BBC NEWS

It's Hinglish, innit?

By Sean Coughlan
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Hinglish - a hybrid of English and south Asian languages, used both in Asia and the UK - now has its own dictionary. Is it really a pukka way to speak?

Are you a "badmash"? And if you had to get somewhere in a hurry, would you make an "airdash"? Maybe you should be at your desk working, instead you're reading this as a "timepass".

These are examples of Hinglish, in which English and the languages of south Asia overlap, with phrases and words borrowed and re-invented.

It's used on the Indian sub-continent, with English words blending with Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi, and also within British Asian families to enliven standard English.

A dictionary of the hybrid language has been gathered by Baljinder Mahal, a Derby-based teacher and published this week as The Queen's Hinglish.

"Much of it comes from banter - the exchanges between the British white population and the Asians," she says.

"It's also sometimes a secret language, which is being used by lots of British Asians, but it's never been picked up on."

And in multi-cultural playgrounds, she now hears white pupils using Asian words, such as "kati", meaning "I'm not your friend any more". For the young are linguistic magpies, borrowing from any language, accent or dialect that seems fashionable.

And the dictionary identifies how the ubiquitous "innit" was absorbed into British Asian speech via "haina" - a Hindi tag phrase, stuck on the sentences and meaning "is no?".

Birmingham balti

It's also the language of globalisation. There are more English-speakers in India than anywhere else in the world - and satellite television, movies and the internet mean that more and more people in the sub-continent are exposed to both standard English and Hinglish.

This collision of languages has generated some flavoursome phrases. If you're feeling "glassy" it means you need a drink. And a "timepass" is a way of distracting yourself.

A hooligan is a "badmash" and if you need to bring a meeting forward, you do the opposite of postponing - in Hinglish you can "prepone".

There are also some evocatively archaic phrases - such as "stepney", which in south Asia is used to mean a spare, as in spare wheel, spare mobile or even, "insultingly, it must be said, a mistress," says Ms Mahal.

Its origins aren't in Stepney, east London, but Stepney Street in Llanelli, Wales, where a popular brand of spare tyre was once manufactured

But don't assume that familiar Asian words used in the UK will necessarily translate back. "Balti" will probably be taken to mean bucket in India rather than a type of cooking, as this cuisine owes more to the west Midlands than south Asia.

Ad land

In south Asia, Hinglish has been given a modern, fashionable spin by its use on music channels and in advertising. And it's appeared in the UK on programmes such as Goodness Gracious Me and the Kumars at Number 42, with a catchphrase about "chuddies" (underpants).

IMPORTED FROM INDIA
- Pyjamas, caravan, bungalow
- Doolally, cushy, dinghy
- Pundit, thug

The exporting of words into English has also caught the attention of the south Asian media, with the Times of India reporting: "Brand India has shaken, stirred and otherwise Bangalored the world's consciousness." Yes, "to Bangalore" is another Hinglishism, meaning to send overseas, as in call centres.

The arrival of Hinglish and the influence of Indian words on English are also a reflection of the rise of the Indian sub-continent as an economic power-house.

Language expert David Crystal has described India as having a "unique position in the English-speaking world".

"[It's a] linguistic bridge between the major first-language dialects of the world, such as British and American English, and the major foreign-language varieties, such as those emerging in China and Japan."

But there are much older crossovers between English and the languages of the Indian sub-continent, with many words imported from the soldiers and administrators of the British Raj.

These borrowed words include "pundit", originally meaning a learned man; "shampoo", derived from a word for massage; "pyjamas", meaning a leg garment and "dungarees", originating from the Dungri district of Mumbai.

Even the suburban-sounding "caravan" and "bungalow" - and the funky "bandana" and "bangles" - were all taken from Hindi words.

Pick and mix

It's not only the south Asian languages that have fused with English to take on a new identity.

There is Spanglish, used in parts of the United States where people shift seamlessly between Spanish and English, and where hybrid words are created - such as a sign "No hangear" meaning "No hanging around."

Advertisers in the Far East use a form of fractured English too, as much for its visual impact as its meaning.

But this pick and mix approach should be embraced not resisted, says Ms Mahal. It's natural and inevitable that languages will adapt and change to whatever is around.

"There might be puritans in any culture who say you can only be the master of one language, and that you shouldn't try to cross two languages. But do we only have one fixed identity? I don't

think so, I think we can step in and out of different identities - and we can do the same with languages.

"People might say this is my language, this is way it has always been. Well, it hasn't. Shakespeare's English was different from Chaucer's. The evolution of language is never going to stop."

As George Orwell wrote in 1984, the fewer words we have, the more restricted our thinking becomes. With this in mind, I embrace the evolution and expansion of any language (especially the one I use). Adding words to your language, allows for more freedom of thought and expression. However, it does also mean you need a better spellchecker.
DS, Bromley, England

We have always used a mix of English, Gujarati and Swahili in our everyday language. It is so embedded that we do not realise it. So all this is natural and continues to evolve as more mixtures of languages occur. It's great listening to people in Kenya and those here as well those from India. We just mix more as we expand use of the internet as well.
Kiran Chauhan, Leicester

I love the integration of foreign languages into the English language. It's one of the reasons I studied it, and one of the reasons etymology was my favourite subject. Let's face it, English is a mish-mash of foreign languages with added dodgy pronunciation and spelling!
Martje Ross, Lancaster, UK

This is gruntling news - a most appointing story for anyone who enjoys flirting with language. And let's not overlook the claims of Honklish and Singlish too, lah! All those dynamic Chuppies (Chinese-speaking upwardly-mobile people) can't be wrong . . . !
Tom, Lewes

The latest fashionable version of Thai also contains a lot of English words. To the with-it crowd, "chill chill" now means relaxing and "hiso" (from high society) posh. For example, a commonly said phrase "pai nang chill chill kan" translates to "let's go and lounge around."
Nophol T., Bangkok, Thailand

I would query the origin of "innit" as from "haina". My father told me off for saying innit in the sixties, it is from "isn't it", especially around Bristol. Check Dirk Robson's books, Krek waiters peak brissle, and Eurekal.
Dave Gibbs, Weston super Mare, England

As a British Asian, I grew up in West London in the late Sixties/early Seventies, whilst my cousins grew up in the West Midlands. The origin of the word, "init" is pure Brummie - and we (in the South) adopted it after listening to our cousins.
Gurmit Flora, London

I agree with Dave Gibbs about the origin of "innit". In rural Gloucestershire I was being corrected by my parents well before 1950 for using innit istead of isn't it.
Les Giles, Great Missenden, Bucks

The previous comments about "innit" being from "isn't it" are indeed correct, but your respondents have missed the point being made. English has many forms of these so-called "tag questions" depending on the sentence: "isn't it", "aren't we", "weren't they", "don't you". Hindi has just one ("na" or "hai na"), just as French ("n'est-ce pas") and German ("nicht wahr") do. The usage being described is that these English speakers now use "isn't it" (reduced to "innit") in ALL cases, and not just where you would expect it grammatically. The suggestion is that it's the way it's being used that has been influenced by other languages, not the etymology of the word itself.
David E Newton, London

To Dave Gibbs and Les Giles: The article doesn't claim "innit" comes from "haina". It only states "innit" was introduced into Hinglish as an invariant tag (in the same way "haina" is used in Hindi), i.e. a tag that can substitute any other kind of English tag (English: "We've seen this movie before, haven't we", Hinglish: "We've seen this movie before, innit").
Wim Vandenberghe, Hässelby, Stockholm

Very good article. You can also add other Indian words like cash (From kasu - Tamil), catamaran (Kattu maram - Tamil), mango (mangai - Tamil), juggernaut (jegannath -Sanskrit).
Arun, Stratford, London

Another example of the erosion of Britishness. Why isn't there an article on how Asians that come to Britain are becoming more British, instead of the locals becoming more foreign? Why is the BBC so terrified of Britishness?
John Alexander, Portsmouth

I had always wonderd why there is a pub in Southall called "Glassy Junction". Now I know. Thank you for enlightening me!
Steve Burns, Reading

Hinglish? Sounds good to me. Language should be alive. And to Mr Alexander of Portsmouth - I might live in Quebec but I still consider myself a Brit. Its just that my concept of "Britishness" includes using local French argot terms in my everyday speech. Learn to live with it.
Chris, Verdun, Quebec

It is the greatest strength of the English language that it adopts anything it can use to enrich itself. This is one of the reasons why English is such dominant language internationally and why it is supremely well suited to the production of poetry and literature of so many varieties. Hinglish is a wonderful example of a living language in action, evolving to meet the needs of its speakers. I can't wait to call somebody at work and "prepone" a future meeting!
Amanda, Bradford, UK

A very good article indeed. Indians have no doubt got their language embedded into English but in doing so they have also made their language(at least spoken one) 'corrupt'. You would see more and more of younger generation speaking English rather than their mother tongue (which could be one of the hundreds of languages India has). Let us take the case of Kashmir (where I am from). Kids are actually discouraged to speak Kashmiri (their native language) by their parents/elders which I feel is disgusting. No doubt English is a must in today's world but not at the expense of one's mother tongue. This has reached to the point in Kashmir where over 95% of people cannot write Kashmiri and a slighlty smaller percentage cannot read their language. By the way, I can read Kashmiri to some extent but cannot write it, which I really feel sad about.
Saqib, England

Well, I am originally from Wales, and can certainly vouch for the strong existence for a 'Wenglish' (mixture of Welsh and English). Great fun to use and just another way of expressing oneself.
Ruth, London

It is all well and good enriching languages, but I think the Indians have gone one step too far to try and destroy thier own language. If you listen to an Indian news broadcast one in Hindi and the other one in English you will find that the news in Hindi uses a lot of English words and the news in English is pure English.This applies to all programmes whether it is in Engand or India.
Ram Maharaj, London

English is so rich because it has never been crystallised like German or French. As long as it keeps growing and developing it will remain predominant as the most democratic language of all. However, people in Britain must accept that it is no longer our language and that we will one day be simply speaking a dialect of a much wider common tongue.
Andy Crick, Oxfordshire, UK

Fascinating! I was checking out the BBC take on our election and found a new source of interesting news stories. We do not say "Innit" here in the US, but the use of the word "like" cannot be, like, described, like, you know?
Whitney Wetherill, Clinton Town, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, USA

On the derivation of 'caravan'. Does this have Indian roots or Arabic. There is a city in Tunisia named 'Kairouan/Qairouan'. Arabs may have borrowed it from he Indians like the numerals though...
Khan, London

This is a truly delightful piece. English, whilst basically a Germanic language, is already a glorious concoction of French, Nordic, Latin, Greek with trace elements of Celtic and much else besides. I see no reason to be other than grateful that we have such a wonderful language and additional Hindi elements will only add to its richness. English is a prime example of Saussure's principle of diachronic change. Long may it be so.
Dr Ian Sedwell, Weymouth

Don't forget Franglais, Chinglish, Konglish, Janglish, Singlish and Texmex. These dialects will always appear where main languages meet.
Glenn , St Helens

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