

THE ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH AND USE OF IT
BY STUDENTS OF THREE DIFFERENT
MOTHER TONGUES : HINDI,
KANNADA AND TAMIL

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To what extent can a foreign language, imposed on a country during a colonial period, maintain its position against strong forces promoting a new indigenous national language and the revival of many regional languages?

English became the official language in India when the British were in power, through its use in the civil service, education, the professions, business and commerce. After Independence its position as the official language was threatened when Hindi was made the new national language and later when regional language groups began to push for more linguistic power (Roy 1962).¹

That it has not disappeared over the twenty years since India obtained Independence implies that it may still be serving some important function. What is this function? Is it equally important for Indians in the different linguistic regions? It also implies that mechanisms still exist through which the language is being passed on to successive generations. What are these mechanisms? How effective are they in maintaining a language which was imposed from above, and, except for a small portion of the more Anglicized Indians and the small group of Anglo-Indians, never took roots amongst the large majority of the Indian people?

A broad generalization has been formulated stating: "Language maintenance is a function of intactness of group membership or group loyalty, particularly of such ideologized expressions of group loyalty as nationalism" (Fishman 1964: 442).

Does this apply to India? It is difficult to think of the English-

speaking Indians as being a closely integrated group. Sociologically speaking, the one factor that binds them all is that they *do* speak English. An exception might be the Anglo-Indians, who may have a strong sense of loyalty to English. However, they are not numerically large enough, nor do they have enough prestige to maintain English except within their own group.

What chance has a language to survive, then, when it no longer has an 'intact group' to maintain it, supported by 'group loyalty'? Another broad generalization may indicate one of the main reasons why English still remains powerful in India. "When two languages are in competition the more prestigious language displaces the less prestigious language" (Fishman 1964 : 444). In the present case, this might read : "The international prestige of English gives it strong support in comparison to the indigeneous Indian languages." Moreover, its world-wide importance in the economic, political and scientific fields means that at least some members of each country must be facile in English. But is this reason strong enough to motivate one to learn English when one is not sure whether he will ever have to use it? Two other reasons may be more important motivating factors. Some linguistic groups, notably the Tamil-speaking Indians of Tamilnadu state, have felt that the rise of Hindi to the position of a national language has put them at a great disadvantage, particularly in regard to positions in the central civil services. They have thus tried to retain English as a barrier against Hindi.

The other reason is that many ambitious parents feel that their children will not be able to attain the highest business, political or professional careers without a good knowledge of English. It is therefore still deemed important for their self-interests to see that they become fluent in that language. English, then, is still encouraged, but the degree to which it is accepted varies from one part of India to another. Various other factors may also be relevant.

In this context, the present study explores the extent to which English is being maintained by samples of fourth year college students in the capital cities of three different States, each having a different regional language. "Maintenance" would be measured by the number of students speaking it and their proficiency in that language. The cities chosen were Bangalore, Jaipur and Madras, the capital cities, respectively, of the States of Mysore, Rajasthan and Madras.¹

It was hypothesised that we would find English as being maintained to a greater extent in the Southern than the Northern cities. It was also hypothesised that English would be maintained to a greater degree in Madras than Bangalore. Finally, it was hypothesised that the students in the Southern capital cities would have a greater desire to have English as medium of instruction, and at the State and Central levels of government than those of Jaipur, and that the Madras students would be more favourable to this than those of Bangalore.

The maintenance of English was tested on two levels, namely, how people were actually preserving it, and how they felt about preserving it. The first hypotheses were tested by the use of certain variables which were thought to be important in maintaining a language, namely, the use of English in the home, at school and in the students' social life. These variables were chosen because each represented a different type of training and a different 'approach' to the language. The home has the advantage over the school in maintaining a 'foreign' language in that it may be spoken daily in a relaxed atmosphere where the child has little fear of being ridiculed, and so is able to experiment with the vocabulary. As we expected that the longer a child was exposed to a language the more proficient he would become. The students were asked two questions: "What languages did you speak at home as a child?" and "What languages do you now speak at home?"

Schools and colleges have the advantage in language training in that they teach more systematically and precisely than do parents, and the child will learn to read and write as well as speak. Talking English every day, possibly with a wide variety of people as well as with friends, has the advantage of forcing the student to cover many more topics than in the home or class-room, and so it extends his vocabulary. Conversation with friends is usually of a more intimate and subtle nature, especially when it includes humour, and proficiency in this respect is perhaps the best index of a person's bilingual ability.

Several other minor hypotheses were tested, namely, that students who had grown up in cities or large towns would be more anxious to have English as medium of instruction at college, and as the official language of the State and Central governments, than those who had been brought up in villages; male students would want English at these three levels more than female students; and students

who had a very high proficiency in English would prefer English at these three levels more than those whose proficiency in English was below average.

Table 1 shows the students' own estimation of their proficiency in

TABLE 1
STUDENTS REPORTING PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH IN THE
THREE CAPITAL CITIES CONSIDERED TOGETHER

<i>Proficiency of English</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>
(1)	(2)
Very high	68.9
Moderately high	13.1
Average	15.6
Moderately low	1.8
Very low	0.6
Total	100.0 (n=665)

[The students' claim to proficiency in speaking, reading and writing English was rated on a seven-point scale. Those coded with 6 or 7 points were said to have very high proficiency in English; 5 moderately high; 4 average; 3 moderately low and 1 and 2 were rated as very low.]

English. A surprisingly large proportion of them rated their ability to speak, read and write English as very or moderately high. Only a relatively few rated themselves as moderately low or very low in this respect.

Table 2 shows that this is more true for the students studying in

TABLE 2
STUDENTS REPORTING PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH IN THE
CITIES OF MADRAS, BANGALORE AND JAIPUR

<i>Proficiency in English</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>		
	<i>Madras</i>	<i>Bangalore</i>	<i>Jaipur</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Very high	76.1	77.0	37.2
Moderately high	10.7	11.0	22.5
Average	13.2	10.2	31.0
Moderately low	—	1.8	6.2
Very low	—	—	3.1
Total	100.0 (n=310)	100.0 (n=226)	100.0 (n=129)

Madras and Bangalore than in Jaipur. In that city, we find a much larger proportion of students who claim to possess average or below average proficiency in English.

When we look at Tables 3 and 4 we see the way in which the three

TABLE 3
STUDENTS REPORTING VERY HIGH PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH
IN RELATION TO THEIR USE OF IT AT HOME, AS MEDIUM
OF INSTRUCTION AT SCHOOL AND IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS
IN THE CITIES OF MADRAS, BANGALORE AND JAIPUR

City	<i>Percentage of Students reporting very high proficiency in English when</i>		
	<i>English was spoken at home during childhood and/or at present</i>	<i>English was the medium of instruction in primary and/or high school</i>	<i>Student speaks English every day and/or uses it most often with friends</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Madras	86.4 (125)	89.8 (59)	80.4 (266)
Bangalore	89.3 (28)	90.7 (118)	89.8 (187)
Jaipur	60.0 (25)	75.0 (12)	47.2 (72)
Total	83.1 (178)	89.4 (189)	77.5 (525)
Results of test for inter-city differences (χ^2 at 2 df)	6.304(*)	2.892(—)	45.285(**)

[Figures in brackets indicate the number of students in each cell; in this and other tables *** and ** show where the results are significant at 1% and 5% levels respectively, '—' shows that a result is not significant at even 5% level.]

variables—speaking English at home, exposure to it at school and using it in social situations—are related to the proportion of students who claimed very high proficiency in that language. We find that a higher proportion of the students from the two Southern cities had been exposed to English in these three areas than the students from Jaipur. Table 3 also shows a high association between the use of English in the home, at school and in social situations and high proficiency in that language. The only exception is in the case of Jaipur,

where less than half the students who claimed very high proficiency in English used it extensively in social situations.

TABLE 4

STUDENTS REPORTING VERY HIGH PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH
IN RELATION TO THEIR USE OF IT AT HOME, AS MEDIUM
OF INSTRUCTION AT SCHOOL AND IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS
IN THE CITIES OF MADRAS, BANGALORE AND JAIPUR

City	<i>Differences between the cities in the percentages of students with very high proficiency in English (t-test results indicated in brackets)</i>									
	<i>English was spoken at home during childhood and/or at present</i>			<i>Medium of instruction at primary and/or high school was English</i>			<i>English spoken everyday and/or most often with friends</i>			
	<i>Madras</i>	<i>Bangalore</i>	<i>Jaipur</i>	<i>Madras</i>	<i>Bangalore</i>	<i>Jaipur</i>	<i>Madras</i>	<i>Bangalore</i>	<i>Jaipur</i>	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	
Madras		2.9	-26.4		0.9	-14.8		-9.4	-33.2	
		(-)	(**)			(-)	(-)	(**)	(**)	
Bangalore			-29.3			-15.7			-42.6	
			(*)				(-)		(**)	
Jaipur										

Unexpectedly, we found that the three variables did not have the same importance in maintaining English in each city. For we had thought that if the use of English in the home was important in, say, Madras in promoting proficiency, it would be equally important in Bangalore and Jaipur. This, however, was not the case. The difference between the cities was of greatest significance in regard to the use of English in social situations, less in regard to its use in the home, and quite insignificant in regard to its use in school. This seems to suggest that the school plays a rather independent role, irrespective of the city in which it functions, whereas the location of the home has some relevance in promoting proficiency. The most important difference in the influence of the cities on proficiency in language, however, is seen in its use in social situations. To understand why this is so we must consider some of the different characteristics of the cities themselves. Only a few suggestions can be made in this short paper.

One possible reason may be that, whereas Jaipur is situated in a Hindi-speaking region, and the other two cities are located in that

part of India which is, generally speaking, pro-English and anti-Hindi, the 'climate of opinion' in regard to speaking English is more favourable in the latter than in the former cities (Roy 1962 : 24).³ That is, students achieve prestige when they show ability in English in the South, but in the North, and this acts as a motivating factor to speak it well in public.

Another reason for the difference in the climate of opinion to English in the three cities might be found in the linguistic composition of the three cities. The proportion of people who have other mother tongues than the regional language varies from city to city. Bangalore, a highly industrialized city, has attracted workers from many States. Only slightly over half of its population, 51.7%, have Kannada as mother tongue, and there are significant numbers of Tamil, Telugu, Urdu and Marathi-speaking people in that city.⁴ Figures for Madras show that it has a high proportion of Tamil-speaking citizens (i.e. 72.3%), a relatively large number of Telugu speaking-people, and some whose mother tongue is Urdu. Jaipur has the highest proportion of residents, 83.4%, who speak the regional language, Hindi. Urdu is the mother tongue of the second largest group. These two languages are so basically alike that people speaking one of them can communicate relatively easily with those speaking the other language. This means that about 94% of the population of Jaipur can communicate without the need of a common language. In the South, whereas Tamil, Kannada and Telugu have the same roots, they are different enough to make it impossible for people speaking say, Tamil, to be understood by a Kannada-speaking citizen. Urdu is an even more 'foreign' language, so there is much more need for a *lingua franca* for those living in Madras and Bangalore than in Jaipur.

This linguistic composition of the population helps to explain the Southern students' greater use of English in public, and with friends. For it is evident that students must share a mutual language if they wish to have friends, and, as the medium of instruction in the colleges is largely English, then it is the natural choice. In this way the desire to have friends becomes another motivating factor to learn English. Its use is also more practical in the affairs of daily life, for one may buy in the market from a Tamil or Telugu-speaking Indian, or have neighbours who speak these languages.

The climate of opinion towards English, however, is best seen in the figures of Table 5, which show the extent to which the students

desire to retain English at three important levels, namely, as medium of instruction in college, and as the official language of the Central and/or State governments. Here we see that, whereas a very large majority of the Madras and Bangalore students wish to retain

TABLE 5

STUDENTS' PREFERENCE FOR ENGLISH AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AT COLLEGE AND AS THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS COMPARED TO THEIR SEX, URBAN OR RURAL BACKGROUND, PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH AND COLLEGE CITY

Background Characteristics		Percentage of students preferring English as			
		Medium of instruction at College	Official language of the Centre	of the State	
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sex	Male	74.8 (456)	70.4 (456)	44.3 (456)	
	Female	76.6 (222)	63.5 (222)	57.6 (456)	
χ^2 (at 1 df)		0.259(-)	3.257(-)	10.667(**)	
According to where brought up	Urban	70.0 (540)	68.9 (540)	50.7 (540)	
	Rural	68.8 (138)	65.2 (138)	40.6 (138)	
χ^2 (at 1 df)		3.978(*)	0.682(-)	4.542(*)	
Proficiency in English	Very high	86.0 (460)	78.2 (450)	57.2 (458)	
	Moderate or low	52.2 (207)	53.1 (207)	30.3 (208)	
χ^2 (at 1 df)		88.296(**)	42.828(**)	44.197(**)	
City where studying	Madras	90.2 (315)	88.3 (315)	71.1 (315)	
	Bangalore	84.2 (228)	70.6 (228)	41.7 (228)	
	Jaipur	25.9 (135)	17.0 (135)	8.1 (135)	
χ^2 (at 2 df)		214.510(**)	221.682(**)	156.717(**)	
Over-all		75.4 (678)	68.1 (678)	48.7 (678)	

[Figures in brackets indicate the number of students in each cell.]

English as medium of instruction at college, only a quarter of the Jaipur students have that desire. A slightly lower but still high proportion of the Madras students wish to retain it as the official language of the Central government, and fewer, but still a high proportion want to keep it as the official State language.

The Bangalore students also show a strong preference for English as medium of instruction and as the official language of the Central government. However, there is a sharp drop in the proportion of those wanting to retain it as the official State language.

The figures for Jaipur vary significantly from the other two cities at each level. Only 25% want to keep it as the medium of instruction, but the proportion drops to 17% for those who wish it as the official language of the Centre, and this figure almost halves for those who want it as the official State language.

It can thus be seen that the Madras students are much more strongly in favour of maintaining English than students of the other two cities, and the students of Bangalore are far ahead of Jaipur in this respect.

It appears, then, that our first hypothesis that the students in the Southern capital cities would have a greater desire to maintain English than the students in the Northern city, and the Madras students more than the Bangalore students, is supported by our data. In this sense, the "Southern" cities have their internal variations and should not be bracketed as such.

The second hypothesis, based on the expectation that those brought up in cities would be more cosmopolitan in outlook than those who had grown up in small towns, and would therefore have a greater desire to keep English as medium of instruction at college, and as the official language of the two governments, was borne out in the first two instances. There was no significant difference, however, in their desire to have English as the official language of the Central government.

The third hypothesis, that male students would prefer English at these three levels more than female students was not maintained except in respect to the State government, for the female students showed a keener desire to have English at that level than the men.

Finally, very high proficiency in English was highly associated with approval of retaining English in each city. Therefore, proficiency more than any of the other variables tested becomes the common and the most important factor in motivating students to

TABLE 6
STUDENTS' PREFERENCE FOR ENGLISH AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AT COLLEGE AND AS
THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS
COMPARED TO THEIR PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH*

Proficiency in English	Percentage of students preferring English as									
	Medium of instruction at college			Official language of the Centre			Official language of the State			
	Madras	Bangalore	Jaipur	Madras	Bangalore	Jaipur	Madras	Bangalore	Jaipur	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	
Very high	91.5 (236)	89.8 (176)	41.7 (48)	91.2 (228)	74.7 (174)	41.7 (48)	74.5 (236)	46.0 (174)	12.5 (48)	
Moderate or low	86.5 (74)	61.5 (52)	14.8 (81)	89.2 (74)	57.7 (52)	17.3 (81)	60.0 (75)	26.9 (52)	4.9 (81)	
χ^2 (at 1 df)	1.636 (-)	23.552 (**)	11.650 (**)	0.061 (-)	5.610 (*)	9.232 (**)	5.580 (*)	6.075 (*)	2.410 (-)	
χ^2 (at 3 df) in case χ^2 at 1 df is not significant at 1% level	3.753 (-)			2.327 (-)	7.832 (*)		13.589 (**)	15.377 (**)	5.979 (-)	

retain English.

In summary, the extensive use of English as medium of instruction in primary and/or high school was found to be the most important factor in attaining proficiency in English. For it was an influential factor irrespective of the city in which the learning took place. Speaking English at home when the students were young and/or at the present time was found to be next in importance. However, speaking English every day and most often with friends was not found to be highly associated with proficiency in all of the cities. In other words, it was the variable most affected by outside contingencies, and so not a constant influence in learning English.

When we look at the way in which the different variables are associated with the students' desire to retain English in three important areas of life we find that proficiency in the language is more highly associated with the desire to retain English at these three levels (Table 6). The conclusions drawn from these data are that, whereas the school and home are the main agencies that generate proficiency in English, it is the mastery of the language which becomes the key factor in determining the students' attitudes towards English. In other words, proficiency in English leads to a preference to retain it.

NOTES

1. Roy (1962) gives a comprehensive account of the rise of Hindi in the different linguistic States in India.
2. The original study is based on the answers of 1,254 fourth year college students in the summer of 1965 to a questionnaire based on their language experiences at home, school and college. Their Mother Tongues were Tamil, Kannada and Hindi. Data were gathered from colleges in the capital cities of Madras, Bangalore and Jaipur, and from two other non-capital cities and small towns in the Southern States. This enabled us to compare the different ways in which the students wanted to maintain English in cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city areas as compared to those attending colleges in the more rural atmosphere of small towns.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN SAMPLE

<i>State</i>	<i>Sample size</i>	<i>Capital City</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Town</i>
Madras	531	Madras	320	Madurai 150 Vaniambadi 61
Mysore	577	Bangalore	236	Mysore 154 Tumkur 187
Rajasthan	146	Jaipur	146	—
Total	1254	702	304	248

This paper, however, deals only with the data collected in the three capital cities.

3. Roy claims that some Indians want to maintain English because it was never regarded as a "foreign imposition, associated with foreign rule and to be discarded like foreign cloth. It was on the contrary taken as the one relieving feature of British rule, to be carefully nursed, developed and used for the delectation of the mind. Hindi on the other hand was regarded (in the South) as a North Indian imposition to be resisted and discarded."

This helps to explain the prestige of English in Southern India, and why it has been used as a *lingua franca* instead of the regional languages, such as Tamil and Kannada. The use of English was probably more important in Bangalore as it was a cantonment during part of the British period.

4. *Census of India*, 1961. Vol. I, Part II-C(ii), Language Tables. Only the languages spoken by 1% or more of the population in the city are shown.

Percentage of the population speaking different languages :

Madras—Tamil, 72.3%, Telugu 14.4%, Urdu 6.0%

Bangalore—Kannada 51.7%, Telugu 17.5%, Tamil 16.2%, Urdu 9.7%,

Marathi 2.5%

Jaiपुर—Hindi 83.4%, Urdu 13.6%, Punjabi 2.7%.

5. For the purpose of this table all the codes of the item denoting the "below average" and "average" proficiency were lumped into one category while the three other codes representing the "above average" proficiency were treated exactly. Unlike Madras, the (obtained) value of χ^2 for Jaipur led to a more sensitive test of significance as follows :

Source	df	χ^2
Linear regression	1	5.035 (*)
Deviation	3	1.028 (-)
Overall value	4	6.063 (-)

A test similar to that done for Jaipur becomes more effective :

Source	df	χ^2
Linear regression	1	9.088 (**)
Deviation	3	1.257 (-)
Overall value	4	10.345 (**)

Since the overall obtained value of χ^2 for Madras would not be significant even at 1 df, the splitting of overall obtained χ^2 would not provide any additional evidence.

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