

ANALYSIS OF INDIAN ENGLISH (IE) ON THE MOVIE “SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE”

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1 Introduction

This paper aims at analyzing some aspects of the varieties of the English Language, linking the theoretical knowledge about World Englishes to some piece of art which involves this language. Knowing that there are several different varieties of the English Language around the world, we decided to write this paper about Indian English because of a personal feeling for it, which causes us a lot of curiosity about the differences between it and other varieties. We chose the movie “*Slumdog Millionaire*²” as the piece of art in which we would like to talk about IE.

2 Indian English

The linguist Braj Kachru developed a model of division of English in three circles, so called Kachuru’s circles of English (KACHURU, 2006). These circles describe how English is spread around the world. The first circle is called *inner circle*, which constitutes the speakers of English as mother tongue, as in the USA, Canada and England. The second circle is called *outer circle* and represents the speakers of English as second language, as in India, Singapore and the Philippines. And the third one, the *expanding circle*, represents the speakers of English as Foreign Language or English as Lingua Franca (c.f. JENKINS, 2009). As we can figure it out, Indian English is in the *outer circle* and has a great number of speakers, representing the second largest amount of speakers of English, considering English as first and second language. According to data available on the Internet³, based on the Indian census, English is spoken by around 11% of India’s total population (1,210,193,422 people in 2011⁴), which consists of about 125 million speakers (including those who have it as first, second or third language⁵).

These numbers are very representative, but the history of English in India can show us how the English language was imposed to them since the English colonization from the XVI century until the middle of the last century when the country had its independence. Although there were

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² *Slumdog Millionaire* is a 2008 British drama film directed by Danny Boyle, written by Simon Beaufoy, and co-directed in India by Loveleen Tandan. It is an adaptation of the novel *Q & A* (2005) by Indian author and diplomat Vikas Swarup. Set and filmed in India, the film tells the story of Jamal Malik, a young man from the Dharavi slums of Mumbai who appears on the Indian version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (*Kaun Banega Crorepati* in the Hindi version) and exceeds people’s expectations, thereby arousing the suspicions of the game show host and of law enforcement officials. The movie combines elements of crime and adventure.

(source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slumdog_Millionaire)

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_English-speaking_population

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_India

⁵ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-03-14/india/28117934_1_second-language-speakers-urdu

many protests against this language, today it represents the *lingua franca* among those who cannot communicate using the other Indian dialects.

As it might be expected, IE presents several differences from the other English varieties. There are some people who say that it is more similar to British, and some ones who believe it to be more American like. In our short study of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, we found out that IE was influenced by both American and British varieties, concerning pronunciation, use, and structure of the language. Besides that, it was, and still is, strongly influenced by Hindi, which is the primarily language of most of Indians. One very strong difference, which we are going to refer later, is that IE does not have the same American or British suprasegmental phonological patterns, once stress is put in all words of the sentence (c.f. KACHURU, 2006), making disappear the rising or falling intonation we might perceive in other English varieties. This phonological feature and other ones we are going to discuss in the next topic.

3 Analysis of some phonological features of Indian English on Slumdog Millionaire

As we mentioned before, Indian English is a mixture of other English varieties and Indian dialects. Phonologically, it has some sounds which are basically the same of American or British English, but some are not. We are going to identify some of these differences in some utterances of the characters.

Passage 1 [03:07]

Presenter: "And what type of call center, would that be?"

Jamal: "XL 5 mobile phones"

Presenter: "Oh, so you're the one who calls me up every single day of my life with special offers, huh?"

In this passage, we noticed that the dark l [ɫ] is not really pronounced by them. They pronounced [kɔl], [ˈeksˈel]. What also calls our attention is the fact that they did not aspirate the voiceless sounds when an American or British would do (Kachuru, 2006), e.g. [kɔl] (IE) and [k^hɔl] (BrE/AmE), [taɪp] (IE) and [t^haɪp] (BrE/AmE). In this passage, we also noticed that IE /r/ in final position tends not to be realized (c.f. SAILAJA, 2009), which is a heritage from British accent, e.g. in [yʊ:ə], [hʌsɪntə] and [hʊ:fəz].

Passage 2 [03:57]

Police officer 2 (Srinivas): Except his name, I could not get out of this runt.

Police officer 1: You have been here a whole bloody night, Srinivas. What have you been doing?

Police officer 2 (Srinivas): He's a tough guy.

Police officer 1: A little electricity will loosen his tongue. Give him.

In this passage, we notice some other features of the IE pronunciation. Some of them we may find in Kachuru (2006). The first is the syllable-time rhythm, which consists of the pronunciation of all syllables in a sentence with almost the same strength. ['yu: 'ʌv 'bi:ʌn 'iə 'ʊəl 'blʌdɪ 'naɪt] (*You have been here a whole bloody night*). In this same sentence, we noticed that the man did not pronounce the [h], and the word “whole” is pronounced quite different from the other varieties, [ʊəl].

In the next sentence, ['vʊət 'ev 'yu: 'bɪn 'dʊ:ɪŋg] (*What have you been doing?*), we found out, as described by Kachuru (2006), that IE speakers tend to pronounce [d] as a retroflex [ɖ], as in ['dʊ:ɪŋg]. Also, he pronounces “what” with a [v] sound in the beginning, which is explained by Sailaja (2009)⁶ as occurring in some non-standard IE speakers utterances. We also found that the verb “loosen”, which should be pronounced [lu:sŋ] is uttered like this, [lu:zŋ] with the letter “s” being voiced.

Passage 2 [1:05:45]

Police officer 1: Money and women, reasons to make most mistakes in life.

Police officer 2 (Srinivas): Correct!

Police officer 1: Looks like you're mixed up with both.

In this last passage, we found out the pronunciation of /r/ in the beginning of syllables is realized as the vibrant /r/, whose realization is called *tap* or *flap* [ɾ], like in the Portuguese word “braço” ['brasu]. The IE examples are [ˈrɪ:zənz] are [kəˈrɛkt]. Another feature of IE pronunciation is the change of [ə] for [t]. We found this in [bʊt] “both”.

In order to conclude our paper, we can mention one last fact: IE speakers tend not to pronounce the –ed endings, like in [mɪks] for “mixed”. Having achieved our goal, it is important to say one more time that we understand all the English varieties are important; IE was chosen to compose the *corpus* of our assignment for reasons already mentioned.

References

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⁶“(…) the difference between /v/ and /w/ is often absent in the speech of many IE speakers”. SAILAJA (2009, p. 20)