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THE USE OF HINGLISH IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIETY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF HINDI-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING IN BOLLYWOOD AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The growing contact between Hindi and English has made Hinglish a visible feature of contemporary communication in India. The term refers broadly to speech and writing in which speakers combine Hindi and English words, phrases, or grammatical structures. This article examines Hinglish from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on Bollywood cinema and social media. It uses a qualitative, literature-based method and discusses published studies alongside illustrative examples; it does not claim to present a new survey or statistical corpus. The analysis considers common linguistic patterns, including lexical insertion, switching within sentences, and Romanised Hindi in digital writing. It argues that Hinglish can express identity, belonging, humour, modernity, and relationships, while also reflecting the audience and situation. Bollywood helps circulate recognisable language styles, whereas social media allows users to reproduce and adapt them in everyday communication. The article also considers concerns about language standards and explains why informal bilingual practices can coexist with the need for formal Hindi and English.

Keywords: Hinglish; Hindi; English; code-switching; sociolinguistics; Bollywood; social media; bilingualism.

INTRODUCTION

Language is more than a system of grammar and vocabulary. It is also a social resource through which people express identity, relationships, attitudes, and cultural belonging. In multilingual communities, speakers may use resources from more than one language in the same conversation. Sociolinguists commonly examine this practice through the concepts of code-switching and code-mixing.

India provides an important context for studying language contact. Hindi is widely used in many parts of the country, while English has a significant role in higher education, administration, business, media, and international communication. Their long-term contact has contributed to flexible forms of communication commonly described as Hinglish. The term does not refer to one fully standardised language with a fixed grammar. Instead, it covers different ways of combining Hindi and English, and these patterns can vary according to region, age, education, topic, audience, and purpose.

This article focuses on two spaces where Hinglish is particularly visible: Bollywood cinema and social media. Film dialogue can show how language choices help represent characters and social relationships. Online platforms provide a more immediate environment for mixed-language captions, comments, memes, and short videos. The article asks three questions: What linguistic patterns are associated with Hinglish? What social meanings can these patterns communicate? How do Bollywood and social media contribute to its visibility?

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: CODE-SWITCHING AND HINGLISH

Code-switching is the alternation between languages or language varieties within a conversation, sentence, or wider discourse. Speakers may switch languages because of the topic, audience, emphasis, humour, quotation, solidarity, or the availability of a particular expression. It should not automatically be understood as weak language ability. Research in bilingualism shows that language mixing can be systematic and shaped by grammatical and social patterns.

Hinglish is sometimes used as a broad label for code-switching, code-mixing, and English words that have become familiar in Hindi speech. These phenomena are related but not identical. A borrowed word may become established and be used without an active switch between languages. Code-switching, more narrowly, involves movement between linguistic systems in a communicative event. Sahni (2025) discusses how established models can be used to analyse the grammatical organisation of Hinglish. Bhatt (2008), in turn, demonstrates that language mixing can contribute to identity representation and the creation of social meaning. These perspectives support an approach that considers both linguistic structure and social context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive approach. It is a desk-based study of published research on Hindi-English code-switching, Hinglish, Bollywood dialogue, and digital communication. The literature considered includes work on language mixing and identity, changes in Bollywood film scripts, generational patterns among Hindi-English bilinguals, and recent research on online code-mixing.

The discussion is organised around three themes: linguistic form, media representation, and sociolinguistic meaning. Illustrative examples are used to explain common patterns; they are constructed examples rather than quotations from particular films, posts, or speakers. The article does not independently measure the frequency of Hinglish in a representative sample. Therefore, it makes no numerical claims about all Indian speakers. A future empirical study could analyse a clearly defined set of film scenes or public social media posts using a transparent coding procedure.

LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF HINGLISH

One common feature is lexical insertion, in which a word from one language appears in a sentence whose grammatical structure mainly follows the other language. For example, a speaker might say “Mujhe message karna” (“Send me a message”) or “Aaj meeting hai” (“There is a meeting today”). In these illustrative examples, English nouns occur within Hindi sentence structures. Such expressions may be convenient when English terms are familiar in education, work, technology, or everyday life.

A second feature is intra-sentential switching, which means changing languages within one sentence. For example: “Mujhe lagta hai this is a good idea” (“I think this is a good idea”). Speakers may also begin an idea in Hindi and continue in English in the next sentence. Another visible feature in digital communication is Romanised Hindi, where Hindi words are written with the Latin alphabet. This may be convenient on a keyboard or may reflect the writing habits of an online community. However, Roman script alone does not make a text Hinglish; the language resources used are what matter.

These patterns show that Hinglish is flexible rather than uniform. A speaker may use more English in a professional or educational topic and more Hindi in a family conversation. The form of mixing depends on linguistic knowledge as well as the social setting. A comparison of the examples above makes the difference clearer: “Aaj meeting hai” mainly inserts an English noun into a Hindi sentence, whereas “Mujhe lagta hai this is a good idea” moves from Hindi to English within one sentence. This shows that Hinglish does not follow only one pattern; speakers can choose different forms of mixing depending on what they want to express.

HINGLISH IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA

Bollywood is an influential space for the representation of Hindi-English language practices. Film dialogue is written for particular characters and situations, so language choices can help communicate education, occupation, social background, relationships, and personality. A character who combines Hindi and English may be presented as comfortable in both local and global cultural settings. In other scenes, a switch may create humour, emotional emphasis, or a sense of informality. This relationship between film language and social identity is also discussed by Baig et al. (2024), who examine the portrayal of social mobility through Hinglish in Bollywood cinema.

Si (2011) examines Hindi-English code-switching in Bollywood film scripts over time. This research is relevant because it treats film dialogue as material through which changing language practices can be studied. Film language is scripted and should not be treated as a direct record of how every person speaks. Nevertheless, popular films can make certain expressions familiar to large audiences. When

viewers repeat memorable lines or imitate a character's style, cinematic language can enter everyday interaction.

Hinglish in cinema therefore has both representational and cultural functions. It can help construct a character and can also reflect wider social attitudes towards Hindi, English, education, and modern life. Its meaning depends on the scene and the audience rather than on the presence of English words alone.

HINGLISH ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has expanded opportunities for informal bilingual communication. Users combine Hindi and English in captions, comments, hashtags, memes, and short videos. The language may be written in Devanagari, Roman script, or a mixture of both. Compared with formal writing, online communication often values speed, creativity, humour, and a close relationship with the audience. Hinglish can therefore be a practical and expressive choice.

Sengupta et al. (2024) investigate social, economic, and demographic factors connected with the emergence of Hinglish code-mixing on social media. Their work demonstrates that digital language practices can be studied systematically and that they are connected with wider social conditions. Online expressions can spread through repetition: a phrase from a video may later appear in comments, memes, or personal captions. Users can modify it by adding local expressions or combining it with other languages.

Online language use is not the same for every person or situation. Someone may use Hinglish with friends but choose standard Hindi or English for an academic assignment or professional email. Platform, audience, topic, and formality all influence language choice. It is therefore more accurate to view Hinglish as one resource in a speaker's repertoire than as a style used by all users in the same way.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC FUNCTIONS AND SOCIAL MEANINGS

Identity and belonging: Hinglish may allow speakers to show a connection with Hindi-speaking cultural contexts while also participating in English-influenced areas such as education, business, entertainment, and online culture. Bhatt (2008) highlights the relationship between language mixing and identity representation. The meaning of a mixed expression depends on who uses it, who receives it, and where the interaction takes place.

Generation and peer communication: Age and social networks can influence language preferences. Young people who regularly use digital platforms may encounter mixed expressions in videos, comments, music, and conversations with friends. Klingler (2017) examines changes in code-switching patterns among Hindi-English bilinguals in Northern India. Such research draws attention to social variation, although it does not mean that all young people use Hinglish in the same way.

Prestige, education, and modernity: English has a complex social history in India and may be associated with education, professional opportunities, and social mobility. Highet (2022) examines how English, womanhood, and aspirations intersect in the lives of young women in Delhi. This context helps explain why English elements may sometimes carry associations with modernity or status. However, English words may also be selected simply because they are familiar or convenient.

Creativity and audience: Mixed-language communication can create humour, emphasis, affection, and memorable expressions. Speakers may choose one language because a phrase sounds more playful or suitable for a particular audience. The same person may speak differently with family, classmates, colleagues, or online followers. This ability to adapt language to the situation is part of sociolinguistic competence.

DISCUSSION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The research reviewed here suggests that Hinglish is a dynamic practice shaped by language contact and social interaction. One debate concerns its relationship with standard Hindi. Some people worry that frequent English vocabulary may reduce the use of traditional Hindi expressions or affect language learning. Such concerns are relevant in formal education, where students need to develop accurate academic Hindi and English. However, informal code-switching does not automatically mean that a

speaker cannot use either language separately. The ability to move between languages can itself be part of bilingual competence.

A second issue is the suitability of Hinglish in different contexts. It may be effective among friends or on social media, but it may not meet the expectations of a formal report, legal document, or academic article. The appropriate language choice depends on purpose and audience. Educators can recognise multilingual communication while continuing to teach formal registers. Researchers should also avoid generalising from a small number of films or online posts: India is linguistically diverse, and language practices vary across regions and communities.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined Hinglish as a visible form of Hindi-English interaction in contemporary Indian society, focusing on Bollywood and social media. The discussion has outlined lexical insertion, switching within sentences, and Romanised Hindi in digital writing. These practices are influenced by the speaker, audience, topic, and communicative setting. Bollywood can represent language choices as part of characterisation and storytelling, while social media allows mixed expressions to be created, shared, and adapted.

Hinglish may communicate identity, belonging, generational affiliation, humour, and associations with education or modernity. These meanings are not universal and should be interpreted in context. Rather than describing Hinglish only as incorrect Hindi or English, it is more productive to study it as a flexible bilingual practice. At the same time, speakers need access to standard language forms for academic, official, and professional communication. Future research could compare regions, age groups, and online platforms through a clearly defined sample of film scenes and public posts.

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