

February 1, 2018

RE: Article 42222 Submission

Dear Editors,

Thank you for the opportunity to revise my article, “Call Center Agents and Expatriate Writers: Twin Subjects of New Indian Capital,” for *ARIEL*’s special issue on postcolonial capitalism.

As you will find, the attached revision is fairly substantial. I reorganized much of the essay, eliminated and consolidated sections, and relegated some discussion to endnotes. I also removed all subheadings, which I found in many cases marked abrupt topical transitions. One aim of this revision has been to provide a seamless and continuous exposition of my thesis and organizing questions, and I believe that is reflected in the restructuring. An added bonus: the body of the essay is now slightly shorter than it was originally (7849 words; it was 8611 in the previous draft).

I found the reader’s and editors’ suggestions extremely helpful, and include below notes on how I have sought to address specific queries.

- Both the reader and editors recommended that I include more examples and readings of the transactional English to which I refer. The editors asked specifically for juxtaposition of Rushdie’s language and Bhagat’s, as well as more discussion of what constitutes “telephonic English” and what constitutes “literary English.” In this revision (see especially pages 14-17), I have added a reading of the call center English in Bharati Mukherjee’s *Miss New India*, expanded the treatment of Chetan Bhagat’s *One Night @ the Call Center*, and made more specific references to the work of Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, and G.V. Desani.
- To the editors’ note that “on page 5, the author poses a series of incisive questions concerning capitalism and the colonial periphery... [but] the paper’s central focus on language gets elided”: I have significantly revised the section in question, which now appears on pages 8 (see 7-9 for full discussion). First, I specify the ways in which the call center “provides a new vantage from which to enter a longstanding debate within postcolonial studies about the putative differences of Indian capitalism and globality from their Western counterparts” (8). Then, I have sought to be more specific about how my interest in the language of capital, English, relates to the question of capital’s treatment of difference in the colonial periphery: “As a scholar of literature and literary discourse, I offer an account of postcolonial capitalism’s returns that focuses on the language of capitalism, English: how it is read, written, and heard; and how India’s global legibility continues to be staked on its subjects’ differential performances of the Anglophonic. I am interested in the putative difference between Indian postcoloniality and Indian globality... How are global capitalist institutions and their subjects recognized as global in





the first place?” (8-9).

- To the editors’ point that the section on the “virtual migrant” can be trimmed: I agree. I trimmed this section significantly, split it up, and then re-integrated what remained into the body of the essay. Some of what was previously included in this section now appears in endnotes 3 and 8.
- To the editors’ questions about the constellation of terms “return,” “resemblance,” and “newness” which originally appeared on page 6, and whether or not “the (putative) newness of call center English is consonant with the ‘new’ in New India,” and finally if the point (or a point) of this essay is to debunk either or both claims to the new: I have attempted to both deemphasize and clarify my usage of these terms, which seemed to take up too much oxygen in the previous draft. I have, for instance, more specifically posed the question of the relation of the call center’s newness to New India’s newness: “Was the call center’s promise also a sham, or was it a dynamic space of potential for aspiring global subjects? Did it represent the perfect marriage of tradition and opportunity? In the first two decades of the 21st century, numerous expatriate writers returned to India from diaspora in order to pursue questions such as these...At stake was the question of the ‘newness’ of New India itself: did it mark a decisive transition from the postcolonial to the global?” (6).
- To the reader’s comment that ethnicization and globalization are seemingly contradictory impulses: In the previous version of this essay, I gestured in a few places to the relation between ethnic difference and global difference. Here, I have tried to streamline the discussion of mimicry and coercive mimeticism, starting on page 19, in order to make a clearer argument that “call center mimicry can be read as a process whereby the agent must strive, not to approximate whiteness or Americanness as the superior value, but rather a form of global Indianness, analogizable to ethnicity in Chow’s terms...the ideal customer service agent is actually an *Indian* subject, a brown subject, and a speaker of Indian English” (19-20). I further specify that part of being and voicing global India means (telephonically) interacting with other “global” Indians who are ethnic subjects. So, again, it is not necessarily the case that the call center agent is in the business of approximating whiteness or Americanness, but rather s/he has to inhabit an ethnicized global Indian identity that “take[s] into consideration...the presence of Indian ethnic subjects in diaspora, like Bharati Mukherjee, who are as likely to answer the call as any white American or otherwise dominant subject” (20).
- To the reader’s comment that the idea of neutral English undercuts the designation Indian English (the reader asks: “does that adjectival designation not in fact indicate location as opposed to the absence of location?”), my answer is yes, exactly! This is essentially the argument that A. Aneesh anticipates in *Neutral Accent*, and which I discuss on pages 20-23 of the essay. I have tried to be more explicit here about the fact that I am interested in how Indian English that is accented, idiosyncratic, affected, and so on can nevertheless assume currency as “neutral” because of the nature and marketability of its





difference from a global (in this case, American, British or Transatlantic) norm: “To speak call center English is to speak a dominant, global language, the language of capital, in a way that is at once non-threatening in its patent irregularities and highly efficient as a conduit for international exchange. To speak call center English is to speak Indian English *neutrally*, for the purpose of monetizable communication, but it is foremost a way of speaking *Indian English*” (23).

- To the readers’ concerns about the comparison between “the indeterminate neutrality of call center (Indian) English” and “the neutrality of English in the postcolonial/Nehruvian context” as a “neutrality of determinate exception”: I removed this entire section. The reader’s questions alerted me to the fact that this part of the discussion was conflating the idea of a neutral *performance* of a language with the idea of a neutral language itself.
- The editors raised the question of whether this essay is an “effort to situate the call center into existing postcolonial criticism” or “to explicate a particular genealogy of India’s relation to global representativeness.” I agree with their estimation that the latter should be the focus of the essay. In service of this goal, I have tightened the comparison of my titular figures by consolidating and streamlining the juxtaposition (see pages 9-14) and removed many tangents along the way (including, for example, significantly shortening the discussion of the two images I present on pages 9-10). I have also been more specific about the fact that the expatriate writer was always already a global figure, so the twin subjects in question do not actually represent the postcolonial-global divide they suggest on first blush. This also goes to the editor’s comment that it is “intriguing that the upper-class figure of the expatriate writer does not correspond with the New India context”—correspond, no, but anticipate, yes, as I have tried to show in this revision.

Please let me know if any of the above requires more explanation. I would be very happy to address further queries, and to undertake other revisions as necessary. Thanks again for your support of this work, and thanks in advance for your feedback on this revision.

Sincerely,

Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan

