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Hinglish Hamari Identity: The Language of Advertising in India

Abstract

The paper deals with code-mixing in the present-day advertisements in the print as well as on the electronic media. Hinglish has become the popular language among youngsters not only in the megacities but even in the rural India. India is in the phase of Endonormative stabilization of English where the language has mingled with the local hue of indigenous languages thus establishing a new identity. The English language we find around us is thus an amalgam of not only various Indian languages and the native English, but also of two or more cultures. The world of advertisement reflects the same social reality of India. The multinational brands like Pepsi could realize this and preferred to go with the local sentiments by using Hinglish language to popularise their products.

Keywords: Hinglish, language of advertisements, fusion, Endonormative Stabilization, acculturation, code-switching

The paper thus attempts to analyse the linguistic dimensions of some of the exemplary commercial advertisements on both- the print as well as the electronic media. It further analyses the types of words that are localized in an English advertisement or vice versa, i.e.,

English words being accommodated in a Hindi advertisement. The purpose of using such a fusion of local and Western language is also probed. The socio-cultural as well as historical background of the advertisements in the newspaper and on the electronic media is also discussed so as to search for parallelisms, if any.

A small questionnaire was administered to the students from regional medium background to know about their responses to such fusion of two languages in the advertisements.

The paper concludes on a positive note stating that such a fusion of Hindi and English should not be looked upon as a threat to the existing languages, but it is an inevitable process in the history of language development.

The researcher begins with a personal experience, narrated in first person that led her towards the theme of this paper.

“The language spoken by my children is far different from the version I used to speak in their age or even when I was a college student. Their expressions are multilingual, i.e., a mixture of Marathi, Hindi and English. The impact of English syntax on their Marathi language further adds to what language teachers would consider as ‘impurity’ of their mother tongue. My daughter once said to me, ‘माझ्या बर्थडेवर तू केला होतास तसा केक कर’. She was transliterating, i.e., applying the syntactic pattern of English to Marathi because the syntax of Marathi entails the suffix ‘ला’ being added to the noun, which in Marathi would have been ‘बाढदिवस’, meaning ‘birthday’. Firstly, she was using an English word for ‘बाढदिवस’ (which is a very common phenomenon in India because even an illiterate maid uses this expression to such an extent that one can doubt whether she knows the original Marathi word or not.). Secondly, she was applying the rule of English syntax which entails the preposition ‘on’ to be prefixed to the noun ‘birthday’. By the process of transliteration, she therefore changes the suffix to ‘वर’, the Marathi equivalent of ‘on’.

The researcher's reason for the above personal narration is that the paper intends to analyse the code mixing in the present-day advertisements in the print as well as electronic media. The illustration of transliteration mentioned above should highlight this fusion of Indian language and English. The humour is further underlined as the researcher also mixes the codes/scripts to enhance the impact of her expression. Though the example of transliteration in the beginning illustrates a mixing of Marathi and English, Hinglish (a fusion of Hindi and English) as a linguistic version commonly observed in Indian advertisements forms the major scope of this paper to be encompassed.

The paper thus attempts to analyse the linguistic dimensions of some of the exemplary commercial advertisements on both- the print as well as the electronic media. It begins with a review of literature which includes the definition of Hinglish as put forward by researchers like Parshad, Bhowmich, Chand et al (2015) and then leads to the rationale behind the spread of Hinglish as a language of popular commercial advertisements. It then discusses the motivation of Indians for speaking and using the English language. The paper further reviews Schneider's (2003) model of the processes the New Englishes have undergone and refers to the Endonormative stage of stabilization that English is undergoing presently. This reference to Schneider's model thus establishes a view in support of the increasing use of Hinglish in the advertisements.

The paper further analyses the types of words that are localized in an English advertisement or vice versa, i.e., English words being accommodated in a Hindi advertisement. The purpose of using such a fusion of local and Western language is also probed. The socio-cultural as well as historical background of the advertisements in the newspaper and on the electronic media is also discussed so as to search for parallelisms, if any.

The paper ends with a small informal survey conducted by the researcher in the form of interviews with 16 students in the age group of 14-16 studying in regional language as the medium of instruction. The paper thus examined the responses of these students to the fusion of Hindi and English in advertisements.

It is important to review the work of Indian researchers in the field. Parshad, Bhowmick, Chand et al (2015:5) mention Hinglish as “a colloquial umbrella-term spanning isolated borrowings, indigenized Indian English forms, within otherwise Monolingual Hindi or English, to rich code-switching practices unintelligible to Monolingual Hindi or English speakers.” Prof. Thusu, in an interview with BBC, mentions that major multinational companies try to sell their products in Hinglish. It is the mass media, according to him, like Hindi films, advertisements that try to promote such fusion of English as a language of international communication and Hindi, the most widely used language in the country for reasons like reaching out to a larger and more varied audience.

According to Bhatia & Ritchie (2006b:518, cited in Kathpalia and Ong: 2015:5), in the present scenario, the sociolinguists look at language mixing as ‘a systematic and rule-governed phenomenon which satisfies the creative needs of bilinguals. According to them, these are the needs which cannot be satisfied by ‘single, separate linguistic systems’ that they know.

Luna & Peracchi (2005a, 2005b cited in Kathpalia and Ong: 2015:2) state that such a fusion of languages not only appeals to bilinguals but it also offers new ways for the copywriters to experiment with new creative ways of utilising the resources of both the languages. This would ‘achieve special socio-psychological effects. Such a fusion of languages, if used along with figures of speech like puns and metaphors enhances ‘brand recall and positive attitudes’ as mentioned by McQuarrie & Mick (1993, cited in Kathpalia and Ong :2015:5).

As Chand (2016) has rightly pointed out, there are two main reasons for wide and increasing use of Hinglish. First reason being the fact that fluency in English is always looked upon as a matter of social prestige in India and the people here are motivated to use the language for both- the instrumental as well as integrative reasons. There has also been an increasing shift in the psychological set up of Indian learners of English from instrumental to integrative motivation for speaking English as a means of ‘upward social mobility.’

The second reason mentioned by Chand is the limited opportunities and exposure to the language. Due to both reasons, Hinglish is one of the ‘communication styles’ easily and more readily available to the masses and hence the faster growth and spread of the version. A research undertaken by Chand and her colleagues (2015 cited in Chand:2016) argues that Hinglish is taking over full English fluency in India and that the population speaking Hinglish fills ‘a niche between monolingual Hindi and full bilingualism’. This, according to them, is because it assures a fulfilment of the need for ‘a modern, yet localized way speaking’ that will facilitate communication even for masses.

Many researchers have of course expressed concern about emergence of Hinglish, a hybrid code. According to them, it might lead to the dilution of one or more languages. In this connection, it is appropriate to refer to the model presented by Schneider (2003) which explains the shared processes which all the New Englishes have gone through. The model outlines five stages of changes:

- Foundation
- Exonormative stabilization
- Nativization
- Endonormative Stabilization
- Differentiation

The third phase, Nativization, is considered to be the most vibrant realization of the fact that something fundamental is changing. It is during this phase that a New English starts constructing its own identity which is different from the native variety.

Endonormative stabilization is a phase characterized by a gradual adoption and acceptance of an indigenous linguistic norm supported by a new locally rooted self-confidence.

In the Indian context, one finds such an endonormative stabilization of English where the language has mingled with the local hue of indigenous languages thus establishing a new identity. The English language we find around us is thus an amalgam of not only various Indian languages and the native English, but also of two or more cultures. One can call it the process of acculturation wherein both the languages reciprocally impact each other. Intertwining of two cultures and languages lead to a third altogether different reality called the non-native variety of English. In case of India, the cultural ownership is no more

restricted to the educated elite class, but even other strata of society would like to make it their 'own' language.

It is this cultural trait of the present times that is skilfully exploited by the commercial world not only in India but even at the multinational level. Bhana (2014) stated that for anybody wanting to export and market any product or service to India, Hinglish is something one should consider important. Hinglish being one of the world's most potent Anglo-hybrids, it is considered to be the key to advertising success in India. One can observe code-switching as a common practice on television channels and radio stations as well as in music and movies. This is further enhanced by an easy and cheaper access to television and internet thus leading to the spread of Hinglish to rural areas.

According to Bhana (2014), it is necessary for a businessman who wants to do business in India to note that the customers here are most receptive to Hinglish. Especially for

the urban young generation, it corresponds with their own identity and therefore not using it may lead to be a social blunder that can cause embarrassment.

The saga of Hinglish advertising started with Pepsi playing around with linguistic fusion in 1990. The tagline “Yehi hai right choice, baby!” (You’ve got the right one, baby!) changed the outlook of Indians towards Hinglish from a dumb, poor variety of English to a lively representation of the young India. This advertisement proved to be the most successful in the history of the organization. The same popularity was enjoyed by one more such tagline for the same product advertised by the world-famous master blaster Sachin Tendulkar as it said, “Yeh dil maange more!” (The heart wants more).

One more such tagline that could catch the attention of the younger generation is the one by Domino’s for their mouth-watering Pizza. “Hungry Kya?” (Are you Hungry?) is an example of how a short and simple but linguistically mixed message can have a magical impact on the viewers. “Pal banaye magical” (It makes every moment magical) is one more such example wherein the organization rightly touched the nerve of the targeted audience to sell their tangy eatable- Lays. Similarly, the commercial visual for Coca Cola exploited

the same technique by using the fusion of these two languages in “Life ho to aisi” (That’s what life should be like). Sunsilk shampoo was also presented to the young girls with a catchy line “Come on girls, waqt hai shine karne ka!” (Come on, girls, it’s time to shine). “Kya aap Close Up karate hain?” (Do you use Close Up?) tagline of the well-known toothpaste or the one advertising Hero Motocorp – “Hum mein hai hero” (There is a hero in every one of us) have followed the same path and technique to be successful in advertising their products.

All these above taglines use Hindi lexis and syntax but condition it with a word or two in English. The selection of English words displays the advertisers’ very good sense of human psyche as only the main words in the sentence which play an important syntactic as

well as semantic role in the structure are borrowed from English. These are usually the lexical words and not the functional words. These can be either nouns, adjectives or verbs (e.g. shine, hero, life, magical, etc.)

Lexical Words Borrowed from English in Hinglish Taglines

Sr. No.	Brand	Lexical Word/s Borrowed from English
1.	Pepsi	Right choice, baby
2.	Pepsi	More (as an adjective in this context)
3.	Domino's	Hungry
4.	Lays	magical
5.	Coca-Cola	Life
6.	Sunsilk	Come on, Girls!, shine
7.	Close-Up	Close Up
8.	Hero Motocorp	Hero
9.	Freshwrapp	Fresh
10.	ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund	Market
11.	Volini	Expert

The English words used in these expressions reflect the scenario very commonly observed in India. Not only in the mega cities or small towns but even in the rural parts of the country, people weave in some English words in their routine conversation in their specific regional language or in Hindi. Hinglish has thus become a part of daily life and culture of every Indian irrespective of whether s/he belongs to urban or rural India.

Some of the advertising taglines mentioned above are used to advertise multi-national brands. Ashok Chakravarty, the creative head of Publicis India, (cited in Bhana, 2014) provides a rationale for this choice of Hinglish by foreign multi nationals in India that

majority of Indians' lack of proficiency in English makes it necessary for the multi nationals to resort to such a fusion of Hindi and English.

The June 2018 issue of Reader's Digest, a well-known magazine in English, contains 6 advertisements which have their tagline in Hindi. In spite of it being a magazine in English

language catering to upper middle-class readers, the issue includes such advertisements in the L1 as the publishers are aware that the concepts of these advertisements made an emotional appeal. For example, the advertisement of the capsule Revital is a mixture of English and Hindi. The page is full of English descriptions of the product as well as the tagline "Live life to the fullest" followed by an attractive, unconventional phrase in Hindi without any punctuations – "ThaknaManaHai" (You are not allowed to be tired). Freshwrap aluminium foil has been advertised with a tagline in Hinglish, i.e., Hindi syntax accommodating an English word- "Khaana jobhi ho, fresh ho!" (The food you eat should be fresh) followed by a paragraph describing the product in English. Similarly, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund advertisement is a fusion of Hinglish, English and Hindi with a question in Hinglish "Ab market ke utar-chadhav ka darr kaisa?" (Why should one be scared of upheavals in the market?) followed by a long space on the page being occupied by English language with one short tagline in Hindi (scripted in English) – "Tarakki Karein!" (Let's progress). "Jab Kamar Dard Sataye Sirf Expert Kaam Aaye" (When lower back pain troubles you, it is only the expert who helps you) is one more such Hinglish tagline that advertises Volini, a pain reliever, followed by all details of the product in English. Sleepwell products are also advertised with a Hindi tagline "Ek koshish, Maa jaisa aaram dene ki..." (An attempt, to provide motherly comfort.) followed by the description in English.

Interestingly, these Hinglish or Hindi taglines are printed in bold, colourful fonts separately either along with the picture or at the beginning or at the end. It is interesting to note that the Reader's Digest targets largely middle/upper middle-class readers, who are

extremely comfortable in English. Despite this, it is interesting that the advertisers have consciously chosen Hinglish taglines in order to appeal to the reader's emotions and to help them identify with the modern Indian who is comfortable with a blend of languages and cultures.

In order to know how these Hinglish advertisements are taken by the teenagers with regional medium background, the researcher administered a small questionnaire to 16

students studying in a Marathi medium school in Vikhroli, a suburb in Mumbai. They were asked whether the language of advertisements should be Hindi, English or Hinglish. 10 (62.5%) of them replied in favour of Hinglish. 12 (75%) of them reported that they find advertisements in Hinglish more interesting as the fusion of both the languages, one being their own national language, makes it easier for them to understand difficult concepts in English.

These responses by the students from regional medium background are reflective enough of the present social situation in India. These are the youngsters who would be the generation taking the language further. The advertisements on the television and in the newspaper around 1980s had upper and middle classes as their target audience and so English used to be the choice of language for their advertisements. However, the present times have witnessed the all-pervasive advent of electronics and the media which has reached even the lower socio-economic strata. The son of a household help proudly feels that he is a part of future modern generation that will blend languages and so enjoys speaking a fusion of languages as well as finds a Hinglish advertisement interesting. In addition to this socio-psychological reason, such a liking for fusion of languages also helps him express himself better and understand an expression which would otherwise be difficult with the use of only Hindi or only English language.

The researcher, therefore, concludes that by using such a fusion, the advertising companies address the need within such social strata to take a step up the social ladder by taking recourse to English. The researchers in the field of language and education policy makers, therefore, need not consider such a fusion as a threat to the existing language but as an inevitable process and a reflection of social reality in the present times as an aftermath of globalization and an interaction among various cultures and languages. It is necessary to understand the huge gap between the formal training of languages being taught in the schools and the exposure that the students get to code mixing through popular media like television commercials and movies. The teachers and the syllabus framers, according to the researcher,

need to ponder over this aspect of inclusive nature of languages as well as the strategies used by the students while speaking/ writing in English as well as Indian languages.

These inclusive and accommodative manifestations of the languages pave the way for further research, by widening the scope of research that is otherwise limited to single language studies. It would thus be interesting to conclude this paper with a reference by Acharya (March 2018) to a recent report by The Telegraph mentioning that Portsmouth College in the UK has introduced 'Hinglish' as a new course to help British aspirant students do business in India. This is because, as mentions The Telegraph, such an introduction to this fusion would enable and prepare the students for the international opportunities in 'the world's seventh largest economy' that is faster than any other economy in the world.

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