

Syntax Patterns in Anurag Mathur's *The Inscrutable Americans*

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In the novel *The Inscrutable Americans*, Anurag Mathur makes use of present progressive form of narration through the protagonist Gopal. This repertoire of the character, if taken as a representative of a common variety of Indian English, in the same novel, the speech of Randy represents American English. Through the speech of the two characters Gopal Kumar and Randy Wolff, the novel is a skilled blending of Indian and American English. This paper analyses the spoken forms of Indian English, that is, the speech of Gopal which is glittered with present progressive and gives possible explanations for the occurrence of the present progressive forms.

Since, Gopal hails from the town of Jajau situated in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, he is a bilingual whose first language (L1) is Hindi. From the text, it is found that the present progressive has been used to indicate simple present, present perfect, simple past, past progressive, past perfect, future and modal forms. Thus the present progressive has replaced the following tense forms, which are listed in tabular forms below.

I. Simple Present

Sentence/phrase interpretation	Contextual
Hoping your end is fine too (9)	I hope
. . . I am not knowing if cooks are Brahmins (9)	do not know
He is talking English strangely . . . (11)	He talks
I am wondering suddenly (28)	I wonder
How much I am missing one and all . . . (54)	I miss
They are allowing many kinds of things like this here (55)	They allow
You are wanting to come over? (78)	Do you want
You are recognizing (174)	You recognize
. . . I am understanding all many things (191)	I understand

According to Jamuna Kachru (1980), in Hindi, the present and past progressive “express an event or action in progress at the moment of speaking with reference to some point of time in the past”. However, the present progressive forms in the novel are mostly of the structure “I am +V-ing” where “am” is the copula represented by “hai” in Hindi, and “-

raha” in Hindi “indicates actions or processes extended over a period of time” (“*raha*” is equivalent to English *-ing* forms).

For example

“ *ajay parh raha hai*
Ajay read-ing is
Ajay is reading”

II. Present Perfect

**Sentence/phrase
interpretation**

Contextual

So many things are happening (39)	have happened
... I am not finding bathroom ... (40)	I have not found

III. Simple Past

**Sentence/phrase
interpretation**

Contextual

... I am sitting in corner seat ... (9)	I sat
... if I am getting up then they are put in lot of botheration (9)	if I got up
I am asking lady if they are giving student discount ... (10)	I asked
Then I am sleeping long time ... (10)	I slept
... when I am waking ... (10)	I woke up
... as I am leaving airplane, ... (10)	when I left
... air hostess is giving me one more can of Coca-Cola (10)	gave me
... as I am opening it he is holding out hand ... (10)	opened it
... so I am shaking it ... (10)	shook it
I am telling him if he is ever coming ... (10)	I told him
... I am meeting very friendly gentleman ... (11)	I met
... I am saying that I am liking very much . . . (11)	said, like(d)
... and eating many on plane (11)	ate
... he is listening very quietly with eyes on me . . (11)	listened
Ann is just calling (80)	Ann called
I am applying to many places ... (152)	applied

Kachru mentions that in Hindi the simple past indicates completed action or process.

She gives an example:

“*piyush dilli gaya hai*

Piyush has gone to Delhi”

If *hai* is translated as the copula “is”, then the construction will become a progressive from instead of simple past.

It is also noted in Kachru that in narratives, the past tense marker is usually dropped after establishing the context. For example:

“*nitu pac baje uthti hai. Hath mukh dho kar parne baith jati hai*

Nitu five o'clock gets up hand face washing study sit goes

Nitu gets up at five. She wahes and sits down to study.”

IV. Past Progressive

Sentence/phrase interpretation

Contextual

. . . cousins are waiting . . . (12)	were waiting
I am dancing (78)	was dancing
. . . I think . . . he is writing leaflets . . . (177)	was writing

Unlike English, where the past progressive refers to an event or action in progress in the past, Hindi past progressive refers to the event or action at the moment of speaking with reference to some point of time in the past. This sense of event or action at the moment of speaking is reflected in the above construction tabulated under the contextual interpretation “past progressive”.

V. Past Perfect

Sentence/phrase interpretation

Contextual

I am having good time drinking 37 glasses of Coca-Cola (9)	I had a good time
I am also throwing myself on bag . . . (11)	I had thrown
. . . before it is escaping (11)	it had escaped
. . . if I am going to Great Principal of Jajau College. . . (55)	I had gone

In Hindi simple perfect indicates completed state resulting from completion of the act or the process. The completion of the act or process in the present is present perfect and in the past is past perfect. In past perfect there is no “relevance of the act or the event to the present” (Kachru, 1980: 132).

However in all the sentences from the text, for the past perfect there is no completion of the act or process as it was for the present perfect mentioned in the tabular form II.

VI. Future

Sentence/phrase interpretation	Contextual
I am only going to classes, . . . (23)	I will only attend classes
. . . I am returning to use new technologies in our factory (24)	I will return
I am finishing diploma course and returning (27)	I will finish
. . . Gloria is giving new one if any problem (46)	will give
. . . I am fearing she is starting to sing Holy songs . . . (54)	will start
. . . and mother is getting headache (54)	will get
. . . what I am eating? (117)	will I eat
You are please keeping this one only for me . . . (228)	Will you please keep
. . . I am going to apartment to get money . . . (228)	I will go
. . . and collect from you soon (228)	will collect

From Kachru, in Hindi, “the present continuous can be used to indicate the future also:

shashi kal banaras ja rahi hai
Shashi is going to Banaras tomorrow”

VII. Modals

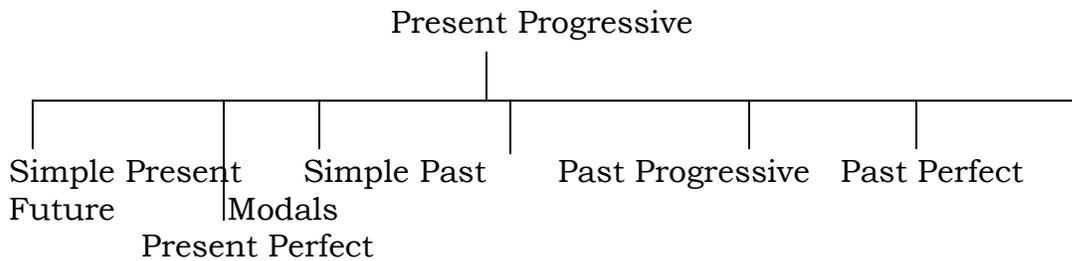
Sentence/phrase interpretation	Contextual
. . . as far as I am seeing there are lights . . . (10)	I could see
. . . I am not finding bathroom . . . (40)	I could not find

In Hindi, the modal “could” is equivalent to the word “*sakna*”. This modal usage can be optional with simple present tense in usage. For instance in the above two examples, “as far as I am seeing” (*meine jitna dur dekha*) and “I am not finding bathroom” (*mujhe bathroom nehi mila*) the corresponding Hindi equivalents are expressed without the modal “could”. This may be one of the reasons of the absence of modals in the constructions found in the text.

From the above forms of example in the novel it can be concluded that there is semantic extension of the present progressive form into seven distinct instances of grammatical markers. This is due to the L1 influence on the spoken form. This involves transfer of grammatical patterns which are absent or different from native English grammatical patterns. However even though there are grammatical deviations, Indian English is intelligible in other parts of the world. Grammatical (non syntactical) deviations are not as deadly as semantic ones in rendering speech unintelligible as illustrated by the following anecdote:

A German youth to the waiter in a restaurant: I have been waiting here for half an hour, when do I become a sausage? (German Bekommen = to get).

The semantic extension mentioned above can be described as:



In the text present progressive expresses the same meaning as the seven grammatical forms. In the novel present progressive occurs as syntactically conditioned speech form of the character Gopal. If the speech form is compared with American English from the novel, it is apparent that there are some semantic lexical deviations between the two forms of the language. Unlike other Indian English contemporary novels, words from Indian languages do not occur in *The Inscrutable Americans*. Although there are some instances of translation of Hindi phrases such as “very nice of you and all that” (127) (cf. Hindi *ap ki taraf se sab bohot accha raha*) etc. It may be noted here that the Hindi of L1 English foreigners containing deviations from the normal verbal phrases like

“*Hindi nehi ati*” (= I cannot speak Hindi)

though quite amusing, especially when heard, is not unintelligible to those who know Hindi.

Conclusion

Anurag Mathur’s innovative style of presenting American English and Indian English in the novel may have been one of the reasons which made it the only Indian book on the bestseller list for eleven long years. The present progressive form has been semantically extended to simple present, present perfect, simple past, past progressive, past perfect, future and modal.

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