THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON MODERN HINDI: LINGUISTIC ADAPTATION OR LOSS OF ORIGINALITY?

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ABSTRACT

Contact between Hindi and English has shaped the vocabulary, grammar and social uses of modern Hindi for more than two centuries. Public discussion of this influence is often polarised: some see English elements as a sign of vitality and adaptation, while others see them as a threat to the originality of Hindi. This article examines both views from a sociolinguistic perspective. It uses a qualitative, literature-based method and discusses published studies alongside illustrative examples; it does not claim to present a new survey or statistical corpus. The analysis considers lexical borrowing, hybrid verb constructions, code-switching, and the position of English in education, administration, media and digital communication. It argues that English influence is better described as part of the long history of Hindi language contact than as a simple loss of originality, but that legitimate concerns remain about prestige, access and the development of formal Hindi vocabulary. The article concludes that the central question is not whether English words are present in Hindi, but how speakers, institutions and educators manage the relationship between the two languages.

Keywords: Hindi; English; language contact; borrowing; code-switching; linguistic purism; language change; bilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

Languages change when their speakers meet other languages. Vocabulary is borrowed, grammatical habits shift, and new styles of speech appear. Linguists regard this as a normal result of language contact, but in public debate it is often treated as a warning sign. Hindi is a frequent subject of such debate, because English has a prominent place in Indian education, administration, business, entertainment and online life.

Hindi is widely used across northern and central India and is one of the country's major languages. English, introduced through colonial administration and later retained as an important language of higher education, law, commerce and international communication, now exists alongside Hindi in the repertoires of many speakers. As a result, English words such as

station, doctor, school, mobile and internet are familiar in everyday Hindi speech, and mixed expressions are common in conversation and in media.

This raises a question that is both linguistic and cultural: does the influence of English represent a natural adaptation of Hindi to new conditions, or does it threaten the originality of the language? This article asks three more specific questions. Which features of modern Hindi show the influence of English? How have scholars interpreted this influence? What arguments support the view of adaptation, and what arguments support the view of loss?

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE CONTACT, BORROWING AND ORIGINALITY

Language contact refers to the situation in which speakers of different languages interact and influence one another. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) show that the outcome of contact depends heavily on social factors, such as the length and intensity of contact, the attitudes of speakers and the status of the languages involved, and not only on structural similarity. For this reason, the same linguistic element may be accepted easily in one community and resisted in another.

Two related concepts are useful here. Borrowing is the incorporation of words or features from one language into another until they become part of the receiving language. Code-switching, by contrast, is the alternation between languages within a conversation or a sentence. A borrowed word such as “station” may be used by Hindi speakers without any sense of switching into English, whereas a speaker who moves from Hindi to English in the middle of a sentence is making a communicative choice. The boundary between the two is not always clear, and this makes the discussion of English influence more complex than a simple list of foreign words.

The idea of “originality” also needs careful treatment. No language is entirely free of outside influence. Hindi has absorbed vocabulary from Persian and Arabic over centuries, as well as from Sanskrit-derived and regional sources, and these elements are now usually felt to be fully Hindi (King, 1994). The question, then, is not whether Hindi has ever been “pure”, but why English influence is sometimes perceived differently from earlier contact. Rai (2001) shows that debates about the purity of Hindi have been closely connected with questions of national and cultural identity, which helps explain why the issue attracts strong feelings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article adopts a qualitative, descriptive and interpretive approach. It is a desk-based study of published research on English influence on Hindi, world Englishes, Hindi-English code-switching, and language attitudes in India. The literature considered includes classic work on the Indianization of English, studies of multilingualism and education, and recent research on code-mixing in digital communication.

The discussion is organised around three themes: linguistic form, social context, and competing evaluations. Illustrative examples are used to explain common patterns; they are constructed examples rather than quotations from particular speakers, texts or broadcasts. The article does not independently measure the frequency of English elements in Hindi and therefore makes no numerical claims about all Hindi speakers. A future empirical study could

analyse a clearly defined corpus of news articles, textbooks or public social media posts using a transparent coding procedure.

LINGUISTIC EFFECTS OF ENGLISH ON HINDI

Lexical borrowing

The most visible influence is lexical. Many English words are used in Hindi in fields connected with technology, education, transport, medicine and administration, including computer, internet, ticket, college and hospital. These words are usually adapted to Hindi pronunciation and are written in Devanagari, for example as “station”, “doctor” and “mobile”. In many cases there is no widely used native equivalent, or the English word is simply the more familiar one. Borrowing of this kind helps speakers talk about new technologies and institutions, and it is a common process in languages around the world.

Hybrid constructions

A more interesting sign of adaptation is the way English words are integrated into Hindi grammar. Hindi frequently forms verbs by combining a noun with a light verb such as “karna” (to do) or “hona” (to be). English words fit easily into this pattern, producing expressions such as “call karna”, “download karna” or “plan banana” (illustrative examples). The English element supplies the lexical meaning, while the Hindi verb provides the grammatical structure. This shows that borrowed words are not simply pasted into Hindi but are absorbed by the existing system, which supports the argument that Hindi adapts incoming material according to its own rules.

Code-switching and mixed forms

Beyond individual words, speakers may combine the two languages within sentences, as in “Mujhe lagta hai this is a good idea” (“I think this is a good idea”; illustrative example). Research on Hindi-English code-switching suggests that such mixing is systematic and socially meaningful rather than random. Sahni (2025) discusses how established grammatical models can be applied to Hinglish, and Bhatt (2008) shows that language mixing can express identity and create social meaning. Mixed forms therefore show the bilingual competence of speakers rather than a lack of knowledge of Hindi.

Calques and influence on style

Influence is not limited to visible English words. Speakers and writers may also translate English expressions or sentence patterns into Hindi, a process called calquing. Such influence may appear in the language of news, advertising or translation, where the Hindi wording follows the structure of an English original. It is less obvious than direct borrowing, and it is one reason why some critics feel that the “natural” feel of Hindi may be changing. At the same time, the extent of this influence is difficult to measure and requires careful corpus-based research.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF ENGLISH INFLUENCE

The linguistic patterns described above cannot be understood without their social background. Kachru (1983) describes the long process through which English in India has been

adapted to local needs, and argues that it has become an Indian language in its own right. Bhatt (2001) places this development within the wider study of world Englishes, in which English is shaped by local cultures and multilingual speakers. Contact, in other words, is not one-way: English in India has been influenced by Hindi and other Indian languages at the same time.

Education. English is associated with higher education, technical subjects and professional mobility. Mohanty (2006) discusses the inequalities that arise in multilingual education systems, where the languages valued by institutions may differ from the languages children speak at home. In this context, the spread of English can be seen both as an opportunity and as a pressure on other languages. Highet (2022) shows how English, social mobility and aspiration are connected in the lives of young women in Delhi, and this helps explain why English elements may carry associations of status.

Administration and law. Official and legal language often relies on English terminology, and the development of Hindi equivalents has been a long-standing concern. Some official terms created for Hindi are precise but may feel unfamiliar to ordinary speakers, which sometimes encourages the use of the English forms instead.

Media and popular culture. Film, advertising and television present mixed-language styles to large audiences. Si (2011) examines Hindi-English code-switching in Bollywood scripts over time, and Baig et al. (2024) discuss how Hinglish represents social mobility in cinema. Film language is scripted and cannot be treated as a record of how everyone speaks, but it can make certain expressions widely familiar.

Digital communication. Online platforms encourage fast, informal and creative writing. Sengupta et al. (2024) investigate social, economic and demographic factors connected with Hinglish code-mixing on social media, showing that digital language practices are linked to wider social conditions. Users may write in Devanagari, in Roman script, or in a mixture of both, according to platform, audience and convenience.

ADAPTATION OR LOSS OF ORIGINALITY? COMPETING VIEWS

The adaptation view

Supporters of the adaptation view stress that borrowing is a normal and productive feature of all living languages. Hindi has repeatedly absorbed words from other languages without losing its identity, and English elements are often fitted to Hindi sounds and grammar, as the example of light verb constructions shows. According to this view, the ability to take in new vocabulary for new realities, such as digital technology, is evidence of flexibility. Bilingual speakers also use mixing deliberately to express humour, closeness, emphasis and identity, so it can be seen as a resource rather than a deficiency. Klingler (2017) shows that code-switching patterns among Hindi-English bilinguals change across time and social groups, which supports the view that mixing is a dynamic and socially shaped practice.

The loss view

Supporters of the loss view raise concerns that deserve to be taken seriously. First, they argue that frequent use of English words may reduce the use of existing Hindi vocabulary, including expressions that are still understood but are used less often. Second, they note that the prestige attached to English may create a social hierarchy in which Hindi is treated as less modern or less suitable for education, science and professional life. Third, they point to the risk

that younger speakers may become less confident in formal and literary Hindi if they meet it less often in daily life. These concerns are connected with broader debates about language and identity in India (Rai, 2001; Annamalai, 2001).

Evaluating the two views

The two views are not entirely opposed. The adaptation view is strongest when it concerns the process of language change: there is no evidence that borrowing in itself destroys a language, and Hindi has a long history of absorbing outside influence. The loss view is strongest when it concerns social conditions: if English is the main language of prestige and opportunity, speakers may feel pressure to use it even where Hindi would serve equally well. In this sense the risk is less that Hindi will lose its originality through borrowed words, and more that it may lose functions and status in particular domains. The linguistic question and the social question should therefore be considered separately.

DISCUSSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The research reviewed here suggests that English influence on Hindi is real, visible and significant, but that it is not uniform. Speakers differ in region, age, education and profession, and the same person may use more English in a workplace conversation and more Hindi at home. Generalising from a small number of films, advertisements or online posts would therefore be misleading, particularly because India is linguistically diverse.

One practical challenge is vocabulary development. If Hindi is to be used fully in science, technology and administration, it needs terminology that speakers find both accurate and natural. Past experience suggests that artificially constructed terms are not always accepted by speakers, while terms that grow from actual use are more likely to survive. A balanced policy can recognise useful borrowings while also supporting the creation and teaching of Hindi terminology.

A second challenge concerns education and register. Informal mixing is appropriate in many situations, but formal writing, official documents and academic work require control of standard forms. Educators can acknowledge the multilingual abilities of students while continuing to teach formal Hindi and English. The ability to choose the right variety for the right situation is itself an important part of bilingual competence.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the influence of English on modern Hindi through lexical borrowing, hybrid verb constructions, code-switching and the social contexts of education, administration, media and digital communication. It has shown that many English elements are integrated into Hindi grammar and pronunciation, and that mixing between the two languages is often a purposeful and systematic practice.

The evidence discussed here supports the view that English influence is primarily a form of linguistic adaptation, in line with the long history of Hindi contact with other languages. However, the concern about loss of originality should not be dismissed. It is best understood as a concern about the status, domains and formal development of Hindi rather than about the mere presence of borrowed words. Rather than treating the question as a choice between adaptation and loss, it is more productive to study how contact interacts with social power and

educational policy. Future research could compare regions, age groups and text types, such as news, textbooks and social media, through clearly defined corpora.

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