educated) and who are literarily speaking, illiterate in other Indian languages, and the other tier, for the majority, produces individuals who are shut out of the higher education sector and formal sector jobs, and are forced to earn informal sector incomes under precarious

working conditions. A very large portion of India's celebrated "service economy" consists precisely of such insecure informal jobs. As we have shown here, participants of this informal service economy have a complex relationship to English.

The larger question that presents itself is the following. Six decades after Independence, what is a pro-people position on English? If *angrezi hataao* no longer has resonance politically, is *angrezi paDhaao* its substitute? There is no easy answer to this question. The present study only presents some empirical facts that can inform theoretical approaches to this question. However, it is certain that the present system works against the vast majority of Indian people. Can the language emerging organically in Mumbai (even if under economic pressures) be taken as a model for how to incorporate English in Indian languages on terms that the majority can control?

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¹ Swati Birla is at the Department of Sociology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA,
USA

² Amit Basole is at the Department of Economics, University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA,
USA



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