LWAG TALKS

A podcast by Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

Ep 7: Stories of the Indian Diaspora with Sana Bharadwaj

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Transcript of a public talk with Sana Bharadwaj, PhD Candidate in Linguistics at the University of Western Australia, on the ways that language, culture and identity interact in the sociolinguistics of the Indian diaspora in Australia.

**NARRATOR:**

You are listening to the Friday talk by Sana Bharadwaj PhD candidate in Linguistics. This podcast was recorded on the first of April.

**JANICE LALLY (HOST):**

So I'd like to first of all introduce myself and welcome you. I'm the public programs curator Janice Lally here at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. And as the public programs curator here and it's really a delight for me to find the positive and energetic campus partners to work with, when I work to get a talk series and events for the programme that we use. We try and connect our academic stream of university with the exhibitions that we have in the gallery, and with this exhibition is Bharti Kher ‘In Her Own Language’, which is a wonderful exhibition from Perth International Art Festival and so I want to go further on that in a moment but also apart from acknowledging our campus partner at the outset, I acknowledge that we are meeting today on Wadjuk Nyoongar land and we acknowledge the elders past and present.

So this exhibition that brings us to have this Friday talk partnership with the campus partner, which is the discipline of Linguistics, School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, is because Bharti Kher is an Indian artist born in London to Indian parents, but then removed herself back to New Delhi and that's where her practice has been based all her professional life. And in terms of what we have at the university in linguistics, we have Dr. Celeste Rodriguez Louro, who is working with PhD student, Sana, who she will introduce in a moment in terms of Indian linguistics, and so it’s a thrill first of all to acknowledge Celeste and to tell you that Celeste will formally introduce Sana. So Celeste herself is another diaspora to Australia. She was raised and educated in Argentina, and she travelled to Costa Rica in the USA, Austria, Poland and Australia. She completed her BA Honours in English Language Teaching at the university in Argentina, the Mater Plate University and she also did an MA in Hispanic Linguistics at the University of Illinois, and also a PhD in Linguistics at the Melbourne University here in Australia. And since 2011, has been a lecturer in linguistics at the University of Western Australia. So thank you, I invite you to come and introduce the event today.

**CELESTE RODRIGUEZ LOURO:**

Okay, good afternoon, everyone. Thanks Janice for a warm introduction. It is a real pleasure for me to be here today. The exhibition is remarkable and we are so thrilled that you guys had the initiative of contacting us to collaborate on this. Today I am here to introduce Sana Bharadwaj. Sana is one of my PhD students in their linguistics programme here at the University of Western Australia. She is a socio-linguist which means she is interested in how language is used in its cultural, social and cultural context. Sana was born in India, she was brought up in Malaysia, Fiji and Australia and perhaps because of this multicultural upbringing, she has always been fascinated by language and especially the interaction between language society and culture. Sana speaks English as a first language, as well as a Hindi Marathi and French and she can also speak Australian English, American English and Indian English.

What is driving Sana’s research at the moment is how Indian English is used as a means to encode cultural identity. Her current research focuses on Indian communities in metropolitan Perth. And today she will be telling us a bit about some of the most salient issues in her area of study. We're very much looking forward to it Sana. So over to you.

**SANA BHARADWAJ:**

Thank you so much, Celeste for your lovely welcome. And thank you all for coming here today. It's really nice to see the friendly familiar faces and lots of friendly unfamiliar faces too so thank you for coming. And thank you so much to Janice and art gallery for all their amazing efforts and making today come together.

So this talk runs in conjunction with Bharti Kher’s exhibition ‘In Her Own Language’. And it is just really amazing. I totally recommend you see it in person. So as Janice said Bharti Kher is of Indian origin and she was born and brought up in the UK, and at the age of 23, she flipped a coin between New York and the united and New Delhi and decided with the coin flip to move her art practice to New Delhi. She calls it a reverse migration of sorts and has spent the last 20 years or so practising in India. One of the reasons I am sure so many others find her art so engaging is because of her unique position as a person of Indian origin and still a migrant to India and the way it informs her artwork. To quote Professor Snell, from the UWA Cultural Precinct, “I think Bharti Kher represents a thoroughly modern view of culture and identity.” So I'd like to start by actually sharing one of my favourite pieces from this exhibition and the story that it tells me. This is her piece ‘Sing To Them That Will Listen’ and it's currently an exhibition at the centre of the art gallery and it is a Tibetan singing bowl filled with rice grains. When you look closer, you'll see that every single grain of rice is inscribed with the Devanagari or Hindi script, as well as Roman or English script. The words on these grains of rice were taken from the matrimonial section of Indian newspapers, and they tell me a story about the social practices relating to Indian marriages. You might have a son or daughter of marriageable age and you want to find them the best match possible. So you go to a newspaper and you advertise their education, religion, caste, personal attributes, occupation, income, and often in the case of women the fairness of their complexion. So some of these stories challenge my feminist ideals. But there's more to it. At the heart of it, all of these are stories about people trying to find someone to share their lives with; stories of loneliness and the search for something more, which ultimately, hopefully turn into stories about love that warm our hearts. This seemingly ordinary bowl of rice actually gives us a glimpse into the complex social structure of another culture. A picture is really worth 1000 words and I encourage you to take a look at it in person because it's amazing.

When speaking about her art as part of the Perth international Arts Festival, Bharti emphasise that her work doesn't represent Indian culture. Instead, her work tells stories of and is informed by her surroundings. Her use of saris and bindis tell us a story about life in India and her interpretations of it, and it's possible that an artist in another part of the world might not use saris or bindis in the same way that she does. So just as her surroundings influence and shape her artwork, our surroundings influence the ways in which we use language consciously or unconsciously. So today, I'd like to tell you a story about English in India and its journey around the world in the diaspora, and a little bit about my research in the area too.

First I'll tell you a little bit more about myself. So when I was offered the opportunity to present in conjunction with this exhibition, I was thrilled for a number of reasons. The first one is because like most children, I took my crayons very seriously. I've always had a very positive relationship with art and I've been passionate about it. So getting the chance to speak about art is something that I was really excited about. And in addition to being passionate about art as Celeste said, I'm passionate about languages, my parents will be the first to tell you that I was a very enthusiastic babbler. My love for language was shaped by my upbringing and my constantly changing surroundings as a child. By the time I was in year eight, I'd been to three countries, four cities and eight different schools. In that time, I'd been exposed to a variety of languages and varieties of English as well. So I've always been curious about how it varies from place to place. And although knowing another language is not a requirement for being a linguist, it just so happens that most of us do speak a lot of languages.

As I grew up, what fascinated me about language was the role it plays in expressing my own identity. So as Celeste mentioned, I speak American English, Indian English and Australian English. It's a very strange combination and it's usually on auto pilot. But I love the way that language allows me to express my identity as Indian when I communicate with my family and my relatives, and also as an Australian. And most importantly, as a third culture kid, which is what you're getting today, when I find my accent all over the place with years of international schooling. I love the language in Bollywood movies with the rich mixing of Hindi and English that result in a beautiful hybrid of Hinglish, like in these movie titles such as English, Vinglish, when we met and the side effects of marriage. I also love the unique ways in which my parents and their friends would speak to each other like the use of pre POM to bring a meeting forward instead of pushing it further. And also the creative ways in which my cousins back in India might speak; so the use of “senti” for sentimental or timepass which is great because it's what you use to describe something that wasn't that great that you'll just use to pass the time.

So I've told you a little bit about who I am. And as Celeste mentioned, I'm a first year student, well I've just completed my first year in my PhD in linguistics. So for the non-linguists in the room, does anyone know what linguistics is, or a vague idea of it? It's the scientific study of language. And in linguistics, I'm really interested in socio-linguistics, which is the study of language in society. I'm particularly interested in language variation and change. Language is always changing, whether we like it or not, that's just how it is. So we're interested in how language changes why it changes and who changes it. So in my research, I'm focusing on the use of Indian English in society. But first we'll talk about English a little bit more generally.

The spread of English has been viewed both as a unique phenomenon of our times, and as an unprecedented form of linguistic and cultural colonisation. English is no longer just the language of England, it's a language of the world. And in linguistics one of the models that we use to understand the types of English around the world is called a circles of English model. I promise this is as technical as it gets. This model groups them into three different types of Englishes; the inner, outer and expanding circles. So the inner circle is where English is used as a native language for example, the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the very traditional English speaking contexts. The outer circle consists of countries where English is spoken as a second language, often in a post-colonial context, with a long history of contact via colonialism meant that new varieties of English developed. Here, English is used widely in formal contexts such as administration and politics, but also in everyday interactions between informal speakers. So some of these examples might be Fiji, Singapore and India. The expanding circle of English describe situations where English is learned as a foreign language. It's generally restricted to very few contexts of use. So only informal contexts like perhaps politics or international communication. While most day to day interactions will take place instead in the local language. So this includes countries like Japan, Argentina, and Poland. So as you can see, English in India falls into the outer circle of Englishes, where it's used as a second language in formal and informal interactions. Before this kind of model was developed, varieties such as Indian English were generally thought of as poor, and poor approximations of proper English full of mistakes - something to be frowned upon basically, or as a result of inadequate fluency in English. We can't really ignore the role of language proficiency, how fluent a speaker is in English. But this model paved the way for linguists to reconsider the varieties like Indian English with all their quirks to be culture bound codes of communication shaped by their history of contact with British English. Consequently, we now understand these varieties to have equal value to native varieties of English. So let's take a look at the history and role of English in India.

The Indian subcontinent has been in contact with English for over four centuries, initiated by the East India Trading Company in the 17th century. It's one of the oldest varieties of English around the world and it's older than European Australia. While language contact was pretty limited early on, trade and missionary efforts laid the foundation for the first stages of bilingualism with English. In 1835 McCaulley’s minute on Indian education saw the beginning of Indian medium education in schools. And by the time India actually achieved independence in 1947, English had become entrenched in the administrative and educational sectors of society. English is listed as one of the official languages of India alongside Hindi. And importantly, despite its ties to colonialism, it takes the unusual position of a neutral lingua franca, a language that bridges the gap between communities and languages. This is a result of complex socio-political and linguistic tensions between North and South India, which we'll talk about a little bit more soon. Today, English in India continues to thrive with 125 million speakers of English, making it the second largest population of English speakers in the world. English is tightly woven into India's social, political and cultural context.

So, multilingual contact-rich environments often give rise to distinct varieties that take their own shape and form. With such a long history of contact between the native Indian languages and English, we can really say that in India, English has become an Indian language, both in its structure and use. It's distinct in a number of ways. Has anyone here heard Indian English? Can you think of some of the ways that might sound different? Yeah. Yeah, go ahead. What do you think is like one thing that's different about it?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

My family is originally from Pakistan, so their version of Indian English is probably quite similar.

**SANA:**

Yep

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

I’m just trying to think of an example for the question…

**SANA:**

Do you ever talk to your family in a different way?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

I do, I do, when I talk to my parents - they’re fully English but I put on an Indian accent and I think they can understand me better…They have PhD’s, they’re full on English…

**SANA**:

Yeah, totally. Yeah, I do exactly the same thing. So that's just one of the ways it's the sounds the phonology and what you made about Pakistan is a really good point, because Indian English it's probably a better term to South Asian English, because only difference between India and Pakistan is the political borders in terms of the languages right? So same with Bangladesh. So, the sounds are different the phonology. So for those of you who might not have heard it, there are different consonants in Indian English than in Indian languages than in English. So for example, T and D as in today, could be pronounced like ‘today ‘with my tongue further back in my mouth, or it could be pronounced with my tongue further forward like ‘tandoori’. So aside from the fact that the ‘r’ is different there as well, these differences in the sound systems of languages is what we perceive as an accent.

So another way it could be different is in the vocabulary. So we've already seen some examples; ‘time pass’, ‘senti’, ‘Pripo’, these are words that are derived from the Indian cultural context. It can also vary in grammar. So, you might find that speakers of Indian English, say things like “we are knowing each other” instead of “we know each other”. These are just a few features of Indian English, and they do vary between speakers and across communities. So this last one, use in context, that's another way in which it varies and this is what I'm really interested in. And it comes right back to language as a culture bound code of communication. So this means that the use of language in context is determined by cultural norms. It's all well and good to know how to use a language accurately in terms of the grammar, but what about using it appropriately? We use language to do things. We use it to make requests. We use it to express opinions, to tell stories, to show respect. And what we define as appropriate for each of these things that we need to do differs from culture to culture. So why is this important? Well, one of the reasons is, that understanding that you can do the same thing in different ways across cultures reduces misunderstandings, and it can help us form better relationships with other countries. So for example, in India, if I were interacting with a family friend, maybe someone friends with my parents and older generation not related to me, it is not appropriate for me to refer to them by first name. And if I were to refer to them by last name, I would be creating an unnatural social distance and being way too formal. So instead, I would refer to them as ‘Auntie’ or ‘Uncle’. This is a way that I can express my respect for someone older than me without creating these problems with social distance. You can imagine if I were to do that in Australia, it could, it could be a little confusing.

Another way, which I mentioned, is expressing opinions. So in 2013, back when I was an honours student, I did a small study. I wanted to know if the way that people express their opinions in the Indian community is different to how you do it in mainstream Australian community. So I interviewed people and I found that in Australian English, the previous research showed me that we tend to emphasise non-imposition. You don't want to present your opinion as fact, you don't want to be too forceful; you want to respect that the other person's opinion might be different from yours. And I found that some of the speakers in my cohort would just say things without softening it. So Australian English speakers might say, “I think it's good. I believe it's wrong”. And Indian English speakers, some of them would just say “it's good”, or “it's wrong”. So to some speakers of Australian English, this could be perceived as rude and impositional and forceful. So that doesn't mean that there is a right or wrong way to do it. It means that there are different ways to do it. And when we look more closely at how we do things with language, we can reduce miscommunications and we can reduce the negative perceptions of people coming from different language backgrounds. So obviously, I won't-I don't know yet whether this is something that's common across Indian English. And I mentioned already that some of the other features we talked about do vary between speakers and communities. One of the reasons for that is because Indian English, unlike the name implies, is actually not a uniform or homogenous variety. Like Australia, India is home to a wealth of linguistic diversity from at least two major language families: the Indo-European languages in the north and the Dravidian languages in the south. So, language families are unrelated to each other. Meaning that comparing a language that's Dravidian like Tamil with one that's Indo-European, like Hindi, is about as good as comparing Chinese and Spanish.

After independence during the 1960s, the Indian government considered making Hindi the only official or national language of India. In this situation Hindi couldn't never be a politically neutral choice because it risks alienating anyone from a Dravidian language family. So consequently, English has become the more neutral official language, sharing the role with Hindi. The country is broadly divided into states separated by linguistic territories. So in addition to Hindi and English as official languages, there are 22 scheduled or constitutionally recognised languages of India, with hundreds more that have been documented by the people's Linguistic Survey of India. Speaking two or three languages is the norm because most schools have a three language system where you're taught in English, in Hindi, as well as the local language of the region. And by the way, this map shows pre-independence India. So this part here is modern day Pakistan. This part here is modern day Bangladesh. So the term ‘Indian English’ is really more of an umbrella term covering a range of Englishes spoken across the subcontinent. One of the ways to deal with this potential for variation in language research is to focus on a single linguistic community. My research focuses on speakers from the same language background as my own, which is Marathi, spoken in the state of Maharashtra, and home to the well-known city of Mumbai or Bombay. Like any other ‘natural’ language, there are different registers of Indian English. Standard Indian English holds the greatest prestige in society. This variety is institutionalised, which means it's taught at schools and it is set to differ from standard British English only in accent. So that's the only point of difference, just the way it sounds. But what I'm really interested in is the vernacular variety, which is the everyday variety used in casual conversation. So whereas prestige variety might be what you're taught in the classroom, the vernacular is what you might speak with your friends in the schoolyard. And I should mention that these vary on a continuum across a range of social contexts and registers of formality.

So we've taken a journey to India, and we've looked at what Indian English might be and a bit about its history and its role. Our next stop is to look at things from a global perspective. The use of Indian English is not confined to India, but it's also used by members of the Indian diaspora around the world. The term ‘diaspora’ refers to the widespread transnational migration of groups with a common cultural heritage. As of last year, according to the UN migration trends report, the Indian diaspora is the largest in the world with over 16 million persons of Indian origin living outside of India. This figure has nearly tripled in the last three decades. Indians have been migrating since the 19th century as indentured labourers, often akin to slavery, or as traders to former British colonies such as South Africa, Malaysia, Mauritius, the Caribbean, and also as modern day free migrants in significant numbers to English speaking countries such as the USA, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand. Often in the case of indentured or trade migration with the British colonies, these people would stay in these colonies and subsequent generations would migrate to other English-speaking countries. So in this case with a long history of language contact, different varieties of English have developed and different languages varieties have developed such as South African, Indian English and Fiji Hindi. So they have taken a different linguistic journey to the modern day migrants that my research focuses on. English in the Indian diaspora has been well documented around the world, including the USA, UK, South Africa, Singapore, Fiji, New Zealand, but we just don't know much about it in the Australian setting. To the best of my knowledge, I'm one of the few people in the southern hemisphere interested in Indian English. So my research focuses on modern day Indian migrants to Australia, where Indians are the second largest group of Asian migrants to the country, the fourth largest group of migrants to Australia overall, and the fastest growing group of migrants where the number has quadrupled in the last two decades.

So who are these people? And why is it important to tell their stories? Well, I think the better question is why haven't we done it yet? As Barbara Horvath, a prominent socio-linguist from Australia said back in 1985, “the large number of migrants and their children who have become members of the Australian English speech community could not have failed to make an impact on Australian English.” What happens when you take Indian English outside of India? Well, relocated communities bring with them transplanted cultures and new ways of speaking. Central to the migrant experience are questions of ethnic identity and belonging. And I think one of the most exciting things about Indian English for me is how it's used to construct ethnic identity. So ethnicity is a socially constructed category. It's not biological, we make it what it is. So in the same way that our surroundings shape art, the way we speak, by chance or by choice, shapes the way we are perceived and the ways that we perceive ourselves. Language and ethnicity are tightly linked, moreso than language and any other social factors such as gender or age, but you can see that they all interact with each other in some way. So it's hard to really separate these out. So I'd like to stop for a moment and just take a little detour to ask you what about white ethnicity? Because we can't have a discussion about ethnicity as a social variable if we don't take everyone into consideration. So white ethnicity, is there such a thing? Yes, there is. Generally speaking, we tend to understand ethnicity as something that only relates to minority communities in society, where the majority of group remains unmarked, neutral or perceived to have no ethnicity, and unaccented.

The mainstream norms of speaking are usually the white ways of speaking, and are associated with mainstream speech. This kind of model where white is neutral and unmarked is problematic because when you say it's neutral, we assume that the power relationship between these groups in society is neutral, when in reality, that's usually not the case. While we know that it's all relative, and we do need terms to talk about these kinds of things and the relationships between groups and patterns, it's really important for me to stress here that everyone has an ethnicity and everyone has an accent. So referring to ethnically marked ways of speaking as wrong or engaging in othering can result in negative and even painful experiences from migrants as a result of mockery, intolerance, or stereotyping. But on the flip side, these different ways of speaking can create positive experiences for migrants too, by giving them a feeling of belonging, a sense of pride and membership to the migrant community. So, language and ethnicity interact in very complex ways to shape positive and negative experiences. And all of this interacts with the construction of your ethnic identity. Constructing ethnic identity involves more than just language use, other key players, or language attitudes, and that feeling of belonging which we're going to come back a lot. I’ll talk about each of these in turn, I'm going to start with language use. So some of the ways in which ethnicity marks our language use are some of the things that we talked about earlier like sounding different when you're on the phone to your parents. It could also be the way we use language to do things which we just talked about as well, like expressing opinions, or giving compliments, or telling stories. And again, it all comes back to the idea of language as a culture bound code of communication. This is so important to a discussion of language and ethnicity, because these culture-bound ways of speaking are involved in constructing identity through language. Language ideology plays an important role too. So as one of the oldest varieties of English around the world, Indian English comes with a set of ideologies, by which I mean prestige attributed to it. And there are attitudes towards it too. So, remember the standard and vernacular forms of Indian English? Well, understanding the attitude that a person of Indian origin might have to the variety that they speak can help us to understand the motivations for them to use language to perceive themselves as more Indian. The prestige associated with standard Indian English is not just in India, but also in the diaspora, as far as second generation migrants as British Asians in the UK. So they said in a study that was done in 2014 in London, a second generation British migrant said “when you're in India, you talk completely different to when you're here. You still speak English and their command of the English language is far better than in this country, the UK.” There are some very clear attitudes towards Indian English there. And a younger speaker, again of second generation said that “they know proper English in India” like from the book, yeah? Even outside the Indian diaspora, for example, in the international community like in cricket commentary, Indian English is regarded as a variety with as much weight as British English or for other sports, American English. And more recently, just a few weeks ago, when I was on a talk show with Talk the Talk on RTR FM, the Australian host actually said, “Oh yeah, Indian English, that's that ridiculously perfect kind of English.” So these attitudes and prestige of Indian English are diffusing throughout the world.

What do these attitudes mean for the construction of ethnic identity? Well, it's brought together by transnational ties and belonging. So when I say ‘transnational ties’, I'm referring to the connection that a migrant feels to the place of origin. How much do they travel there? Do they have a lot of family there? Even if they don't, do they feel that they are connected to the homeland in some way? So strong transnational ties, and a positive relationship and a sense of belonging to the Indian community are likely to impact on language use, where speakers perceive the use of Indian English to be a positive thing, and construct their Indian ethnic identity. So this is particularly relevant in the case of first generation migrants, but sometimes even in second generation migrants such as myself where I might not have as much fluency in my native language. So, speaking a different variety of English allows me to feel that connection to India. Of course, we could predict that it would go the other way too. So, someone who doesn't feel connectedness to India, and doesn't feel that they belong in the migrant community, and doesn't have a very good feeling towards Indian English might adjust the way they speak to try and sound more mainstream.

So we can see here, that language and ethnic background interact, resulting in different ways of speaking to dominant norms. Members of migrant communities are actually very skilled in the way they use language to negotiate layers of identity across a range of social contexts. This is what I'm most interested in, and I'm approaching it through the use of stories. So why stories? And I should clarify that when I say stories, I mean narratives or recounting of past personal experience, not ‘Harry Potter’ or fictional stories, right? So stories of personal experience or narratives are fundamental function of human cognition. Storytelling is also central to the study of my field, sociolinguistics, because when people tell stories, they're really relaxed and engaging and that's how we can get the most natural, comfortable kind of speech the vernacular, rather than something artificial and uncomfortable. Narratives are used to appeal to, impress, and solidify the relationship with the hearer. We use stories of personal experience to build and strengthen relationships between ourselves and the people that we're around, while also allowing us to construct identity. Our transformation of experience into stories and the way we carry it out is a way to show our interlocutors the salience of particular aspects of identity. Telling a good story is like creating art. There's a method to the madness in the way we try to find meaningful connections between sometimes fragmented experiences. Storytelling does have a structure to it, though. In general, a narrative of personal experience has an abstract; an overview; an orientation; setting the scene: who, when, where; complicating actions - that's the juiciest part of the story - what happened next? What happened next, right?; Evaluation, so what?; A resolution; the outcome, and sometimes, a coda or moral or something else to bring your story back to the present here and now. It's not always a straight path from beginning to end. The way we weave stories varies. And there are different ways in which different cultures tell these stories. For example, in Fort Wayne, Indiana, there's a lot of emphasis in storytelling practices with fine detail when setting the scene of the story. And this is again culture-bound. In this group of speakers, it's actually really impolite for the listener to interrupt the storyteller. So it's the storytellers responsibility to make sure that he's included as much detail as they possibly could, to make sure no one feels compelled to interrupt and ask a question. In the South African Indian community, the level of fine detail is used in a different way. We set the scene and throughout the story, have lots of fine detail to assert the authenticity. “This really happened, and I was there because I remember the colour of the dress that she was wearing.” And also the use of rhetorical questions to ensure that the audience is engaged, and it creates a suspenseful atmosphere. Elsewhere, the level of audience participation changes the style of storytelling. For example, in the Israeli Jewish community, the emphasis is on the shared interpretation of the story. So let all of us tell your story, which could be embarrassing in some situations. Whereas in the oh, there's a typo there, in the American Jewish community, the focus is on one person narrating their own experience or a shared experience. So let me tell our story. These are just some of the ways in which stories of personal experience are told across cultures. And we just don't know much about how it's done in Indian English or in the Indian diaspora of Australia.

This is something I’d like to change with my research in the field. The number of Indian migrants is considerable, and we just don't know how to use narratives in everyday interaction to build relationships in the community and construct identity. We don't know about how they engage with, or react to, ongoing language change because as Imentioned language is changing all the time. Most importantly though, we don't know much about their stories and experiences of migration - so not just Indian English but as south Asians we don't know much about their voices in our multicultural communities. So by telling the stories of these speakers, I’d like to contribute to the story of language change of the Indian diaspora around the world, but also to tell the story of these voices in our community.

Thank you so much for coming and I hope you enjoyed it and please feel free to ask me any questions.

**JANICE:**

Thank you very much Sana. Fantastic opportunity for questions, lots of juicy information there.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

With the change of names of cities in India, did that originate with the colonial speaker, say for example Mumbai?

**SANA:**

Yep so when the British came to India these names were Anglicized because they were quite difficult to pronounce, so Mumbai was Bombay. I've actually grown up saying Bombay my entire life because it was only in 1995 that it changed to Mumbai so my parents were used to saying Bombay so when, it took a long time, but most of these names have reverted back to their original Indian names.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Can you just elaborate a little bit more on Indian English compared to American English and Australian English, I mean why Indian English, is there a Argentinian English and Pakistani English, do you know what I mean?

**SANA:**

Well there's a few questions in there right? One of them is Indian English is definitely a distinct variety, so it's not arbitrary that it just sounds different and it's a different variety but I think because of that contact with British English there are many unique things about it. For example ‘prepo’, I thought that was a word in Australian English or British English but it turns out it actually isn't. But other things as well, like the use of ‘nah’, which you might know or the use of ‘only’, so someone asked me, if my mum asked me if I delivered a letter today, I'd say “Yeah I did it today only.” It doesn't mean it was only today and no other day, it means I did it today, you know, so it's an emphasis. So all of these kind of features, the grammar, the sounds, the morphology, the tense variation, they've actually been documented as different from Indian English. So if you'd like a more technical example I do have one here. So in quotation, the way that we tell stories, traditionally older speakers of mainstream Englishes might say “I said this and then she said that and then I said this”. But now in mainstream Englishes, younger speakers are saying “I was like and then she was like” and we're also using different tenses. So here you can see this is one of the 2nd generation migrants from my 2013 study and she's telling a story of migration, about her experience learning English and she would say yes to everything in the school and she decided one day to change it up and say no and you can see that resulted in a bit of confusion. What is interesting for linguistics here is that this speaker is from a non-mainstream community is using the mainstream forms of “be like, so she's like and I'm like” and then she's also using no verb to introduce the speech. So another way in which this is being documented is that someone has done a study of these verbs of quotation in India, not in the diaspora, and found different ways of saying again to mainstream varieties. So that speaker was doing what the mainstream are doing, she is reacting to change, but in India you might say something like “I said kee”, which is kee is the compliment so, it means that. So instead of “I said that”, “I said kee”, so there are different ways of which they are mixing it there as well.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

So speaking Indian English is not necessary the wrong way of speaking?

**SANA:**

Absolutely not. And I'm so glad you asked that because that's exactly, if there is one thing that you guys can take home today, especially if you are a person of south Asian origin, the way that you speak is not wrong. Because I have an American accent, I have an Indian accent, I have an Australian accent, some people have a French or Spanish accent, there is no wrong way of doing it and in linguistics we try at least in my discipline, we try and be descriptive, why are people saying things differently, because we want to know what motivates them to say it differently, instead of saying that's wrong don't do it.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Great, my extended family will be very happy.

**CELESTE:**

Can I just add one thing?

**SANA:**

Yes

**CELESTE:**

So you were asking whether there was such things as Argentinian English?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Yes, I was just wondering why its Indian English and not European English more?

**CELESTE:**

I think it's important if I go back to the concentric circle model where the idea is once upon a time that English belonged to the British and then with colonisation or invasion, whatever you want to call it, it encroached cultures and the ways of life of so many of the people around the world. The research that Sana was referring to did something really important to kind of say well actually it's not just the outcome of invasion or colonisation but it’s now become an Indian way of speaking. So it’s our so language, you know, we’re owning it, it's not your language anymore, it's Indian English. So that has to do with the lengths of colonisation and the fact that colonisers were invaders of British origin. You know in Argentina the invasion was carried out by the Spanish speaking population, so its a similar linguistic context in terms of how Spanish then became an Argentinian, Latin American rather than European, the same thing. But in terms of English in Argentina, it is not a native language as it is in India, English in Argentina is an international language. So I starting studying English when I was 13 years old so it's really interesting, it's really the ecology of English. So that's what it is. You should definitely tell your family by no means are they using it the wrong way. The problem is with mainstream society does cast a lot of that kind of judgement, not only about whether India or Japan or any country’s using English properly or not, that also say that all the speakers will have younger people who have the right to language. It's human nature to be really judgemental to think the way we used to do it was much better. Anyway it is a good question, it's at the core of what Sana is talking about.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Because they are often being corrected, whatever they introduce themselves as, say myself, they don’t say ‘hello I am’, they say ‘myself’…

**SANA:**

Well I mean also you have to remember that the things that they're doing, if someone has an accent or different way of speaking it's also often influenced by their first language. So they're transferring over the way you would say it in Urdu and then putting it into English and again when you say why Indian English it just so happens as a person of Indian origin it's, I'm in a good position to study this variety but you know Pakistani English, Bangladesh English we can break it right down to Marathi English, Tamil English, Malalum English so the political boundaries between India and Pakistan also shouldn't effect the way in which we perceive it. In an ideal world we can call it South Asian English. But you also have other languages like Fiji Hindi. So I lived in Fiji for a year and in Fiji the indentured migration and the generations that settled there, their variety of Hindi is really different to standard Hindi in India. And when Indian migrants modern day come to Fiji there's a lot of clash because they say ‘you're not a real Indian, you don't speak real Hindi’. So these attitudes aren't just in English varieties, but everywhere. The best thing we can tell them is ‘you know what? Your variety is just as good as any other.’

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

I’m interested to know more about the relationship between Urdu and Hindi?

**SANA:**

So Urdu and Hindi, I'll bring up the map so we can see them, oh jeez. Ok so Urdu, I'm not the expert on this, Sarah is probably a better person to answer this but Urdu has more of an Arabic influence and Hindi has more of a Sanskrit influence. For me, as someone who has grown up outside of India, I didn't know Hindi and Urdu were different languages. They're mutually intelligible, so you find that modern day Hindi takes a lot of influences from Urdu. These Arabic sounding words like ‘ishk’ is the word for love right, whereas ‘prem’ is the word in Hindi so that same word are used interchangeably in the same movie and to me it just sounded like one sounds more poetic because the sounds were different so the difference between them is their origins and politically they’re different languages but for most speakers they're pretty understandable.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Is Urdu spoken in different geographic regions?

**SANA:**

Urdu is spoken more in Pakistan, whereas Hindi is spoken more in India but I think my dad here might be a better person to ask, clarify.

**SANA’S DAD:**

Even from the map you can see there is a lot of (indecipherable) influence as well… This is spoken in parts of North India which were ruled by the princes in British era and some of them still carry that tradition. In fact for many of us, I speak Hindi fluently but I'm not very fluent with Urdu and that is mainly the difference of vocabulary and I admire Urdu poetry and just because I don't understand one word there which is of Arabic origin, the whole poem is lost on me, so that happens.

**SANA:**

I hope that answers your question, great.

**SANA’S DAD:**

In fact if you ask if this word, does this word belong to Hindi or Urdu even a fluent speaker like me may have to think oh no we have a Sanskrit origin Hindi word for this so this must be Urdu and then a fluent speaker may even question if it is Sanksrit or Arabic.

**SANA:**

So even for native speakers the boundaries are pretty blurred. So what was your question?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

I was actually interested in the migration you were talking about. So like I migrated four years ago so effectively I find that my English is sort of morphed in tonation and some phrases like ‘no worries’, ‘mate’ and things like that. So I find it sort of becomes automatic, so is that like you mentioned more a tendency to try and fit in and go mainstream. But I find I can’t go back in some places, is that me being a social chameleon here or is that something automatic?

**SANA:**

Well there are different levels to it. So you might be subconsciously trained to fit in but also, if you don't mind me asking how old were you when you came here?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Seventeen.

**SANA:**  
So you're a pretty young speaker so even though you migrated in adulthood, it is still easier for you to pick up a different language or a different language variety. So our brains are really plastic and if we move around at a younger age you are surrounded by it all the time and you hear it all the time. The example that I gave about someone choosing to sound more Indian, it's not always conscious, but there are some speakers who might say ‘you know what, I don't want to make that effort to change because I like the way I speak’. So I see it as an advantage to you to be able to sort of accommodate to that when you come here. When I speak Marathi or Hindi it's very accented apparently, I don't hear it, by my English is a first language so I think that maybe in your case you obviously feel comfortable with the mainstream society and you picked it up really well.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

The problem is it doesn't tend to fit in mainstream so…

**SANA:**

Yeah because it's kind of in between, right? Because what language did you speak?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

I'm Tamil.

**SANA:**

Yeah ok so you know the sounds systems are not easy to acquire all the way so you can't just go from here to here without anything in between. So I can hear from the way you speak you are obviously on your way but you might not make it fully but that's okay because it's an international kind of accent.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

Why can't you go back though, if I want to speak Indian, like English, why can't I go back?

**SANA:**

I guess that the longer we're away from that environment, you're not hearing it right? So for me, I was fluent in Marathi as a young child but now if I try to go back to that because I haven't been exposed to it that's really difficult, so we respond to our surrounding. If your surrounding doesn't have that input of that sound then it's probably a little bit more difficult for you to go back to it. I'm sure once you go back if you stay there long enough it would probably come back because once again you're changing your surroundings for an extended period of time.

**JANICE:**

Sana you mentioned one point when we were talking earlier about tense can you tell from the age group the use of tenses? Can you comment on that?

**SANA:**

Yeah sure. So tense is also something that we're using differently in mainstream English, ignore the slides please. So for example when we're telling stories younger speakers might now do something like refer to a past event but using the present tense word. So if I were to talk about yesterday how “I was watching the tv and then my dog came and barked at me and I'm like oh my god that's annoying and he's sitting right here next to me”. So I just changed the tenses to talk about my dog as if he is sitting here right next to me, but I'm referring to a past event. So this is one of the ways in which tenses are changed in the way we tell stories and in Indian English it's interesting to see whether people are doing the same kind of things. In Indian English we also have different tenses used for different things altogether so that has to do with verb classes so when I said “we are knowing each other” instead of “we know each other” there are different properties for the verb know where it wouldn't normally take that progressive property.

**JANICE:**

And is that age related?

**SANA:**

Yes definitely. So it is seen more in younger speakers so again what Celeste was saying we older speakers tend to say that language is being corrupted and these younger speakers are doing crazy things. Younger speakers tend to move language change forward, and it's generally in these younger speakers that you might see a present tense form with a past reference. These are the more technical ways in which we look at how stories are told.

**JANICE:**

Any further questions? Who are the subjects for your research now?

**SANA:**

So in 2013 the project that I did I interviewed anyone of Indian origin and I asked them to give me their opinions on a bunch of things and I'd see how they'd construct them. But now in my PhD research because we just saw with that map how diverse the languages of India are, it's really important that in order to account for the effects that a person's native language might have on their variety of English that we actually study one specific community. I'm studying the Marathi speaking community which is where my family comes from and it's the language I speak somewhat fluently, so I’ve kind of narrowed it down.

**JANICE:**

There's a lot to choose from.

**SANA:**

Yeah there is. Well the easiest way to do it for me was to choose the community I come from because it's easier to meet these people and ask them to participate because I’m a member of that community. It would be much more difficult in any kind of sociological research if you're an outsider to that community. They tend to be very welcoming anyway but it makes it a little bit easier.

**JANICE:**

Especially when you're telling stories.

**SANA:**

Yeah.

**JANICE:**

Thank you very much Sana it's been very entertaining and a really engaging talk, you've been very generous with your work and all the beautiful work into the PowerPoint. It's really appreciated. Thank you and i have a little something for you and it's under there and i don't want to knock it all over so.

**SANA:**

Thank you so much, thank you for having me.

**JANICE:**

It's a pleasure.

**SANA:**

Thank you all for coming and your questions I enjoyed it. If you do want to get in touch at any point you can google me, the advantages of having a less common last name means I'm very easy to google, sana@uwalingustics get in touch. Thank you.

**JANICE:**

As I said this is part of the Friday talk series of the public program. We'll be finishing this exhibition in the next 2 weeks and we have another exciting exhibition after that time and there'll be further Friday talks and other public program events. There'll be a new program so I'll be delighted if you follow that up and come and join us again.