



# CRITICAL ISSUES IN ELT

Edited by  
Ruchi Kaushik and A.L. Khanna



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*Edited by*  
Ruchi Kaushik  
and  
A.L. Khanna

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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	9
<i>Contributors</i>	11
<i>Introduction</i>	15

## I. Multilingualism

1. To Teach or Not to Teach Code-Mixed English? Translanguaging Hindi-English <i>Tej K. Bhatia</i>	35
2. 'Warm Welcome or Cold Shoulder': Demystifying (‘Positively Noxious’) English in the Multilingual Indian Classroom <i>Shree Deepa and Geetha Durairajan</i>	50
3. From a Monolingual to a Multilingual Approach in Language Teaching <i>Susanna Schwab</i>	62

## II. Critical Pedagogy

4. Critical Pedagogy and English Language Teaching in India <i>Sunita Mishra</i>	77
5. Processes and Protocols of Discourse Oriented Pedagogy Towards Resisting Linguistic Imperialism <i>Anandan Narayanan</i>	89
6. Critical Literacy as a Way of Negotiating Meanings with Stories <i>Prachi Kalra</i>	103
7. Making <i>Daffodils</i> Bloom for Everyone: The Flowering of Critical Pedagogy in the ESL Classroom <i>M. Raja Vishwanathan</i>	115

### **III. Continuing Professional Development**

8. The Dimensions of Continuing Professional Development 129  
*Rod Bolitho*
9. Learner Feedback as a Tool for Teacher Learning and Continuing Professional Development 144  
*K. Padmini Shankar*
10. Data-led Reflection for Self-directed Continuous Professional Development 160  
*Mala Palani*
11. An Action Research Project Exploring Peer Mentoring Enabling CPD 172  
*Monishita Hajra Pande*

### **IV. Materials Development**

12. Training Teachers to be Materials Writers 189  
*Rod Bolitho*
13. Designing Customized ESP Materials: Principles, Procedure and Practice 199  
*Meera Srinivas*
14. Translanguaging, Spices and Authentic Materials 212  
*Madhavi Gayathri Raman and Vijaya*

### **V. Assessment and Evaluation**

15. In Teachers' Hands: Where Formative Assessment Comes to Life in Unforeseen Ways 225  
*Jacob Tharu*
16. Peer Feedback in L2 Writing 243  
*Ramanujam Parthasarathy*
17. Giving Feedback to Treat ESL Writing as a Process: Ideas and Challenges 256  
*Lina Mukhopadhyay*
18. Assessment for Development through Portfolios 270  
*Ravinarayan Chakrakodi*

## VI. Technology-aided Teaching and Learning

19. From Black Board to White Board and Beyond:  
The Role of ICTs in Reforming English Language  
Classrooms in Tamil Nadu 285  
*Elizabeth Eldho and Rajesh Kumar*
20. Bringing Digital Literacy into the ESL Classroom:  
Enhancing Language Learning Tasks using  
Web 2.0 Tools 298  
*Kshema Jose*
21. Design-Based Research for Technology Enabled  
Language Learning: From Theory to Practice 313  
*Jennifer Thomas and Nishevita Jayendran*
22. Using Google Classroom as a Learning Management  
System: An Exploratory Study 324  
*Cherry Mathew Philipose and Sheeja Rajagopal*

## VII. Inclusive Education

23. Inclusive Practices: Equitable Learning for All 339  
*Kirti Kapur*
24. Lessons in Disability: Acceptance and Inclusion 351  
*Shubhangi Vaidya*



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# Introduction

*Ruchi Kaushik and A.L. Khanna*

The primary aim of putting research papers together in this book is to bring to the doorsteps of English language professionals some contemporary debates on critical issues related to English language teaching, primarily in India. The contributors are linguists, language teachers and English language teaching professionals at the university and school level both from India and overseas. We present a variety of articles based on empirical data, papers exploring theoretical positions/frameworks/issues in ELT, classroom-based action research projects as well as personal narratives with the firm belief that dissemination and discussion are prerequisites to any meaningful grassroots level intervention by teachers teaching English language in India.

ELT is a vast field of research although conventionally it has primarily focused on discovering the best strategies for developing learners' proficiency in the language and designing curricula, syllabi, materials and assessment tools for the same. This point is highlighted by Cummins and Davison (2007):

Language teaching research and theory have traditionally focused on issues of effectiveness and efficiency: What is the best method for teaching a second or foreign language? What is the optimal age for starting the teaching of a new language? What emphasis should be placed on each of the 'four language skills'— speaking, listening, reading, and writing—for optimal outcomes? (p. 3)

But the field of ELT has moved beyond these primary issues and is no longer concerned merely with classroom teaching. One of the major issues being debated in recent times is the status accorded to English as a global language and the consequences of this phenomenon. Globalization, to a large extent, is responsible for the exponential growth of English as a means of communication across the world (Crystal, 2003; Halliday, 2003 as quoted in Briguglio & Watson, 2014, p. 69). Policies relating to the stage at which English should be taught to children are motivated by political pressure and also backed by an assumption that introducing English at an early stage, and teaching it with intensity, will inevitably result in better learning. This assumption does not appear to be correct because there are numerous factors that may determine the success or failure in learning English such as the level of exposure to the language, learner motivation, teacher beliefs and attitudes to name a few (Gupta, 1992; Khanna & Agnihotri, 1984; Agnihotri & Khanna, 1997, 1998; Khanna et al., 1998). But the huge hype that has been created in favour of early introduction of English is fuelled by the perceived social and economic advantages of learning English (Peisker, 2002; Murcia, 2003; Landry et al., 2009). Indian youth, particularly those studying in major cities consider proficiency in English language as a means to developing effective communication skills and exploring better career opportunities (Kaushik, 2016; 2018). Moreover, English language is also seen as a language of emancipation and empowerment for marginalized communities in India, particularly the Dalits (Ilaiah, 2013). According to Ilame (2020),

The world of Dalits is a sizable section of our society, which is still having blood-chilling incidents of cruelty and oppression. Most of them are living below the poverty line even after sixty-six years of political freedom and progress in all the spheres of life. The linguistic imbalance between Dalits and other castes is due to poverty and varnashram dharma of Hindus...Dr Ambedkar rightly compared this language (English) to the milk of a lioness. It helps a person to assert himself. (p. 1000)

On the other hand, the adverse impact of the growing role of English as a lingua franca on other languages has been an area of severe apprehension and linguists have pointed out the ill-effects of “English linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992, p. 47). Skutnabb-Kangas argues that similar to other ‘isms’, linguiscism is “an illness, a disease” that can be defined as “ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.” (1988, p. 13). Apart from linguistic disparities, researchers have also drawn attention to the apparent racial discrimination that is propagated by the “hegemonic white supremacy in English teaching” (Gerald, 2020, p. 44). According to Ramjattan (2015, p. 694 as quoted in Gerald, 2020, p. 48), “In ELT, race and language are also components in the aesthetic labour of teachers: to look good is to be white, while to sound right entails speaking an inner circle variety of English.” Moreover, Western theories and practices are centred, prioritized and expected to be used in contexts that may be very different. This may be seen as a subtle way of maintaining the White supremacy even in the post-colonial scenario. There is thus an urgent need to decentre ELT and empower our teachers to promote local-context(s) appropriate English teaching and learning frameworks, materials and practices that will be more suited to the needs of our learners.

The use of English exclusively as the medium of instruction, in many countries including in several private schools of India, at the expense of the indigenous mother tongues or regional languages, becomes disadvantageous for several students since it forces them to negotiate all school subjects in the language they are not proficient in. As a result, students don’t just ‘drop out’ of the education system, they are ‘pushed out’ of it (Mohanty, 2009; 2017).

Today many language teaching practices are under review. One of the language teaching practices which has

drawn the attention of researchers globally is the use of the indigenous languages that learners bring into the classroom for the teaching of English. Earlier, using the home/local/regional languages of the learners in an English classroom was considered a pathology. Initially, several advocates of the use of languages of children in the teaching of English restricted it to its 'judicious use' for providing explanations of concepts or as a support system wherever the learners faced difficulty in processing the target language. But it still had predominantly a monolingual bias which prevented teachers from allowing learners to use their multilingual repertoire which is part of the metalinguistic and language awareness of learners inhabiting multilingual contexts. Increasingly, research has established that languages of learners should be seen more as a resource than as a burden or a curse because these languages help not only in the cognitive growth of the learners but also give them socio-political, cultural and economic advantages. Cummins (2017) comments:

....an increasing number of educators have begun to explore ways in which students' home languages can contribute to their learning and ease their adjustment to schooling in a new country. Their instruction has consciously positioned students from linguistically diverse, low socioeconomic status, and marginalized communities as powerful learners, capable of generating knowledge and insights, rather than as passive recipients of instruction. (p. 9)

This shift in the focus from teaching 'English only' in the English class, to not only allowing but welcoming the languages of children as a resource, has opened up several possibilities. This has foregrounded languages of the learners and perhaps could be interpreted as one of the significant steps towards decentring of teaching English in the formerly colonized countries (Di Ferrante et al., 2019). The awareness of the fact that most learners are multilingual and transact in multilingual social contexts, the monolingual pedagogies are being replaced with multilingual pedagogies which include

translanguaging as one of them. Several researchers who are new to the concept of translanguaging often tend to confuse it with code switching and code mixing. Translanguaging, in fact, encourages teachers to apply or permit pedagogical and language practices in classrooms that support teaching and learning and affirm students' multilingual identities (Wei, 2014; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Heugh et al., 2019). According to Wei (2018), translanguaging is:

a process of meaning- and sense-making. The analytical focus is therefore on how the language user draws upon different linguistic, cognitive and semiotic resources to make meaning and make sense. The identities of individual languages in structural and/or socio-political terms only become relevant when the user deliberately manipulates them. Moreover, Translanguaging defines language as a multilingual, multimodal, and multisensory sense- and meaning-making resource. In doing so, it seeks to challenge boundaries: boundaries between named languages, boundaries between the so-called linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic means of communication, and boundaries between language and other human cognitive capacities. Language in its conventional sense of speech and writing is only one of many meaning- and sense-making resources that people use for everyday communication. (paragraph 4)

The dichotomy between the language of instruction (presumably English) and the language(s) learners are well equipped with (considering our multilingual social fabric) raises the fundamental question whether it is advisable to start teaching in the language they are least familiar with but which is perceived as a language of opportunities within India as well as globally, or should it begin with the language(s) of the children or with both? The concern for preserving and strengthening our linguistic plurality has been addressed both in the *National Curriculum Framework 2005* (NCF, NCERT, 2005) and the *National Education Policy 2020* (NEP). According to the NCF 2005:

Multilingualism, which is constitutive of the identity of a child and a typical feature of the Indian linguistic landscape, must be

used as a resource, classroom strategy and a goal by a creative language teacher. This is not only the best use of a resource readily available, but also a way of ensuring that every child feels secure and accepted, and that no one is left behind on account of his/her linguistic background (p. 36).

Similarly, in the section titled 'Multilingualism and the power of language,' of the *National Education Policy 2020* (GoI, 2020) the following observation is made:

It is well understood that young children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue. Home language is usually the same language as the mother tongue or that which is spoken by local communities. However, at times in multi-lingual families, there can be a home language spoken by other family members which may sometimes be different from mother tongue or local language. Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible...Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction. (p. 13)

The NCF, 2005, however, also acknowledges people's aspirations for learning English and considers its status in India as that of "a global language in a multilingual country" (p. 38). It spells out the objectives of second language acquisition and "argues for an across-the-curriculum approach that breaks down the barriers between English and other subjects, and English and other Indian languages" (p. 39). In our opinion, the main focus of the ELT teachers should be "adopting a multilingual approach to educational development" that entails "redefining the roles of English and indigenous languages as languages of teaching and learning" (Obondo, 2007, p. 47). What we need are clear and well-defined policies besides realizable programmes that lead to both successful English learning and LI maintenance.

Another significant challenge that the English teaching profession faces today is in the field of professional development of teachers to make them more practical and increase their efficacy. One of the major questions is whether this goal can be achieved by attending stand-alone formal conferences, virtual or online, or can teachers, at their own ease, develop their personal and professional qualities, and improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, and development of their pupils? This question becomes even more pertinent with the growing use of technology in the teaching and learning process. Though technology has increasingly played a crucial role in education, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought its use into the limelight and schools and institutions are rushing towards online solutions to teaching all subjects including English language. The issue of how best to use an education technology remains unanswered, but in the wake of the pandemic, blended learning appears to gain currency. However, the question remains whether technology-driven teaching comes close to how people learn languages and the best practices for language learning and teaching. Corbel (1997) addresses the issue of teachers' professional development in the context of emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) and argues that ICT will require English language teachers to adopt a wider range of roles and become flexible and adaptable in managing their work in a context where change is likely to be a constant. Moreover, in the 'new normal' post-pandemic context, teachers must be trained to think of coping strategies such as making creative use of learning spaces beyond the conventional classroom and designing flexible language materials suitable for diverse modes of education (Kaushik & Gupta, 2021).

We conclude by reiterating that the field of ELT is witnessing rapid changes, particularly to de-centralize and de-elitize English and promote a multilingual approach to language learning ironically amidst the widespread demand

of people to acquire English language skills. In order to find a sustainable solution in such a situation, we have to, as Sah (2020, p. 11) observes, “seek an effective alternative that could enhance English skills without acting on the local languages and replacing local cultures.” The way forward for achieving an equitable and a socially just system/society appears to be to think of measures that would “redefine the role of minor languages for democracy and equity and ultimately contribute to the redistribution of power in society” (Agnihotri, 2014, p. 6). This would not only help bridge the gap between policies and practices but also serve the social aspirations of the disadvantaged population both in urban and rural India by considering children’s languages not as appendages but as powerful resources in language learning.

### **Sections in the Book**

The articles in this collection have been divided into seven sections:

1. Multilingualism, 2. Critical Pedagogy, 3. Continuing Professional Development, 4. Materials Development, 5. Assessment and Evaluation, 6. Technology-aided Teaching and Learning, 7. Inclusive Education

### **1. Multilingualism**

In the opening article, Bhatia explores the unique multilingual context of English in India and contends that code-mixing is a natural aspect of bilingual behaviour. Advocating the use of Hinglish and other forms of language mixing, he makes a case for second language acquisition grounded in the concept of additive multilingualism though he highlights some inherent challenges involved in the process, such as the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers and learners, translanguaging practices in the classroom, authentic material preparation etc. This is followed by Deepa and Durairajan’s paper in which they argue that certain myths surrounding the English language and its teaching and learning in a country as linguistically diverse such as ours need to be

busted. These include considering English superior to Indian languages, believing that there is zero level of English in India, dismissing our knowledge capital as useless and considering that only imperialist studies can inform the English teacher. According to them, it is high time that we reclaim pride in our multilinguality and use English as a 'window on India.' Schwab, in her paper, describes the multilingual approach adopted towards materials development, language learning and teaching in Switzerland following the Council of Europe's recommendations of introducing two additional languages besides the local language into the school curriculum. She argues that language teaching grounded in third language learning theories can be a rewarding exercise provided teachers are encouraged to interrogate their own language experiences based on a monolingual approach and are adequately trained in adapting the multilingual pedagogy.

## **2. Critical Pedagogy**

In the first paper of this section, Mishra provides an overview of seminal critical pedagogy (CP) theoretical frameworks and debates to begin with. She then explores how CP has been adopted in Indian education policies, curriculum and syllabus design and how Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Learning (MTBML) has been an important pedagogical intervention in developing critical literacy in India. However, she emphasizes training and empowering teachers as a possible solution for implementing CP given the diversity of our learners. In the next paper, Anandan argues how the growing popularity of English has propagated linguistic imperialism by obliterating the linguistic and cultural identities of the native speakers of the non-Standard varieties of English and the speakers of other languages. He proposes Discourse Oriented Pedagogy (DOP) as a critical literacy tool as opposed to conventional ELT practices in order to facilitate second language acquisition. Kalra's article undercuts the common perception that knowledge construction and interrogations of

hegemony are possible only in classrooms comprising young adults. She describes her efforts to introduce CP in primary classrooms comprising small children through storytelling, a powerful tool, that goes beyond developing 'critical thinking' in children and involves them in meaning making and challenging narratives of power, hierarchy and inequity. In the concluding paper of this section, Vishwanathan describes his classroom experiences with primarily first-generation undergraduate learners of English whose initial discomfiture with an alien English text and context gradually faded as their local cultures, languages and real-life concerns, particularly of the deprived and dispossessed, were used as resources in classroom interactions.

### **3. Continuing Professional Development**

According to Bolitho, although the concept of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is well understood and undertaken by professionals from diverse fields, it has only recently come to occupy an important place in the field of education and there is still no common understanding of the term among its stakeholders. However, Bolitho identifies and clarifies in his paper some key aspects of CPD which he considers important for teachers and managers/administrators in educational institutions before emphasizing some obstacles that may impede a teacher's professional development. Shankar shares the findings from her research on the role of learner feedback in the development of a teacher's pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) and teacher's heightened sense of her own practice. Using insights from her study, she illustrates in detail how learner feedback can contribute to teacher learning leading to CPD. Shankar contends that learner feedback is an important tool that a teacher may use to her advantage in offering better content, pedagogy and learning-oriented assessment measures. According to Palani, reflective practice is an integral component of professional development. The use of technology, particularly the inexpensive and

convenient facility of video-recording one's lectures on a smart phone and subsequently using that information for exploring more effective teaching practices for one's own CPD forms the basis of Palani's paper who reports an autoethnographic study conducted by a teacher educator. It is followed by Pande's article in which she underscores that CPD is a continuum as teachers endeavour to improve their understanding of their classroom practices and expand their knowledge and skills. Highlighting the importance of action research, she explains how it allows teachers to engage in CPD activities within their own micro-contexts and offers opportunities to trigger changes in institutional practices.

#### **4. Materials Development**

Bolitho's article draws attention towards the importance of locally produced textbooks that can, unlike global textbooks, address learners' needs better by taking into consideration the local culture, school realities, influence of mother tongue etc. Highlighting the need for expansion of locally produced materials, he underlines the processes involved in training teachers to become materials writers. Srinivas, in her article, draws readers' attention to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and argues that learners with specialized professional or academic needs require customized instructional materials that provide support and stimulus for learning. Building the case for developing tailored materials using authentic sources in alignment with learners' needs and learning objectives, she presents a framework for the same and validates it through an analysis of some samples. Gayathri Raman and Vijaya demonstrate the efficacy of using authentic materials within the task-based-language-teaching framework wherein learners are engaged in real-world tasks. Describing how their use of a graphic text on Indian spices with Foreign Language Learners of English facilitated translanguaging in the classroom, they contend that multilingual practices help develop in learners their sense of self and identity.

## **5. Assessment and Evaluation**

Locating Formative Assessment (FA) as one of the significant strands of evaluation in the reform-centred discourse in educational policies of India, Tharu elucidates the merits of Formative Assessment (Assessment FOR learning) and argues that Continuous and Cumulative Evaluation (CCE) has paved the way for carrying FA more purposefully into classroom practice. Highlighting the complexity of the process of assessment as inextricably linked with teaching and teacher autonomy, he underscores the need for more conceptual clarity regarding the term alongside reconsidering notions of teacher agency and revamping teacher training programmes. Parthasarathy offers a comprehensive review of peer feedback (PF) research in L2 writing and presents significant findings of a research study conducted to examine the role of PF in second language writing, Parthasarathy claims that it may be adopted as an effective and viable alternative to teacher feedback which, in most cases, is non-existent or unusable. However, the success or failure of PF, according to him, is dependent on multiple factors such as the institutional culture, training given to peer reviewers in written and oral feedback techniques etc. Mukhopadhyay strongly makes a case for building a process-oriented approach to teaching writing in ESL/EFL classrooms. Highlighting how important teacher feedback can be in order to achieve this objective, she offers some useful ideas to teachers for providing constructive feedback to their students on the micro and macro features of writing. Mukhopadhyay underscores how this may not only help track students' growth but also benefit teachers as they reflect through their feedback and gain more insights on the process of ESL writing. Chakrakodi underscores the benefits of portfolio assessment as it integrates instruction and assessment. Sharing details of the study he conducted in the context of an in-service teacher education programme, Chakrakodi elucidates how teacher-learners were able to

develop their writing abilities, monitor their growth as well as use assessment for developmental purposes.

## **6. Technology-aided Teaching and Learning**

In their article, Eldho and Kumar draw our attention to the transformative effects of technology in the educational sector, particularly its impact on English language teaching and learning with special reference to the success of digital education policies in Tamil Nadu. Their study offers an in-depth examination of the role of ICT in redefining the context, content and contours of English language education and reiterates that traditional face-to-face interaction cannot be completely replaced with technology in English language classrooms. Jose's paper underlines the significance of English language competence and digital literacy skills in a twenty-first century learner, particularly the 4 Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. Using sample learning tasks, she demonstrates how Web 2.0 tools offer participatory environments and microcontent creation features that can help overcome constraints of print-coursebook tasks and can be employed by ESL teachers to integrate digital literacy skills with language learning in their classrooms. Thomas and Jayendran contend that although the Indian market is flooded with ICT-based language materials, several of them do not factor in learning contexts and pedagogical principles that should ideally be taken into consideration while creating digital content to support language learning and ensure equitable access. Therefore, the duo argues for the suitability of the Design Based Research (DBR) model for designing technology-enabled language learning (TELL) materials for under-resourced contexts based on their project of developing TELL materials for government schools in India. In the concluding paper of this section, Philipose and Rajagopal describe the benefits of digital platforms of learning, particularly the Google Classroom, a free web service and describe through their study, its use as a Learning

Management System (LMS) explored by an English teacher in a blended learning experience with her undergraduate students. They explain the benefits as well as the drawbacks of adopting the Google Classroom for language teaching and learning from a teacher's perspective.

## 7. Inclusive Education

Kirti Kapur's article underlines that inclusivity is the cornerstone of equitable quality education which in turn, is the foundation for an inclusive and equitable society. According to her, inclusive education should be regarded as a value system or philosophy, and not as a project or programme. She argues that Universal Design for Learning integrated with technology can expand educational opportunities for diverse needs of learners. In the concluding article of this anthology, Shubhangi Vaidya offers an 'insider's perspective' on disability as she recounts her experiences of bringing up an autistic child and the challenges she faced while exploring educational settings that truly practised 'inclusion' in creating respectful and empowering spaces for children with special needs. Her powerful narrative builds a strong case for teacher sensitization and training as well as finding practical strategies for creating inclusive learning environments.

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# **I. MULTILINGUALISM**



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# 1

## To Teach or Not to Teach Code-Mixed English? Translanguaging Hindi-English

*Tej K. Bhatia*

While English is often bestowed the unflattering title of ‘the killer language’ of linguistic diversity, nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that English is the single most important vehicle of global bilingualism and multilingualism. With the unprecedented global spread of English in the history of human communication, English came in contact with every major and minor language around the globe. As it is often the case, depending on the forces of individual, social and political bilingualism among others, language contact either leads to sustainable bilingualism or transient bilingualism. While sustainable bilingualism brings about innovations and language vitality, transient bilingualism yields monolingualism or even language death. In other words, English is not a killer language as long as bilingualism is sustainable and not transient. I will argue in this paper that the bilingual language mixing—code-mixing (CM) and code-switching (CS) and /or translanguaging in classroom settings is one of the inevitable consequences of sustainable bilingualism which has now reached its new height in the history of Indian bilingualism/multilingualism. In this paper, I will use the term ‘multilingualism’ as a cover term for both bilingualism and multilingualism for the ease of exposition. Also, the term, Hinglish refers to the mixing of Hindi as an embedded language with English as a matrix language (see Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009, p. 594).