


The Indian Poems in English: A Kachruvian Analysis

Saleh Ahmad^{1&2}

¹Department of English, Uttara University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

²Ph. D. Fellow (English), IML, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5339-6481>

Email: saleh.elt30@gmail.com

DOI: 10.53103/cjlls.v2i1.27

Abstract

The presentation of local Indian themes and ideas in the Indian poems written in English can be analysed as an important decolonizing attempt in the efforts to establish the Indian English as a distinct variety of the English language. Braj B. Kachru's (1990) concept of 'World Englishes' has been widely discussed by a large number of linguists and researchers worldwide for more than three decades which emphasizes on the recognition of the national varieties of English as an International Language (EIL). A post-colonial reading of the Anglo-Indian poetry presents the local themes in the EIL and builds own position as a distinct variety of English called Indian English. The current examination surpasses Halliday's (1971) concepts of 'tenor' or 'mode'. This paper attempts to analyse some poems of modern English poetry by few major Indian poets and juxtaposes the literary analysis to applied-linguistic analysis through Kachru's view of World Englishes.

Keywords: World Englishes, Indian English, Discourse Analysis, Post-colonialism, Decolonizing English

Introduction

As a mirror of India, the Indian literature in English attempts to present India in typical Indian ways. But in the field of poetry, not a great number of Indian writers have been recognized to be successful in writing English poems that are rich in Indian themes, sensibilities and tone. The English poems written by the poets of India, which is the largest country of the outer circle of the Braj B. Kachru's (1985, 1992) model of World Englishes, can be analysed from the angle of the post-colonialism to explore the local and classic themes and their treatment and the language in the Indian English poems. Braj B. Kachru (1992) tried to remove the 'substandard' tag from those varieties of English language which are used in the former British colonies of the Outer Circle and presented English as an International Language (EIL) in an attempt to decolonize the language. The Indian English poetry establishes its genre by presenting India in typical Indian variety of English language with own essence and characteristics which can be seen as a process of

decolonizing English language in India. Since an area of the field of Discourse Analysis (DA) aims to observe, describe and interpret the use of language in context and the Indian English has become a variety which is used by a large number of people, it is worthy of a DA research indeed.

Literature Review

Genuine Indian poetry in English really began in the nineteen-fifties which is totally different from the early and nationalist poetry with their traditional and sentimental presentation of India. But no study was found on the Indian English poetry from the angle of discourse analysis in applied linguistics.

The poems written by later poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, Kamala Das, Rajagopal Parthasarathy, and Jayanta Mahapatra are stuffed with emotions and commitment expressed in the typical 'Indian-English'. Like other varieties of the English language of the outer circle, the Indian English variety also uses local words to mirror local culture, people and their feelings to keep the flavor of postcolonialism. The modern Indian poetry in English tries to portray the 'true' or 'authentic' India against the former colonisers' writings in the language of the colonisers' language.

Research Methodology

This particular study has followed the qualitative research method of Discourse Analysis (DA). Because the qualitative research attempt "to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3). According to Trappes-Lomax (2004, p.133), discourse analysts study "what people in their everyday experience of language do instinctively and largely unconsciously: notice patterning of language in use and the circumstances with which these are typically associated."

The DA follows different approaches of investigation of written texts (such as, novel, poetry, news article, essay, etc.) and spoken discourses (such as interviews, social media, etc.). Peräkylä (2004) states, "In the context of linguistics, DA usually refers to the research that aim at uncovering the features of text that maintain coherence in units larger than the sentence" (p. 871).

As a DA research is mainly interpretative, hence, qualitative in nature, this paper will explore the poems by some famous modern Indian English poets and try to see whether the English poems by those Indian poets embody typical Indian themes in a special variety of English language called Indian English variety. This way it will try to search for the decolonizing attempts by the poets as well.

‘Kachruvian’ Analysis

Since early 1980’s, Braj B. Kachru attempted to establish the Indian English as an important variety of the English language in several works (Kachru, 1992, 2006). Sridhar (2017) stated in a special De Gruyter memorial:

successfully challenged the ortho-doxies of the English establishment on both sides of the Atlantic (the British Council, TESOL International Association), including the “sacred linguistic cow” of the native speaker as the sole arbiter of standards, which looked upon non-native varieties as erroneous approximations of standard English (p. 361).

Kachru’s enormously influential model Three Circles of English ‘called for a pluralistic, socially realistic view of the English-using world’ to symbolize the identities varieties of English with the new term ‘World Englishes’ (1985) (Sridhar (2017, p.361). According to the Kachruvian linguists, the study of World Englishes ‘have to be interdisciplinary and integrative, and different methodologies must be used (literary, linguistic and pedagogical) to capture distinct identities of different Englishes’ (Kachru, 1992, p. 2). In that model, the countries of the world have been divided in three circles on the basis of the status of English. The first circle, the Inner Circle, includes the countries where English is widely used as the first language, such as, Britain, the US, or Australia, etc. Then the Outer Circle includes those countries that have institutionalized English, such as, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, etc. The Expanding Circle incorporates the other countries ‘where English was traditionally seen as a foreign language’ (Kirkpatrick, 2014, p. 37). In the book, *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India* (1992), Kachru tried to focus on ‘the twice-born characteristic of English in India’ (Kachru, 2006, p. 1). Kachru analysed the Indianization of the English language, the common themes in the English poems, ‘Indianisms’ and ‘the distinction between a deviation and a mistake’ in it (Kachru, 2006, p. 2).

Some other contemporary applied linguists also have criticized the linguistic imperialism of English and stressed on the decolonizing process of English by exposing the politics of language (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994, 2017; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). In India, English was used by the British colonisers as a colonizing tool as it is found in the *Minute on Education* (1835) by Thomas Babington Macaulay (Ahmad, 2014; Ahmad, 2017). Though Kirkpatrick (2014, p. 37) goes further by defending Pennycook’s (2010) arguments for more localized identification of linguistic varieties after ignoring the national geographical boundaries ‘for a better understanding of the way different language ideologies construct English locally’, the establishment of the Indian English as standard variety is far behind their argument in reality. That is why, some Indian writers attempted to capture some common Indian themes in their English poems. The Indian writers used

the old colonizing tool with a new purpose. In modern India, the English language plays a unifying role to make its huge population with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds feel the Indian nationhood.

Emerging from the mainstream of English literature, the Indian verse in English in the mid-twentieth century appeared as a part of Indian literature. In the widely accepted selection of Indian poems, *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, its editor Parthasarathy (1990) analyses the origin of this stream of literature that “It is Indian in sensibility and content, and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically.” Many Indian poets have tried their hands in writing poems in this foreign language. Though most of the poems lack quality of experience and quality of language, they are rich enough in very Indian themes – its culture, land, economy, people and their feelings, beliefs and problems.

Major Modern Indian English Poetry

Nissim Ezekiel, widely considered to be the pioneer poet since 1950s, has exposed in his poems the real India with the follies, foibles, weaknesses, identity crisis, superstitions and deficiencies of the Indians from a reformative point of view. His commitment to the country is well vivid in his poem ‘Background Casually’:

I have made my commitments now

This is one: to stay where I am

The images of burnt-out mothers, frightened virgins, beggars, hawkers, pavement-sleepers, slum-dwellers, the tall buildings, factory-chimneys and many other urban ones are found in his poems - ‘In India’, ‘A Morning Walk’, ‘Standing at Crossroads’ and ‘Urban’ – where the poet gives us a somewhat depressing picture of the life in the city of Bombay which is a Mini-India to him. In another poem, ‘Night of the Scorpion’, also Ezekiel points to several aspects of Indian people’s psychology, the superstitions, the concepts of sex, sin and emancipation, their desires and misfortunes.

Ezekiel satirized the way Indians use English. He “seriously considered the use of pidgin English notably in poems ‘A Very Indian Poem in Indian English’, ‘Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpa TS’ and ‘The Professor’” and “these poems imitate the idiolectal features of English used by Gujrati speakers” (Parthasarathy, 1989, p. 8):

If you are coming again this side by chance,

Visit please my humble residence also.

I am living just on opposite house’s backside.

(The Professor)

Arun Kolatkar’s *Kala Ghoda Poems* delineates the ‘lowlife’ of Mumbai vividly:

Shit city, he thunders;

the lion of Bombay thunders,

Shit city!

I shit on you.

(Kala Ghoda Poems)

He wrote in both the Marathi and the English languages. His book *Jejuri* won the Commonwealth Prize in 1977 that inspired other Indian English poets to try their hands in English. The following lines present the poverty of an Indian old woman in an Indian setting:

And you look on

the cracks that begin around her eyes

spread beyond her skin

And the hills crack.

And the temples crack.

And the sky falls

with a plateglass clatter

around the shatter proof crone

who stands alone.

(*Jejuri*)

The frankest among the major poets is Kamala Das, a feminist poet, who depicts the unsatisfied desire of Indian woman, their traditional coyness about sex and overlooked plights beside her personal disillusionments in the emotion charged confessional poems, as observed by Paniker (1980). She denounces the male cult to be loveless, lustful, selfish and coward and chants slogans for feminine boldness and freedom:

The heart,

An empty cistern, waiting

Through long hours, fills itself

With coiling snakes of silence...

(*The Freaks*, lines: 14-17)

Rajagopal Parthasarathy is another Indo-Anglian poet who comes back to his motherland, India, after staying few years in London with great disillusionment in quest of his roots - his identity in Indian language and culture which find expression in the three-tier groups of poems entitled *Rough Passage*.

His voyage of seeking own root and Identity starts in the first group of the *Rough*

Passage, entitled 'from Exile':

You learn roots are deeps;
That language is a tree, loses colour
under another sky.

(Poem no. 2)

He feels an urge from his heart to regain his lost connections and moves from England to Bombay. Then he visits Ilhas near Goa, Madras the capital of Tamil Nadu – his ancestral home and Calcutta, but does not find what he seeks for. In the second group, 'Trial', a tranquil recollection of past and renewal of love find their expressions. And the last group of Rough Passage, 'Homecoming', shows his trial to establish his cultural link with Tamil, as he refers to 'Kural' - the ancient Tamil classic. But the decadence of present day Tamilian culture is imaged in the transformation of the river Vaikai. Even Tamil language is found to be degenerated – "hooked on celluloid" and advertisements only. In spite of Parthasarathy's sense of decline and death on personal level, expressed through his father's death, the poet goes on to express his consciousness of the continuity of the Indian family tradition: "I am my father now" (Poem no.4 in Homecoming)

Taken into consideration of the setting, Jayanta Mahapatra's poetry is truly Indian as a large chunk of it deals with Orissa – the history, culture, lifestyle and landscape of Orissa, an important, though backward region of India. His poems like 'Dwan at puri', 'The Orissa Poems', 'Indian Summer Poem', 'The Exile', 'A Rain of Rites', 'Hunger', 'A Missing Person' and 'The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street' are abundant in local images with fusion of objectivity and subjectivity Paniker (1980). Religious beliefs, feeling of guilt and shame, double consciousness of the people of Orissa, of India to the greater extent, are the major themes of his poetry. The themes like appetite for sex and food, poverty, social and political aspects and the poor conditions of public daily life also are found in local settings of India.

Conclusion

The linguistic and idiolectal features of the poetry of almost all of the poets since mid-twentieth century are the direct result of the Indian consciousness. Therefore, it is not surprising that these writers in English are conscious of their Indianness. Not surprisingly, the readers may explore the common theme of identity-crisis in the Indian English poems for this reason. Though the empire writes back in the language of the colonisers, it seems that the writers show a sort of lack of confidence in using the same colonizing tool to hit the former colonisers. Nevertheless, the use of Indian words in English transliteration is taken as a known process of decolonizing English language.

The use of particular phrases, that are not used in standard English, might be treated as a feature of typical Indian English. For example, ‘this side’ in ‘If you are coming again this side by chance’ in Ezekiel’s poem titled The Professor is not an example of standard English, though it expresses the intended meaning clearly. Again, here the wrong use of Present Progressive Tense has been used. The Indian people use the Present Progressive Tense both in spoken and written forms of Indian English to a great extent which is commonly found in the Indian English poems.

The influence of native English poets and the lack in the quality of experience and ambiguous expressions are common in many Indian poems in English. But the themes like love, sex, poverty, the plights of women, the identity-crisis, the common feelings of the people, the social disillusionments, and Indian beliefs, culture, landscape, and social customs are expressed with very Indian sensibilities and in typical Indian-English which has become an important variety of English on the current linguistic map of the world.

References

- Ahmad, S. (2014). A socio-psycholinguistic investigation into the correlation between English language learner motivation and the present status of EFL learning in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Research Foundation Journal*, 3(1), 61–74. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264986365>
- Ahmad, S. (2017). *Motivation of the EFL learners in Bangladesh: Sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, & ELT aspects*. Seattle, WA: Amazon USA. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1521759170/>
- Bose, A. (1970). Modern Indian poetry in English. *Indian Literature*, 13(1), 51–59. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23329701>
- Peräkylä, A. (2004). Analyzing talk and text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Freeman, D. (n.d.) Linguistics in literature. *Linguistic Society of America*. Retrieved from <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/linguistics-literature>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1971). Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's *The Inheritors*. *Literary style: A symposium*, ed. by S. Chatman. London and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, R. (2008). Searching for the greatest Bengali: The BBC and shifting identity categories in South Asia. *National Identities*, 10(2), 149-165.
- Kachru, B. B. (1982). *The other tongue: English across cultures*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1983). *The Indianization of English: The English Language in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. xvi +280 pp.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk and H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in*

- the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1986). The power and politics of English. *World Englishes*, 5(2-3), 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971x.1986.tb00720.x>
- Kachru, B. B. (1990). World Englishes and applied linguistics. *World Englishes*, 9(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971x.1990.tb00683.x>
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). World Englishes: Approaches, issues and resources. *Language Teaching*, 25(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444800006583>
- Kachru, B. B. (1996). The paradigms of marginality. *World Englishes*, 15(3), 241-255.
- Kachru, B. B., Kachru, Y., & Nelson, C. L. (Eds.). (2006). *The handbook of world Englishes*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kachru, Y. & Smith, L. E. (2006). *Cultures, contexts, and world Englishes*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kachru, Y., & Nelson, C. L. (2011). *World Englishes in Asian contexts* (Series: Asian Englishes Today). Aberdeen: Hong Kong University Press.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2014). World Englishes. In C. Leung & B. V. Street (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to English studies* (pp. 33-45). Abingdon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315852515.ch3>
- Kohli, D. (1974). *Kamala Das*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann.
- Lin, H. Y. (2013). Critical perspectives on global English: A study of their implications. *Intergrams*, 13(2), 24.
- Mahboob, A., & Liang, J. (2014). Researching and critiquing world Englishes. *Asian Englishes*, 16(2), 125-140.
- Pennycook, A. (2010). The Future of Englishes: One, Many, or None? In A. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of world Englishes* (pp. 673–688). London: Routledge.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paniker, K. A. (1980). *The poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. Indian poetry in English: A critical assessment*. Delhi: Macmillan.
- Partahasrathy, R. (Ed.). (1989). *Ten twentieth century Indian poets*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). [2017]. *The cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Pearson Longman. (Republished by Routledge).
- Sen, S. (1997). *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India.
- Sridhar, S. N. (2017). In memoriam Braj B. Kachru (1932–2016). *Journal of South Asian Languages and Linguistics*, 4(2), 361-364. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jsall-2017-0020>
- Trappes-Lomax, H. (2004). Discourse Analysis. In A. Davies, & C. Elder (Eds.), *The*

Handbook of Applied Linguistics. Oxford: Blackwell.

Tsui, A.B.M., & Tollefson, J.W. (Eds.) (2007). Language policy and the construction of national cultural identity. *Language policy, culture, and identity in Asian contexts*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<https://doi.org/10.10170S0047404508081141>

About the Author

Saleh Ahmad has the experience of teaching TESOL/ ELT at different universities at home and abroad. Besides, he has been doing research in the fields of TESOL, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, CALL, discourse analysis, and ethnography for more than fourteen years.