CALL CENTRES IN INDIA: OFFSHORING, LANGUAGE AND
GLOBALIZATION

By

MICHELLE MCINTYRE

Integrated Studies Project
submitted to Dr. Paul Kellogg
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

April, 2013
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iii

Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 1

Language and the economy ........................................................................................................... 3

Corporations, customers and ‘accent’ .......................................................................................... 5

Training ......................................................................................................................................... 8

Social Issues .................................................................................................................................. 12

Cultural Issues .............................................................................................................................. 13

North versus South ....................................................................................................................... 18

Geographic Issues ....................................................................................................................... 21

Power ........................................................................................................................................... 22

Conclusions ................................................................................................................................... 25

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................. 27
Abstract

This paper examines the role that the English language plays in call centres in India through its ability to connect with customers worldwide. The importance of call centre training is highlighted with an emphasis on accent neutralization and knowledge of western cultural attitudes and influences which are deemed essential to successfully service customers. This in turn enables identity masking which can have a negative impact on employees. The paper analyzes the implications for the global economy and identifies some of the ways in which language is used to the advantage of the elite in the global north and the disadvantage of the global south. It highlights the economic benefit to India. It also discusses many of the negative implications such as the impact on the mental and physical health of workers. This paper attempts to determine whether there can be a balance between the economic benefits to India versus the negative implications as a result of the control that a small elite group has over the structure and procedures of the call centre industry.
Introduction

India is a developing country. It is also a major player in the call centre industry due to its location, ability to connect to different time zones worldwide, ability to work in the English language regardless of mother tongue and its people who are educated and enthusiastic for employment. An analysis of call centres in India reveals that while India continues to have a growing economy in part due to the call centre outsourcing offshoring industry, the major benefactors are large corporations in the global north who are able to use language as a means to make significant profit while India and other economies in the global south struggle to find a balance in this new global economy. Language has impacted the global market and altered views on the perception of language uses and power. This paper will evaluate the impact on the call centre industry in India by focusing on the economic, social, geographic and power relationships in the industry.

The Indian call centre industry originated in the 1990’s with companies such as GE establishing India’s first call centre which was followed by a boom in third party outsourcing. Due to the growing value of offshoring contracts, larger companies with sufficient infrastructure and financial resources are able to meet international demands. Since then, various arrangements have developed such as global business process outsourcing to third party providers and joint ventures between global north companies and Indian companies (Taylor et al, 2005: 268). All this has occurred due to the ability to communicate and establish contracts and guidelines of business. The ability to
communicate is easier when both parties can speak the same language. In this case, that language is English. Outsourcing call centres has changed the way the business world operates and has created complex and diverse work arrangements to meet ever changing global needs.

The expansion of call centres over the past two decades has been remarkable (Brophy, 2011: 412). This has been a benefit to India as well as countries in the global north. Developing countries in the global south are now able to take part in the global economy which provides benefits and opportunities for the country as a whole and the people in the call centre regions. India is a capital scarce country that provides electronic services but is not a major market country (Mukherji, 2004: 90). This is significant because it highlights the changing global structure whereby value is placed on service through the use of language. India is becoming a factor in the global economy not through the production of physical goods but rather through the export of services (Dossani, 2009: 78). These services are not without their share of challenges in terms of English language linguistic variation between India and its customers. These challenges complicate the call centre functions as the global north has specific requirements on how the English language should be utilized for business purposes. In the call centre industry, outsourcing signals the emptying of the linear organization while offshoring enables corporations to transfer repetitive tasks while the home office concentrates on core business functions (Nadeem, 2009: 23). These are functions that India willingly accepts even though this creates jobs in India that can be quite monotonous. There are 845 languages spoken in India with 18 dominant languages. Hindi is the official language (Ramanathan, 2008:
Since English is not the official language, not all of the population would be fluent in English therefore only a percentage of the population would be eligible for employment in the call centre industry.

**Language and the economy**

Language also plays a part in the economic development of the south and the business plan of the north. This can be seen by the impact of the English language on the Indian economy, the use of the English language by corporations to attain their goals, and the education necessary to be considered telephone ready to sufficiently interact with customers. Call centres have been increasing at a fast pace in the last few years. This service industry has become a major player in the developed world with approximately two-thirds of customer interactions occurring in call centres. Employees are required to provide voice labour with speed and efficiency. Due to new communication technologies, one of the biggest trends is to move call centres offshore to the global south to such countries as India where labour is cheap and the employees speak English. 80% of call centres in India cater to the international market. This industry in India is the result of globalization since there were no domestic call centres in India prior to the international call centres. It is estimated that the Indian call centre industry now employs 1.2 million people for both inbound and outbound customer service. (Das et al, 2008: 1502-1503).

The economic gain is not only significant to corporations but to Indian businesses and call centre workers as well. With customer care centres being the main point of contact for clients, it is essential that both the company and employee understands the value of
customer service and the importance of the image that is portrayed to customers. For call centres, customers rely on voice-to-voice contact therefore language and telephone skills are crucial. The accent of call centre workers does have an impact on whether the customer is able to understand what is being said. Since call centre interaction occurs in English, it does play a part in shaping the world economy.

Available evidence suggests a 40-60% savings when labour processes are moved to India. This cost savings would be meaningless without the ability of the labour force to speak English, since the majority of the business which brings in revenue operates in English (Taylor et al, 2005: 268). Without this English speaking population, call centre outsourcing to India would not be possible. The English language has opened doors to a global workforce where corporations are able to capitalize with cheaper labour and India is able to capitalize with more employment opportunities for the population. This in turn produces greater profit for the corporation and greater revenue for India. While the English language has enabled this to be possible, it has created a new challenge whereby pronunciation and grammar have become major factors in training. The need for English language learning is not an issue since employees speak English. The need for English language training is high since employers require a specific tone, pronunciation and speech pattern. This focus on accent is considered crucial to the call centre industry although even customers would have different accents based on their nationality or country of residence and even area of residence within each country.
Information and communication technologies which are essential for call centre functioning can connect customers to service centres worldwide. The global economy is borderless and can send information and capital worldwide. Companies in search of lower costs have taken advantage of political and economic factors which have impelled the relocation of call centres and created new forms of work organizations that have become visible in India (Taylor et al, 2005: 262). Organizations have invested a great deal into offshore operations with the intention that this result in cost reduction and the ability to remain competitive in this global market. Call centres in the global north did not provide service noticeably superior to that provided in India and costs were higher therefore corporations had little to lose in terms of the relocation. If corporations do decide that the accent is a barrier due to too many customer complaints, then a decision would need to be made whether to provide further training or move the business back to the original country.

**Corporations, customers and ‘accent’**

Call centres operate with the need to be cost efficient and to be customer oriented. Customer service is driven by the logic that it produces profitable outcomes so while the interests of the customers are important and companies place high value on service quality and satisfaction, it is subordinate to capital accumulation which relies on cost minimization and greater profit (Taylor et al, 2005: 264). The lower costs to operate in India are a bonus; however, corporations do pay special attention to the interaction between customers and call centre workers. One area of concern is whether there is a negative reaction to call centre employees in terms of speech which could have an impact
on an organization’s image if customers are not responsive, uncomfortable or find the pronunciation or speech pattern unclear. This is an interesting concept since fluency in the English language would be enough in the global north; however, in the south a particular accent is considered more desirable. As trivial as it seems, the issue of accent can impact an organization’s bottom line therefore it receives constant attention so that employees can practice their English based on an accent the global north does not find offensive. Corporations are therefore concerned about the feelings of customers in the global north but are less concerned about the feelings of their call centre workers in the global south.

As workers gain awareness of global economic relations, and position their jobs within that political economy of cost reduction and capital accumulation, there is a greater sense of understanding that their jobs may not be as privileged and desirable as led to believe but rather are a product of India’s geographic location and the value of labour in that region (Mirchandani, 2004: 369). The economic gain to workers is great, but the economic gain to corporations is greater. Employees can recognize that based on their geographic location the salary is good; however, they can also recognize that the corporation is making a bigger profit due to this geographic location.

Corporations dictate the accent used in Indian call centres. The preferred accent is an American accent or “international” accent. A review of the recruitment and training of Indian workers indicate that despite the availability of English speaking workers and the extensive selection and training including accent training, problems persist in attaining
the desired results in terms of interaction between Indian agents and western customers. This is due to linguistic and cultural differences. The labour process is generally standardized and does not grant employees the opportunity for interactive communication found in other knowledge based industries (Abraham, 2008: 200-202). Employees have to cope with strict scripts, long hours, a fast pace as well as identity disguise. This identity masking is not a feature dealt with in the global north therefore this is an added stress to an already hectic work life. Corporations are able to demand that employees change their pronunciation and neutralize their accent. Any trace of the worker’s mother tongue is frown upon and considered unacceptable. It is not sufficient that employees have a professional tone with clear and distinctive speech. What is required is an accent that the organizations feel is acceptable for international customers which unfortunately is one that hides who an employee really is where the employee actually resides. In essence, the employee is required to perform a role as an actor which includes a script, fake accent, fake name and fake culture, with a personality that is warm and welcoming to the customer. There is no mention of the fact that international customers have varying accents themselves since they are from different parts of the world and may not have an issue with the natural accent of call centre workers. The assumption made by corporations to alter the accent is based on ulterior motives to control both the employee by limiting the abilities and freedom of workers. Organizations are creating what they perceive to be an international accent which can be defined as an accent with a speech pattern and pronunciation that can be understood worldwide therefore they are treating accent as a commodity to be sought rather than simply a means of communication.
The global outsourcing industry is worth over US$600 billion annually and for the call centre sector, the key is excellent verbal English language phone skills (Lockwood, 2012: 49). Corporations are very much aware of the financial impact of perceived poor speech and are desperate to control results (Cowie, 2007: 328). Part of this is an attempt to make customers unaware of the geographic location of the worker. An international accent or American accent is considered a skill to be acquired rather than a characteristic of a person. Generally, accents can be used as distinguishing features or to set individuals apart. In the call centre industry in India, employees should blend into the American culture not be set apart from it. Workers are aware that while fluent English is a must, it is not enough. Hiring decisions are greatly influenced by the level of mother tongue interference (Lockwood, 2012: 114). This can determine how easily a worker can modify his or her accent to start producing results.

**Training**

Indian workers were originally trained to develop American or British accents; however, there has been a shift to developing a global accent which is also called an international accent. This would mean that workers are flexible to handle customers from any part of the world. As the demand for globalized speech increased, specialized institutions were created to train on accent neutralization. One tool used for this training is American, movies, television shows and soap operas that convey American culture and attitudes (Nadeem, 2009: 112). This training focuses on the two issues that corporations believe Indian workers need to mask, which are accent and culture. These are two elements that call centre workers in the global north regardless of their culture or accent did not have to
contend with. Their identity was not questioned or told in a subtle manner that it should be hidden. The additional pressure and focus on accent masking therefore is a by-product of geographic location. In addition to this stress, a western worker may have 45 seconds between calls whereas an Indian worker may have 10 seconds. This means that actual phone hours for Indian workers are lengthened (Nadeem, 2009: 25). It would be difficult to maintain composure under these circumstances but even more difficult to do so continuously with a fabricated accent.

Call centre work in India consists of inbound and outbound calls ranging from technological support to sales. These calls can be characterized as high volume, routinized work. The usual trainee is in her or his early 20’s and is equally likely to be male as female. Call centre training can include customer care, culture, attitude, English and phonetics (Cowie: 2007: 318-319). While training is important to improve employee skills and therefore company productivity, it is interesting that the training components are mainly focused on elements that keep employees oppressed and under control rather than training that improves employee skills. The benefit of accent training, cultural training, and phonetics is to improve the organizations’ image with the customer as the training does not improve a worker’s ability to perform. These call centre workers already know the English language and already have a culture therefore this training likely hinders their ability to perform due to frustration at not being their authentic self. The training is designed to ensure the global north is comfortable.
A typical call centre is approximately 4 years old, employs 500 employees, focuses on outbound calling and performs 80% of its services to the international market (Das et al, 2008: 1512). These call centres operate under strict guidelines and perform services for a wide variety of industries. The average Indian call centre employee works longer hours than call centre employees in the global north, likely has no job security as they tend to be hired on a contractual basis, receives greater electronic monitoring and there is a lack of upward movement within the job (Abraham, 2008: 207). Still, call centre jobs are sought after in India as salaries are higher than in many other industries.

The distinctive character of the call centre industry comes from its cost cutting methods through standardised, routinized, high volume work combined with personal customer service that lets the customer believe that they are in charge of the call (Coyle, 2010: 291-292). The calls are tightly scripted with automatic responses for questions posed by customers. The customers are not in charge of the call but again language is used to communicate the information the organization wants to supply in order to achieve a desired set of results. Call centre employees need to maintain their proper “neutral accent” while maintaining a pleasant phone manner and working in this fast paced environment.

Being professional is a key component of call centre training. It is expected that workers always remain professional as defined by the employer. A professional is defined as someone with a willingness to satisfy customers, puts personal issues aside, concentrates on service, does not oppose monitoring and shift times, is able to work under pressure
and is open to identity masking for the sake of the organization and customer (D’Cruz et al, 2006: 346). It is clear that this definition of professionalism entails far more than a North American definition which would aim for employees to be competent rather than be docile and accepting of whatever the employer demands. In the global north, while there is the willingness to satisfy customers and get the job done, if the employer demands are too rigid, workers have the option to find employment elsewhere. In the global south, while workers are free to seek alternative arrangements, the options are much more limited since call centre jobs are considered good jobs. Employees are therefore more inclined to tolerate the work conditions for as long as possible recognizing that others in the population not employed in the call centre industry can be envious of such a prestigious opportunity. The local job market has an impact on an employees` perception of expectations and acceptable working conditions. (Paulet, 2008:314-315).

Call centre workers in the north would have higher expectations since there are more opportunities. This may be a reason why call centre employees in India tolerate the accent requirement of their roles. The role that accent plays in identity is major due to the attempt to disguise location and limit publicity for job losses associated with outsourcing (Cowie, 2007: 316). Rather than take responsibility for the lay offs in the north, organizations attempt to pretend everything is fine by focusing on accent neutralization in the south. This way, customers have fewer reminders of the job losses they may have experienced or a fearful will happen to them.
Social Issues

The social impacts of language can be clearly seen in India. The demands for fluent English speaking worker have led to the creation of some facilities that provide voice, accent, conversational skills, and cultural sensitization training to international call centre employees (Das et al, 2008: 1505-1506). This highlights that additional work designs have resulted from outsourcing. Local companies have noticed gaps and created a service to fill that need. The call centre also has unique work arrangements such as night shifts and employee drop off and pick up services (Das et al, 2008: 1506). This is another example where jobs have been created or expanded as a result of the call centre industry in India.

India call centres operate on shift work, something which can have a negative impact on workers in terms of family life, social life and health. Employees also experience a physical impact due to the changing of shifts every few months. (Mirchandani, 2004:364). While call centre works provides economic advancement for the employee, the negative aspects cannot be ignored. The impact on family life and social life is a result of the long and irregular hours of work; however, the impact on health can be partly attributed to the demands of the English language training and the impact of denying one’s identity on a daily basis. One of the demands of Indian call centres is emotional labour. This emotional labour is as a result of linguistic and cultural differences combined with the masking of identity and location and the requirement for accent neutralization (Russell et al, 2008: 617). When customers perceive that workers cannot speak or understand English properly and workers are fully aware that their
command of the English language is not an issue, this can create internal turmoil for the worker. As well, the constant surveillance to ensure that workers are masking their identity would increase one’s level of frustration and in the long run affect their emotional and subsequently physical health. The subtle message is one of not being good enough or not as good as the north.

**Cultural Issues**

Most call centre workers are selected mainly from the upper class or caste in society mainly due to the requirements of English language proficiency (which these employees are more likely to have developed in their education) and partly because of the social skills required for the role (Murphy, 2011: 420). This means that the English language is a stepping-stone to a better life and more opportunities. Access to the English language is not equal for all the population therefore the global market still benefits an elite whether they are in the global north or south. Government schools teach Indian languages so students of these schools are unlikely to be sufficiently fluent in English. Access to better schools is dependent on money and connections therefore the relationship between language and social power is evident. There is a connection between old and new middle classes. The parents of the new middle class are usually professionals such as engineers or government bureaucrats. This in turn provides access to elite education which translates into employment in the transnational economy. This access to better jobs is partly due to the family monetary resources which provide better education and partly due to caste status both of which are prerequisites for success in the evolving economic climate (Murphy, 2011: 423). Call centres through employment have given some the
resources to improve their standard of living and that of their families while others in the population are not able to break the poverty cycle. Due to the lack of family resources they did not learn English and due to not learning English they have limited choices. Fluency in English is a major distinguishing factor between call centre workers and the Indian population since less than 5 percent of the population is fluent in English (Murphy, 2011: 427).

Religion now plays an increasing part in global business. In India, religion is an important organizing principle around which people define their identity (Das et al, 2008: 1509-1510). The impact of organizational practices on personal and emotional lives will be evident and also affect work attitudes and organizational commitment as employees struggle with national identity, religious identity and occupational identity as a result of having to mask national identity and religious identity at work. This could signify to the employee a devaluing of their beliefs and cause turmoil with performance. Globalization brings together social identities which intersect with new forms of employment where services are not face to face but require customer interaction in a more scripted manner.

Call centre employees in India attain a higher level of education and training than employees in the global south; however, they are given less opportunity for discretion and problem solving while under high levels of surveillance (Das et al, 2008: 1507-1508). It is a huge benefit to organizations that outsource to India because the work force is more educated and can be paid significantly less. The work force due to economic reasons is also willing to tolerate a higher level of stress not only in their work tasks but
also in their mental ability. Call centre workers in India are constantly struggling to improve their accent. This pseudo accent appears to have greater value to corporations than a higher level of education.

Through culture individuals identify themselves as members of particular groups. This has implications for transnational service workers such as call centre employees in India. In order to anticipate in a smooth customer service experience, these employees are required to conceal their true identity and assume different religious associations (Das et al, 2008:1501). Being employed by a call centre in India therefore has an impact on an individual’s cultural identity as their work identity places them in a different cultural identity which is separate from their true identity. This could also impact their job satisfaction and organizational commitment as employees may struggle with the dual roles. On the one hand, the salary is considered to be good for that geographic location; on the other hand, studying the American culture is a requirement of accent training and improvement of customer interactions.

Indian employees are required to significantly reduce or eliminate their mother tongue influence and adopt the accent of their customers in the global north. Employees are also encouraged to study the culture and lifestyle in an attempt to understand the global north. These employees assume a western name for interaction with clients and may even be required to pretend to live in the country of the customers. This pretence of identity has been referred to as virtual migration. Only after successfully completing this initial training would product training begin. (Das et al, 2008: 1508). This gives the impression
that speaking, thinking and behaving like someone from the global north is more important than product knowledge to assist customers. Virtual migration ties into the concept of identity-masking, as it is an additional layer to the call centre experience. The first layer is identity masking which involves concealing his or her identity while the next layer is virtual migration which involves masking his or her location to match that of the customer. The result is a call centre employee who physically functions in India while simultaneously speaking and interacting in a different geographic location. This would involve not just knowledge of the job but also knowledge of the events in other geographic locations so that any differences are not transparent. Call centre employees therefore operate in two distinct worlds – both real although one is physical and one is distant. It is possible that employees may be more current on events foreign locations than their home location due to the isolation that can occur as a result of call centre hours.

The most outstanding characteristic of Indian culture is the value placed on the family relationships and social class (Mohan, 2011: 215). The shift hours of call centres in India interferes with family relationships as workers miss family gatherings or occasions due to work. Relationship with friends could also be affected, as socialization times would be different. The business hours of operation in India is set by the global north which is significantly different than the time zones in India. This creates a gap in the lives of call centre employees as their work and home schedules conflict with the rest of the family and community. Employees may be in the same residence as the family; however, they would still be isolated due to the shift hours. As well, employees would now be exposed to western culture and therefore may experience a shift in values. One of the threats of
globalization is its focus on individualism. Importance is placed on personal achievement and skills rather than family, caste or class. Western culture is more focused on individualism while Indian culture is more focused on family. This can create a divide in attitudes as call centre employees have increased knowledge of western values and lifestyle. The salary of call centre employees provides economic independence which can lead to freedom from family, as call centre workers can earn in one month what their parents earn in a year. New money can turn into too much freedom and too much consumerism (Nadeem, 2009: 115-116). This can lead to a neglect of traditions as workers buy into the ‘American dream’. Language does not directly create these additional areas of concern; however, due to the intersecting of values and beliefs along with technological advancements, there can be a shift in culture. The operating procedures of the call centre industry in India, provides access to western influences that in many ways are contrary to Indian lifestyle.

Globalization poses a threat to cultural autonomy as telecommunications and the deregulation of markets can lead to a global culture. With India’s middle class forming approximately one third of its population, the marketing potential for increased consumerism is great and has gradually increased in the past decade (Mohan, 2011: 219-220). Technology provides the access to information and consumerism while language provides the means through which this is communicated. Additional income means increased access to goods and services. It is interesting that the global north uses language as a way to control call centre employees by enforcing an accent requirement while at the same time the north has also found a way to benefit for the additional income
received the call centre workers. Consumerism benefits corporations, and these corporations have found a way through language to potentially increase Indian spending on non-Indian goods through technology.

**North versus South**

Race can also be a factor in the divide between the global north and south. Employees in the global south may be at the mercy of customers in the global north. Employees may be subject to hostility from customers who suspect their true national identity. This could lead to increased stress and negative well being as employees cope with this identity conflict (Das et al, 2008: 1508-1509). This hostility can occur for many reasons. One main factor is the offshoring of white-collar jobs (Das et al, 2008: 1523). Employees who are not responsible for the offshoring decision, are often on the front-line, dealing with the fall-out. Another factor is race and the perception of incorrect English language pronunciation. The assumption that employees in call centres in India do not understand English can make it seem acceptable to be impolite.

Transnational inequality can be visualized by the geopolitical divide between the global north and south. Institutionalized racism is ingrained in the labour markets and functions through a process of empowering some and not others (Poster et al, 2008: 296-298). The global south is a location where physical capital is scarce therefore it holds less power in the global market. As well, people of colour are more likely to be exploited in today’s capitalist global system. Workers in these racialized groups have fewer resources to defend themselves. Employers are therefore able to pay lower wages to increase profits
The north has more power to control how the south participates in the global labour process. This can be seen by not only the lower wages but also how the English language is used to control the way Indian workers interact with customers in order to fit into the north’s version of what is acceptable. Despite the labour legislation that exists in some of the developing countries, workers have little access to fight their true employers, which are giant corporations in developed countries. Also, workers in the north have some rights such as minimum wage and the right to take legal action. Workers in the south often have fewer such rights. While some governments in developing countries try to set limits on transnational corporations, due to the world power imbalance of developing versus developed countries, these governments are at a severe disadvantage (Bonacich et al., 2008: 349). Corporations have the ability to go elsewhere if developing nations are seen as disagreeable. Globalization has had an impact on the business world and can be viewed as both a presence and an absence – a presence in terms of the impact on everyday lives and an absence in terms of the distance due to geographic locations (Das et al., 2008: 1500).

Fully 60% of IT outsourcing from Fortune 500 companies are handled in Bangalore, India. While the working conditions are decent, workers in Bangalore receive one tenth the amount western employees would be paid for the same job. These workers are also subjected to increased stress due to their required hidden identity - becoming less Indian and more western (Bonacich et al., 2008: 350-351). The English language has brought gains to call centre workers and others who benefit from the industry; however, the same language has also brought insight into Indian stereotypes and control issues of the north.
Although these corporations are far away, employees and work functions can still be monitored through telecommunications surveillance. Although call centre workers in the south are paid less, the south is still subjected to greater call centre work pressures than the north.

Services are the most rapidly growing sector of the global economy. These service industries influence many of the transnational labour patterns such as outsourcing of call centres to India. Southern workers in Indian call centres provide services that benefit northern wealth. In addition to this, the work has negative racial and national implications as workers are required to create a persona rather than simply provide information. (Poster et al 2008: 301-302). Information could easily be provided to customers without the persona and workers could experience personal growth and development rather than a breakdown of their spirit. The use of language is important in a service industry as this is how communication occurs. Without language, the call centre works would have no form of interactions with customers since the service provided is verbal.

Corporate domination masks the colonialism still present in the world order. Policies have been implemented that grant companies access to the world for the most vulnerable workers (Bonachich et al, 2008: 351). Corporations are able to search the globe for locations that will meet their goals and vision.
**Geographic Issues**

The geographic location of India makes it a prime location for outsourcing. Globalization involves the coming together of nationalist time with capitalist time. Time is a resource that can be manipulated and controlled in order to use as a commodity. Indian call centres are at the forefront of this resource since the service provided is time sensitive in nature. Due to the time difference between India and its` customers, call centres operate primarily at night and this makes India an ideal location for outsourcing as companies can operate round the clock (Mirchandani, 2004: 363-364). Time is a commodity just like a neutral English accent in India is a commodity. The global market has turned intangible things such as time and accent into things with value. The market has found a way to capitalize on new avenues that can be controlled for profit. In India, time is being put to profitable use. Many companies use the time zone differences to create a 24-hour business cycle. This extends the hours of work and speeds up the labour process (Nadeem, 2009: 21). Nationalist time works together with the biological clock of the human body while capitalist time is not limited to any clock. This again can be harmful to employees as they are required to not just keep up but be productive. Offices are equipped with bright lights and the blinds are shut to give the illusion of daylight (Nadeem, 2009: 32). This kind of manipulation of time and surroundings allows customers to be contacted on western time; however, the human biological clock will be affected. Being required to imitate life in a foreign time zone and live in one’s own time zone can create a level of disorientation (Nadeem, 2009: 33). This disorientation and frustration over the job design and requirements is the price Indian call centre workers pay for a better standard of living.
For the benefit of the industry, Indian labour law introduced changes that better reflects the use of time. These changes include shift work, work on national holidays, allowing women to work the night shift, and allowing businesses to operate 365 days a year 24 hours a day (Nadeem, 2009: 33). This shows that the Indian government recognizes the value of time and is committed to changes that would create longer work hours. As well, allowing women to work the night shift is important as call centre jobs provides greater independence for women.

**Power**

The labour process of call centres is routinized and deskilled where employees perform a series of repetitive tasks. This involves language at work through the production of communication and information. Call centres have become essential for balancing the relationship between companies and customers (Brophy, 2011: 411-412). Language in Indian call centres plays a major role in the work process. The use of language is both positive and negative. Indian workers can view language as a positive since it was a deciding factor in the hiring process; however, it can also be viewed as negative in terms of the impact on not just their work lives but how the effects creep into their personal life. The decision of determining the usage of language in the global economy is handed down by corporations who have the power to decide how it can be utilized to acquire additional profit. Corporations have experienced significant savings by offshoring and outsourcing, but additional ways to save are always on the horizon. There is debate over whether the way in which corporations are taxed should be changed. The source formula would
benefit all countries that create value including capital abundant countries. The residence formula would benefit only capital abundant countries with global operations. A country like India is more likely to collect revenue from source based taxation rather than residence based taxation therefore India, like other capital scare countries, have fought to maintain source based taxation. (Mukherji, 2004: 100-101). Due to the power of the global north, changes in regulations can occur in the interest of the north therefore developing countries need be vigilant to ensure that their voice is heard. This voice involves using language to get a point across and ultimately coming to an agreement. As capitalism globalizes, new forms of domination and power have become evident. There is global inequality among nations and regions in the world. Economic growth in India has created a new middle class; however, the division of labour still places the north as high skilled, high paid workers and the south as low skilled, low paid workers (Robinson, 2011: 38). The power therefore still lies in the north that is able to control not just the north but also many aspects of how the south functions. This control is more than economic as changes in income and work design leads to changes in other areas of the economy and culture. The north through the use of language in Indian call centres is changing the way many people in India operate and think. This influence is not limited to only call centre employees as these employees interact in the broader community and there is always a trickle down effect. India as a whole is evolving as a result of the English language and the economic opportunities that have been created. India positioned itself as a receptive country to outsourcing and offshoring and has maintained a reputation for efficient service. Through its reputation, India is has allowed developed nations to see the potential. This was achieved through soft power. Soft power is defined
as the ability to get others to do what you want on the basis of their perception of you. Soft vulnerability is the fate of seeing others do to you what you don’t want based on their perception of you (Hymans, 2009: 259). India’s soft power enabled corporations to invest in India and view the country as a profitable choice for outsourcing. India soft power vulnerability can be seen through the effects of the English language on culture, traditions and workers. India is perceived by the global north as having less power and therefore having less autonomy over consequences of decisions made. When India envisioned becoming a country as a service provider, the full impact of that decision would have been unknown as change in technology and job design creates an evolution process. The use of language has evolved from communication purposes to a status symbol based on pronunciation. The global north dictates the value of speech patterns and uses speech and accent variation in the global south as an exploitative measure to marginalize workers. Knowledge of the English language no longer has full value; value is now based on accent. Since the global north has the global economic power, the accent of the global north or a variation deemed appropriate by the global north has the highest value.

One of the main challenges of call centres in India is maintaining committed employees with a “welcoming telephone etiquette” and providing high quality service in this fast paced, high volume, and low cost process. Due to the nature of work, a positive attitude, great communication skills and warm feelings towards the customer have greater value than product knowledge or technical capabilities. In these call centres, employees have a lack of autonomy over their roles as there are set targets, high surveillance, extended
work hours and minimum breaks. This can ultimately lead to negative impacts on the employees such as additional stress, emotional exhaustion, and absenteeism (Taylor, 2005: 265). It is ironic that these negative impacts can also affect a corporation’s bottom line as employees cannot perform to their full ability under additional stress and emotional exhaustion. Absenteeism is also an expense for organizations. This may be an issue to be addressed whereby a reduction in the strict language requirements could produce more satisfied workers able to completely focus on providing a service.

Conclusions

Offshore and outsourced call centres play a major role in India and have a significant impact on the global economy. This is achieved through the use of language to connect customers to call centre workers. The English language is used in call centres in India and this has change perceptions of what is considered acceptable English as well as how language can have both a negative and positive impact by enhancing the quality of life of many Indian call centre workers and their families as well as highlight the views of the north as having authority to dictate what should be considered appropriate English based on accent.

In order to remain competitive in the global economy, organizations must establish global as opposed to national or regional markets. Globalization has enabled capitalism to be mobile and seek from around the world the most favourable conditions for production from the cheapest labour to the most favourable labour laws, tax rates and stable working environments. Outsourcing has become a fundamental characteristic of global economic
activity (Robinson, 2011: 38). The opportunity for skilled and cheaper labour, advanced telecommunications, low cost property and time zone was enough for corporations to take an interest in India. But offshoring would not have been possible without the many in the Indian population who are fluent in English.

The rise of technology driven economies has redefined perceptions of time, space, distance and production and boundaries in the global context. Forms of global interaction have changed including social, political, economic and cultural (Abraham, 2008: 198). These changes can be viewed by analysing the impact of language not just on the call centre industry in India but also on the implications to other aspects of society affecting both the global south and north.
Bibliography


Baru, Sanjaya. (2009). The Influence of Business and Media on Indian Foreign Policy. *India Review, 8*(3), 266-285


Coyle, Angela. (2010). Are you in this country? How “Local” social relations can limit the “Globalisation” of customer services supply chains. *Antipode, 42*(2), 289-309


Taylor, Phil. (2008). United by a Common Language? Trade Union Responses in the UK and India to Call Centre Offshoring. *Antipode, 131*, 131-154


