



# Compte-rendu de English in the Indian Diaspora

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► **To cite this version:**

Isabelle Gaudy-Campbell. Compte-rendu de English in the Indian Diaspora. 2016, pp.393-395.  
10.1163/19552629-00902009 . hal-01738657

**HAL Id: hal-01738657**

**<https://hal.univ-lorraine.fr/hal-01738657>**

Submitted on 26 Apr 2019

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**Marianne Hundt and Devyani Sharma (Eds.)**

*English in the Indian Diaspora*, 2014. ix, 244 pages. Varieties of English Around the World G50. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. ISBN 9789027249104.

The volume deals with the linguistic aspects of the Indian Diaspora, the regional spread ranging here from Singapore, via Africa and the UK to the Caribbean and the South Pacific. Both primary and secondary diaspora contexts (in the UK and New Zealand) are covered.

Apart from Mesthrie (1991) and Wiebesiek (2011), very little research has been produced on the local contact variety of Indian English. This selection of articles brings together scholarly research on the use of English in the Indian Diaspora posing the following theoretical and methodological questions (Different diasporic situations for different outcomes?/Similarity of contact features and processes across diasporic situations/Types of responses to dialect contact relating to the degree of endonormative stabilisation of Asian Englishes?/The relations between the differences and our understanding of community structures, attitudinal orientations/Identity development and the link between the rate of change, adaptation, and the degree of transnational network maintenance). Linguistic features such as phonetics, syntax and lexis are tackled.

Within variationist linguistics, four articles first deal with phonetic variation.

First, Leung and Deuber, in 'Indo-Trinidadian speech: an investigation into a popular stereotype surrounding speech', question whether the fundamental frequency (Fo) is a cue to distinguish ethnicity. Indo-Trinidadians are perceived as having high-pitched voices whereas Afro-Trinidadians are said to have low-pitched voices. Samples of both communities are modified and tested on listeners. It is thereby suggested that there exists an Indo-Trinidadian suprasegmental ethnolect and it is proven that Trinidadians rely on Fo to distinguish ethnicity. This can especially be applied to Indo-Trinidadian women whose pitch-range is clearly different. It is less obvious on male samples.

Farhana Alam and Jane Stuart-Smith present a sociophonetic study of /t/ in their article entitled 'Identity, ethnicity and fine phonetic detail'. They deal with the phonological processes by which features are passed on through generations. In keeping with the research framework of Lawson (2011), Docherty and Foulkes (1999), they are concerned with phonetic characteristics being salient for a community. More precisely, they present an acoustic phonetic analysis of /t/ when used as the syllable-initial, in the speech of Pakistani heritage Glaswegian girls in inner-city secondary schools. Through an acoustic phonetic analysis, tokens of syllable-initial /t/ are extracted into Praat and four measures (the mean, the spread, the skew and the kurtosis) of the spectral energy are considered on a statistical level: they prove that fine phonetic variation is indexical of local ethnic identity.

Claudia Rathore studies the phonological variation across generations in her research entitled 'East African Indian twice migrants in Britain'. Do the dynamics of dialect variation differ if one considers on the one hand double diaspora situations or second generations? This question is tackled by studying the variation in the production of postvocalic /r/ by first generation East African Indians in Leicester (whose use very much equals the rhoticity variable in Indian English) and by second-generation speakers (whose use is very similar to that of the East Midland speakers). Though twice migrant, the former have kept apart from African linguistic influence and their linguistic pattern is very much that of Indian English. This is accounted for by their recurrent ties with their home land and their schooling in Africa via imported South Asian teachers. As far as the difference between the first and the second generation goes, socioeconomic backgrounds are also factored in. The retention of the rhoticity by the first generation East African Indians can be linked to the fact that they have mainly been a working-class community whereas the second generation enjoys higher education and is employed in middle-class occupations.

In their study entitled 'Sociophonetics and the Indian diaspora', Rajend Mesthrie and Alida Chevalier deal with 'the NURSE vowel and other selected features in South African Indian English'. Besides considerations on the Indian English phonology (retroflexion, aspiration) giving indications of levelling and fudging of variables like aspiration of P T K, the authors follow a sociophonetic study showing internal sociolinguistic developments and innovations within the South African Indian English relating to age, gender and class. A detailed analysis of NURSE vowel shows that young South African Indian English speakers move away from the L2 norms of the former generation, take on gender differences without necessarily adopting the variants used in the White South African English. As a matter of fact, middle class females have lower(-ed) NURSE vowels (lower vowel height, F<sub>1</sub>) and fronted Nurse vowels (more vowel advancement, F<sub>2</sub>).

The two following studies are concerned by grammatical variation.

In their article entitled 'Imperfectives in Singapore's Indian community', Jakob R.E. Leimburger and Lavanya Sankaran test the over-use of the *-ing* form as a marker of all imperfectives among 96 informants in Singapore coming from the Tamil, Malay and Chinese communities. Much more than the two other groups who tend to dismiss the inflection on statives and non-delimited habituals, the Tamils rate the use of *-ing* as acceptable. This can be understood by the fact that this over-extension reproduces the Tamil aspectual system where the marker *kondiru* is used to mark all imperfectives. The Tamils, though a minority representing 9% of the population, against 13% of Malays and 74% of Chinese, are a well-established ethnic group, both socially and economically, who use English as a home language and are likely to be linguistically

influential. The parallel with the Tamil aspectual system might account for the (Indian) Singapore English aspect system even if it is too early to speak of a complete pan-ethnic Singapore English.

Marianne Hundt studies 'Zero articles in Indian Englishes: a comparison of primary and secondary diaspora situations'. The primary diaspora situation considered here is that of Fiji Indians in Fiji and the author conducts fieldwork on spontaneous conversations. The secondary diaspora situation is that of Fiji Indians in Wellington, New Zealand, where both first- and second-generation migrants are recorded. The questions asked here are whether the fact of acquiring English in a mainly English-speaking environment has an influence on the omission of articles that is a typical feature of Indian English and whether there is a link between the use of zero articles and the construction of identity in the secondary diaspora. The data based study concludes that both indefinite and definite articles are likely to be omitted in modified noun phrases, and that only first-generation speakers will substitute definite articles with demonstrative adjectives and indefinite articles with *one*. This substrate influence does not persist into the second-generation migrants whose omission of the article is infrequent. The educational background, rather than the degree of contact with native English speakers or the identity construction as a New Zealander, relates to the level of proficiency in the use of the articles.

The last three articles go beyond the level of markers and adopt a wider perspective.

Rajend Mesthrie contributes an article on 'A lesser globalisation: A sociolinguistic study of Indian Englishes in diaspora, with a primary focus on South Africa'. It is a sociolinguistic vocabulary study in the fields of food, music, kinship and clothing accounting for cultural changes (adaptation, survival, retention and innovation) in diaspora. The aim is to compare how main Indian terms have survived in different territories. The study is based on Indian English within the data given by the *Dictionary of South African English* and proves that second generation speakers keep Indian words when speaking English. This lexical retention is accounted for through bilingualism, return trips to India and through the issue of separating the use of Indian vocabulary from colloquial use.

In 'Indo-Fijian English: linguistic diaspora or endonormative stabilisation?', Lena Zipp considers exonormative (diasporic) effects against endonormative stabilisation of a variety of Fiji English. It is shown that there are few linguistic links between the Indo-Fijian variety of English and Indian English. Through field work and the analyses of questionnaires, the author shows that a local variety is emerging and speaks of Fiji English. This variety of English presents endonormative stabilisation' rather diasporic influence.

In the article 'Transnational flows, language variation, and ideology', Devyani Sharma studies a diasporic Punjabi community in West London for their

transnational ties and their impacts on language. The lessening of the former has an impact on the latter. Namely, the use of the retracted /t/ (retraction of the tip of the tongue in the postalveolar region) tends to disappear in the second generation British Asians with decreasing transnational ties. Language ideologies are also studied. The Indian community is increasingly associated with economic growth and the urban middle class variety of Standard Indian English is now perceived as a stable and influencing reference in the diaspora.

Along with the editors, Marianne Hundt and Devyani, we will underline the key elements that this volume presents: the persistence of accent features and syntactic patterns, the question of retention versus adaptation to a new environment, the issue of identity construction within and beyond that of language, and the use by the later generations of new social meanings embedded in their class and gender environment.

To conclude on this book review, we might regret that the third part of the volume makes obvious socio-linguistic remarks. Namely, it seems self-evident that the retention of Indian features within Indian English should be linked with speakers with low education or a working class activity. Still, we very much value the different angles under which the linguistic contacts are tackled in this volume, be it for their geographic or historical diversity, or for their linguistic pertinence. For those reasons, we would like to recommend reading this volume that gives a qualified and precisely documented insight into Indian English.

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