Reimagining English in Postcolonial India: Artificial Intelligence, Linguistic Politics, and Pedagogical Futures

Dr. Sarala Kisan Sanap

Professor and Head Department of English, MGV's Loknete Vyankatrao Hiray Arts, Science and Commerce College, Panchavati, Nashik, India.

Article Info	Abstract
  	*Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping how English is learned, taught, researched, and produced in India. Moving beyond automation and convenience, AI compels a deeper rethinking of what counts as "English competence," who gets to participate in English-language knowledge economies, and how literary and cultural value is created and evaluated. This article examines the role of AI across three interlocking domains—language learning, literary studies (including creative practice and criticism), and classroom pedagogy. After establishing the historical and sociolinguistic context of English in India, it maps key AI affordances (e.g., adaptive feedback, multimodal tutoring, corpus-driven literary analysis, assistive writing, and automated assessment), and critically explores their promise and pitfalls in relation to equity, multilingualism, authenticity, academic integrity, and teacher identity. The paper proposes a pragmatic framework—**CARE** (Contextualize, Augment, Reframe, Evaluate)—to guide responsible adoption, outlines design principles for Indian classrooms and campuses, and identifies a research agenda tailored to India's linguistic diversity and infrastructural realities. It argues that AI is not merely a tool to accelerate existing practices but a catalyst for reimagining the epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic foundations of English in India.*

I. INTRODUCTION: WHY "REIMAGINE" ENGLISH NOW?

To "reimagine" English in India through the lens of AI is not a neutral project. It is caught within tensions of **technological determinism vs. human agency**, **linguistic imperialism vs. pluralism**, and **democratization vs. deepening inequality**. AI is often marketed as a "solution" to pedagogical challenges, yet behind the rhetoric lie **global corporate infrastructures**, **data extractivism**, and **algorithmic bias** that shape what kinds of English (and whose English) are valued.

While AI promises personalization and democratization, it can also risk **perpetuating the coloniality of English** in India. If Indian learners are evaluated against "standard" Anglophone benchmarks encoded in training corpora, AI may reinforce a hierarchy where Indian Englishes remain inferior to British or American models. On the other hand, AI also has the **radical potential** to legitimize local codes—by recognizing Hinglish, or by valorizing translanguaging practices as competent communication rather than "defective English."

Thus, reimagining English is not simply about inserting AI into classrooms but about critically interrogating how AI reframes **linguistic norms, epistemic authority, and pedagogical values**.

Three shifts make "reimagining" imperative:

1. **From content mastery to knowledge navigation:** AI can retrieve, summarize, and translate information. The distinctive human value in English education moves toward critical reading, rhetorical judgment, intercultural competence, and ethical reasoning about sources and systems.

2. **From monolingual proficiency to translanguaging fluency:** Indian learners routinely shuttle between English and Indian languages. AI tools that embrace code-mixing, local idioms, and regional knowledge can legitimize and cultivate this reality rather than suppress it.

3. **From static curricula to dynamic, data-informed ecosystems:** Classroom practice can be augmented by learning analytics, adaptive tasks, and corpus-based insights—provided privacy, transparency, and teacher agency are preserved.

This article explores how AI can help Indian institutions transition from a narrow accountability model (grammar, accuracy, exam performance) to a broader literacy model that includes creativity, multimodal expression, and socio-technical critique.

II. HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND: ENGLISH AND ITS DISCONTENTS

English in India has long functioned as a **double-edged sword**. Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) envisioned an English-educated class as intermediaries between colonial rulers and subjects, embedding linguistic hierarchy into governance. After independence, English became a **link language** among India's multilingual population but retained its status as a gatekeeper of higher education, bureaucracy, and economic opportunity.

In this historical context:

- **Regional languages** often suffer in prestige, creating what Alok Rai calls a "language divide" that stratifies society.

- **Code-mixing** (Hinglish, Tanglish, Benglish) is dismissed in formal education but thrives in popular culture.

- **Exams** dominate pedagogy, reducing English to a high-stakes skill rather than a medium of cultural imagination.

The arrival of AI risks replaying these historical hierarchies in a new technological form. If AI systems are predominantly trained on Anglophone corpora, they may **recolonize Indian learners**, implicitly treating Indian English as deviation. Conversely, if designed inclusively, AI could help legitimize India's rich linguistic hybridity.

III. WHAT AI BRINGS: BEYOND EFFICIENCY TO POWER AND POLITICS

3.1 Capabilities

AI can already:

- Provide adaptive grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary support.

- Generate texts across genres—from essays to poems.

- Analyze literary corpora at scale (topic modeling, stylometry).

- Offer instant translations and voice-to-text scaffolds.

3.2 Risks

Yet, these capabilities are not politically neutral:

- **Bias:** AI accents often misrecognize Indian English, privileging Western phonology.

- **Opacity:** Proprietary systems hide their training data, making it impossible to know whose voices shaped the model.

- **Overreliance:** Students may bypass critical thinking by outsourcing essays to AI, echoing Freire's critique of "banking education."

- **Surveillance capitalism:** Student data becomes a commodity in global tech economies, a form of **digital colonialism** (Couldry & Mejias).

Thus, AI in India is not just an educational tool but a **sociotechnical apparatus** that redistributes power and authority in English studies.

IV.   AI IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CRITICAL READING

4.1 Pronunciation and Accent Politics

AI speech tutors often demand conformity to "standard" pronunciation. But what counts as standard? Indian English, spoken by millions, is globally intelligible yet marginalized in algorithmic scoring systems. Such practices reproduce linguistic imperialism, implicitly positioning learners as deficient.

A critical pedagogy would instead valorize **intelligibility over nativeness**, designing AI systems trained on **Indian English corpora** that reflect diversity of accents (Kerala English, Punjabi English, etc.).

4.2 Grammar, Writing, and Rhetoric

Grammar-checking AI often penalizes **code-switching** or Indianized idioms. Yet Hinglish is a legitimate cultural form, evident in advertising ("Yeh Dil Maange More!") and Bollywood dialogues. By labeling such forms "incorrect," AI risks erasing **local creativity**.

A critical approach reframes grammar not as mechanical correctness but as **rhetorical choice**—when is Hinglish effective? When is formal English necessary? AI should scaffold

these decisions rather than enforce a monolithic standard.

4.3 Assessment and Integrity

Automated essay scoring promises efficiency but risks reinforcing a **technocratic view of language**, where what cannot be quantified (irony, satire, cultural nuance) is disregarded. Indian classrooms must resist reducing writing to an algorithmic score, instead embedding AI feedback in reflective, dialogic assessment.

V.   AI IN LITERATURE: SCHOLARSHIP, CREATIVITY, CRITIQUE

5.1 Digital Humanities in India

AI enables "distant reading"—mapping word frequencies, sentiment, or networks across large corpora. While useful, such methods risk overshadowing **close reading traditions** essential in postcolonial critique. For example, topic modeling of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* may reveal themes of nationhood, but it cannot capture the **polyphonic irony** that defies easy categorization.

Thus, AI must be treated as a **complement, not a substitute**—opening new research vistas while remaining tethered to interpretive traditions.

5.2 Creative Writing and the Question of Originality

AI can generate short stories in the style of R.K. Narayan or poems inspired by Tagore. But this raises critical questions:

- **Authorship:** If a student co-writes with AI, whose voice is it?

- **Cultural authenticity:** Can AI, trained largely on Western data, authentically reproduce the idioms of Dalit protest poetry or bhasha literatures?

- **Homogenization:** AI tends toward safe, generic prose, threatening the raw particularity of subaltern voices.

Instead of replacing human creativity, AI should be framed as a **provocateur**—a tool for experimentation, not final production. Students might generate drafts with AI, then critique, revise, and assert their own voices, thereby learning **meta-creativity**.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

AI challenges the very categories of **literature and criticism**:

- If machines can mimic metaphor, what happens to our notion of originality?

- If criticism can be automated, do we risk reducing texts to data points?

- Can postcolonial theory be extended to "post-digital colonialism," interrogating how algorithmic systems privilege certain cultural imaginaries?

VI.   PEDAGOGY: HUMAN–AI CLASSROOMS OR MACHINE-FIRST CLASSROOMS?

6.1 Risks of Dehumanization

Uncritical adoption of AI in classrooms risks creating **machine-first pedagogy**, where students interact more with apps than with teachers or peers. Education becomes transactional—improving scores rather than cultivating dialogue.

6.2 Teacher Agency

Teachers risk being marginalized as "facilitators of AI platforms." Yet a critical approach insists that **teachers remain epistemic authorities**, not by resisting AI but by **curating, contextualizing, and contesting it**.

For instance, a teacher might deliberately highlight where AI fails—its inability to grasp cultural nuance in a Dalit autobiography—thus teaching students both language skills and **critical AI literacy**.

6.3 Equity Concerns

Elite urban schools may deploy AI labs, while rural schools struggle with connectivity. Without policy intervention, AI could deepen the **digital divide**. To democratize access, India must invest in **low-bandwidth, multilingual AI tools** designed for rural contexts.

VII.   INCLUSION AND MULTILINGUAL JUSTICE

AI could either entrench English dominance or promote **linguistic pluralism**. If used primarily to accelerate English acquisition for jobs, it risks further marginalizing bhasha literatures. But if designed to encourage **translanguaging**—moving fluidly between English and regional languages—it could validate India's natural multilingualism.

Imagine an AI tutor that allows a student to draft an essay in Marathi, then scaffold translations into English, encouraging comparison of idioms, cultural metaphors, and rhetorical forms. Such designs could decolonize AI from within, transforming it into a **multilingual ally** rather than a monolingual enforcer.

VIII.   ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE: WHOSE AI?

- **Data colonialism:** Indian students' essays and voices risk becoming raw material for Western corporations. Without strong data governance, this is a digital replay of colonial extraction.

- **Bias and representation:** Whose English informs AI? Indian rural English? Dalit English? Or only elite urban registers?

- **Policy vacuum:** India currently lacks clear policies on AI in education, leaving institutions to improvise. This risks confusion and inequity.

Critical governance must therefore include:

1. **National standards for ethical AI use in education.**

2. **Mandates for transparency** in data sources and bias auditing.

3. **Encouragement of Indian-made AI tools**, grounded in local linguistic corpora.

IX.   TOWARD A FRAMEWORK OF CRITICAL ADOPTION

I propose a model of **Critical AI Adoption in English Studies**, extending the earlier CARE framework:

- **C — Contextualize** AI within India's postcolonial, multilingual realities.

- **A — Augment, not Replace** human teaching and creativity.

- **R — Resist** homogenization by actively critiquing AI's biases.

- **E — Empower** students and teachers with critical AI literacy.

This reframes AI from a neutral helper to a **contested partner**, always subject to human interpretation and resistance.

10. Conclusion: The Future of English, the Future of AI

AI compels Indian educators to ask: *Is English in India to remain a colonial inheritance, or can it be reinvented as a plural, critical, and creative medium?* AI can accelerate the former or enable the latter.

If left unexamined, AI may reinforce Anglophone norms, commodify creativity, and widen inequities. But if critically adopted—through teacher agency, multilingual design, and ethical governance—it can democratize English education, amplify marginalized voices, and foster new forms of cultural expression.

The future of English in India, then, will depend less on AI's technological evolution than on **our critical imagination**. To reimagine English is to insist that technology serve plurality, justice, and creativity, rather than conformity and control.

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