

Why is “Naya Knorr Soup, 100% Real Vegetables ke Saath, Itna Healthy ki Mummy Khush . . .”: Analysing Code-Mixing in Indian TV Commercials

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Abstract:

The paper explores the bilingual nature of Indian advertising, focusing on the phenomenon of code-mixing between Hindi and English. Bilingualism, particularly in the context of India, is a complex interplay of linguistic systems, influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors. The study begins by elucidating the distinctions between code-switching and code-mixing; crucial aspects of bilingual communication. Code-mixing, the integration of elements from two languages within a single utterance, is of particular interest due to its prevalence in Indian advertising, reflecting societal attitudes towards language and identity. The paper delves into the socio-linguistic dynamics of bilingual communities, where code-switching and code-mixing serve as mechanisms for effective communication. It investigates the reasons behind the use of English alongside native languages in Indian advertising, attributing it to the perceived prestige associated with English and its role as a global language. The study examines code-mixing practices in Indian television commercials (TVCs), analysing linguistic strategies employed to appeal to diverse consumer audiences. Drawing on empirical evidence, the paper discusses the impact of English on native languages within the socio-cultural and economic context of India. It explores the implications of bilingual advertising for language attitudes, consumer behaviour, and market expansion. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of bilingualism in the context of Indian advertising, shedding light on the intricate relationship between language, identity, and consumer culture.

Keywords:Bilingualism, Code-mixing, Code-switching, Indian advertising, Language contact, Multilingualism, Consumer behaviour

Introduction and Aim:

Typically, language acquisition begins with a single language, the native tongue, which is acquired through early interactions with caregivers. Subsequent languages, often referred to as ‘second languages,’ are learned with varying degrees of proficiency under diverse circumstances. Achieving fluency in two languages is termed as bilingualism. This can occur in several ways, such as through childhood exposure to different languages at home from bilingual parents or by growing up in a multilingual community, resulting in sequential bilingualism. Beardsmore argues that a bilingual is “the person who is capable of functioning equally well in either of his languages in all domains of activity and without any traces of the language in his use of the other” (7). In the same vein, Haugen believes that bilingualism is present “at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language” (10). Mackey proposes a minimalist definition of bilingualism or multilingualism, characterizing it as the simple alternation between two or more languages. This definition along with the view of bilingualism, proposed by Grosjean that “bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society, and in all age groups. In fact, it is difficult to find a society that is genuinely monolingual. Not only is bilingualism worldwide, it is a phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of language in human history. It is important to acknowledge the inherent complexity of bilingualism as no language group has ever existed in isolation from the language groups, and the history of languages is replete with examples of language contact leading to some form of bilingualism. The aforementioned argument serves as useful foundation for the present study. Each bilingual individual possesses a unique configuration of linguistic knowledge, resulting from the intricate blend of two distinct languages. Furthermore, their proficiency is subject to dynamic adjustments based on the specific communication environment. Within bilingual communities, the phenomenon of code-switching, characterized by the habitual oscillation between two or more linguistic systems in verbal interaction, has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years. Sociolinguists, particularly, have focused on unravelling the intricate communicative networks that

emerge in these settings. Their primary objective lies in elucidating the systematic principles governing speakers' selections from their available linguistic repertoires. A significant research question in this domain pertains to the interplay of factors that influence language choice in bilingual contexts. It is well acknowledged that no language is impervious to the influence of words and phrases originating from other languages, which, through their universal appeal, become integrated into the lexicon of another language. This includes examining the influence of interlocutors, the communicative setting, and the specific discourse functions that speakers aim to achieve through their code-switching practices.

The present paper delves into the bilingual character of Indian advertising, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of code-mixing (CM) between Hindi, the dominant language (or host language), and English, a foreign language with global influence. It aims to provide a detailed analysis of the integration of English words in Hindi syntactic and morphological structures, as well as the converse that is the use of Hindi words in English matrices. However, before embarking on this analysis, it is crucial to distinguish between code-mixing and code-switching, two seemingly interchangeable consequences of bilingualism. Additionally, understanding the status of English as a global language and its specific role in the Indian context is equally significant.

Background:

Bilingual communities are characterized by a frequent phenomenon, code-switching. It is the act of transitioning between two languages in a conversation. Traught et al. argue that "This code-switching may at first look random, but is actually highly systematic and based upon particular appropriateness conditions" (374). Bilingual speakers, by virtue of their competence in multiple languages, are constantly faced with the choice of the language to be employed to optimize communication with their interlocutors. Social rules play a primary role in guiding these choices. Linguists have appropriated the term 'code' from the field of communication technology (Gardner-Chloros). In communication technology, a code signifies a mechanism for the unambiguous conversion of signals between systems (Gardner-Chloros). This concept serves as an apt analogy for how bilingual speakers navigate between language systems during everyday communication. Consequently, linguists now frequently employ 'code' as an umbrella term encompassing languages, dialects, and styles (Gardner-

Chloros). However, code-switching should be distinguished from code-mixing, a distinct phenomenon observed in bilingual interactions.

The term 'code-switching' refers to the phenomenon where bilingual or bidialectal individuals alternate between different linguistic varieties in a single conversation. Code-mixing, on the other hand, involves the integration of elements from both languages in a single utterance, even when the conversational topic remains unchanged. This mixing can occur at various linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, grammar, or vocabulary. Sridhar and Sridhar define code-mixing as, "the transition from using linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, etc.) of one language to using those of another within a single sentence. It is to be distinguished from the better known term code switching in two respects: (i) each instance of language alternation in CM is not accompanied by a shift in the speech situation . . . and (ii) the language alternations take place intra-sententially" (408). The underlying purpose of code-mixing appears multifaceted. It can serve to reflect the ambiguity of a situation, achieve a desired pragmatic effect, or act as a symbolic performance of the speaker's bilingual identity. In essence, speakers engage in code-mixing by creating a 'linguistic cocktail,' a unique blend of elements from both languages in a single speech event.

In India, a multilingual nation, the use of English alongside native languages is a prevalent feature of everyday communication. This extends to the domain of advertising, where the influence of English has become commonplace. This phenomenon can be attributed, in part, to the perception of English as a language of prestige in Indian society. Consequently, code-mixed advertising varieties that incorporate English as an embedded language can be seen as carrying a certain degree of social status. The emergence of such varieties is likely indicative of a growing linguistic awareness among the educated Indian middle class. Annamalai also agrees that "... the mixed language can be said to have prestige, since the amount of mixing corresponds with the level of education and is an indicator of membership in the elite group" (69). Undoubtedly, English occupies a prominent position as the most widely used language for code-switching and code-mixing on a global scale. This dominance can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, English serves as the official language, encompassing parliamentary and administrative functions, in a large number of former colonies. Consequently, it is undergoing continuous evolution as a secondary or tertiary language across the globe (Traught et.al. 358). Secondly, the emphasis on English transcends the

business culture of our time. The globalization of the world economy, particularly in trade and commerce, has necessitated its adoption as a primary communication tool. This widespread influence of English contributes to the rise of bilingualism and multilingualism in the contemporary world. A significant portion of the global population can now be classified as bilingual or multilingual, possessing fluency in both their native languages and English. The impact of English on these native languages is becoming increasingly evident in the current sociolinguistic landscape.

The present paper confines its investigation to the use of English in the domain of Indian advertising. The analysis focuses on code-mixing practices observed in Indian television commercials (TVCs) televised nationwide. The contemporary advertising industry strategically leverages creative language and situational contexts to persuade target audiences towards product acquisition. We inhabit a media-saturated environment where we encounter advertisements across diverse platforms – hundreds appear in daily newspapers, tens populate popular magazines, and countless others bombard us through radio and television channels. Advertisements claim a significant portion of media space, occupying roughly one-third of daily newspapers and consuming approximately one-tenth of prime viewing time on major television channels. In essence, advertising has become a ubiquitous presence in our daily lives. We are constantly bombarded with messages; for instance, we are informed that Nokia is “connecting people” and KFC is “finger lickin’ good.” Shipra Kundra also observes this potential nature of advertising. She mentions, “In a developing country like ours, advertising is needed with a view to make an effective and all-pervasive communication to the customers so that he can aware of the existence of a particular product, services or idea to freely exercise his rights to fulfill the dominant needs which are otherwise left unfulfilled” (26).

Compelling proof suggests that advertising language deviates significantly from non-persuasive varieties in terms of medium selection, functional goals, participant roles, and most importantly, its innovative use of linguistic and paralinguistic features to capture attention. Notably, advertisers leverage bilingual and multilingual advertisements to reach diverse consumer communities. Bhatia and Ritchie illustrate this point with the example of a Mexican shopkeeper who justified his bilingual signage by stating, “I would sell only half if I did not use English” (517). This candid admission underscores both the desire to maximize consumer reach and the prevalence

of English in bilingual advertising campaigns. While market expansion may be the primary motivator, the implementation of bilingual advertising varies across countries. One valuable framework for analysing this phenomenon is Kachru's concentric circle model of English spread. This model categorizes countries based on their historical and current relationship with English: the inner circle (native-speaking countries), the expanding circle (countries actively adopting English), and the outer circle (countries with a colonial history of English). Notably, India falls in the outer circle category.

Analysis:

Narrowing our interest back to India, it is well-established that historically, English did not hold a dominant position in the realm of mass-market advertising. Consequently, advertisers prioritized the use of simple language, ensuring comprehension by a diverse audience and fostering brand recall to drive purchase behaviour. However, the contemporary advertising landscape necessitates a balance between maintaining this accessibility and achieving creative expression to convey a sense of modernity in televised advertisements. This evolving approach aligns with the rise of linguistic consciousness in the Indian middle class, which increasingly views English as a language of prestige. As a result, the past few years have seen a surge in the use of bilingual advertising strategies in India.

The contemporary advertising world compels corporations to capture consumer attention through engaging and entertaining advertisements that trigger repeated product consideration. In this endeavour, creative language manipulation plays a pivotal role. Language is stretched, modified, and playfully employed to craft these persuasive messages. In relation to this aspect, Guy Cook observes clearly: "It is the unusual and playful use of language which catches our attention, most surely, a fact well known to advertisers, whose copy almost invariably seeks out original and unusual combination of words" (169-170). Viewers flipping through television channels encounter a multitude of commercials that seamlessly switch between various Indian languages and even between English and Hindi. This code-mixing strategy leverages the multilingual proficiency of the target audience. However, advertisers must navigate a delicate balance – effectively integrating both languages within a single advertisement while avoiding the perception of linguistic deficiency.

Across product categories, from essential goods to lifestyle choices, advertising slogans exemplify the creative application of code-mixing.

Catchphrases like “Yeh dil mange more” and “Dhak Dhak go” have become deeply ingrained in the consciousness of younger generations raised with them. This trend extends beyond slogans, as advertisers now aspire to craft entire 30-second television commercials as intricate illustrations of code-mixed dialogue between the ‘participants’ or, more accurately, ‘actors’ featured in the advertisements.

To illustrate the pervasiveness of code-mixing in Indian advertising, we can analyse a recent advertisement for Knorr soup. The ad depicts a common scenario: a child experiencing hunger pangs and requesting a snack from his mother. This situation serves as a microcosm of ‘young India,’ a generation comfortable expressing itself in both English and Hindi, often switching codes unconsciously due to its integration into everyday language use. For ease of comprehension, the dialogue of the advertisement is transcribed in Roman script. The scene in the advertisement opens with the child murmuring in Hindi to his empty stomach, “Chup? Kya?” (English: “Quiet? What?”). Interestingly, the child seamlessly switches to English, requesting, “Snacks?” without any contextual shift. The mother, employing Hindi, inquires, “Kaun bola?” (English: “Who spoke?”). The child, adhering to the mother’s code, replies, “Main nahi, yeh” (English: “Not me, this”) while pointing to his stomach. This prompts the mother to question again, this time code-switching rapidly: “Tummy bole snacks? 7 baje?” (English: “[Your] tummy says snacks? At 7?”) and asserts, “Mummy bole no. Dinner kaun khayega?” (English: “Mommy says no. Who will eat dinner?”). However, the mother’s final utterance warrants closer examination. Unlike her previous statements, it begins with an English sentence structure (Subject-Verb-Object or SVO) but incorporates the Hindi word “bole” (meaning “says”), creating a code-mixed construction. Similarly, she indicates the time using Hindi, and then reverts to English structure with a Hindi verb (“bole”) before finally expressing her disapproval by switching to Hindi syntax but inserting the English word “dinner.” This rapid code-switching reflects the mother’s attempt to negotiate with her child while maintaining a familiar and affectionate tone.

In the meanwhile, the mother rapidly flips through various snack options while consistently employing English. She playfully chants, “Tummy mummy, Tummy mummy, Tummy...” Finally, upon selecting the desired Knorr soup packet, she beams at the child and asks, “...yummy?” This is followed by a voice-over narration (VON) that, echoing the observed code-

mixing, seamlessly switches between languages while highlighting the product's attributes. The VON declares, "Naya Knorr soup 100% real vegetables ke saath (with 100% real vegetables). Itna healthy ki mummy khush (So healthy that mom's happy). Itna yummy ki..." (So yummy that...). Here, the child, satiated after his snack, interjects, "...tummy khush" (tummy's happy), prompting his mother's giggle. The authoritative VON reaffirms the product's quality with the concluding statement: "7 bajee Knorr soups. 100% real vegetables kesaath (7 pm Knorr soups. With 100% real vegetables)." Interestingly, the advertisement strategically incorporates three English words – "tummy," "mummy," and "yummy" – which, through their rhyming scheme, creates a catchy jingle for enhanced memorability.

This Knorr soup advertisement exemplifies the code-mixing characteristic of the new, educated Indian middle class. Their inherent linguistic repertoire allows for the effortless use of both English and Hindi for self-expression. However, it is crucial to note that the nature of code-mixing varies across bilingual advertisements. A closer examination of code-mixed slogans in television commercials reveals distinct mechanisms at play. To elucidate this point, we can categorize these mechanisms as follows:

1. Romanized Hindi Slogans:

In this category, the entire slogan and intended message are spoken entirely in Hindi, without any English words. However, for written presentation, the Hindi is transliterated into the Roman script using appropriate phonetic encoding to match the Hindi lexical database. This type of slogan is the most prevalent and widely circulated in the Indian market. Here are some examples:

Pepsi: "Yeh pyaas hai badi"

Dish T.V.: "Ghar aayi zindagi"

Big Babol: "Bade kaam ki cheez"

Tata salt: "Desh ka namek"

Minto Gol: "Gol ki boli bol"

Sahara City Home: "Jahaan base bharat"

ICICI Bank: "Khayal Apka"

2. English in Devanagari Script:

This category presents a direct contrast to the previous one. Here, the entire slogan is written in Devanagari script, the primary writing system for Hindi, rather than the Roman script. However, during spoken delivery, English words are incorporated into the Hindi sentences. These inserted English words are

then written using the Devanagari script for visual representation. Here are some examples of this kind:

Colgate Toothpaste: “डेंटिस्ट का सुझाया #1 ब्रैण्ड”

Sunsilk Shampoo: “बाल जो एक्सपर्ट ससवारें”

Lux Soap: “नया लक्स ब्यूटीऑयल्स के साथ”

Everest Masala: “टेस्ट से बैस्ट, मम्मी और ओवरेस्ट”

3. English Matrix with Hindi Inserts:

This category involves code-mixing where English serves as the primary or ‘matrix’ language. The basic sentence structure adheres to English grammar, but Hindi words are strategically inserted within the Roman script. Notably, this type of code-mixing is relatively uncommon in Indian advertising slogans:

Ford Ikon: “The Josh Machine”

AskMe: : “The Baap of all Apps”

X Box – “Where is the gheeee?”

Chevrolet Sparks: “Har drive, happy drive”

Uber Eats: “For your tinda moments”

ParleG: “G maane Genius”

4. Hindi Matrix with English words:

This category represents code-mixing where Hindi functions as the matrix language. English words are strategically inserted within the Hindi framework, and the entire slogan is written in Roman script for wider comprehension. These Hindi-matrix slogans with English insertions are a prevalent feature of Indian television advertising. Here are some illustrative examples:

Maggie: “Taste bhi, health bhi”

Dominos: “Khushiyo ki home delivery”

Passion pro bike: “Ab sirf style bolega”

Act II Popcorn: “Har ghar ka interval”

Nature Fresh oil: “Khao lite, jiyo lite”

Halls: “Thandi saans ka blast”

Smart chips: “Smart khao, shape mei raho”

Radio Mirchi: “Mirchi sunne vale always khush”

Flipkart: “Ab har wish hoga poori”

MakeMyTrip: “Dil to roaming hai”

Bingo Chips: “Har angle se tasty”

BookMyShow: “Mood kia book kia”

Airtel: “Hare ek friend zaroori hota hai”

Hero MotoCorp: “Hum mai hai Hero”

5. Half-Mixed Slogans:

In certain instances, slogans may exhibit a mixed structure where one half incorporates words from both languages, while the other half adheres strictly to a single language. The promotional slogan for the soft drink Fanta, “Fanta ka signal out, bunking is allowed,” exemplifies this concept. Here, the first half follows an English matrix with three English words and a single Hindi word (“Fanta ka signal out”). Conversely, the second half adheres entirely to English (“bunking is allowed”). The tag line for Uncle Chips can be read in the similar light, “Bole mere lips, I love Uncle Chips.” Interestingly, Yatra.com promotes its case in the similar mixed fashion but by counting entirely on Hindi in the first half, “Ehsan mat lo, discount lo.” What is more, the presence of such mixed structures can also be detected in the advertisements boasting off the equal usage of both the codes in a single verbatim. However, such an equal distribution of words renders the actual determination of syntactic structure elusive. The observation underneath relates a few examples:

IDBI Bank: “Banking for all, Aao Sochein bada”

Navratna Hair Oil: “Thanda thanda, cool cool”

Revive starch: “Super kadak”

Snapdeal: “Unbox zindagi”

Sprite: “Clear hai”

ACC Cement: “Suraksha power”

5. Mixing at Morphological level:

This category represents the rarest form of code-mixing in advertising slogans. It involves the creation of a novel word, termed a ‘portmanteau,’ by fusing morphological elements from both English and Hindi. These newly coined words do not strictly belong to either language. A prime example is Lay’s past slogan, which features the neologism “dillogical.” This word is a portmanteau formed by combining “dil” (Hindi noun meaning “heart”) and “logical” (English adjective). The resulting word playfully conveys the concept of “logic of the heart.” Another illustration can be found in Pepsi’s slogan, “Youngistan meri jaan.” Here, “Youngistan” is a neologism created by

merging “young” (English adjective) and “-istan” (Persian suffix denoting a land or country). This coinage signifies “the land of the young.”

6. Script Mixing at the Syntactic Level:

Code-mixing can even extend to the visual representation of the slogan through script variation. This phenomenon, though uncommon, creates a striking visual effect. A well-known example is Coca-Cola’s popular slogan featuring actor Aamir Khan. The slogan, “Thanda मतलब Coca-Cola,” visually combines both Roman and Devanagari scripts within a single syntactic unit. Here, the first word, “Thanda” (meaning “cold”), belongs to the Hindi lexicon but is written in Roman script. The second word, “मतलब” (meaning “means”), is written in Devanagari script and functions as a verb. Finally, “Coca-Cola” remains the product name in Roman script.

7. Code-Mixing Beyond Advertising Slogans:

While our focus has been on code-mixing in advertising slogans, it's important to acknowledge its presence in broader marketing strategies. Certain companies strategically employ both English and Hindi to reach a wider audience. For instance, Amul, a leading Indian dairy brand, uses bilingual packaging to cater to a diverse linguistic consumer base. This phenomenon extends to television commercials as well. L’Oréal Paris exemplifies this by airing separate Hindi and English advertisements for their beauty products on different channels. Furthermore, code-mixing transcends the realm of promoting lifestyle products. It is also utilized by government organizations and public service initiatives to disseminate messages effectively. A prime example is the code-mixed slogan of India's largest insurance company, “Insurance bhi, health bhi” (meaning “insurance also, health also”) written in Roman script. This slogan leverages both languages to emphasize the health benefits of insurance. Similarly, the Incredible India tourism campaign employs a bilingual approach with the slogan “Incredible! India” in English and “अतुल्य! भारत” (Atulya! Bharat) in Hindi, signifying “Incredible India” in both languages. This strategy of code-mixing is devised even to promote and advertise local products on the small scale. Such a case can be seen in the marketing of a milk product brand, Verka which deftly uses English and Punjabi on its products.

8. The Rise of Hinglish in Popular Culture:

The creative fusion of Hindi and English, often referred to as ‘Hinglish,’ has permeated various aspects of Indian popular culture. This phenomenon is evident in television advertisements, roadside billboards, and even multicultural films like *Bend It Like Beckham* and *Monsoon Wedding*. Titles of old and recent Bollywood movies further showcase the widespread acceptance of Hinglish. Examples include *Jab We Met*, *Love Aaj Kal*, and *Pyaar Impossible*, *Shudh Desi Romance*, *Shaadi ke Side Effects*, *Total Siyaapa*, *Ek Villian*, *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai Dobaara* which all seamlessly blend Hindi and English elements. Hinglish is also prevalent in contemporary Bollywood music, captivating young audiences across nightclubs and taxis alike. Songs like “Crazy Kiya Re,” “My Desi Girl,” “Pocket Mein Rocket Hai,” “What Jhumkaa,” to name a few, demonstrate the undeniable magnetic appeal of Hinglish within popular music. Television and OTT shows like *Lift Kara De*, *Sukh By Chance*, *Ye Meri Family*, *Bang Baaja Baraat*, *BOSS: Baap of Special Services* further exemplify this trend, incorporating bilingual titles into their branding. This widespread code-mixing represents a significant shift from the past. Previously, generations in India prioritized correct and formal English usage, avoiding code-switching due to the perceived risk of appearing incompetent. However, the past two decades have witnessed a crucial change. With the rise of a younger generation holding greater influence, the linguistic landscape has transformed. As one English-medium student aptly observes, “Anyone who speaks for a few minutes without using a couple of Hindi words in an English sentence or English words while speaking in Hindi is considered a big bore and outdated” (<http://www.theweek.com/23Mar23/life>). The introduction of cable television in the early 1990s is credited with fostering this new, sophisticated approach to language. Popular channels, like MTV and Channel V, emulating the format of English music channels, promoted English usage by employing fluent English speakers as video jockeys (VJs). This media influence, along with overall societal advancements, fostered a view of English as a fashionable expression while simultaneously retaining cultural roots. Recognizing this bilingual nature of the population, media outlets have strategically leveraged it to their advantage. While code-mixing, or Hinglish, may be a recent phenomenon in Indian advertising, it is rapidly establishing itself as a prominent and influential force.

Conclusion:India, a linguistically and culturally diverse nation, utilizes English as a prominent second language. Statistical data suggests that the number of English speakers in India may even surpass the combined figures of England and America. This widespread use of English has demonstrably influenced the character and usage of native languages, particularly Hindi. Bilingual advertising serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. Hindi magazines, newspapers, shop signs, billboards, and television commercials frequently incorporate English words, sometimes even exceeding the number of Hindi words used. This trend in bilingual advertising can be attributed to the forces of globalization. The present analysis aims to explore the nature of code-mixing prevalent in contemporary Indian television commercials. It examines the various forms in which two languages – English and Hindi – blend to create an impression of modernity and prestige. Specifically, the study focuses on code-mixing in Hindi with English insertions, as well as English with Hindi insertions. The analysis investigates this phenomenon at both the syntactic (sentence structure) and morphological (word structure) levels.

Code-mixing can, thus, be viewed not simply as a sign of linguistic inadequacy, but rather as a creative marketing strategy. It serves a dual purpose: appealing to the current Generation and reflecting the dominant linguistic behaviour of a population prepared to navigate an evolving linguistic landscape. Language, after all, is a powerful mirror reflecting the social conditions and thought patterns of a society.

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