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Attitudes towards Indian English among young urban professionals in Hyderabad, India

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Abstract

Despite extensive work on the description of Indian English(es), only limited attention has been paid to attitudes towards the variety among its speakers. This paper reports on semi-structured interviews eliciting language attitudes with 32 educated young students and professionals in Hyderabad, India. Results reveal that Indian English is occupying an increasingly legitimate position within the popular consciousness, and that there is an increasing sense of ownership of a supra-local or pan-dialectal 'Indian English'. There is an expressed desire for Indian English to continue to expand, and to be accepted as one of the authentic languages of India. The participants exhibited relatively high levels of linguistic security, and while a certain 'nostalgia' for British English was retained by some, Indian English appears to be emerging as an authentic carrier of Indian identity.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This study examines language attitudes among speakers of Indian English, a cover term conventionally applied to the variety(/ies) of English spoken both in India and the Indian diaspora (Chand, 2009a; Sharma, 2017). Speakers' metalinguistic awareness and folk linguistic perceptions can be elucidatory in the context of understanding more about status, prestige and stability of norms within a variety, particularly in a postcolonial context. Speakers' perceptions of their own variety can highlight what is marked and unmarked, what is subject to social comment, and what may be undergoing change or evolution.

In present-day India, English has an instrumental function and is used as 'an intranational link language' by middle- and upper-class Indians in public and private domains (Sedlatschek, 2009, p. 23). It is seen as a marker of culture, prestige and status (Aramavudan, 2007; Gargesh & Sailaja, 2017), a 'language of possibility', a 'promise of modernity' (Aneesh, 2015, p. 6), and as essential for competitiveness in employment (Hohenthal, 2003; Gargesh & Sailaja, 2017). While these descriptions would suggest that Indian English has increasing levels of cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), the issue of language attitudes towards English in postcolonial settings is complex, due in part to the historical context in which the varieties developed, including prolonged contact with the indigenous languages spoken in those regions. The role that English plays in everyday communication, often as a *lingua franca*, means that speakers may have an array of relationships and experiences with English, often co-existing with other languages in their multilingual repertoire (Kachru, 1996).

Since the introduction of the world Englishes paradigm in the 1980s (Kachru, 1985, 1986), several static and dynamic models have been applied to varieties of English, such as, for example, the Three Concentric Circles of English (Kachru, 1985), the dynamic model of the evolution of

postcolonial Englishes (Schneider, 2007, 2016) and Trudgill's (2004) deterministic theory. These theories and models have contributed to a large body of work documenting and examining syntactic, lexical, morphological and phonological features of Outer Circle Englishes spoken in former British and American colonies, including Indian English (Fuchs, 2016; Lange, 2012; Maxwell, 2014; Maxwell & Payne, in print; Sailaja, 2009, 2012).

Outer Circle speakers generally acquire English as a second language (L2) and are often taught by other L2 speakers. They are thus exposed to multiple accents, due to substantial variation based on first language (L1) influence, educational background, and other sociolinguistic factors. This mixed input contributes to fewer stable conventions as compared with long-standing mainstream varieties, such as American or Australian English (Van Rooy, 2010), leading to questions of stability of norms and the perceived 'legitimacy' of these varieties. Despite this, limited work has been conducted on attitudes of Outer Circle English speakers towards varieties of English, addressing the issue of endonormative (looking inward, a local model) versus exonormative (looking outward, an external model) standards in postcolonial Englishes.

Following Schneider's (2007) dynamic model, Indian English is said to be in a complex transition between the phases of (a) *nativisation* (phase 3), the emergence of local linguistic features and identities, associated with the movement towards political, psychological and economic independence and (b) *endonormative stabilisation* (phase 4), whereby English is no longer the language of the elite. Thus, a local linguistic norm develops as a result of the gradual adoption of local forms of English (Maxwell, 2014; Fuchs, 2016; Sailaja, 2009, 2012; Sirsa & Redford, 2013; Kutlu & Wiltshire, 2020). According to Sailaja (2012, p.367), '[Indian English] today is at a stage of gradual grammaticalisation of structures, wide-spread code-switching, Indian accents, considerable use of local lexical items, but with a lack of grammar books and dictionaries. The issue of norms in Indian

English is still unresolved'. We attempt to address these issues of unresolved norms in the present paper.

1.1 English in India and Indian English(es)

English in India has the longest history among postcolonial varieties: first introduced by the British in the early 17th century, it has maintained its presence since the country's independence in 1947, becoming one of India's official languages, following Hindi (Bhatia & Richie, 2006). Sailaja suggests that in India, 'English is given equal if not more importance than Hindi' (2009, p. 5). English is used in education, administration, the media, business, religion, literary writing, informal communication (D'souza, 2001), medicine, technology and sciences (Sailaja, 2009), and as the language of wider communication for many people (Kachru, 1986; Sailaja, 2009; Sedlatschek, 2009). It is frequently used as a *lingua franca* by speakers of different L1 communities across the country, especially in the south. The introduction of the Official Languages Act of 1963 enabled indefinite use of English in India and promoted its use as the link between the central government and the governments of the non-Hindi states (Gargesh & Sailaja, 2017; Sailaja, 2009). In the Hindi belt, English is used alongside Hindi, a *lingua franca* for many Indians in that region. Despite its wide use, it is important to note that English is not on the list of the scheduled languages and has no official status at the state level.

India itself has been recognised as a 'linguistic area' (Masica, 2005), in the sense that there are a number of convergent phonological features across the languages of the region (even those that are typologically distinct), such as retroflexion and gemination. Shared features across Indian languages likely explain the existence of unified features and homogeneity in the phonology of Indian English, which makes the variety of English spoken there 'identifiable as Indian' (Sailaja, 2009, p. 15). However, the country is vast and known for its linguistic diversity, where each state or territory may have speakers of up to 12 indigenous languages (Choudhary, 2003). The 2011 Census of India included a total of 270 identifiable L1s (Government of India, 2011). Multilingualism is highly

prevalent, with regional borders showing 'diffusion' and contact-induced convergence, diglossia and complex multilingualism (Gargesh, 2006).

Indian English is often considered to be a 'second language' variety, but it can also be the first language of speakers in India (Kutlu & Wiltshire, 2020; Sailaja, 2012). Initially, the term 'General' or 'Generalised Indian English' was introduced after the independence from British rule to account for the proposed model of English that was taught in schools and universities (Bansal, 1969, 1976; CIEFL, 1972). As a result, 'General' (Wells, 1982) or 'Standard' (Kachru, 1983) Indian English applies to the language spoken by educated Indians (Bansal, 1990). Today, the words 'General' or 'Standard' are often omitted, resulting in the more commonly-used term 'Indian English'. However, an acrolectal versus basilectal distinction is maintained via the label 'Indian English', because Indian English is used to implicitly refer to a standard (acrolectal) variety. Indian English is considered to be more 'prestigious' and different from other, more basilectal varieties of English which are traditionally associated with the spoken language used by low socioeconomic groups with limited or no education (Pandey, 2016).

India's emerging economy and increased mobility of the young blurs the lines between sub-varieties and accents. Educated speakers of Indian English often move from one state to another for further study or for employment, which may lead to the development of more 'urban' Indian English(es) (Maxwell & Payne, in print) and 'a more urban Indian identity' (Chand, 2009a).

This study is set in the large, cosmopolitan city of Hyderabad, a rapidly expanding business centre attracting Indians from all over the country, due to education and job opportunities. We specifically target a group of young, highly educated professionals and students who describe themselves as fluent in English. We examine their attitudes towards the English they speak, Indian English more broadly, and other mainstream/Inner Circle Englishes, along with their views on norms, standardness and accent variability. According to Wiltshire (2020), studying this population is of

extreme importance. This socio-demographic group is a good representation of speakers of a more acrolectal variety/ies of Indian English, given the majority of Indian English speakers are urban, less likely to have spent time overseas, started learning English in early childhood, and have had exposure to 'more contemporaneous pedagogical approaches [...] involving teachers and linguistic models from within India' (Wiltshire (2020, p. 12).

In sum, we acknowledge that the term 'Indian English' is not a monolithic entity: it is used as a shorthand in order to align with previous empirical work on this variety. There is an ongoing debate whether we are dealing with a single pan-Indian variety or multiple sub-varieties (Gargesh, 2004; Maxwell, 2014; Maxwell & Payne, in print; Mukherjee, 2007; Sailaja, 2012; Wiltshire, 2020). Furthermore, it has been recognised that there is little consensus as to how best describe 'Indian English(es)' (Maxwell & Payne, in print; Sailaja 2009, 2012), and not all Indian English speakers may be comfortable with the use of the term (Sailaja, 2009). This is precisely what this paper explores.

1.2 Language Attitudes towards Indian English

To date, only a handful of studies have examined attitudes to Indian English as well as to other English varieties amongst the Indian population (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016; Chand, 2009a, 2009b; Cowie, 2007; Hohenthal, 2003; Kachru, 1976; Sahgal, 1991). Sahgal (1991) investigated language attitudes among speakers in elite areas of Delhi. He reported an increased awareness of Indian English as a specific variety, with a significant proportion of participants showing preference for Indian English, followed by English as spoken on Indian radio and TV (where presenters often imitated BBC pronunciation). A study with Indian participants by Hohenthal (2003) examined the domains of use of English (i.e. friendship, education, employment); attitudes to English; Hindi and other languages spoken in South Asia; and respondents' views on the most suitable model for English in India. The majority of respondents (90%) considered English to be an important language

in India, and had positive attitudes towards Indian English. However, the findings also showed that languages other than English (Indigenous languages) were the preferred choice for communication with the family (87%), while English was more frequently used in the domains of education, government and employment, and was viewed as a conduit for better employment opportunities. Hohenthal (2003) concluded that Indian English is a variety in its own right, with speakers expressing 'ownership' of Indian English. However, when asked about the most suitable linguistic model for English in India, 70% of participants felt that (what they termed) Received Pronunciation (RP) or British English should be the model, followed by Indian English (17%), and then American English (10%).

As part of the study on the pronunciation of /v/ in Indian English, Chand (2009a) conducted sociolinguistic interviews with 35 upper-middle class Hindi/English bilinguals (aged 18–87) in the South of Delhi. She focused on eliciting speakers' views about Indian English, British English and American English, their awareness about Indian English as a variety, and of the features which could be considered to be part of a stereotypical Indian English. She reported that some speakers described Indian English as a neutral variety, referring to it as 'normal, plain, simple English' (Chand, 2009a, p. 409). It was also viewed by some as 'more liberal' and 'far more open', with 'much more flexibility' (Chand, 2009a, p. 410), compared to such varieties as British, suggesting greater acceptance of variability in Indian English. Interestingly, younger participants were less confident in their English skills and were more susceptible to the influence of global language ideologies (a preference for American English or British) compared to the older generations.

Bernaish and Koch (2016) carried out a study on Indian English speakers' attitudes to Indian, American, British and Sri Lankan Englishes. Surveying 94 participants from various regions in India, they reported British English to be rated more positively than the other varieties, but participants' views were dependent on the higher-level, descriptive categories that the individual

descriptors represented, namely competence, power, solidarity and status. British English was rated most favourably in terms of competence, power and status, which the authors interpreted as possibly due to 'colonial baggage', whereas Indian English was ranked most highly for solidarity, humility and friendliness (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016, p. 124). American English was most strongly associated with the attribute 'modern', resembling somewhat the findings of studies of English elsewhere, such as Carrie (2016) who reports that speakers of English in Spain view American English as more 'urban'. Overall, the participants in Bernaisch and Koch (2016) showed a positive attitude towards Indian English, but closer examination of the data based on gender and age group suggested that young women (also overrepresented in the sample) rated Indian English more positively compared to male participants.

The idea of a 'neutral accent' surfaces often in the literature on Indian English and gives further insight into attitudes towards the variety. Cowie (2007) analyses what this means in an Indian call centre context, through an ethnographic study in Bangalore. When asked what accent they were aiming for, staff tended to respond with 'the same (puzzled) answer: 'a neutral accent', with no clear reference for what this really meant' (Cowie, 2007, p. 321). For the majority of Indians, a neutral accent in the Indian context is not necessarily 'regionless' or nationless, as described in the ESL literature (Davies, 2004; Jenkins, 2000), yet it is the expectation of many corporate clients engaging the services of the call centre (Cowie, 2007, p. 329).

Aneesh (2015, p.57) found that training programmes targeting imitation of British English or American English in Indian call centres in the 1990s shifted towards a more 'neutral accent' in the 2000s, whereby 'neutralization of regional accents was more important than sounding like an American'. Thus, the term 'neutral' may be a strategic construction in global communication promoted by call centre agencies. However, as has been found in other work investigating language

attitudes towards English varieties, such as Coupland and Bishop (2007), Lippi-Green (1997) and Cowie (2007) discussed above, the concept of a 'neutral accent' remains elusive.

1.3 Research aims

Attitude studies are crucial for defining the parameters of any language variety, and particularly for postcolonial Englishes, where English plays an important economic, educational and social role. Most of the studies on attitudes to Indian English have been based on survey data (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016; Hohenthal, 2003) and mostly aimed at eliciting responses about the Indian English/Indian English accent, other varieties of English and/or variability across world Englishes. These studies often fail to capture speakers' views on variation within Indian English itself, and the possible sources of this variation. Furthermore, the few studies based on interview data are now quite dated, including that of Chand (2009a), where the data collection took place in 2007–2008. Times are changing rapidly in India as a result of increased mobility and rapid economic growth. Our study extends previous work on attitudes to Indian English and uses semi-structured interviews to explore the concept of Indian English. In addition, it examines both Indian English speakers' views about Indian English as a carrier of pan-Indian identity, and their views on variation within Indian English itself, in order to better understand how this variation is mitigated in the construction of their linguistic identity.

The present study aims to:

1. examine the concept of Indian English(es) among young speakers and the relationship between Indian English and identity;
2. investigate the evaluation of Indian English with respect to other varieties of English (particularly mainstream varieties such British English and American English); and

3. capture young Indian English speakers' views on evolving endonormative and exonormative standards.

2 | METHODOLOGY

In 2017, a series of semi-structured interviews with 32 participants were conducted by the first author as part of a larger project investigating phonetic and phonological variation in Indian English (Maxwell & Payne, 2018; Maxwell & Payne, in print; Payne & Maxwell, 2019). Interview questions were adapted from Llamas (1999) and Horvath (1985). Some questions were designed to prompt responses about participants' views of their own accents, while others were aimed at:

1. eliciting information about Indian English as a variety;
2. gaining insights about Indian English variability and its sources;
3. investigating the degree of acceptance of Indian English as a variety; and
4. exploring attitudes to other English accents.

Examples of interview questions are in Table 1. The duration of each audio-recorded interview varied between 8 and 15 minutes and included two, and on one occasion three, interviewees in a single session. All interviews were conducted on the campus of the University of Hyderabad.

[Insert Table 1 here.]

At the interview, participants were asked to fill out a language background questionnaire to elicit socio-demographic and language background information (L1, other languages spoken, parents' languages, frequency and domains for using English). All participants reported speaking English fluently and were either university students or recent graduates working in the private sector. One participant was employed as a postdoctoral researcher at a higher institution outside Hyderabad. There were more females (62.5%) than males (37.5%), with an age range between 20 and 31 years (mean = 25). Most participants identified as bi- or multilingual and were speakers of several L1s, representing four major languages across two major language families (Indo-Aryan and Dravidian). There were eight L1 speakers each of Bengali, Hindi, Telegu and Tamil. Age of onset for learning English varied from 2 to 11 years (mean = 4.5). None of the participants had ever travelled outside India, except one who had spent a few months on a study exchange in Poland. Three of the informants were born in Hyderabad, while the rest were born in other cities of India. Birth places are depicted on the map in relation to the states of India and major cosmopolitan cities (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 here.]

Participants who had moved to Hyderabad did so either for continued education or for employment. Reflecting the increasing mobility in India, the majority had lived in various cities prior to coming to Hyderabad. In terms of educational background, 28% of the interviewees had attended a convent or a Catholic school, 34% a private school, 25% a government (often state regional) school, and 13% had had a mixed schooling experience. The student participants were enrolled in various undergraduate (43%) and postgraduate (57%) degrees of the University, and most had not studied linguistics or related subjects. However, as a result of this project receiving support from the Centre for English Language Studies at the University of Hyderabad, four PhD students at the Centre

volunteered to take part in the study. These students were working on various projects related to the role and use of English in India (past policies, English in the educational domain).

Interviews were recorded in a quiet room using a Zoom H4nSP audio recorder with a lapel microphone. All recordings were transcribed automatically by using the speech-to-text online platform *Trint* (2014–2020). The interview transcripts were then manually corrected by a research assistant, and participant codes were assigned as pseudonyms. The authors examined the transcribed interviews and identified several themes for content analysis. For example, ‘understanding of sub-categories in Indian English’, ‘legitimacy of Indian English’, ‘aspirational variety of English’, ‘linguistic security/insecurity’. The text data were subsequently imported into the qualitative software *Nvivo 12* (QSR International, 1999) and coded by a research assistant. In the process of coding, some of the themes were collapsed and modified, with the final list including 16 themes in total (See Appendix).

3 | RESULTS

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis, and is structured as follows. It begins with the exploration of the participants’ attitudes towards British English and American English. It is followed by the results that discuss the sources of variation within Indian English, teasing apart the concept of ‘Indian English’ and exploring the use of several other terms used to describe Indian English(es), including the elusive ‘neutral accent’. The section concludes with a discussion of linguistic security and ownership with reference to evolving endonormative and exonormative standards.

3.1 British English

British English was discussed explicitly with participants. They were asked *What do you think about the accents of English, e.g., American, British, etc.?* Responses relating to British English tended to be highly positive. Descriptions of the variety clearly highlight this, such as ‘nice’, ‘clearer’, ‘cool’, ‘suave’, ‘sophisticated’, ‘intriguing’, and ‘more exciting’.

The theme of familiarity in relation to British English also emerged, which may have been tinged with a sense of nostalgia. Participants said that British English was the ‘standard’, ‘the one learned in school’ and it ‘sounds so nice’. It was described as ‘comfortable’ and the ‘proper accent’, as well as the ‘neutral accent’. One participant believed it was the appropriate variety to target:

IE8: We are supposed to follow in a British English. We are following the spellings of British English, so we are supposed to speak the British English as well; the Received Pronunciation of British English.

A further theme was aspiration, with British English held in extremely high regard by a number of participants. IE25, for example, states that she would love to have a British accent if she ‘could do it properly’, while noting that ‘earlier I was feeling very bad that I’m not able to speak British English accent’. Another participant, IE31, reported a desire to speak like the English actor Benedict Cumberbatch.

The theme colonial context also emerged, with IE21 stating ‘any Indian, we will always try to pronounce it Queen’s English way’, although not all comments were positive in this regard. For example, IE19 claimed to not have a preference for any specific variety, clearly noting the historical context of British English in India.

IE19 We don't care, we don't care ... maybe inherently we held the British accent in our blood because of hundreds of years we have been with them but there is a transition going on from ... a couple of decades ... There is a mixture of things happening so we don't care this accent we are targeting, we don't care.

IE3 stated:

[T]there is a concept of 'colonial hangover'. We, in the third world country, we kind of look up to the other countries, the European and the American ones, the other, other so called thir- developed countries that we find to be superior.

3.2 American English

Views on American English were more varied than for British English. While there were some positive attitudes, participants also had mixed, and negative, opinions about American English. Positive attitudes were evident through evaluations of American English as 'cool', 'hip', 'funky' 'more casual' and 'easier to understand'.

A few said that American, rather than British English, was the 'proper accent' or 'neutral accent' and two participants expressed a preference for American English over British English:

IE30: I guess the American accent sounds pretty much like relaxed as opposed to the British accent which is very stressed, and you have to twist your tongue a

lot of ways which I find annoying, but yeah American English is kind of relaxed

Preference for American English was also explained by greater exposure through music and media:

IE1: I think it's more because we are more used to listening to American accent, because we watch so much YouTube, videos or movies of Hollywood or things like that. So I guess after a certain point of time American accent doesn't, like, surprise us so much.

However, a number of participants were negative and even expressed dislike for American English. They described it as 'not clear' and one participant reported needing subtitles for movies from the US. Participant IE12 commented that 'American English [is] a little confusing because half of the time they eat their words or phonemes in-between'. Another stated that the variety was 'grammatically not very sound', and another stated that it was 'non-standard', especially in the Indian context.

3.3 Indian English(es)

A set of interview questions focused on the use of the term 'Indian English' to refer to the English accent spoken in India, with the aim of teasing apart the concept of Indian English and to better understand participants' views on homogeneity/heterogeneity. Participants were asked the following: *What would you think if your accent was referred to as Indian English? What about*

Bengali/Hindi/Tamil/etc. English? Do you think there is such a thing as e.g., Bengali English, distinct from e.g., Hindi English? We acknowledge that the use of these terms may have inadvertently drawn attention to the role of L1 and L1 influence, but we consider these terms to be important in order to conceptualise what Indian English is and they were in broad usage in Hyderabad at the time of data collection. These L1-based terms date back to the 1960s, referring often to geographical variation as well as L1 variation (Wiltshire, 2020), and form part of the broader discourse on Indian English that circulates among its speakers.

A number of the participants, such as IE3, reported that they were comfortable with the use of the term 'Indian English'.

IE3: I would still call it 'Indian English' and I think that's almost the same all over the world. If you go to France, they have a different accent, if you go to America they have a different accent, and, of course, in UK they have a different accent.

However, consistent with recent literature on Indian English (Gargesh, 2004; Maxwell & Payne, in print; Payne & Maxwell, 2019; Sailaja, 2009, 2012; Wiltshire, 2020), our results show strong awareness of variation within Indian English and of the complexity in describing this variation. This emerged in a response from IE30, who demonstrated a degree of uncertainty about the term 'Indian English':

It's really hard to say because after you've heard so many different accents of the same language around you, you cannot really arrive at a definitive conclusion, so I really don't know what to say to that'.

This is despite the fact that earlier in the interview, IE30 had identified as a speaker of Indian English. Similarly, IE21 described Indian English as '[d]iverse. I mean there is no one way of speaking it. There are so many within the same community'. When asked about the possibility of using additional labels, such as 'Bengali English', 'Hindi English' or 'Tamil English', she stated, 'It's just "Indian English"'. This opinion was shared by several participants who believed that, regardless of the existing variability, the English language in India is better referred to as 'Indian English'. Other participants, however, viewed English spoken in India as a very diverse entity where variation needs to be acknowledged. Some found these terms, to be useful labels, as IE15 stated:

[b]ecause India has so many different languages you cannot say 'Indian English', it would be so wrong because people are, yes we are influenced by mother tongues but different kind of mother tongues.

Other participants acknowledged variation, but showed concern about the implications of sub-categorisation within Indian English which could lead to regional division. Furthermore, speakers of Indian English had different understandings about labels such as 'Hindi English' or 'Bengali English'. Several viewed these labels as referring to code-switching between English and the L1, or as a combination of pronunciation features (spoken accent) and codeswitching, as stated by IE23:

there definitely is such a thing as Bengali English or Tamil English as such and it's not just about the pronunciation but also about the content of the language, as in people mixing Bengali with English and you know Hindi with English.

Some participants used blends as labels and mentioned 'Hinglish' (Hindi and English) and 'Tanglish' (Tamil and English):

IE28: People here in India have started saying it as 'Tanglish', 'Manglish', 'Hinglish' and so on, because those will be the words where Tamil and English is mixed together and used.

In contrast, one participant explained that terms such as Bengali English or Hindi English are no longer valid or needed, at least for the younger generation who acquire English through the present-day educational system. Moreover, they viewed labels such as 'Hinglish' as negative, indicating a lack of proficiency and fluency in English.

Over 80% of participants admitted that they could hear differences in English spoken by speakers from different parts of India, with some accents being more recognisable than others. In the words of IE11, 'To a certain extent yeah I can recognise, but I can tell you that there's a difference in accent, but maybe I may not be able to recognise it as such'. One of the most common themes that emerged was the broad division based on language families (Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman), also roughly linked to the regions of North, North-East and South of the country, resulting in 'regional accents':

IE26: I think it's more the regional factor because all the regions they have different languages spoken [...] and that's where our English you know varies, like Kolkata English is very different from how in Assam we speak and then the further you go east like in Mizoram or Manipur it's different.

IE4's response to the ability to recognise different accents resembled that of a number of participants: 'Yes, I can [recognise different accents], especially when a North Indian speaks English and South Indian, there is much difference'. Participants born in the North or North-East reported to instantly recognise someone from the South and vice versa. Indian English speakers from Delhi were said to have 'very good English' and the South Indian accent was described as a 'thick accent' and 'more distinct accent' (IE31), possibly due to the influence from the Dravidian languages spoken in the south of the country.

Socio-economic and educational background were also noted by participants as playing a major role in variation within Indian English, and were viewed as linked to speakers' fluency and overall proficiency in English. Higher socio-economic status was viewed as a gateway to better education, and thus more exposure to (acrolectal) English through a public/private or Catholic school setting, where English is used most of the time:

IE12: A person who comes from a government school, his or her accent is very strong ... it's very clearly associated with economic background, people who ... can spend some more, generally they go to English medium school or a private school or a central school. Others who can't afford, they are sent to

government schools, so in a way it's also an interlinked ... State schooling, they usually have a lot of first language influence.

Further, participant IE2 describes the influence of the higher education experience, stating: 'educational background sometimes neutralises [accent]. So it becomes difficult to actually decide what place a person would be coming from'. Indian English speakers attending higher education institutions also have more exposure to English through English-medium instruction. IE3 described attending a prestigious and elite college in Kolkata, West Bengal, where:

the teachers had a particular way of speaking ... they did not have a Bengali or other Indian accent per se. They just picked it up via the modes of conversations and other methods, via the modes of interactions with other speakers of English who speak really well and that influenced theirs, in turn influenced mine.

There was also a strong awareness of generational differences among the participants, where this younger generation recognised themselves as legitimate speakers of Indian English. Most viewed the generational gap as related to changes in the educational system and the growth of English in India, especially in the past few decades. Some acknowledged that their parents did not speak English at all, others said that their accent was 'better' than their parents', that their parents' accent had 'more of a mother tongue influence', speaking a more basilectal form of English: a 'more Indianised kind of English' (IE25), or with 'Indianish accent' (IE32). Participant IE28 further explained, 'my parents didn't have the kind of education that I had. They had their education through the medium of Malayalam and Tamil [...] not in the medium of English'. IE13 elaborates 'they don't have

a university education or a college education so obviously my accent is better than my parents' accent'. For these participants, moving away from an accent that has 'Indian' features, and thus speaking an English that is more acrolectal, is seen as more prestigious.

3.4 'Neutral accent'

The concept of a neutral accent emerged in many of the interviews. Similar to our review further above, there was no unified idea of what 'neutral' really meant, signifying different things to different people. The term was used variously to describe British English, American English and Indian English, or even to refer to their own L1/ variety, i.e. if another speaker used the same L1/variety, then their accent was viewed as 'normal' or 'neutral'. IE27, when asked about their own accent, commented 'I think it's pretty neutral, I mean I don't think I have a particular accent as such'.

'Neutral' appeared to be used to describe either a supra-regional accent, one free of any regionally identifying features. It was also used in the context of describing a levelled dialect where migration to urban areas has resulted in different features being acquired through exposure. IE3 alluded to dialect levelling through mobility: 'it's not always very distinct and most of us in our generation we stay away from our hometown or region and spend a lot more time in other regions, that kind of neutralises the effect'. People from the large urban centre of Mumbai were identified as having a 'very neutral' accent: Mumbai being the place where 'everyone [...] speaks normal English' (IE23).

IE28 for example, stated: 'as long as I am mutually intelligible to you I'm happy about it and yeah I'm trying to make some effort even more so that I can be free from the accents that I am carrying, just to be neutral when I am speaking English'. The notion of 'supralocal as neutral' is described by IE20:

IE20: I think I have a neutral accent.

Interviewer: And by neutral what do you mean?

IE20: It's in between American and British. So, for example, if we take 'r' [/ɑ:r/] so there would be a lot of difference between how an American spell it and how a British spell it, whereas I just say 'r' [/ɑ:r/] so I don't know which accent is it. So, I define it as a neutral accent.

The term 'neutral' was also used to denote a highly prestigious accent, used by speakers from a high socioeconomic background. IE3, who attended a prestigious Kolkata college where teachers did not sound 'Indian' or 'Bengali', described herself as having developed a 'neutral' accent. Further, IE13 applies the concepts of both L1 and (high) socioeconomic background when asked about influences on accents in India: '[arriving at a neutral accent] seems to be easy for those who come up from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. But mother tongue is the base'. This is reflective of what has been identified in previous research on Indian English (Chand, 2009a; Cowie, 2007), with the term *neutral* thus evoking complex and at times mixed responses from participants, without a clear definition.

3.5 Security/insecurity

The theme of linguistic security was also prominent among participants, with the majority feeling comfortable with the way that they speak. Feelings of security about language use emerged as being tied to endonormative standards within India, whereas insecurities emerged with reference to

exonormative standards. This is exemplified in the following exchange, with IE15 demonstrating confidence in their accent in the Indian context, while IE16 expresses concern that it might not be acceptable in an international context:

Interviewer: What do you think about your accent?

IE15: I've never really thought about it but it's fine, it helps me communicate.

IE16: Yeah in India it's good, but if you go outside it's like, comparatively it's not good. As far as this country's concerned it's fine.

This view was shared by several participants. IE14 explicitly states 'I don't think I have a different accent [...] as long as I'm in India'.

A number of participants felt entirely secure about the way that they spoke, expressing 'pride' (IE2) and 'honour' (IE19) in speaking Indian English, being part of the 'community' (IE19), and being 'happy' (IE5) to be called an Indian English speaker. It is important to acknowledge that participants IE1, IE5, IE13 and IE19 had linguistic training, and seemed to have more objective attitudes. IE1 explicitly described a developing sense of security, connected to both education *about* Indian English as a unique variety, and her communicative experiences with diverse audiences in general from her higher education:

My perspective's changed a lot after I did a few courses on English in India and things like that, but I wouldn't feel conscious if someone told me that my English is 'Indian

English'. I wouldn't take offence because there's nothing wrong in it. Yes of course it should be Indian English, because I was born here and I was brought up here.

[...]

So sometimes I change [my accent], sometimes I'm like 'I don't care' it doesn't matter because, you know, I've been using this and it worked fine [...] I don't feel guilty about making those mistakes, phonetically or syntactically, so now I'm fine with it'.

Confidence in using Indian English was also reported by IE21: 'by the time I'm doing my masters I think it's okay to pronounce an English word whatever way I want to ... I just do whatever seems comfortable'. IE21 observed that her English was simply 'normal', that it was a given: 'of course I speak "Indian English"'. IE13 claimed that the content and being understood is more important than how he sounds: 'If my mother tongue influence or my regional influence hinders my information flow to my audience then I'll look into [changing] it very seriously ... if it goes smooth, I'll be happy'.

Similarly, IE2 reported: 'the content is more important than the accent', while IE5 also noted the utility of using Indian English as a *lingua franca*: 'I'm quite comfortable with my accent [...] when I travelled across India [...] I was quite intelligible to people'. The usefulness of Indian English when travelling across India was echoed by IE25, who stated that Indian English was 'proper and convenient', and by IE5, who described it as 'quite intelligible' (IE5). There were several comments on the change in attitudes towards Indian English, indicative of a growing sense of linguistic security. When asked about this, IE5 and IE8 stated:

IE5: I feel because it is quite natural to have it, so accent, there is no superiority or inferiority about any accent that I feel [...] our teachers were also trying to attempt to make our accent look as similar to British accent or American accent, so that kind of attempts were made but when I came to higher education I realised that Indian English is also equally good to any other accent, so now that inhibitions of that inferiority.

IE8: In fact, if you would tell it's Indian English and then yeah we are comfortable, so we need not go up to the expectation of speaking in British English or American English or Australian English or whatever it is.

Nonetheless, insecurities emerged regarding accent, including reports of a lack of certainty surrounding the pronunciation of particular English words, a fear of getting laughed at, being taken aback by the term 'Indian English', and some expressing the need to 'work on' their accent. IE23 mentioned avoiding a stereotypical Indian English accent: 'I definitely consciously try to avoid the typical Indian', referring to his own accent as 'sophisticated'. Similarly, IE28 felt quite insecure about her own accent and saw the need to modify it to not sound Indian:

IE28: I, not being very conscious, I think I am trying to improve my accent. Improve in the sense, trying to copy more of the western accent, either American or British. Sometimes I might not even classify and

see whether I am trying to follow British accent or American, but something that is not of Indian.

Some participants were taught specific accent features in school which were not always possible to produce. IE24 referred to the stigmatisation of Indian English as a variety and the fact that it is sometimes a derogatory term, stating that ‘usually Indians are made fun of for their accent everywhere’. Participants also referred to the negative portrayal of Indian English in the media, movies and on TV, suggesting this as a reason for their linguistic insecurity. IE5 noted that more exposure would be needed to sound like a ‘native speaker’. IE16, who had previously expressed feelings about endo- and exonormative standards, reported that, if they had to choose, ‘any [accent] would do’ over Indian English, including a ‘foreign’ accent:

Interviewer: What would be your preference if you had to choose? What sort of accent would you like to learn?

IE16: Foreign language, I mean the accent of foreign [non-English speaking] countries, they are much better than the Indian accent, so any would do.

3.6 Ownership

Despite somewhat mixed levels of confidence amongst the participants, they signalled a growing sense of ownership of the English language in India:

IE21: English is not even a language that is spoken only by the people belonging to one place, English is everybody's'.

When asked what word they would use to describe their own English, the majority identified themselves as 'speakers of Indian English' or as having 'an Indian accent', thus affording the variety some legitimacy. IE25 compared Indian English to other mainstream varieties of English, emphasising it as a variety in its own right: 'Australians speak English in a way, Americans in a way, Indians speak English in their own way, we just make things our own, right'. IE33 (and others) responded: 'It can be given its own name and it's 'Indian English'' (IE33).

Some participants advocated strongly for Indian English to be considered a legitimate variety, on par with other Inner Circle Englishes. IE13 addressed linguistic norms and the need for a standard or pan-dialectal variety:

IE13: I believe it's time for us to have an Indian variety which is considered to be a standard variety or a normal variety, not as something as a second rated or third rated, which is as par with Australian, American or British or New Zealand, so I think it's time for us to bring in Indian English as something which is standard or neutral or common or whatever.

The legitimacy of Indian English was also demonstrated by participants' evaluations, ranging from neutral ('it's okay' and 'fine'), to extremely positive ('unique'; 'good'; 'comfortable'; 'happy about it'). IE22 claimed that '[Indian English] is good. I'm an Indian and it's absolutely comfortable

and fine with me if someone calls me an ‘Indian English speaker’’. In response to the question of having one’s accent referred to as Indian English, the overall view was one of confidence:

IE12: I’m totally cool with it. It is what it is.

IE11: That’s okay. I’m fine with that, I’ve been living in India ...

IE19: That’s a good term. That’s good to have it, yep, because we do have our own. It’s most honour to, I take it in a positive way.

IE28 used the term ‘Desi English’ when referring to Indian English. ‘Desi’ is a word of Sanskrit origin meaning land or country, often used to describe someone or something that is of the nation, local and not foreign. It implies acceptance and ownership of English as an authentic language of India.

IE28: ‘Desi English’. Which is Indian English, yeah, that’s what I think because there are a lot of videos also that goes across how English is spoken in different parts of the Indian country and even across the world, be it American English, British English, Australian English and Arabic English and all those things, so yeah. So Indian English will be one among those, that’s all.

4 | DISCUSSION

4.1 Indian English(es) and world Englishes

Overall, this study unveiled a range of contrasting and at times contradictory views towards Indian English(es), shedding light on the spectrum of potential social meanings, experiences and attitudes towards varieties of English spoken on the Indian subcontinent. Our findings indicate that Indian English, in line with Schneider's dynamic model (2007), may still be at a stage of instability. We discuss this instability in the paragraphs that follow.

Similar to the findings of Hohenthal (2003), Chand (2009a) and Bernaisch and Koch (2016), our analysis revealed the omnipresence of British English as a continued, anchored sociolinguistic entity in the minds of many speakers – indicating an ongoing 'nostalgia' for the so-called 'colonial' variety. Despite an increased self-confidence and sense of ownership of Indian English, participants continued to view British English favourably, viewing it as 'standard', 'proper', 'neutral', as well as 'exciting', 'intriguing' and 'sophisticated'. Associations between British English and standardness are neither particularly surprising nor controversial, considering the pervasive presence of British English in pedagogical contexts around the world and in India, such as in English language textbooks and audio materials for English language learners, and the propagation and maintenance of the status of British English via institutions such as the British Council. Many speakers of English in India may be relying on exonormative standards, as they are considered to be more stable and reliable sources of cultural (and real) capital. This could also be a reflection of the participants' age, echoing the findings of Chand (2009a) who reported more exonormative views among the younger generation of Indian English speakers.

A point raised by IE3 – that of the ‘colonial hangover’ – is a reminder that exonormative standards may persist longer in postcolonial territories than in so-called ‘new’ English-speaking contexts. In other words, British English may carry different kinds of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) in India than it may in such as Korea or China, as it has its own specific history, trajectory and wealth of experiences and associations that have become part of the identity and status of English in India. Furthermore, speakers are exposed to the particular history of English in India via their language socialisation as (multilingual) speakers. For example, this ongoing nostalgia for British English in India is dissimilar to the somewhat hostile opposition to anything British (including English) observed in some other postcolonial contexts, such as the Republic of Ireland (Hickey, 2007).

Despite the pervasiveness of British English, participant responses were not entirely homogeneous. A number of participants displayed an expressed interest in, and favour for, American English as a potential carrier of prestige; or more accurately, ‘coolness’. This is reminiscent of Carrie’s (2016) claim that speakers of English in Spain viewed American English as more ‘urban’, but British English as more ‘professional’; and expressed greater feelings of solidarity and affiliation with (General) American English than with British English. While respondents in the present study did not report the same affiliation or solidarity with American English (and its speakers), it was described as ‘cool’, ‘hip’ and ‘funky’, indicating its appeal for some speakers, particularly those with more direct recent exposure or experience with American English. However, it must be remembered that both American English and British English are still considered to be ‘Inner Circle’ varieties (in the sense of Kachru, 1986), and that these views do little to counter preference for standards of English in India to be exonormative.

4.2 Ownership, legitimacy and authenticity

Despite varying degrees of linguistic insecurity and ongoing orientation to Inner Circle varieties and exonormative standards, we found an emerging security and attachment to Indian English(es), with some speakers expressing the need to display their (linguistic) identity through a variety they considered to be ‘their own’, along with a sense of urgency to elevate Indian English to the status of British English or American English. The ‘convenience’ of having an indigenised *lingua franca* across India was also expressed – a situation experienced in many postcolonial countries, including sub-Saharan Africa (Bangbose, 1991).

There was also a distinct sense, among certain participants at least, that Indian English itself is not monolithic, but that its inevitable variability presents not just one Indian English, but many Indian Englishes – a view that accords with contemporary scholars of the variety (Chand 2009a, 2009b; Maxwell & Payne, in print; Payne & Maxwell, 2019; Sailaja, 2012; Wiltshire, 2020; Wiltshire & Harnsberger, 2006). In this study, there was an expressed readiness for a supralocal, endonormative, standardised variety of Indian English. Furthermore, it was clear that this should be a particular kind of English; namely, at the more acrolectal end of the continuum; and that more basilectal forms (sometimes termed ‘stereotypical’ Indian English) should be consciously avoided. This distinction serves to reinforce the state of linguistic insecurity surrounding Indian English, with only one or two respondents in fact displaying positive affect towards the variety, terms such as ‘Desi English’.

The use of the term ‘neutral accent’ by participants emerged as quite broad and at times inconsistent, with the same term applied as a blanket description for any kind of British English or American English, but also for Indian English. The same phenomenon was reported in Chand (2009a). In the latter case, its use was generally in reference to a specific, supralocal, levelled, ‘regionless’, and acrolectal kind of Indian English; in fact, an Indian English that is arguably not

specifically 'Indian' at all. Accordingly, the question remains open whether 'Indian English' as a named sociolinguistic entity is uniform and monolithic, and whether it can in fact be regarded as an authentic carrier of a pan-Indian identity. Consistent with previous work (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016; Chand, 2009a; Hohenthal, 2003; Sahgal, 1991), it seems that Indian English is beginning to be recognised by its speakers as a legitimate variety of English, and as one of the languages of India in its own right, but crucially and perhaps only exclusively, by select members of this particular cohort of young urban professionals, who expressed the desire for Indian English to expand and gain recognition. This is in line with Chand (2009a p. 405), who, citing Raj (2003), argues that a modern, urban Indian culture/s has developed in India, where speakers now identify as 'Indian' in favour of narrower ethnolinguistic, religious, and regional identities'.

The boundaries of legitimacy and authenticity of Indian English appear to be carefully managed by its speakers, with 'illegitimate' speakers (who are less educated, speak a more basilectal form of Indian English, are more regionally-oriented and have more L1 influence) not necessarily accorded the 'right to speak' (Norton, 1997). The question of who is considered to be an 'authentic' speaker of Indian English is related to broader notions of power, whereby presenting oneself as a speaker of Indian English is, we argue, is coming from a position of relative privilege. This privileged status, arising from private schooling, university education, and exposure to English via media outlets, gives some speakers of Indian English the confidence to have pride in the idiosyncrasies of their variety, while running less risk that these idiosyncrasies be viewed as 'errors' arising from substrate influence.

4.3 'Native speakers' and evolving norms

Within broader debates of world Englishes and their evolution, it has been argued that Indian English is less likely to fully reach stage 4 of Schneider's Dynamic Model (2007) – the stage of

endonormative stabilisation. In this paper, we find evidence from metalinguistic commentary that both supports and challenges this view. It must first be noted that the very notion of Indian English emerging from participants' commentary was somewhat elusive. This may indeed be symptomatic of the variety's instability as regards endonormative standards. For some, Indian English is a variety that is basilectal, has heavy L1 influence, and is not 'proper' or 'correct' English. For these speakers, 'proper' or 'correct' English is an Inner Circle variety – an exonormative standard. For others, however, Indian English is an ingroup identity marker, a carrier of Indian identity, and, as a consequence, is in a position to have its endonormativity recognised and standardised. However, it must be stressed that this imagined, supralocal and endonormative variety of Indian English is not uniform and monolithic and does not symbolise or draw on consistent and predictable forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Although often described as 'neutral', this imagined endonormative variety is far from 'neutral' in a sociolinguistic sense. It is a particular kind of Indian English: one that is acrolectal, levelled, and shows signs of educatedness.

In the speakers' imaginings of the future of Indian English, many relied on a native/non-native binary (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Leung et al., 1997) viewing certain varieties of Indian English as 'non-native' or 'L2-like'. This perception of Indian English as an 'non-native' rather than a 'native variety' gives speakers the opportunity to project discriminatory views, by equating non-native English with a lack of symbolic capital. However, there is some sense here that a confidence and attachment to Indian English as an Outer Circle variety is emerging. This is reminiscent of the experiences of a growing body of speakers of a global *lingua franca* English, which may in itself be a marker of a more post-nationalist linguistic security and cosmopolitanism (Canagarajah, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). This offers an alternative to the endonormative stabilisation pathway.

In line with Sailaja (2012, p. 367), we agree that 'the issue of norms in Indian English is still unresolved', and argue that these norms (or 'standards') are not merely linguistic, but are embedded

in notions of power and prestige. They reflect broader conflicting forces of progression, through the expressed will for acceptance of a recognised, indigenised variety of Indian English, and conservatism, through the continued anchoring of norms and standards in Inner Circle varieties (Mukherjee, 2007).

5 | CONCLUSION

Non-linguists' understandings of language structure and language change differ from those of linguists, and may come across as inconsistent and even naive. However, we argue that these views are as valid and authentic as the views of the 'objective' linguist-observer, and that these accounts should continue to be incorporated into more nuanced understandings of world Englishes, particularly in an era of increased globalisation and mobility, where the status of English is constantly called into question. The Indian English speakers in the present study do not necessarily see themselves as 'native speakers', but they do occupy an identity of a 'legitimate speaker' (Bourdieu, 1991) of Indian English. In so doing, they claim ownership *as* legitimacy (Norton, 1997) and carve out a space for a potential future for Indian English that consists of either exo- and endonormative standards; or neither, in the sense of an emerging and imagined *lingua franca* community. As Widdowson (1994, p. 384) wrote, 'you are proficient in a language to the extent that you possess it, make it your own, bend it to your will, assert yourself through it rather than simply submit to the dictates of the form'.

The emergent sociolinguistic status of Indian English, as described in this paper, has the potential to challenge current conceptualisations of the boundaries of so-called 'world Englishes'. Future research is planned, with more in-depth qualitative investigation of the role of other languages in the production and maintenance of a multilingual identity among Indian English speakers (Sharma, 2017), which will be triangulated with experimental data collected from the same

speakers. This data will offer insights into perceptions of Indian English and its phonetic and phonological features, and will provide much-needed descriptive insight, and insight into the social meaning of individual features of speech. This will provide a corollary to the metalinguistic data reported here, offering a fuller picture on the current status of norm evolution in the context of Indian English(es) today.

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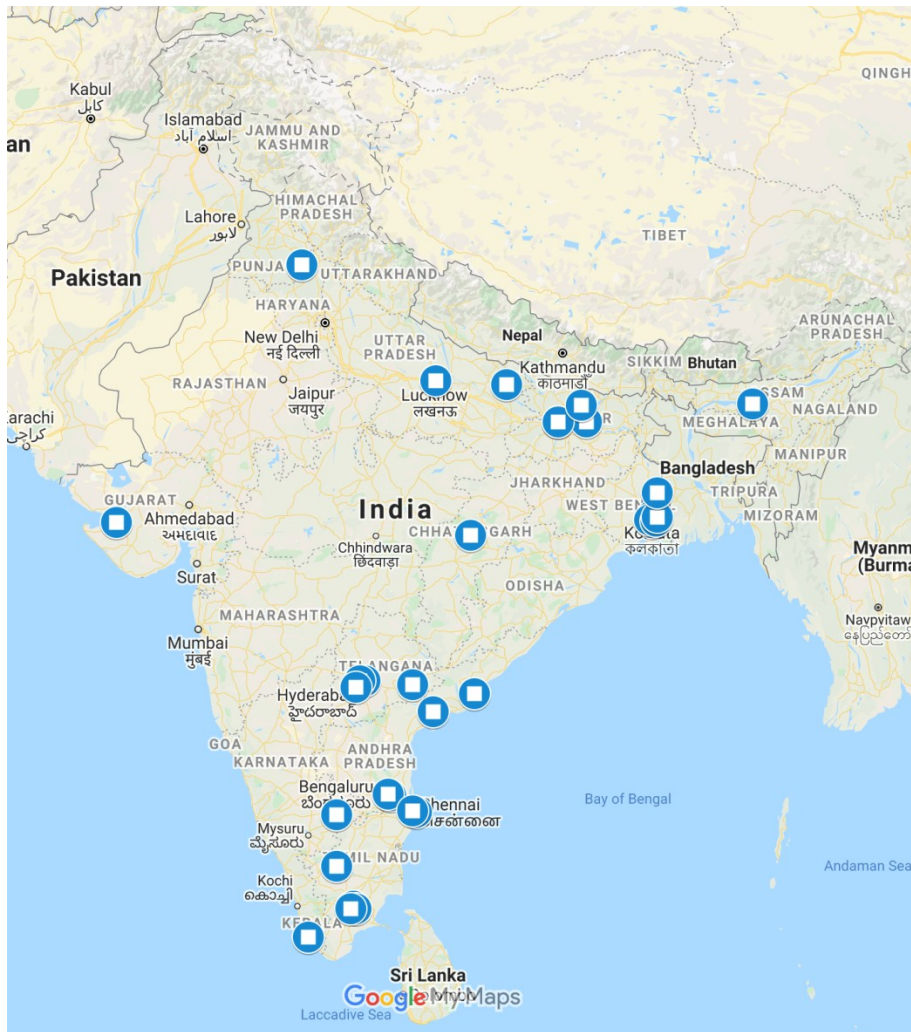
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Tables

TABLE 1 Examples of interview questions (Appendix for a full schedule).

- *Do you think you have an accent?*
- *Would you like to have a different accent?*
- *What do you think about the accents of English, e.g., American, British, etc.?*
- *Can you recognise different accents when you speak to other speakers of English from India?*
- *Have you ever been in a situation where you've deliberately changed the way you talk? If so, why?*

FIGURE 1 Participants' places of birth.



Note: Created with Google Maps Engine (<https://mapsengine.google.com/map/>).

Author

APPENDIX

[Please see additional document.]

APPENDIX

Interview Schedule

1. Do you think you have an accent? If, yes, what accent would you say you have?
2. What do you think about your accent?
3. Would you like to have a different accent? If yes, what would it be?
4. What do you think about the accents of English, e.g., American, British, etc.?
5. Were you aware of your teachers' speaking a particular accent? If yes, do you think this may have influenced the way you speak?
6. Do you think your accent is different to your parents' accent? If yes, in what way?
7. Can you recognise different accents when you speak to other speakers of English from India?
8. If yes, what are these differences based on (mother tongue, geographical region, educational background, economic status, other)? Can you give an example?
9. Have you ever been in a situation where you've deliberately changed the way you talk? If so, why?
10. Have you ever made an attempt to modify your accent (pronunciation classes, working with a speech pathologist, etc.)?
11. What was the motivation behind it?
12. What would you think if your accent was referred to as Indian English? What about Bengali/Hindi/Tamil/etc. English? Do you think there is such a thing as e.g. Bengali English, distinct from e.g. Hindi English?

13. Do you consider yourself bilingual/multilingual?
14. What word/expression would you use to describe the English language you speak?
15. What word/expression would you use to describe English spoken in India?

Thematic codes

Group A: English accents

1. Accents of English
2. Aspirational variety of English
3. Attitudes to British English

Group B - Indian English

4. 'Neutral accent'
5. Future of Indian English as a variety
6. Generational differences in Indian English
1. Legitimacy of Indian English
2. Linguistic security/insecurity
3. Convergence and/or accommodation

Group C - Variation in Indian English

4. Impact of media on Indian English
5. Impact of schooling on Indian English
6. L1-based differences in Indian English
7. North and South divide (accent and pronunciation)
8. Regional differences in Indian English
9. Socio-economic status and its impact on spoken Indian English