

# Hindi–English Code-Switching as a Trend in India’s Emerging Business Class: A Stylistic Analysis of *The White Tiger*

Ms. Pranali Genu Bothe,  
Research Scholar,  
Department of English,  
S. N. Arts, D.J. Malpani Commerce and  
B.N. Sarada Science College, Sangamner  
Dist-Ahilyanagar,  
Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune.

Dr. Shrikant Rambhau Susar  
Associate Professor,  
Department of English,  
P.V.P. College of Arts, Science and Commerce,  
Pravaranagar, Dist-Ahilyanagar  
Mo- 9890519667  
e-mail- [shrikanta.susar@gmail.com](mailto:shrikanta.susar@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This research paper examines Hindi–English code-switching as a stylistic and linguistic style among India’s emerging business class, as shown in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*. This study employs a stylistic approach to analyze how linguistic hybridity functions as a deliberate narrative technique rather than merely casual bilingual usage. Through close textual analysis, this paper explores how code-switching reflects class mobility, ambition, power relations, and identity formation in post-liberalization India. In the present novel, English is associated with education, authority and corporate aspirations. Hindi conveys emotional intimacy, cultural roots and social realism. The study argues that Adiga’s strategic use of code-switching sharpens realism, strengthens social satire, and deepens the novel’s critique of Indian inequality. This paper demonstrates how language choice signifies class transformation and social ambition in contemporary India, thereby contributing to the fields of stylistics, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial literary studies, by situating linguistic hybridity within a stylistic framework.

**Keywords:** Code-switching, Stylistics, Linguistic hybridity, Emerging business class, Indian English fiction, *The White Tiger*

## Introduction

Language plays an important role in shaping identity, power, and social relationships in postcolonial Indian literary works. In India multiple languages coexist and the mixing of Hindi and English is a common feature of everyday communication. This linguistic blending, known as code-switching, reflects social change,

globalization, and the growing influence of the urban middle and business classes. Indian fiction, writers often use this mixed language to present social realities truthfully and effectively.

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is a powerful example of how language reflects social transformation. The story of Balram Halwai, a poor village boy, becomes a successful entrepreneur in modern India. Through Balram's voice, Adiga presents the harsh realities of poverty, inequality, and ambition in rapidly changing societies. Balram describes himself as someone who has escaped the darkness, saying, "I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open" (Adiga 5). This statement reflects his realization that social mobility is possible, although it is restricted by invisible systems of power. Adiga blends Hindi words and expressions with English narration. This mirrors the natural speech patterns in Indian society. Words such as *halwai*, *zamindar*, *lakh*, and *crore* have cultural meanings that cannot be fully translated into English. This mixture creates authenticity and allows readers to understand the characters' social backgrounds. For instance, when Balram introduces himself as "Balram Halwai" (Adiga 9), his caste and social position are made clear through language.

The use of Hindi–English code-switching also highlights class division. English is often associated with power, education, and authority, whereas Hindi reflects emotional expression, tradition, and social limitations. Balram observes this imbalance when he remarks, 'The English have taught us well' (Adiga 176), pointing to the lasting influence of colonial and privileged power structures. Therefore, language becomes a tool through which dominance and submission are maintained. The present study examines Hindi–English code-switching in *The White Tiger* as a stylistic device that reflects social mobility, power relations, and identity formation. This study shows that language in Adiga's work is not only a tool for communication but also a symbol of ambition and power, and that linguistic hybridity reflects the complex realities of India's emerging business class.

## Review of Literature

*The White Tiger* focuses on themes of class struggle, globalization, neoliberal capitalism, corruption, and postcolonial identity. Many critics understand the novel as a powerful critique of India's rapid economic transformation, emphasizing how neoliberal development reproduces inequality rather than eliminating it. Balram Halwai is depicted as a symbolic figure that embodies both resistance and moral compromise, representing the ethical tensions of survival in a competitive capitalist system. While these interpretations offer valuable socio-political insights, they often treat language as a transparent medium, rather than as an active stylistic force shaping meaning.

Linguistic hybridity is frequently identified as a defining feature of postcolonial literature. Scholars argue that Indian writers strategically combine English with native languages to reflect cultural plurality and social stratification in their works. However, much of this scholarship remains descriptive, focusing on the presence of

code-switching rather than its functions. Consequently, the relationship between language choice, power, and identity and particularly within narratives of economic mobility often remains underexplored.

Braj B. Kachru's in his theory *Indianization of English* provides a crucial framework for understanding such linguistic practices. Kachru challenges the notion that non-native varieties of English represent linguistic deficiency, arguing that Indian English operates through its own culturally grounded norms. Code-switching in *The White Tiger* is not a deviation from the linguistic standards but a deliberate stylistic strategy that reflects social negotiation and identity construction. However, Kachru's model legitimizes Indian English, it does not fully account for how language operates dynamically within literary narration to express the power relations and psychological transformation.

Halliday's theory of language as a social semiotic offers a more functional approach. Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions allow for a closer examination of linguistic choices which construct social realities, negotiate power, and organize narrative meaning. *The White Tiger* reveals how code-switching functions not merely as cultural representation but as a structural device that shapes character development and thematic progression.

Sociolinguistic perspectives, particularly John Gumperz's theory of code-switching as a social strategy, provide critical insights into how speakers use language to negotiate authority, cohesion, and identity. Gumperz emphasized that code-switching is context-sensitive and socially meaningful rather than random. This perspective is especially relevant to Balram's shifting linguistic behaviour as he moves between subservience and dominance, and rural marginalization and urban empowerment.

The theoretical frameworks of stylistics, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial theory used to analyze Hindi–English code-switching in *The White Tiger*. Most existing studies privilege thematic or ideological readings while overlooking the stylistic mechanisms through which meaning is produced in the text. This study addresses this gap by adopting a qualitative, text-centred methodology that combines Halliday's functional linguistics, Kachru's model of World Englishes, and Gumperz's theory of code-switching. This offers a more nuanced understanding of how linguistic choices shape representations of class, power, and identity within India's emerging business culture.

## Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three major theoretical perspectives like Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Kachru's theory of World Englishes, and Gumperz's Sociolinguistic theory of code-switching to critically analyze language use in *The White Tiger*. Together, these frameworks explain how language functions as a tool of power, identity construction, and social negotiation within India's emerging business class.

## Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Halliday proposed that language operates through three metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These functions help to explain how meaning is constructed through linguistic choices.

The ideational function represents experiences and reality. Balram's descriptions of poverty, ambition, and social division construct a lived reality of social inequality. When he states, "*I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open*" (Adiga 5), language becomes a vehicle for conceptualizing social entrapment and awakening. The metaphorical structure reflects how oppressed individuals internalize these social limitations.

The interpersonal function reflects the relationships between power and emotion. Balram's submissive tone when addressing his masters sharply contrasts with his confident, ironic tone when narrating his life story. For instance, when he observes that "*The English have taught us well*" (Adiga 176), the sentence carries irony, critique, and awareness of dominance, revealing how language negotiates authority and resistance.

The textual function organizes meaning in discourse. Adiga's blending of Hindi lexical items such as *halwai*, *zamindar*, *lakh*, and *crore* within English narration creates textual cohesion while preserving cultural specificity. This linguistic layering guides readers through the Indian socio-cultural framework and strengthens the narrative's authenticity.

## Kachru's Theory of World Englishes

Braj B. Kachru's theory of World Englishes views Indian English as a legitimate, rule-governed variety shaped by local socio-cultural realities rather than a deviation from British or American norms. In the novel English functions as a language of power, aspiration, and global mobility while simultaneously absorb Indian cultural meanings. Words such as *lakh*, *crore*, *halwai*, and the metaphor *rooster coop* are not stylistic decorations but culturally embedded expressions that are difficult to translate. Their presence asserts the autonomy of Indian English and reflects what Kachru terms the "Indianization of English." Adiga's language challenges linguistic hierarchies and validates localized forms of expression in global literature.

## Gumperz's Code-Switching as a Social Strategy

John Gumperz conceptualizes code-switching as a strategic social practice rather than random alternation. Balram's code-switching reflects shifts in power, identity, and emotion. When he speaks about business, money, or authority, his language becomes more English-dominant and projecting confidence and ambition. The moments of fear, loyalty, or vulnerability are often expressed through culturally loaded expressions in Hindi. This strategic alternation demonstrates how code-switching functions as a social signal. This allows Balram to

navigate hierarchical structures, align himself with power, and distance himself from subordination. Thus, language becomes both a survival mechanism and a tool for self-fashioning.

Thus code-switching in *The White Tiger* is not random, but socially motivated, ideologically charged, and stylistically deliberate. Language emerges as a central mechanism through which identity, power, and resistance are negotiated in contemporary Indian society.

This study adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach. The examples from text are examined in terms of their lexical, functional, and stylistic significance to the text. This analysis focuses on how language mixing contributes to characterization, thematic development, and narrative voice. This study does not aim to quantify code-switching but to interpret its stylistic and social meanings within the text.

### **Code-Switching and Social Mobility**

Hindi–English code-switching is closely linked to social aspirations and upward mobility in the novel. Balram’s appeal to English reflects his belief that language functions as a gateway to power and economic advancement. When he remarks, “*I was looking for the key for years, but the door was always open*” (Adiga 5), he metaphorically suggests that social mobility was never denied intellectually but structurally restricted. In this sense, English becomes symbolic of access to education, authority, and visibility within a rigid class system. Balram frequently incorporates English business-related terms such as *driver*, *mall*, *company*, and *office* into Hindi-influenced syntactic patterns, This linguistic mixing reflecting his psychological transition from rural servant to aspiring entrepreneur. The gradual dominance of English vocabulary mirrors his internal transformation and growing confidence. With a Halliday’s perspective, this shift demonstrates the ideational function of language, as linguistic choices represent changes in social realities and personal ambitions. Code-switching signals align with the urban elite. As Balram becomes more economically empowered, his speech increasingly mirrors that of the business class. This transformation supports Kachru’s view that Indian English is not imitation but appropriation and a functional linguistic resource used to construct new identities in postcolonial India.

### **Language, Power, and Authority**

Language operates as a clear marker of power and dominance. English functions as a language of authority, governance, and legitimacy. Balram observes, “*The English have taught us well*” (Adiga 176), a line loaded with irony that exposes the enduring psychological impact of the colonial hierarchy. English is not merely a language but a system of control that continues to regulate social relations. Characters such as Ashok and the political elite use English in formal and business situations, which show their higher position in society. In contrast, servants mostly speak Hindi, highlighting their lower status and how they are often overlooked. Balram notes that those

who speak English are treated with automatic respect, while those who cannot speak English are dismissed or ignored. This reflects Halliday's interpersonal function, in which language encodes power relations and social distance.

Moreover, linguistic authority is also institutionalized. English has become the language of contracts, bribes, and bureaucracy, while Hindi is confined to emotional expression and domestic life. This unequal distribution reinforces structural inequality and highlights how language operates as an instrument of social control, rather than as a mere means of communication.

### **Code-Switching and Identity Formation**

Balram's narrative voice is inherently hybrid, reflecting his fractured identity as a person. Although the novel is written in English, Adiga repeatedly inserts culturally embedded Hindi terms such as *zamindar*, *halwai*, *lakh*, and *crore*. These terms resist full translation, preserving their socio-cultural specificity. When Balram introduces himself as "*Balram Halwai*" (Adiga 9), his caste and occupational identity are immediately foregrounded, revealing how language encodes social position. This hybridity reflects what Halliday identifies as the ideational and textual functions of language. Linguistically, Balram occupies a liminal space neither fully rural nor urban. His shifting language mirrors his fragmented identity and evolving perceptions of self. As his confidence grows, his language becomes more assertive and English-dominant, signalling a psychological transformation alongside material progress.

Through this linguistic variation, Adiga portrays identity as performative and socially negotiated rather than fixed. Thus, it becomes a narrative strategy through which Balram reconstructs his identity within the power structures that he once feared.

### **Stylistic Realism, Social Satire, and the Rooster Coop Metaphor**

The *Rooster Coop* metaphor stands at the centre of Adiga's social critique. Balram explains, "*The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop*" (Adiga 147). The metaphor, articulated in deceptively simple English, captures the psychological imprisonment of the underclass in the novel. Linguistically, it blends accessibility with cultural depth, allowing the metaphor to resonate across social boundaries. Language sustains the Rooster Coop. Servants internalize obedience through Hindi expressions rooted in fear, duty, and submission, whereas English symbolizes the external mechanisms of control, law, money, and modern authority. As Balram gains linguistic confidence, he begins to break free from this mental cage, suggesting that unrestraint is both psychological and linguistic in nature. This aligns with Gumperz's view of code-switching as a strategic, social practice. Balram's shifting linguistic choices reflect the

changing power relations and emotional positioning. His growing command of English mirrors his moral and social transgressions, culminating in his transformation into an independent entrepreneur.

Adiga's use of Hindi–English code-switching thus enhances stylistic realism while functioning as a sharp social satire. The novel exposes a society that equates English fluency with intelligence and moral worth while ignoring systemic exploitation. Through linguistic hybridity, Adiga critiques the moral contradictions of a globalizing India, where language both liberates and enslaves. Through the strategic use of code-switching, *The White Tiger* demonstrates how language operates as a tool of power, identity, and social mobility. By integrating Halliday's functional linguistics, Kachru's World Englishes, and Gumperz's sociolinguistic theory, the novel reveals that linguistic choice is never neutral; it is deeply political, social, and transformative.

The study finds that Hindi–English code-switching in *The White Tiger* is a deliberate stylistic choice that serves multiple functions in the novel. It represents the aspirations of India's emerging business class, reinforces power structures, and contributes to authentic characterization. Linguistic hybridity is a key marker of class transformation and social ambition. This study examined Hindi–English code-switching in *The White Tiger* through a stylistic and sociolinguistic lens, with particular attention to direct textual evidence. Adiga's strategic use of linguistic hybridity reflects the aspirations, anxieties, and contradictions of the emerging Indian business class. Drawing on Halliday's functional linguistics and Kachru's theory of Indian English, this study shows that code-switching serves ideational, interpersonal, and symbolic functions in the narrative. The *Rooster Coop* metaphor, reinforced through hybrid language, illustrates how linguistic and social control operates together. By integrating close textual analysis with theoretical depth, this study confirms that Hindi–English code-switching in *The White Tiger* is not decorative but central to its stylistic power. This research thus contributes meaningfully to stylistics, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial literary studies.

The present study examined Hindi–English code-switching in *The White Tiger* through a stylistic lens, highlighting its role in representing India's business-driven middle class. Adiga's hybrid language reflects the socio-economic realities of contemporary India, where language functions as a symbol of power and progress. This study, drawing on stylistic and sociolinguistic perspectives, demonstrates that code-switching is not merely a linguistic feature but a significant literary device. This research contributes to stylistics, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial literary studies by offering insights into how language choices shape social representation in modern Indian fiction.

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