Investigating Diachronic Variation and Change in New Varieties of English

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BACKGROUND

The Study of Indian English From a Language-Contact Perspective

The issue of contact instantiating processes of pidginization and creolization can be differentiated according to varieties that arise through contact with languages coming outside the area, especially through colonialism and varieties that arise through internal contact among languages already indigenous to the area (Schiffman 2010, p.741). From this perspective, the South-Asian region can be considered a paradigm example of the phenomenon known as "convergence area" (Weinreich 1958) referred to phenomena specifically occurring in language contact situations that lead to changes in all areas of grammar.

Some decades after Weinreich's descriptive study, Charles Ferguson (1992) published a comprehensive essay on some features of "language use" that make South Asia an interesting subject of study as "sociolinguistic area". His attention to "shared patterns of use" and not only of shared grammatical structures was an important step towards the understanding of general processes of language change in contact situations. Ferguson's particular perspective, in fact, "looks for the relationship between diachronic language change and language development, phonology and syntax, social conventionalization and cognitive processing, and language universals and individual differences" (Huebner 1996, p.12). Consequently, in studies concerning the development of new varieties, a crucial issue is the extent to which universals of language (Pinker 2003, p.23) and language contact exert their influence on shaping those language systems. Recent research has tested current hypotheses on the interrelationship between language universals and language variation and given rise to new challenging theories on contact varieties. Namely, the notion of "vernacular universals" (Chambers 2004) limits the supposed tendency towards the *absolute creativity* of these varieties relying on the identification of universally shared features across varieties of English around the world.

The Study of Indian English From a Comparative Perspective

To date, two important issues have not been exhaustively examined by experts in the field of variationist studies: the first deals with the characterization of Standard English at the time of colonization that was slightly different from today's standard against which new varieties of English are usually investigated, the second concerns possible internal and deterministically governed developments occurring in both early / late Modern English and its new emerging varieties[1].

When considering the peculiar contact situation in the Asian subcontinent English has played a major role in influencing local South Asian languages, though it was not the first European language to have an impact on them since Portuguese was already attested in the area before the founding of the East India Company in the early 1600s. By the end of the 18th century, the knowledge of English had grown greatly and re-

placed Portuguese as the *lingua franca* of India (Nihalani 2005, vi). However, it is worth noting that the *General Report on the Census of India, 1891* still records a low average percentage (4.4%) of 'those who know English' (Baines 1893: 224) and "not anyone who learned English in India was taught directly by a native speaker of the language" (Nihalani 2005, vi). Moreover, the local British community is at that time supposed to be expanding to what Schneider (2007, p. 37) defines as "British plus: genuinely British no doubt, but seasoned with the additional flavor of the colonial experience which those who stayed 'home' do not share". 'Colonial lag' is the expression used to refer to the consequent conservatism in colonial varieties as a potential factor in distinguishing them 'from their home counterparts in all levels of language' (Bauer 2002, p. 5). Overall, some features of a colonial dialect can be predicted from the form used by the majority of the settlers (Bauer, 2002, p.11) who, in the case of India, came originally from the city of London (Salaja 2009, p. 95)[2]. Anyway, 'in the colonial situation, a lot of speakers of many different dialects come face to face, and in the short term the result is a period of diversity where everyone is accommodating to everyone else […I]n most cases the form used by the majority will be the form that survives in the new mixed dialect' (Bauer 2012, p. 8).

The Emergence of a New Variety

Apart from deviations and occasional 'errors', it is therefore possible to classify the features of IndEng into three groups (Meshtrie & Bhatt 2008, p. 47):

1. Dialect features of the superstrate which have survived despite the norms of instructed English
2. Features of early modern English surviving in a particular colony
3. 'True' innovations in IndEng with no equivalent forms in modern English.

Some of the possible effects of these factors on the characterization of the emerging variety can be seen in Table 1. Significantly, when comparing the number of innovations characterizing IndEng and late Modern English, the distance between them dramatically reduces at least for some of those aspects that are generally considered as Indian English-specific (Calabrese 2012, 2015).

In particular, the increase in Verb + particle combinations[4] within the class of multi-word verbs, made up of a common verb, often one syllable combined with a preposition, has been considered as one of the most important characteristics of the modern English vocabulary (Baugh & Cable 2002, p.345). As a matter of fact, the changing uses of prepositions clearly reflect the idiomatic changes[5] in a language from one age to another (ibid., p. 248) following the developmental path from synthetic[6] to analytical constructions. This steady process dating back to Old English led to a gradual structural shift "from a productive system of verbal prefixes to a new system of post-verbal particles [in which] phrasal verbs as well as prepositional verbs come to be the functional equivalents of the older prefixed verbs" (Brinton 1988, p.185). The same tendency to favor phrasal verbs instead of simplex verbs to express aspectual meanings can frequently be observed in contact situations as well (Danchev 1992, p.30). The resulting poly-verbal constructions represent a type of paraphrase that has been

Table 1. Linguistic features emerging in Late Modern English and Indian English

Linguistic feature	Late Modern English	Indian English
Increase in Verb+particle combinations	✓	✓
Extensive use of Verb+particle combinations as nouns	✓	✓
Tendency to eliminate 3rd pers –s marking of *do*[3]	✓	✓
Lexical expansion (borrowings, loanwords, neologisms)	✓	✓

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