

‘Nepenglish’ or ‘Nepali English’: A New Version of English?

Sheetal Sharma¹, Pragyan Joshi² & Edwin van Teijlingen³

^{1,3} Bournemouth University, Bournemouth, UK, ² UNDP, Kathmandu, NEPAL,
³ Manmohan Memorial Institute of Health Sciences, Affiliated with Tribhuvan University,
NEPAL.

¹ evteijlingen@bournemouth.ac.uk, ² pragyan.joshi@undcf.org

ABSTRACT

English is a living language and different native and non-native speakers develop English in slightly different ways. This paper argues that it is time to consider whether we should study the English spoken by native-Nepali speakers (Nepenglish) as a separately developing variant of English. The question is particularly intriguing since Nepali English bears such a similarity with Indian English, as both are largely based on originally Sanskrit-based languages.

The examples of Nepali English used in this paper are from notes taken by the three authors during speeches in English by native-Nepali speakers as well as from published articles. Further evidence was found in draft papers and PhD chapters submitted by Nepali students to the third author.

Keywords: Hinglish, language, globalisation, Nepal, culture

INTRODUCTION

As a global language and the dominating language of commerce and science (Ammon 2001), English-words and phrases have crept into many languages. Some phrases and ways of saying things in English are country or host language specific, in German-speaking countries this version of English has become known as ‘Denglish’ (McCrum *et al.* 2011; Bloch 2013). For example, in Denglish a *handy* is ‘mobile phone’ (McCrum *et al.* 2011: xxii), despite ‘handy’ being a perfectly normal word in English, it not a word used in the UK to describe such a mobile communication object. Similarly we find ‘Frenghish’ in France and ‘Finglish’ in Finland (Bloch 2013), Singlish in Singapore and Taglish in the Philippines (Crystal 2003). Hinglish (the name is a combination of the words "Hindi" and "English") is a macaronic language, a hybrid of English and South Asian languages; the world's Hinglish speakers may outnumber native English speakers (Baldauf, 2004; BBC 2006).

At the same time the mixture of English and Spanish spoken by Hispanic or Latino communities in the United States of America is often referred to as ‘Spanglish’ (Ardila 2005). As Enokizono (2000: 36) reminds us that:

“...various people in various countries and regions use English, its forms vary from people to people as well as from place to place. To be specific, Englishes (sic) in many places get influenced by the local languages and, consequently, develop their own local and original features.”

Pandit (2013) shows a diagramme in his paper ‘English or Englishes’ which includes Nepalese English as a separate entity from Indian English. We wonder whether Nepalese English is really the start of a new language developing, a language we may called Nepali English ‘Nepenglish’, or perhaps less clearly ‘Neplish’ or ‘Nenglish’. We think this particularly as language changes over time and new variants such as Indian English, Australian English, American English and British English have grown apart (Finegan &

Rickford 2004, Crystal 2003). This diversification is not unique to English as we find a growing part of the Spanish (Castellano) spoken in Spain and in South America (Lipski 2002) and Dutch in the Netherlands and in South Africa (Deumart 2004). We often forget that between 90% to 95% of the Afrikaans vocabulary is ultimately of Dutch origin (Mesthrie 1995; Brachin 1985).

Before we outline our argument in support of an identifiable variant of the English language (not necessarily called Nepenglish) we briefly highlight this as closely-related English variant namely Indian English. Not only are India and Nepal neighbouring countries with open borders they are also both highly influenced by Sanskrit as the foundation of their respective languages.

INDIAN ENGLISH

There is a literature on Indian English, and how people on the Indian subcontinent speak English (British Library 2013; Enokizono 2000). It has been observed that due to the influence of traditional Hindi grammar, Indian English speakers often use progressive tenses, such as *'I am believing you'*; *'I am not knowing the answer'* or *'she is liking books'* instead of the present continuous *'I believe you'* and *'she likes books'*.

Indians speaking English often omit the indefinite article, **a** or **an**, or the definite article, **the** (British Library 2013; Enokizono 2000). The number *one* is commonly used where in English the indefinite article is needed. In Indian English, plural nouns sometimes come after 'every' and 'each', one example would be: "I have lost my furnitures" (Enokizono 2000).

In Indian English the word 'about' appears as the speaker is likely to use the equivalents of Indian languages such as Hindi and Urdu, for example in the expression "They mentioned about their plans" (Enokizono 2000). Ravi (2005) mentions two words, which gained popularity in post-colonial India: 'prepone' the antonym of postpone (or to bring something forward in time) and 'scientific temper' (the spirit of enquiry and curiosity) an Indian contribution to science vocabulary coined by Jawaharlal Nehru.

Baldauf wrote in 2004, that "It's a bridge between two cultures that has become an island of its own, a distinct hybrid culture for people who aspire to make it rich abroad without sacrificing the sassiness of the mother tongue." As the business/media houses began to 'Indianize' the English used (Baldauf, 2004). A dictionary for Hinglish has also been published (Mahal 2006).

Examples of such Hinglish include words like: stadium (a bald man with a fringe of hair), co-brother (brother-in-law), glassy (wanting a drink), and a favorite timepass (a distraction to pass the time) and to be filmi (a drama queen or king). Law has also incorporated *Hinglish* with the expression 'eve teasing', an expression which refers to street sexual harassment of women by men (Barnett 2006: 109). In Britain, Hinglish words such as 'chuddies' meaning underpants and 'pukka' feature now in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2004). Furthermore, it has been predicted that this trend of Hinglish words being used by other English speakers is likely to increase (Outlook, 2004). F

NEPALI ENGLISH

Two of the authors are frequent visitors to Nepal and the third is a resident of Kathmandu. Since we have an interest in languages, we have noticed a number of expressions frequently and oft ubiquitously used in English by native Nepali speakers.

In Nepal, we often find the incorrect use of the definite article ‘the’ and indefinite article ‘a’ and ‘an’. One often comes across unnecessary additions, of especially ‘the’ and its omission. Thus we read or hear the extra ‘the’:

“We going to the Kathmandu”

“We need at every the level”

“However, we’re still expecting for the last minute help”

“Last week we went to the London”

“Talking the so many things”

The missing “the” and missing “a”, for example we see expressions such as “In course 240 yearlong monarchy” as opposed to ‘in the course of the 240-year long monarchy’ (Sapkota 2010: 153). Also in Basnet and Bhadhari (2013: 297) in the sentence “Along with clinical training, encouraging practice of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) plays a crucial role in training tomorrow’s doctors”, we find a ‘the’ missing “Along with clinical training, encouraging the practice of Evidence Based Medicine (EBM) plays a crucial role in training tomorrow’s doctors”. In the same paper we read: “... has made medical knowledge more accessible to public at large” (Basnet and Bhandari 2013: 297) where a native-English speaker would use “to the public at large”.

The odd plurals or extra ‘s’; Nepali-speakers regularly use plural forms where native-English speakers would find the singular sufficient, for example Subba and Subba (2014: 14) refer to women having a “hospital delivery for safer child births”, where ‘childbirth’ singular and probably one word is more common.

Over the years we have spotted the following plurals in English-language publications written by native Nepali speakers: ‘The peoples’, ‘staffs’, ‘stuffs’, ‘researches’, ‘Switzerlands’, ‘global warmings’, ‘rooms for improvement’, ‘domestic works’ meaning household jobs, such as cooking and cleaning. Another example from the previously mentioned paper by Subba and Subba (2014: 15) speaks of “traditional healers have got trainings from health posts ...” where native English speakers would have used the singular ‘training’. In a draft from Nepali researchers on women and health issues in Kathmandu we recently read that some people: “have less experience and greater needs for professional guidance ...”, again where a native speaker might have said: “have less experience and a greater need for professional guidance ...”

One inappropriate plural often spotted in the work of Nepali researchers is the category “others”, as the final option in a list of answers to a multiple-choice question, where one would expect the singular “other”.

Slightly less common than the unnecessary plurals is the use of the preposition ‘to’ or the lack thereof. We have come across both, for example “I requested to him”, a sentence used in the sense of “I asked him” or slightly stronger “I requested from him”. The preposition ‘to’ gets missed out in sentence such as: “They suggested me”, where one would expect “They suggested to me”, or perhaps the passive “It was suggested to me”.

An occasional issue is the use of the wrong verb, commonly ‘to know’ (passive) instead of ‘to find out’ (active), for example: “I was conscious to know” or “I was anxious to know.”

Unique usage of certain words, on more than one occasion we have come across the expression “sticks” for individual cigarettes, for example, “he smokes five to ten sticks a day”, meaning he smokes five to ten cigarettes a day. Or other such variants are:

“This is Sheetal Sharma” and “Myself Edwin”

“They frequented visit”

“we are not that much confidence”

“community people” or “backward people”

The English expression “for a few years” and “starting a few years ago” and “since 2012” are combined and mixed up into “since few years ago” in a sentence such as the following published example: “Binayatara foundation (BTF) has been providing financial grants for medical research in Nepal since few years ago” (Basnet & Bhandari 2013: 299). Whilst Subba and Subba (2014: 13) mix up ‘during’, ‘in the old days’ and ‘in the past’ in their phrase “During past days ...”. Or other such variants we have come across include “Been since five years”, and in a paper by Khanal and colleagues (2013) who used the expression “since oldest time”. A different mix of two verbs conveying more or less the same action is the expression “So let me allow to say”, a combination we think of “Let me say this ...” and “allow me to say ...”.

Use of wrong preposition such as “they discussed on”, and particularly the use of the word ‘about’ when most native English-speakers would simply omit ‘about’ in the kind of circumstance a Nepali is likely to include it: “you highlighted about” and “shared about their experiences ...” and “he spelled out about the source of ...”. In Indian English postpositions different from the equivalents of Indian languages such as Hindi and Urdu, for example “They mentioned about their plans.” Occasionally we find ‘for’ missing after the verb “search” (Enokizono 2000). Other examples include:

“I as head of family”

“We are taken the consent”

“Therefore I call a disease socio-clinical”

Adding words is not necessarily specific to Nepenglish, but we have heard “in the context of Nepal”, were the term “in Nepal” would have been sufficient.

Like Indian English speakers Nepali English speakers often use the progressive tense in English. Subba and Subba (2014:14) “Usually they are doing referred (sic) people to clinics ...” Weich and colleagues (2004) highlighted that the structure of South Asian languages is different to European languages that independent translation and back-translation between these different language groups creates real problems in this very process. With Nepal increasingly bilingual in the health, education and the political sector with presentations to native English speakers; this article aims to question if it this different from Indian English, or is it very similar because of the Sanskrit origin. For example, is New Zealand English different enough from Australian English to be classified as a separate variant of English as they are both Antipodean English (Fritz 2007). Again like their Indian English speaking counterparts Nepali English speakers refer to 100,000 as one lakh and 10,000,000 as one crore in both spoken and written English.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In any culture, puritans may not wish to ‘mix’ languages but the mixing of identities seems unavoidable with globalization. With addition of words and the evolution of speech patterns expansion will be progressive. If nothing else it will mean you will need a better spell-check tool. We have discussed the integration of foreign languages into the English language. This is not a linguistic article but hopes some underpinnings of etymology will contribute to an understanding of language evolving (as part of history) in Nepal, a small land-locked country.

As the evolution of language never stops, from Chaucer to Shakespeare, Rabindranath Tagore to Manjushree Thapa, words of great insight to this effect were written by George Orwell (1954) in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* “the fewer words we have, the more restricted our thinking becomes”.

We are not sure whether there is a new version of English in the making with Nepenglish or whether it a variant of Hinglish, because Indian English and Nepali English are strongly influence by the language structure of Sanskrit. Some people may argue that Nepal and India have different history with Britain and the English language. But we would argue that although Nepal was never colonised by the British, it has an equality long relationship with Britain as India. Nepal, for example, has a history of nearly two centuries through the Gurkha regiments in the British army (Kochhar-George 2010).

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