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“Hinglish”

Hindi finds its roots in Sanskrit and the Devanagari script, dating all the way back to the 12th century. It has been the official language of the government of India since 1950, and despite the presence of English, due to British Colonization, and many regional languages, it continues to be the mother tongue of many Indians. However, Hindi is in a revolutionary phase right now. Throughout its history, it has been a rich and expressive language with a rich lexicon, but due to historic and socioeconomic factors, the nature of Hindi's existence is being turned upon its head in modern day India.

The regional prominence of Hindi and the number of Hindi speakers is correlated to socioeconomic class, the presence of regional languages, and predominantly the influence of English. First and foremost, for the majority of rural India, people grow up bilingual in Hindi and their regional language. This has to do with the fact that rural India is exponentially poorer than the Urban parts, and education is minimal, with extremely limited exposure to English. Here, individuals speak a much more complete and pure form of Hindi since English does not affect its usage as it does in Urban areas.

For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to Hindi speakers as the set of speakers in Urban areas, where the presence of English in modern day India is astonishingly prominent. English is the primary language of instruction in almost all private schools, while we begin learning formal Hindi only after 1st grade and as a 2nd language. Only a few government schools provide instruction in Hindi or regional languages. Due to the minimal stress on formal instruction in Hindi, most Indians in my generation and the recent ones can barely write 3 sentences without spelling errors and can read English several times faster than they can read Hindi.

English is also the language used for interviews, meetings, conferences, and almost every other business-related work. Moreover, English is a status symbol in modern day India, where one's level of fluency in English is often used as a measure for unfounded estimates about their social class and level of intelligence.

The increasing presence of English in modern day India is leading to a shift from what one may call “Shudh [ʃʊdʰ] Hindi” to a more colloquial and conversational Hindi. “Shudh” in Hindi means “pure,” and this pure refers to the way our older generations and people in rural areas speak. They have an extensive vocabulary, stick to a prescriptive Hindi grammar, and use mannerisms of speaking that a younger speaker would perceive as extremely formal, often to the point of incomprehension. Younger speakers speak using significantly more colloquial words, and much of their communication uses English mixed into their Hindi. While the addition of colloquial or slang words, which is often a result of borrowed words from regional languages, is ever present in Hindi, it does not reduce our usage of Hindi. The truly impactful factor is the manner in which English has permeated its way into everyday spoken Hindi.

Codeswitching using Hindi and English is a daily and subconscious occurrence for almost everyone from my demographic (middle-class) and above. And this codeswitching takes place so frequently for the average speaker of Hindi, that it is diminishing our mental lexicon of Hindi day by day. While this does not nearly take away from our ability to construct the language, the reduction in the vocabularies of Hindi words across generations is an

undeniable trend. To illustrate the same, I provide a few words that one could consider quite basic, for which my friends and I (all native Hindi speakers) were unable to identify Hindi translations —

(N) table — पटल [pʌtɪl]

(N) ceiling — छत [ʈʌt]

(V) to criticize — आलोचना करना [a:lɔʃna kʀna]

(A) colorful — रंगीन [rɒŋi:n]

There are scores of words in every grammatical category for which we do not know the Hindi translation, and other words for which we consider the Hindi equivalent too formal, so we stick to exclusively using the English word. And while this language change may be a slow and lengthy process, the people and government of India should assemble initiatives to ensure that the country does not lose the essence of Hindi, a key pillar of its culture, in the long-run.