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**THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER'S
AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS**

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for seeking an opinion of our teachers on Indian English came from *English Today* which in its July 2005 issue had published a report on China English. There is much similarity in the teaching and learning of English in India and in China, which I had observed during our interactions with Chinese teachers who were our course mates in MEd (TESOL) in the University of Leeds. The journal referred to has also published the questionnaires which I used to collect my data. I have adapted the questionnaire to our needs on Indian English. From being simply Indian English, it is Standard/Educated Indian English and when they talk about the variety of English most commonly used in South East Asia, Indian English is meant, so great a respectability has it achieved.

REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION (RIE), BHUBANESWAR

It is with this background that I decided to elicit teachers' opinion on this subject. In the RIE, Bhubaneswar we have two kinds of courses: pre service and in-service. Pre service courses are those in which prospective teachers in all school subjects are groomed. These students have no idea of classroom teaching; they are fresh from Colleges. In our English classes we have 15 students in each of the 2 parts of the B.Ed., which is of a 2-year duration in our institute. The other courses are for in-service teachers. I need not elaborate that short courses meant for them are for a group that has a vast experience in classroom teaching, with periods varying from 8 - 20 years. Since we cater to all states of the eastern region, and arrange in-service programs in many school subjects, I took the opportunity to get the views of both teachers of English and teachers of other subjects such as say, history, physics, physical education etc.

THE SAMPLE OF TEACHERS

Over a period of time I was able to gather information from 79 teachers. Of these 41 were teachers of subjects other than English, 38 were appointed as English teachers in their schools run by the state governments. Further, the responses cover a range of geographical areas: Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, Bengal. Moreover, they are from different kinds of schools: urban, rural, tribal, private. The teachers' qualifications have not been reported since it had little to do with our objective. Suffice it to say that the survey cum interview, which I conducted personally, sometimes individually, sometimes in groups, has been a rich and rewarding experience. The analysis and discussion of the results will

perhaps show us the status of English in our country and what is our teachers' opinion about it.

English, as Tom McArthur says is a paradox. While it may have been a single language, today it has become so large and varied that it has taken on the features of a family of languages, *a la* Braj Kachru, who first used the term World Englishes.

THE QUESTIONNAIRES

The Questionnaires adapted from *English Today*, July 2005 have been given in the body of the paper so as to make reading simpler and easier so that one does not have to go back and forth too often. Further, the numbers refer to the corresponding ones in the responses, which may help in co relating the issues. This perhaps may help the reader, avoiding jerks and breaks.

Questionnaire A

Response to English

English Teachers

Non-English teachers

1. Does English have a plural form?
2. Have you heard of World Englishes?
3. Have you heard of Indian English?
4. What kind of English do you prefer?
(You can have more than one choice)

British English
American English
Australian English
Indian English
New Zealand English

5. What kind of English do you think is Standard English?

British English
American English
Indian English
There are many Standard Englishes

6. Which variety of English do you want your English to sound like ?

American English

British English
Indian English

7. Which type of culture would you prefer to use in your English class? Why? Use another sheet, if necessary

- a. Contents dealing with aspects of American life and culture
- b. Contents dealing with aspects of British life and culture
- c. Contents dealing with places and people of India
- a. Contents dealing with life and culture of countries around the world

8. Will Indian English stand alongside British, American and the other world Englishes?

Yes
No
Neutral

Executive Summary

Response to English (Q- A)	English Teachers 38
1. 42.1% yes, English has a plural form	52.6% did not feel so
2. 42.1% had heard of world Englishes	78.9% had not
3. 73.7% knew Indian English	21.1% had no idea of its existence
4. 63.2% preferred British English 7.8% American English 2.6% Australian English 57.9% wanted Indian English 2.6% wanted New Zealand English	
5. 50.0% favoured British English 5.3% American English 28.9% wanted Indian English 5.2% felt that there were many standard Englishes in the world	
6. 31.5% preferred British English 2.6% favoured American English 52.7% wanted their English to sound like Indian English	
7. 2.6% wanted American life and culture 5.2% British culture 47.3% wanted the indigenous Indian culture 57.9% wanted cultures and places throughout the world to be considered	

8. 76.3 % answered in the affirmative that Indian English can hold its own ground
36.8 % in the negative
2.6 % preferred the right of silence.

Response to English (Q - A)	Non English Teachers 41
1. 21.9% yes, English has a plural form	82.9 % could not even think so about languages
2. 39.0 % had heard of world Englishes	70.7 % had not
3. 9.7 % knew Indian English	46.3 % had no idea of its existence
4. 34.1% preferred British English 21.6. % American English 4.9 % Australian English 63.4 % wanted Indian English 2.4 % wanted New Zealand English	
5. 82.9 % favoured British English 12.2 % American English 41.5 % wanted Indian English 12.2 % felt that there were many standard Englishes in the world	
6. 58.5 % preferred British English 31.7 % favoured American English 95.1 % wanted their English to sound like Indian English	
7. None ,0,0% in this group were in favour of American life and culture 9.7 % British culture 71.7 % wanted the indigenous Indian culture 51.2% wanted cultures and places throughout the world.	
8. 90.2 % answered that Indian English had a place among world Englishes 12.2 % in the negative 17.1% preferred the right of silence.	

Questionnaire B

OPINION ABOUT ENGLISH

The questionnaire is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of your view on 'World Englishes'. There are no right or wrong answers. Your personal opinion is valuable, only that is required. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate number.

(1. I strongly agree 2 3 4 5. I strongly disagree)

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. English belongs to the UK, USA | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. It is native speaker's right to decide how the English should be used | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Standard English means British or American English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Imitating how native speakers use English is the most important in learning English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I should get rid of my Indian accent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I feel nervous to speak to a native speaker | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. If English is used differently from British or American English, it must be wrong | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. It is better to have many different kinds of English in the world | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Opinion about English - Questionnaire B All teachers 79

	1	2	3	4	5
1.	43%	15.5%	12%	6,8%	20.7%
2.	29%	12%	12%	12%	44.8%
3.	50%	12%	13.9%	5.1%	15.5%
4.	31%	10%	10%	22.4%	22.4%
5.	24%	12%	18.9%	13.7%	34.4%
6.	13%	6.8%	13.7%	18.9%	46.6%
7.	10%	3.4%	8.6%	12%	56.9%

8. 15.5% 10% 12% 8.6% 46.6%

Going by the statistics in each case this would mean, that all teachers in our sample feel that

1. English belongs to the UK, USA.
2. Non-native speakers should decide the use of English.
3. Only British or American English is the standard form of the language.
4. Native speakers are not to be taken as ideals for learning English.
5. Indian accent is fine, intelligible, and smart.
6. Talking to a native speaker in English requires some effort.
7. Our (Indian) English is correct even though it may not be used in the same manner by the British or the Americans.
8. More Englishes, better the world.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1. Many of the teachers said that they knew that English did have a plural form. This is in contrast to many non-English teachers who had no idea about it and still clung to British English. This may be because the English teachers are currently reading the books on English, even by Indian authors, where the word Englishes is finding currency. It is also becoming prevalent in many circles where reference to Indian English has assumed greater relevance.

2. Few non-English teachers had heard the term Indian English whereas many of the English teachers were aware of it. To many, Indian English had become one, and perhaps the only variety of English that mattered. This, in spite of the fact that English is being constantly used in all fields due to liberalization and globalization, the world becoming a global village, terms with which common men and women are familiar. However, in spite of the fact that we are aware of Englishes and have become familiar with the written mode, the spoken form is Indian English what with Indians employed in so many call centres, and being employed world wide in the IT sector. Yet, Indian English does not miss its privilege. Looked at in another way, because of the acumen of the Indian work force, Indian English seems to have nativised itself abroad. When an Indian meets another Indian abroad, the language used is other than English though their mother tongue may not be the same, but snatches of Hindi, English phrases, Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindustani, help the conversation going.

Rarely, and in traces do we find the use of RP, American, and Estuary English. Indian English is the variety most commonly used in India. It needs no mention that within Indian English, there are regional variations - north, south, east and west. The pronunciation and accent identifies the person from Orissa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, UP, or Kashmir. By using English spoken in their own region we try to empathize with and emphasize our own culture and moorings. Other varieties of English mentioned above

may be understood with difficulty. It is interesting to note that Indians when talking with foreigners always try to wear an 'English' accent, perhaps to keep up with the Joneses.

Teachers, both English and non-English said they preferred to have more than one English. American English is more widely understood because of Hollywood films but British English is desirable as a spoken variety since we have been taught that way. Our teachers then and now prefer to swear by it though they may without knowing it be using Indian English. This variant of English is used culturally to stress the status and characteristics of Indian English.

3. Whereas we have a choice of Englishes to choose from, we tend to go by British English since that is the variety of language that we have been taught. Of late the trend is towards American English because of films, magazines and CNN. Further, America is also coming out with its own outsourcing of ELT as was done by the British Council earlier. While Indian English, known as Standard Indian English or General Indian English in academic parlance has its own niche, often we do find terms such as Hinglish or Indish being used for English in India which is often a mixture of English and the local regional language in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, syntax etc, all of which may be present in the same utterance or only some of which may find a place. However instances of this are now rare, much the same as *Babu English* or *chi chi English* being used pejoratively in earlier times, say in the 1920s. It is a matter of some pride and consolation to note that we do not have Englishes in India named after the state or else we'd be lost in a linguistic maze of bengalish, oriyaish, keralish, kannadish and the like. Though not expressed, yet the English language used in the states by its people do have prominent cultural overtones of the region, stressing their own variety of English.

4. Throughout our country, Indian English holds sway. However, only among a few yuppies, and the jet set group Indian English acquires a different foreign twang and it is difficult to place it in any of the categories since it has overtones of American, British and these days of Australian English since down under is the place which is attracting the young. 'Go west young man' was yesterday, today it is, 'go down under'. While the majority of the Indian populace is happy with the regional code-mixed code-switched variety of their own, this group of globe trotters lace their English with all varieties that they know. They are a crowd that stands apart, distinguishable with utterances such as let's ha' a cup of *chai*, or there's no gas in my *gaddi*, or pizza and *dal* is an *accha* combo.

Or in the campus two sams and four g jams are passé, acceptable and understood, or the new chick is *khubsoorat yaar, maaroo*, beautiful *ladki*.

A missing person goes *electric* in M.P.

We prefer to be more staid in our approaches; hence, British English is favoured over the American variety. It may be noteworthy to point out that senior teachers of English today had American Literature as a special paper for their post-graduate degrees, but they would still like to teach American Literature with a British accent.

5. In the above context therefore most of the teachers replied that they regarded British English as Standard English, though they all spoke Indian English, which has a prestigious place in their scheme of languages, in their teaching as well. Not many, not even the young responded enthusiastically to the idea of Englishes. Firm in their opinion that language can only be one, they felt others were dialects, not Englishes. No empirical research however has been done to indicate whether World Englishes have enough in common to be mutually intelligible. Therefore education regarding World Englishes is needed to raise people's awareness of the existence of the vast range of local varieties of English worldwide.

6. Undoubtedly, most of us speak Indian English though we would love to speak English with a British accent. Some students of English medium schools do attempt British English but the pressures of the society, and the speakers of mixed languages in India being so many they fall back on the variety most easily understood: Indian. Women in this matter, specially the *grand dames*, do still hold forth. In fact, it can safely be said that women of the said age group are more westernized than men folk of the same fold. Interestingly, with outsourcing having made its day in Bangalore, while we at the call centres wish time in the best British, American, Australian and Japanese manner possible, reports have come in that from the other side of the Atlantic callers have started opening their conversations with *Namaste!* and *Namaskar!*

Native speakers have tended to be regarded as owners of the language, guardians of its standards, and arbiters of acceptable pedagogic norms. Generally, the non-native speaker teacher's impressions are gathered from previous teachers, their own level of English and their motivation in learning the language.

“Nativity” is not necessarily seen as a norm for English and is not used to speak only with a native speaker. Non-native speakers have been struggling in one direction - towards the native speaker norm. Phillipson (1992) argues that the idea of a single global norm should be abandoned, replaced by modes in various specific English varieties that maintain international intelligibility. English proficiency should be evaluated by "what you know" rather than "who you are."

7. Undoubtedly Indians want Indian culture, so very seemingly proud are we of it. In many matters, we are western; scratch a bit beneath the skin and out comes the diatribe on Indian culture. We would like to be bilingual as well as bicultural in the matter of English. Some respondents did favour an exposure to the world around us to familiarize our students. The majority goes with Indian life and culture. The vastness and uniqueness of Indian culture being what it is, while Bryam and other modern thinkers suggest area culture, we still hold aloft the flag of pan-Indian culture. There are a number of features in Indian English which are not at all related to any other speaker of the language, leave aside whether he / she is British or American.

To quote a few, in this part of the country people use 'deny' when they mean 'refuse', and the other way round.

He *denied* me leave.
She *refused* me food.

He *refused* me leave.
She *denied* me food.

Chariot, or car festival, a world famous religious event in honour of Lord Jagannath, takes on emotional overtones when spoken of as '*ratha yatra*', rather than its poor English equivalent.

Jatra, as a public play, has of late staged a comeback, but is very different from the morality plays of yore. Here *jatra* combines in it the ancient and the modern, and people do have a laugh at this queer juxtaposition. linguistic and social.

I kept waiting in my room for complete sixty minutes for the person had said, "I'm coming, sir". What was implied was that he/she was going / leaving. In this part of the country going is referred to only as going to meet the Creator. In spite of its imperfections, we still would like to see our own friends than meet the Creator! Rather early in the day!

Of special note is the word *Ma* (mother) by which even a day-old female infant is referred to, showing their respect towards the fair sex.

In Manipur, it is good manners to lower your eyes as you pass a woman who has a touch of the sun.

But do take in your linguistic stride if an acquaintance rings your door bell in the evening, meeting you first time in the day by wishing you 'Good night'. His/her intentions are fine, at night linguistics and emotions do get somewhat mixed up!

Indians generally talk in English and Oriya and/ or the regional language they are living in and use code switching when they find it difficult to make their points in English.

In a way, meetings in the English departments of universities are held in Hindi/regional language/Oriya, or with a grand sprinkling of words from those languages, minutes being in chaste English.

On the other hand, meetings in Hindi or in Oriya or in the regional languages are conducted in English, minutes being taken in Hindi, Oriya or the regional language.

There was also a teacher of Hindi who used to write his notices, points, articles first in English and then translate them into Hindi, to be transacted in that language. Strange and ironic to say the least.

Such examples are numerous and can be added on, but I hope my point is illustrated.

Consequently, while we have different regional varieties of (Indian) English, for the country as a whole we are proud to have Indian English, which as mentioned earlier, is respected not only in our own country but also in SE Asia. Linguistically, according to Kachru, while we belong to the outermost circle of English, our very numbers, I can hazard a guess will continue to see that Indian English stays atop in this part of the world. Politically, while there have been forecasts of India soon becoming a superpower, this itself would make an impact on the world linguistic scene, but being no political analyst, I desist from making any comment. Arabic, and Hindi-Urdu have already replaced Spanish as the no. 2 language in the world.

8. While we do welcome native speakers of the language to teach English, we are more taken up with their expressive gestures and the colour of the skin rather than anything else. We in India have gained sufficient knowledge of literature and language in English and are competent to have our own methods and approaches as to how English is to be taught in our own land. It is only the village teacher of English who knows where the problem is, not the University Professor whose orientation in language has been in say, Leeds or Lancaster. Further, it is a moot point that most of us started with English literature (many still swear by it!), and after nearly a decade of British Literature have taken the plunge into English language because its study came with a scholarship. Harish Trivedi has suggested a *Panchdhatu* approach to the teaching of English in India which to my mind is the most suited considering our own books, culture, teachers of all varieties, our backgrounds and habits, both teaching and otherwise. Consider also the current debate over what is meant by the native speaker. Students find themselves more comfortable with a non-native (Indian) speaker of English than the authentic native speaker. My students told me so recently when we had a visiting professor with us for a short duration. Great, they said, but you (meaning all of us Indian teachers) are the best. *Hoi polloi* are better, they meant. Damp squib, the head of an institution told me when I took the foreigner for an interactive week with her teachers. Phillipson sees the educated locals as ideal teachers of English. Second language learners feel more comfortable with local English vernaculars than with Standard British English. Perhaps, things would be different if an NRI teacher of English were to come on a visitorship instead of the whites.

IMPLICATIONS

Our teachers therefore prefer to stay with the English they know and have learnt rather than attempting other varieties. New concepts of language, particularly varieties of English may lead to confusion from which it may be difficult to retrieve our students. All teachers need to be aware of these developments and be able to adapt themselves to the demands of the classroom situations. Teachers, world over have trained themselves to be patient. They need to continue this balance.

Such a short action research can be helpful in teacher development leading to teacher empowerment that can be very productive. They may in turn grow in their understanding of the strengths as well as the limitations of their own English language teaching and make necessary changes in their techniques.

Often teachers are unaware of the influence of culture language, identity, knowledge, in students' writing. The analysis and discussion may help develop interest in gaining knowledge of individual student's writing and understanding valued practices. This should help in avoiding stereotyped work for examinations such as essays and long answer type questions.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have analyzed and discussed the opinion of teachers towards Indian English. English has spread round the world to such an extent that it requires a deeper look both to its learning and to teaching. This may help in the teaching of English in a better manner where it is taught as a second language. Therefore, the approach to English perhaps will have to be pluricentric. Such an attempt should recognize that while speakers of English and all its users need sufficient in common to enable them to communicate with each other, they are also entitled to use varieties of English which project their identities and protect their language rights. This needs no legislation, since it is already being done. However, it needs emphasis and understanding to focus on English in the present world perspective.

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