

The Impact Of Social Media On The English Language In India

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Abstract

The paper describes the role of social media networks in changing the English language in India, analyzing it linguistically, sociocultural and educationally. It notes that the grammatical structures of the English language are disregarded in¹ contexts of code-mixing, use of informal English and slang through WhatsApp, Instagram and other similar platforms. English is the lingua franca which displaces the native languages and at the same time, the English language is considered to be a language of the youth and a means of social change by the youth. This paper also explains the effect of the use of unofficial English on scholastic achievement and advocates for educational strategies that provide a balanced perspective on language and social media use as a way to enhance the digital space.

Keywords: *Social media, English language, code-mixing, linguistic diversity, informal English, regional languages, educational policies, digital literacy, cultural dominance, academic performance.*

Introduction

Background

The English Language used in India has experienced changes due to the existence of social media. Communication and language practices have changed as various age groups are able to consume social media. Being a multilingual nation with English being the link language, India has seen an explosion in social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp, which are a major factor in how languages are used (Altam, 2020). Such networks support a hybrid linguistic environment whereby the dominant English language combines with local languages, leading to phenomena of code-switching and code-mixing. Hindi- English code-switching for informal bound communication, and Hindi English ‘Hinglish’ has come to the fore (Parshad et al. 2016). A unique language is constructed as this new form of communication emphasises the use of abbreviations, slang, emojis and hashtags at the core of social media usage. This shift has both positive and negative implications. On the one hand, this enables the members of dominated rural English-speaking communities to reach the world which increases the overall literacy. These suffixes or abbreviations are now considered informal and so they are quite a norm in the English-speaking countries which now raises concern over the standard usage of the English Language and what effect it may have on traditional writings and important correspondences. Moreover, globalization is enhanced as millions of people from across the globe interact using social media regardless of their location.

In addition, the use of a language for marketing is further propelled by social media influencers, brands and even content creators. Linguistic trends are in part, shaped by these marketers who dominate a culture, English being their main mode of communication. Younger generations in India are increasingly expressing modernity and individuality through the English language, and regional languages are pushed to the background when it comes to online platforms. This phenomenon has alerted educational stakeholders and has stimulated attempts geared towards the embedding of language sense and digital tools focusing on the responsible use of language in school programs. Nevertheless, the need for tension exists because on the one hand linguistic diversity needs to be nurtured and on the other hand English is increasingly dominating the digital space. The changing patterns of English usage on social media platforms such as Facebook in India require detailed studies where the effects of English on identity, culture and education can be studied as well as some of the sociolinguistic aspects that may be worsened (Dovchin, 2019).

Aim and Objectives

This research aims to examine the impact of social media on the usage, evolution, and perception of the English language in India with a strong focus on linguistic, cultural, and educational implications.

Objectives

- To explore the prevalence of code-mixing, slang, and non-standard English forms in social media communication.
- To evaluate cultural shifts: Assess how social media influences the perception of English as a modern and dominant language, impacting regional languages.
- To examine educational challenges: Investigate the effects of informal English usage on academic performance and professional communication skills.
- To identify policy gaps: Highlight the need for balanced digital literacy policies to preserve linguistic diversity while leveraging social media for English learning.

Literature review

The growth of the use of the English language in communication, education, and other sectors has made the study of the role of social media in India useful. Researchers state that social media has created a beehive of activity characterized by code-mixing and code-switching where English and other languages like Hindi are used interchangeably technologically (Barnali, 2017). They add that this practice of cross-language fusion helps to overcome the problem of having to learn the English language to speak or write in it because speakers can employ their first language to communicate with each other. However, such usage is overly casual and ungrammatical most of the time, which raises scepticism about its impact on the linguistic structure and people's ability to effectively engage in formal communication. Linguistic studies emphasize the presence of neologisms and new linguistic devices and constructions such as the use of abbreviations of informal word norms, employing new media symbols including images and even pictures that have transformed the English language all for the sake of inventiveness and thus making it more disintegrative. Sociological studies show how, particularly younger users, make use of social media to emphasize the position of English as up-to-date and progressive while regional languages lose their place in Internet communication (Chidsey, 2018). This focus serves to reinforce the protective status of English culture and invites sociolinguistic gaps as well as impedes the realization of India's linguistic population.

In a school setting, it has been found that students are struggling to gain skills required in the field especially in the area of writing due to the excessive usage of nonstandard English on social media thereby resulting in difficulty when students try to shift from informal styles to more formal ones. Also, when assessing policies, further analysis suggests an inadequate emphasis on the incorporation of responsible language usage and digital skills in educational policies, thereby creating a vacuum in enabling individuals to effectively interact within the digital sphere (Agarwal et al. 2017). But these are important understandings, the social literature fails to provide insight into where social media usage is just beginning to grow, that is, rural and semi-urban areas, instead emphasizing urban settings. In addition, while social media usage influences language and culture in their studies, they tend to look at the impact of these changes on education and policy separately. Social media platform's formal English use has a gap in the literature regarding how it could be utilized as a teaching strategy to foster the learning of English and after that, the internet. These gaps signal a clear need for further research that covers language development, cultural factors and education in a holistic way, considering the need for balancing language conservation and language growth in a digitized India.

Social media fosters widespread code-mixing and slang adoption in English communication.

The younger academics is likely to respect the language spoken by people from diverse cultures. Language should not be restricted in its use only to English. The combination of various languages is inclined to mix code in an informal context or in the informal digital space. The part of India that uses English in addition to Hindi, Tamil and Bengali languages has been exposed to this hybrid language (Jamatia et al. 2019). Now, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter, are used sparsely, and people who use them tend to use their mother tongue and more so try to be expressive. This is reflected in the increased use of Hinglish.

Furthermore, the use of social media acronyms, slang, and even emoticons has altered the use of the English language. Terms such as “LOL”, “BRB,” and hashtag have gained massive popularity, thereby giving birth to a diverse form of language (Faradisa et al. 2019). This highlights the way social media promotes the extensive use of linguistic fashions which are otherwise considered ineffective for proper grammatical structure. While this does foster more inclusivity as the English language can now be ‘broken’ by more people, it does cause suspicion for how loser’s standard English might become, especially among the youth. Research has shown that these linguistic variations and processes impact how a person expresses himself through writing or speaking and indicates an urgent need to comprehend them while communicating in formal settings, education, or cultural practices in Indian society.

Informal English usage on social media challenges grammatical norms and formal writing skills.

These days, English is colloquially used on social platforms informally which has overstepped all the boundaries of correct grammar and formal English writing skills, especially in the Indian context where English is widely used as a lingua franca. On social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, the emphasis is on informal talking, which also leads to losing the grammatical aspect of the language. As the language of the user gets abbreviations, telegraphic sentences, etc. Such as “u” for “you” or “b4” for “before” etc. it becomes easier to type short messages in the character-limited formats (Nwala and Tamunobelega, 2019). These methods

may seem useful, but they lead to the gradual loss of grammatical discipline, particularly for the youth who often log in to social sites.

Evidence suggests that the constant use and exposure to informal English on social media websites hurts writing skills in school and in the professions. Students who tend to use more informal language in electronic communication often have difficulties adapting to formal communication modes where grammar, writing structure and style are basic requirements. This linguistic informality creates barriers also in understanding and expression, which greatly affects the student's ability to articulate ideas in their examinations, job applications and communications within the workplace. Moreover, the connotation of ideas seems to be slopping grammar and the use of such ideas seems to foster the decay of English learning as a compact language (Haristiani and Rifa'i, 2020). Abating this challenge needs to be accomplished by combining education in digital literacy around the appropriate usage of language without undermining formal writing skill acquisition.

The cultural dominance of English on social media marginalizes regional languages.

The influence of the English language on social media has proved detrimental to the status of vernacular languages in India, which is otherwise a country with numerous tongues. Majority of the American users translate their posts on twitter, Facebook, and Instagram even when the majority of users do not understand English, due to poor English applicability. This inclination virtually obliges English to evolve as the medium for metadata descriptions and interactions, thus leaving room for accommodation for a variety of English speakers (Rajprasit and Marlina, 2019). This brings up the question of what may be the reason behind the reduction in cohesion or connectivity in the use of indigenous languages on the internet. Research shows that people avoid using indigenous languages for several reasons including the unavailability of standardised keyboard for writing the language, poor adequate content writing in the vernacular and poor adequacy in the transliterating tools. Besides, English is gradually considered more of a prerequisite and a symbol of class and trendiness among the younger generation, further relegating the regional languages.

The marginalization expands past the virtual dimension and touches on the cultural aspect as regional languages become less prominent within global markets such as the domains of marketing, entertainment, and education (Gale, 2018). Such a linguistic deficit only exacerbates the social constructs and in this case social relations as a whole in which English becomes privileged over indigenous languages. Solutions to this problem need multilingual policies and related technological developments that integrate indigenous languages and English on the web.

Younger generations perceive English as a tool for modernity and self-expression online.

The impact of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, combined with the fact that English is increasingly used in Indian youth culture, fuels the younger generations of India that English is a means to become modern and self-expressive online. English is a language of globalization, technology, and social status which makes it a language of choice in most interactions taking place digitally, especially by the young people who reside in urban areas (Balla, 2016). This means that by using English, young users try to assimilate or identify themselves with the current practices of the world and socially acceptable morals and behaviours in society as they navigate these online platforms.

This linguistically hierarchal change is most noticeable in the mass media, content creation in particular, where the majority of content that is uploaded is in English so that most creators can reach diverse audiences. With memes, captions, hashtags, and videos, people frequently include English with their local dialect as an artistic way of showcasing their originality. Furthermore, this increased attention on the English language further drives a wedge in diversity as Indian local languages are further marginalized into vernacular or subordinate status (Rahman et al. 2018). Research highlights that this trend extends beyond casual communication to professional and educational aspirations, with English as a distinguishing element of professionalism and social mobility. However, this social ideal also has a risk of forsaking those who are less privileged in terms of command of the English language, thus creating socio-linguistic stratifications. It is also crucial to promote English along with such balanced perspectives policies which appreciate multilingualism to not only promote basic tenets of English language.

Academic performance is influenced by the informal digital English environment.

Effective academic performance, especially for students in India, is heavily influenced by informal digital English forms used in social media. Standard English, when used on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, or Twitter, encourages the use of non-doctrinal English, basic grammar rules, abbreviations, slang, and emojis. This omission or avoidance of adopting specific practices has a tangible impact, in this case, student's ability to write essays or comprehend what they write. Another evidence of this impact comes from research done at the Central Institute of Education where 62% of high school students interviewed stated that during their assignments they unwittingly used sorts of informal English like u (you), gr8 (great), emoji etc (Barthakur, 2018). Moreover, some university professors have noted that students not being able to write grammatically correct and comprehensive essays which are not too dependent on incoherent phrases which are frequently seen on social media. Another case study from Mumbai University found that 48% of students using social media heavily struggled to adhere to the appropriate writing style during exams (Puja Pednekar, 2016). The students thus tend to confuse the use of informal digital English with the use of English that is used for academic purposes. This problem can be solved by teaching students how to use a formal written language in their future new generations of students. Educators may implement workshops or modules aiming at assisting students to utilize social media while achieving the required level of academic language proficiency.

Educational policies lack adequate focus on balancing digital literacy with linguistic diversity.

In a country with over 22 official languages and the widespread adoption of English, policy planners in India seem to ignore the need to balance digital education and language education. Although the policies emphasize skills in IT, there is even greater need to focus on language policies which allow the learning of English without loss of regional languages. One such gap was admitted in a report by the National Tele-Communication and Information Administration in 2022 which stated that only 18% of its digital literacy projects employed local language tools (nielit.gov, 2022). Unfortunately, such inadequacies only increase the gaps that exist for students who do not speak English, especially those in rural and semi-urban regions where educational material in speaking languages is scanty. Interestingly, the Indian Council for Social Science Research has also indicated that there are regional students who, on accessing online education, have difficulties due to little or no proficiency in English as most of the resources are in English (Hawi and Samaha, 2017). This under-representation also limits these

regions of students' linguistic capabilities and their ability to excel academically. Strategies need to be put in place to ensure that government policies advocate for the production and adoption of local measures to address the above issues. The educational paradigms should encourage the use of English alongside mother tongues so that diversity and cultural aspects can be maintained.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media in the Indian context has implications for language trends, culture and education. The prevailing trend of code-switching, vernacular English and internet shorthand erodes grammatical structures and edges out minority languages while elevating English as a value of modernity. However, this change poses serious challenges to scholarly outcomes and the maintenance of linguistic variety. To address these problems, it is necessary to formulate education policies that combine information technologies with the advancement of local languages to build the multilingual internet space of the future.

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