Language and Society (CL2.203)

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Project Statement

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Aim

The aim of the project is to study the syntax and morphology of Indian English, as compared to British English and Indian languages. Variables distinct from British English and similar to Indian languages will be given special focus.

Problem Statement

The hypothesis is that Indian English diverges from British English in syntax and morphology principally due to the borrowing of grammatical features from Indian languages.

It is probably that the first generation of English-speaking Indians spoke it as a second language, and therefore the hypothesis that they made use of their native languages' features in it is tenable. This continues even in speakers whose first language is English.
If this hypothesis is true, a number of features will be found in which Indian English diverges from standard British English but is similar to some Indian language.

Variables

It has already been mentioned that only the syntax and morphology of Indian English will be considered. Its phonology, discourse, vocabulary, etc. are not the objects of study.

The variety of (non-Indian) English that will be considered is standard British English. It is assumed that this variety is not significantly different from that spoken at the time when English became popular in India.

The variety of Indian English under study is the one spoken in South India by urban middle-class speakers. For such speakers, Indian English tends to be a first or a second language.

Correspondingly, the Indian languages considered will be English, Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu. Especially in urban centres, a fair proportion of each of these languages is spoken, and therefore has the potential to influence the English spoken in these locations.

Methods

I will collect data from my family and friends, all of whom fit the above description. The data exhibiting divergences from standard British English will be isolated, and these divergences will be compared against the corresponding variables in the Indian language(s) that the speaker is familiar with or exposed to on a regular basis.

Depending on the circumstances, a brief historical review of the use of English in India might also be undertaken.