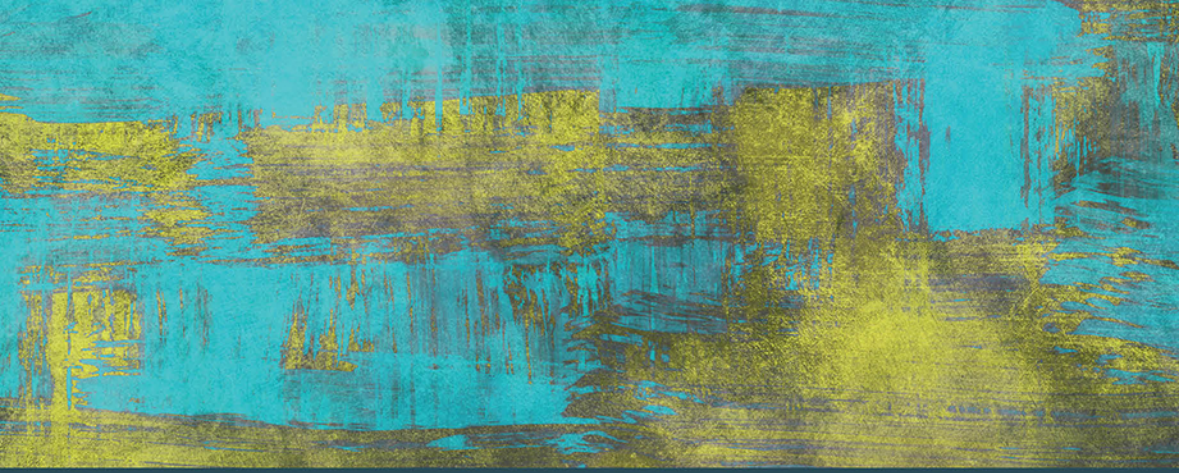
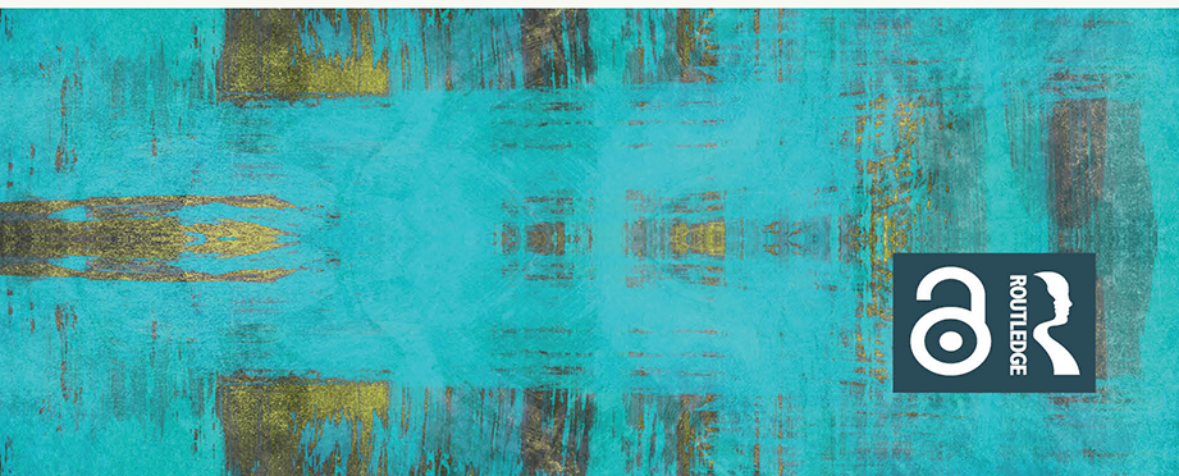


Routledge Research in Language Education

LANGUAGE EDUCATION, POLITICS AND TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH ASIA

SHAPING INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES, IDENTITIES, AND FUTURES

Edited by
Uma Pradhan and Mohini Gupta



"*Language Education, Politics and Technology in South Asia: Shaping Inclusive Societies, Identities, and Futures* is a significant contribution to understanding the intricate and often contentious relationships between language, education, politics and technology in the rapidly evolving context of South Asia. Through its three comprehensive sections with diverse and richly researched chapters, the book deftly analyses the interplay between language and power, the everyday practices and ideologies that challenge established norms, and the transformative impact of the digital age on language use and preservation. This is an essential resource for those committed to fostering inclusive and equitable societies through informed language and education policies."

***Tariq Rahman**, PhD, DLitt (Sheffield), Humboldt Research Award, Salzburg Global Seminar Fellow, Distinguished National Professor and Professor Emeritus, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad (Member of the Common Room, Wolfson College, Oxford)*

"Though language diversity is touted as a new postmodern experience by Western scholars, South Asia boasts a multilingualism that is centuries old. Recent developments such as mobility, globalization, and technology have complicated the local language ecology, and persuaded even educationists in South Asia to treat English medium instruction as the best path for progress. Authors in this book adopt a critical view of the new and the old, and provide constructive directions forward by drawing from their rich indigenous traditions to negotiate the new."

***Professor Suresh Canagarajah**, Evan Pugh University Professor, Penn State College of the Liberal Arts, USA*

"Language Education, Politics and Technology in South Asia: Shaping Inclusive Societies, Identities, and Futures offers a compelling exploration of the complexities of language, education, and power in a postcolonial world. With a focus on the region's linguistic diversity, this book provides critical insights into the challenges and opportunities of language education, addressing the impact of technology and social hierarchies. A must-read for anyone interested in language policy, decolonial studies, and education in South Asia."

***Professor Jieun Kiaer**, University of Oxford, UK*

Language Education, Politics and Technology in South Asia

Bringing together research from the fields of linguistics, education and technology within the dynamic context of South Asia, this timely book investigates the ways in which these fields interact with each other against the backdrop of technological innovation, linguistic diversity and socio-political transformation.

Developing and expanding on findings and insights originating from a conference organised by the Education South Asia Initiative at the University of Oxford, this interdisciplinary book features academic reflections on language politics and diversity as well as empirical insights on linguistic, educational and technological transformations in the region. Featuring analytical and methodological approaches to the study of language and education, chapters range in context from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and address a range of issues such as the marginalisation of languages in education and policy, the interactions between language and social hierarchies in the South Asian context, and technology's impact on language education, acquisition, usage and preservation.

Ultimately initiating dialogue on the need for positive changes in language, education research and policy, this book will appeal to scholars, researchers and postgraduate students in the fields of language education, international and comparative education, and education and technology. Policymakers in international development and sociolinguistics may also find the volume of use.

Uma Pradhan is Associate Professor at the Institute of Education, University College London, UK.

Mohini Gupta has completed a DPhil from the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford, UK. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Routledge Research in Language Education

The *Routledge Research in Language Education* series provides a platform for established and emerging scholars to present their latest research and discuss key issues in Language Education. This series welcomes books on all areas of language teaching and learning, including but not limited to language education policy and politics, multilingualism, literacy, L1, L2 or foreign language acquisition, curriculum, classroom practice, pedagogy, teaching materials, and language teacher education and development. Books in the series are not limited to the discussion of the teaching and learning of English only.

Books in the series include:

Language and Sustainable Development in Bangladesh
Policies, Practices and Perceptions
Edited by M. Obaidul Hamid, Shaila Sultana, and M. Moninoor Roshid

Questioning the Native Speaker Construct in Teacher Education
Enabling Multilingual Identities and Decolonial Language Pedagogies
Julie Waddington

English Language Mediated Settings and Educational Inequalities
Language Education Policy Agendas in the South Pacific
Prashneel Ravisan Goundar

Teacher and Learner Agency for Collaborative Learning
Academic Writing in a Blended Environment
Yue-en Anita Pu and Roger Barnard

Language Education, Politics and Technology in South Asia
Shaping Inclusive Societies, Identities, and Futures
Edited by Uma Pradhan and Mohini Gupta

For more information about the series, please visit www.routledge.com/Routledge-Research-in-Language-Education/book-series/RRLE

Language Education, Politics and Technology in South Asia

Shaping Inclusive Societies, Identities, and Futures

Edited by Uma Pradhan and Mohini Gupta

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2025
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-032-79272-9 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-79275-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-49134-7 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347

Typeset in Galliard
by SPi Technologies India Pvt Ltd (Straive)

Contents

Editors and Contributors

Abhishek Ranjan Datta is a DPhil (PhD) student at the Oxford Department of International Development (ODID). His research focuses on mapping urban transformations in India and the broader South Asian region, particularly their impact on the region's youth. His interests span education, language, urban migration, globalisation, digital media and emerging youth cultures and publics. His doctoral thesis is an ethnography of India's civil service aspirants and his past projects include research on South Asian queer cultures and English language use and unequal multilingualism in urban India.

Mohini Gupta has completed a DPhil Candidate at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford. Her research work is on language, politics and education in India. She has co-edited the books *Rethinking Education in the Context of Post-Pandemic South Asia: Challenges and Possibilities* (Routledge, 2023) and *The Hindu Bard: The Poetry of Dorothy Bonarjee* (Honno Press, 2023). She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark.

Azka Syed is a comparatist of literatures and disciplines, focusing on language, gender, postcolonial identity, and their intersections with education in the Global South. Currently, she works as a Curriculum Development Specialist at The Citizens Foundation (TCF), Pakistan's leading educational NGO, where she researches and develops inclusive pedagogy and curricula to address the literacy needs of young students across the country. Outside of work, Azka enjoys hiking, travelling, conducting recreational filmmaking classes for high school students, dissecting world cinema, and refining her proposals for doctoral studies. Her broader research interests include the real and reel representations of the 1947 Partition and its gendered, diasporic, linguistic and educational impacts.

Kusha Anand is Lecturer in Education and Citizenship at the UCL Institute of Education. As an international policy education sociologist, she specialises in researching education reforms in India. She has recently published three books: Teaching India–Pakistan Relations, Delhi's Education

Revolution, and Bridging Neoliberalism and Hindu Nationalism. In the UK, her research work spans various interdisciplinary projects that delve into the complex relationships between identity, education, and the social and healthcare experiences of ethnic minoritised groups. She frequently disseminates her findings to local communities, local authorities, frontline practitioners, policymakers across the UK, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on Digital Education. Her primary research interests lie in the realms of ecological teacher agency and voice.

Jenifer Deivanayagam is a PhD scholar in English Language Teaching (ELT) at Christ University, Bengaluru, India. She studies the use of the first language (L1) in English language vocabulary assessment in government schools of Tamil Nadu for her PhD. She is interested in multilingual education, and the sociology of English education.

Bhavani Sanjeeviraja is an Associate Professor at CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru, India. She works in the area of ELT. She takes a deep interest in designing materials and classroom activities. She has co-authored English textbooks for students at Christ University.

Manisha Bhadran is a PhD student at the Department of English, University of Hyderabad, studying human rights questions in contemporary West Asian war fiction. Previously, she worked as an Assistant Professor of English at Rajagiri School of Engineering and Technology, Kochi. She completed her postgraduate studies at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, and also earned an MPhil for her research on gendered bodies and the Indian Penal Code. Her research interests include women's studies, human rights and Indian criminal law.

Saurav Goswami is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics at Georgetown University, Washington, DC. His areas of research are critical multilingualism studies and critical language policy. He explores institutional and multilingual discourse and identity work, especially through discourse analytical approaches. He is interested in multi-dialectalism and identity in northeastern India, early career students and multilingual queer communities.

Charza Shahabuddin is a PhD Scholar in Political Science associated with the Center for South Asian and Himalayan Studies - Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales. Her fieldwork study is located in Bangladesh, where she explores the competition, the negotiation and the violence between political and identity entrepreneurs in order to establish their own Islamic normativity. She also teaches Religion, Politics, and Violence at Sciences Po and History of Bengal and Bengali at INALCO.

Mark A. Condra is a linguist and anthropologist working among ethnic Himalayan communities in Nepal. His primary focus is the documentation and preservation of Naawa, a Tibetic language whose natal villages are located in Sankhuwasabha, Nepal. In 2024, with the collaboration of local

teachers and the community, Mark edited and helped to publish the Naawa-English-Nepali dictionary. Mark holds a master's degree in Intercultural Communication from Biola University and academic affiliation with the Linguistic Department at Tribhuvan University. His current research examines Naawa phonology, dialectology and standardisation and mother tongue language education.

Sameer Abraham Thomas is a Writing Instructor at the Undergraduate Writing Programme, Ashoka University. His publications include an essay in *Writing in Academia*, edited by Anannya Dasgupta and Madhura Lohokare; chapters in *Looking Back: The 1947 Partition of India, 70 Years On*, edited by Rakshanda Jalil, Tarun Saint, Debjani Sengupta; and *Rethinking Education in the Context of Post-Pandemic South Asia: Challenges and Possibilities*, edited by Uma Pradhan, Karen Valentin, Mohini Gupta; and a book review in *The JMC Review*. He has an MPhil in English Literature from the University of Delhi and is interested in working on video games for his PhD.

Uma Pradhan is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Education, University College London, UK. Her research focuses on the intersection of language, education and development in South Asia. She is the author of *Simultaneous Identities: Language, Education, and the Nepali Nation* (Cambridge University Press) and the co-editor of *Rethinking Education in the Context of Post-Pandemic South Asia: Challenges and Possibilities* (Routledge).

Andrianna Bashar is a Ukrainian graduate from Somerville College, University of Oxford, and a Sanctuary Scholar. With a background in Sociology, she graduated from Oxford with an MSc in Digital and Social Change in Education, completing a dissertation titled "The Role of EdTech in Decolonising Global Higher Education." Her passion for South Asian education was sparked during her years of teaching and conducting research in Bangladesh, where she explored ways to improve educational access and inclusivity. Andrianna has also collaborated with renowned organisations such as Save the Children and UNICEF, further enriching her expertise in the field. Through her research on leveraging technology to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in education, Andrianna aims to bridge educational gaps and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all. Currently, she is researching the digital response in education in Bangladesh and working part-time for the *Cambridge Educational Research E-Journal (CERJ)* as an Editor and Peer Reviewer.

Sandapa Dissanayake is a Lecturer in the Department of English Language Teaching at the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka. She holds a Bachelor's degree from the University of Kelaniya and a Master's degree from the Open University of Sri Lanka in Teaching English as a Second Language. Her research interests are educational technology and language policy and planning.

Mihiri Jansz is a Senior Lecturer at the Postgraduate Institute of English, The Open University of Sri Lanka. Her research interests are identity studies, technology in English language teaching and global Englishes. Her most recent work has appeared in Asian Englishes.

Brooke Schreiber is an Associate Professor in the English Department of Baruch College. Her research focuses on second language writing pedagogy, translingualism and global Englishes in teacher education. Her work has appeared in journals such as *TESOL Quarterly*, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *ELT Journal*, *Language Learning and Technology*, *Composition Studies, and Composition Forum*, and in several edited collections. She is co-editor of *Linguistic Justice on Campus: Pedagogy and Advocacy for Multilingual Writers (2021)*.

Introduction

Language and Education Futures in South Asia

Uma Pradhan and Mohini Gupta

Introduction

Language education in South Asia presents a complex conundrum of historical legacies, contemporary challenges and future possibilities. With thousands of languages spoken across the South Asian region, its linguistic diversity is astounding. On one hand, this linguistic diversity is profoundly affected by long and complicated colonial and postcolonial histories, which continue to shape education policies, perpetuate social hierarchies and reinforce limiting worldviews. On the other hand, these postcolonial struggles are occurring in a rapidly changing socio-political and technological context and hold the transformative potential to shape the region's educational landscape. In this context, language education in South Asia is imbued with profound social, political and economic implications. Whether it is the question of institutionalising a "national language," addressing the status of dialects and unrecognised "mother tongues," teaching marginalised indigenous, tribal and minority (ITM) languages, or tackling social hierarchies embedded in language in the rapidly changing technological context, the issue of language continues to challenge scholars, academics, educators and policymakers, especially in the South Asian region. This volume showcases, and celebrates, the plurality of languages across the region and also goes on to address the diverse and complex issues that arise within the study of language, education and technology in regions burdened with colonial histories.

This book emerged from a conference hosted by the Education South Asia initiative, titled "Language Futures in South Asia: Sustainability, Inclusivity and Technology in Education," held at the University of Oxford in June 2023. The conference discussions converged on a shared understanding that any attempt to address issues of equity and social justice must seriously consider the historical context and recognise how the everyday politics of language education are deeply embedded within it. The contributions in this volume, therefore, align with calls to nuance the issues of language, education and social hierarchy, with a conscious effort to include and engage with the region's discourses and practices. Within this framework, we extend an invitation to the readers to appreciate the various ways in which diverse modes of thought are

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-1

interwoven into language education. The rationale behind this volume is rooted in the rapid changes of our times. As the world undergoes shifts driven by socio-political transformation as well as technological innovation, the need to engage in meaningful discourse around the intersection of language, education and technology becomes increasingly important.

This book, therefore, examines how language education serves as a locus of historical and contemporary power struggles as well as a site to envision new futures. Language, as argued by the scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, is a potent tool for decolonising the mind and challenging inherent hierarchies (1987). The idea of decoloniality seeks to liberate knowledge production from the confines of limited rationality. One of the central aspects of this process, particularly in contexts such as South Asia, is acknowledging the power and privilege of different languages at global, national and local levels. This involves identifying tensions and contradictions within hierarchised spaces and cautioning against the potentially deceptive nature of actions that may appear to address equity concerns without being genuinely transformative, while at other times seemingly challenging power and privilege in unexpected ways. This book advocates for the need for deliberate examination of both the marginalisation and aspirations of different language communities as they navigate their positions within the dynamic power relations in South Asia.

We have approached language in two ways. First, the different languages spoken in the South Asian region are a direct object of analysis. In various chapters throughout the book, the readers will get a glimpse into different languages spoken in the region—Hindi, English, Malayalam, Naawa, Bangla, Sinhala, Tamil, Nepal Bhasa etc. Second, we have also analysed language in terms of different terminologies, vocabularies and labels. As scholars of linguistic anthropology have reminded us, the study of language is the study beyond just the language as a scientific set of codes and signs. Language within this approach is more than a "coherent, self-contained object of analysis"; it is also about "relationship, or semiotic ground, between some material sign token and its putative object based on an existential relation" (Nakassis 2016: 331). The focus here is not only the social and political hierarchies between languages but also the language and vocabulary used by people in the Global South to articulate the narratives of gender, class and caste inequalities, marginalisation and oppression in the region.

A key contribution of this book is its analysis of language, education and social hierarchy in South Asia. First, it addresses various issues, including the marginalisation of languages in education and policy, and the interactions between language and social hierarchies in the region. Second, it explores the everyday practices through which people reshape their relationships with language and education. Third, it also explores how the digital age has transformed language acquisition, usage and preservation, examining the significant implications of these changes for the region's future. By highlighting these interactions, the book aims to spark a conversation about the role of language in South Asia, considering how language, education and technology intersect to influence the trajectory of nations and their communities in this region.

Language, Education and Decoloniality in South Asia

Our hope in this book is to celebrate linguistic diversity in South Asia while critically engaging with colonial legacies and postcolonial predicaments that continue to shape the region and acknowledging efforts to (re)negotiate power and privilege within this context. The central argument advanced by this book is that language education functions as a dynamic arena in which power relations are both reinforced or contested. In this context, various visions of the future are negotiated through everyday practices, revealing the complex interplay between language, power and societal structures in South Asia. As Shepherd (2002, 81) notes, "The South is thus 'a position and a politics.'" Highlighting the linguistic diversity of the Global South is inherently political, challenging the colonial perspective that equates national development with linguistic uniformity (Reagan 2002). It was once believed that socio-economic equality in developing countries was tied to the establishment or imposition of a national language, with the assumption that linguistic homogeneity would lead to greater unity and efficiency (Ricento, in Mukherjee 1997, 176). Multilingualism in these regions was often viewed as a problem to be managed through policy, classification and documentation. This volume not only showcases the plurality of languages across the region but also addresses the complex issues that arise in the study of language, education and technology in the region.

Language has been central to the process of imposing social hierarchy and, by extension, plays a crucial role in equity concerns. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us, "the domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised" (wa Thiong'o 1987, 16). One of the main consequences of colonisation is the creation of a hierarchy where dominant languages, often tied to colonial legacies, gain prominence in education, media and policy, while indigenous languages are marginalised. This linguistic hierarchy reinforces social inequalities and perpetuates a Eurocentric worldview. This brings us to the concept of "coloniality," which Peruvian scholar Aníbal Quijano describes as "the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed" (Quijano 2007, 170). He argues that the "coloniality of power" (171) continues to operate globally along the social construct of "race," which maintains the hierarchical relationship established by colonialism. This world order, shaped by the colonial project, sustains a view of the "West" or Europe as superior to the colonised regions (174).

What then is the process of decoloniality? According to Quijano, it is "to liberate the production of knowledge, reflection, and communication from the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity" (2007, 177). If decoloniality is "about recovering and conserving what makes us human" then language has an absolutely key role to play—a much larger part than we are accustomed to accord it (Papadopoulos, 2018). Wa Thiong'o talks about language as the most powerful tool to decolonise the mind, and education plays an important

role in this process. It is education through which people form an image of their own self and culture, and existing education systems seem to propagate an ideology of devaluing indigenous cultures and languages. He says, "to control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (1987, 16) and changing this can be the most effective way to challenge the "inherent superiority" of Western or European cultures, especially through the education system.

While the volume is inherently an act of decoloniality by centring otherwise marginalised perspectives from the South, there are also various contradictions it explores within this process by investigating whom this process benefits in the contemporary period. Even though political colonisation may not be a reality anymore, there are various forms of colonisation still underway in postcolonial countries. Can colonial legacies be viewed in the same way today as they were at the time of independence? How can we understand the ambiguities in decoloniality, while acknowledging that the tensions between the language of coloniser and colonised are still relevant, even if the narrative has shifted? We approach these questions by placing a greater emphasis on the speakers of the language, not on the language itself. We believe that addressing language hierarchy is less about preserving linguistic purity and more about understanding the social and political dynamics influencing the way people use, engage with and transform their relationship with languages.

The greatest challenge, then, is to understand the process of rearranging existing power structures in the region. Tariq Rahman notes how "class supremacy is maintained by denying people an education system which gives them as much control of the language of the domain of power as the elite" (Rahman 2002, 43). These concerns resonate with Fanon's warning against the dangers of a postcolonial society falling into the trap of neo-colonialism, where the newly established elites continue the oppressive systems of their former colonisers (Fanon 2021). In fact, he urges the need for a complete transformation of society, including reimagining social, economic and cultural structures, in order to truly achieve liberation. Those in power may feel threatened by the disruption of the current system and break down existing power structures. At the same time, it is also important to look at how colonial linguistic legacies have played a role in enabling marginalised groups to transcend rigid social boundaries in the region, by virtue of belonging outside of the cultural universe of the region. English-language education, for instance, has been hailed in India by oppressed caste communities for providing an escape from the shackles and prejudices deeply rooted in indigenous languages and knowledge systems. It is therefore imperative to address issues of inequality, discrimination and marginalisation while studying language ideologies and critical pedagogies, it is crucial to ask who benefits from its use in postcolonial contexts.

These concerns have sparked new interest in the issue of language, education and decoloniality in the Global South (Sah and Fang 2024; Phyak 2021). This edited collection seeks to advance the growing scholarship on language

education practices by exploring both the differences and similarities in the experiences of social hierarchy across diverse language practices in South Asia (LaDousa and Davis 2022; Agnihotri 2021). Given the region's linguistic diversity, language education has emerged as a significant area of research, with substantial contributions from Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Kabir 2014), Pakistan (Rahman 2002, Rahman 2010), India (LaDousa 2014, Groff 2017), Nepal (Sah 2022, Pradhan 2020) and Sri Lanka (Davis 2020). As the social and political landscape evolves, recent studies are increasingly focusing on the shifting socio-political roles of languages. This volume aims to enrich this body of work by exploring the intricate and changing discourses and practices surrounding language, illustrating how language education both sustains power structures and offers avenues for resistance to top-down control.

We have made a deliberate effort to include a variety of languages and contexts within the South Asian region. The collection includes 13 chapters, providing interdisciplinary and regional perspectives from scholars across South Asia, including India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Through case studies and comparative analyses, readers are invited to explore the challenges and opportunities presented by South Asia's linguistic diversity. The chapters are organised around the following three distinct themes related to the examination of power, politics and resistance in language education policy; the interaction of language and education with social hierarchies such as gender, caste and social class; and the ever-evolving dynamics of language education in a digital age.

Language, Power and Resistance

For decades, linguistic power has influenced the creation and consumption of knowledge systems, especially in postcolonial contexts. On the one hand, while overt domination impacts speakers through policies like official language education, symbolic domination subtly permeates linguistic interactions, often manifesting as language prestige or linguistic nationalism. On the other hand, while there may be top-down impositions shaping the educational space, people may not always agree with or follow these ideas. People's views of progress and aspirations might differ from those of politicians or national politics. This section presents a set of chapters that seeks to understand the processes through which this power unfolds, explores the linguistic power tied to language hierarchies and understand the complex processes of negotiating its political and everyday significance.

In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Pierre Bourdieu reminds us that "One must not forget that the relations of communication par excellence—linguistic exchanges—are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualised" (1982, 37). He argues that linguistic domination operates on multiple levels and may sometimes appear to maintain cohesion within linguistic domains. In education, this power is reflected in how language ideologies and practices shape and

maintain existing structures within educational institutions, often resulting in the production and reproduction of power relations (Bourdieu 1991). National education policies frequently reinforce social hierarchies by favouring the cultural and economic capital of privileged groups, and thereby perpetuate existing social hierarchies by sustaining unequal access to educational resources and opportunities. Policies concerning the medium of instruction, national language and the privileging of particular forms of language all serve to exert such linguistic power within educational institutions.

Since linguistic power can manifest in language education in various ways, resistance to this domination can also take different forms. As Gal (1988) suggests, when examining how individuals symbolically navigate power dynamics, it becomes clear that language strategies are symbolic responses to their historical position and identity within a given structure. In this context, domination may either be perpetuated or contested through cultural norms (Heller 1995). Discussing the position of English in South Asia, scholar Suresh Canagarajah highlights that "English in postcolonial communities is a splintered, hybrid English, being appropriated, nativised and adapted by local environments" (Canagarajah 1999). English undeniably holds significant social, economic and cultural power in the region, not only due to its colonial heritage but also because of its role as the language of mobility in today's globalised world. Rashmi Sadana questions the authenticity of regional identity in the face of English: "English is at some level part and parcel of Indian literary modernity across languages. In moments, the expression of one's regionality relies on English. One could ask, does this dilute one's regionality?" (Sadana 2012, 105).

This dual stance on English deeply complicates the idea of decolonisation in South Asia. Chapters 1, 2 and 4 in this volume tease out the intricacies of the political narratives around "decolonisation" in India and explore the creation of new hierarchies within Indian languages through language policy, textbooks and education practices. In their chapters, Datta, Gupta and Anand locate these language politics and hierarchies within a specific political moment, dominated by right-wing, majoritarian parties in the region. Datta's chapter, "Becoming Bharat," casts a unique spotlight on the recent political debate around the official renaming of India as "Bharat," and uses this moment as an entry point into looking at Hindi language politics in the nation. He juxtaposes the disproportionate focus on promoting Hindi in India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with the economic and social aspirations of the urban youth in India to highlight the gap between political motivations and persisting material inequalities between the English and Hindi languages. While Hindi is hailed as a symbolic force against a colonial mindset, the voices of the urban youth in this chapter are evidence of how misplaced and tokenistic these policy changes are, almost as much as the changing of the name of the country to "Bharat."

Gupta's chapter on "Erased Curriculum" builds on these debates surrounding Hindi language politics by bringing to attention the recent phenomenon of "syllabus rationalisation" undertaken by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in India since 2021. Textbooks

are located as a rich site of political conflict in South Asia, with history and political science textbooks frequently in the news for erasures under different governments. This chapter makes a case for studying language curricula as valuable resources to understand the dynamic political contexts in the region. Language textbooks are even more important due to their role in "language socialisation" (Ochs and Schieffelin 2011) of students—not just into learning the grammar and vocabulary of the language, but through language learning into larger socio-political ideas of the nation. Hindi-language textbooks have a history of conveying moral and patriotic ideals to students, especially in pre-independence times with Hindi's role as a unifying language, but how does that play out in the classroom in today's political environment?

The third chapter moves on to exploring language politics and education in Pakistan within the framework of language hierarchies and decolonisation practices as well. Syed's chapter on "The Challenges of Literacy Acquisition and Linguistic Proficiency" in Pakistan highlights the complicated question of the lingua franca in the region. The imposition of Urdu-language education on other linguistic minority groups leads to a distancing of the students from acquiring literacy in a language that is alien to them, akin to the "cerebral experience" of learning a coloniser's language, according to Thiong'o (1987). The language hegemony of Urdu in Pakistan and Hindi in India are analysed in similar ways across the chapters, as indigenous languages end up taking the privileged position of the coloniser's language. Syed's chapter traces the impact of the lack of language proficiency through an education initiative in the Punjab region of Pakistan. She also proposes a more mother tongue-based multilingual and inclusive approach towards language teaching in schools as well as in teacher training in order to maximise learning outcomes.

This brings us to Anand's chapter, which focuses on India's NEP 2020 but takes a broader view of the policy's impact on multilingual education in the country. The focus on "mother tongue education" is assessed through interviews with school teachers from multiple states across the country, alluding to the intricate linguistic hierarchies that exist within the political landscape of India. These internal hierarchies are perpetuated and challenged in the chapter, with a focus on the impact of language and education policies on linguistic minorities. Similar to Syed's chapter, this chapter ends with a proposed framework of multilingual education practices that could work in postcolonial contexts where multiple languages compete for resources, privilege, status and even existence. Education policy is a useful site for this investigation and the data from school teachers helps enrich this research even further, especially to understand the dynamics between English and Indian languages as well as between dominant languages like Hindi and other Indian languages in the region.

The final chapter in this section is Devanayagam and Sanjeeviraja's paper on "Unofficial Bilingualism in English-Only Policy Context," drawing from data collected in rural government schools in Tamil Nadu. In continuation with Anand's chapter on multilingual education in diverse states in India, Devanayagam and Sanjeeviraja argue for the use of "unofficial bilingualism" or

"guilty translanguaging" (Anderson 2022) in the language classroom given the advantages of this pedagogy in the context of Tamil Nadu schools. The chapter makes a case for including translanguaging, a pedagogical practice that considers "the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems […] but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages" (García and Wei 2014, 2), as an official policy in the language classroom since it is informally practised in these schools anyway. It critiques the "English-only" policies of schools that make teachers feel "guilty" for using students' mother tongues or L1 in the classrooms even as this must be considered a valuable resource for teachers to employ in their teaching methods. All the chapters in this section critically approach the position of English-language education in postcolonial contexts, especially in comparison with Hindi-, Bengali- or Tamil-language education, and problematise the ideology of rejecting English under the garb of "decolonisation."

Everyday Politics of Language

The chapters presented in this section explore how people are trying to create spaces of inclusion through their everyday interaction with language/s, where language education serves as a site of resistance, negotiating new futures that ensure social justice and equity while individuals resist, challenge or perpetuate language hierarchies. The everyday relationship people have with language is significantly influenced by language ideology, a concept by Michael Silverstein as sets of beliefs articulated by users to rationalise or justify perceived language structure and use (Silverstein 1979). It is imperative to situate contemporary ideologies within a historical backdrop of colonial logics that have marginalised others and their language practices. Language ideologies extend beyond mere statements about language; they encompass hegemonic ideological stances that often become institutionalised, exerting tangible consequences in the material world (Gal and Irvine 2019). Moreover, language ideologies are interconnected with broader identity positions such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality.

Driven by attempts to engage with rapid, unpredictable and multidirectional shifts in social and cultural forms, research in Africa and the South more broadly has shown that the conceptual categories with which to account for rapid social change, the power of the unforeseen and processes of unfolding need to be refined. So, too, does the language with which to describe people's ways of negotiating these conditions of turbulence (Mbembé and Nuttall 2004). This can be applied to the South Asian context as well, and the chapters in this book are an attempt to redefine and nuance these categories and epistemic shifts. Consequently, the emphasis in this book diverges from top-down approaches, advocating for a deliberate approach to the marginalisation experienced by indigenous, tribal and minority languages in both educational and policy contexts. It involves identifying tensions and contradictions within

hierarchised spaces, cautioning against the potentially deceptive nature of actions that may ostensibly appear to address equity concerns. This approach encourages a focus on the peripheries, recognising the importance of marginalised voices and perspectives in shaping a more inclusive and equitable language education.

This section brings together research from India, Nepal and Pakistan to delve deeper into faultlines and hierarchies within these societies. One of the primary motivations of this volume is to foreground research from the Global South to overcome a Eurocentricism in the study of language and education theory. It is with this objective that Bhadran's chapter, "When Gender Disappears in Neutrality," critiques a recent educational language reform in the state of Kerala in south India. A 2023 directive insisted on the use of the gender-neutral term "teacher" instead of gender identifiers such as "sir" or "ma'am," but this "invalidates the gendered identity of educators and is tantamount to gender erasure" and is not feasible when applied to the socio-cultural context of Kerala. The chapter advocates for a more gender-inclusive approach, especially while taking into consideration cultural sensitivity towards the region and calls for the need to create more gender-inclusive vocabulary for South Asian contexts, without adopting Western models to overcome the challenges of gender binaries.

The next chapter in this section takes a sharp geographical turn to study the trans-Himalayan context in the Leh-Ladakh region in north India. Goswami's chapter, "Multilingualism and Globalisation in Remote Trans-Himalayan India," enters the debates around inclusivity through the concept of "remoteness," both geographical, topographical and socio-cultural. It is the sense of remoteness that determines the politics of language and education in the Leh-Ladakh region, and this chapter draws out the complicated relationship of the youth in this territory with the languages it learns, speaks and employs in their careers. Ideas of tradition and modernity are at play in the chapter as the youth navigates the Indian concept of decoloniality in a complex narrative where English becomes an important tool for social mobility in a region that runs its economy on tourism. The chapter points to the unique lens of place or *topos* as an important one with which to view language policy and educational practices as "remoteness" plays a crucial role in determining linguistic and social identities of Ladakhis who are otherwise "excluded" from dominant narratives by the central government.

Shahabuddin's chapter moves our regional focus to Bangladesh and situates the language question within the *madrasa* system of education in the country. The chapter looks at the "inclusion" of madrasa-education students in a society where English-language education system is increasingly valued over Bengali-medium or even other language-medium education systems, especially ones that lie outside the formal schooling system. The chapter also questions the status of Bengali-language education in a country that fought for its independence based on its language and draws out the irony in elite preferences of English-language education over Bengali-language education due to

the former's social and economic currency in today's globalised, modern context. The gap between English-medium and Bengali-medium education students continues to increase with time, and this complicates the situation for students educated in madrasas where the indigenous system of education does not value English-language education and this ends up directly impacting students' aspirations and career prospects in the future.

The final chapter in this section tackles the problem of language standardisation and agency amongst the Naawa people in eastern Nepal. Condra's chapter utilises the lens of sociolinguistics and perceptual dialectology to analyse the process of documenting the Naawa language, or Naget, and including it in future education policy and practice of the region. Language standardisation is a crucial step for Negat speakers to "produce knowledge, contribute to language preservation, and improve education," especially in comparison to Nepali and English, the more dominant languages used in educational institutions. However, at the same time, the chapter also locates a strong sense of emotional connection amongst the Naawa community, which makes them reject textbooks that attempt to standardise their language without paying attention to language variation with other dialects in the area. Even as processes of language standardisation and documentation may be colonial imports in the non-postcolonial context of Nepal, these need to take into consideration the views of the speakers of the particular linguistic community in question in order to create inclusive educational policies for the region.

Language, Technologies and New Possibilities

The third and final set of chapters examines the rapid changes in the technological landscape for language education and the new research possibilities opened up by evolving technology, shifting politics and issues of inclusivity in the region. These chapters highlight the opportunities presented by technological innovation to engage with traditionally Western domains, either by adapting the technology or reshaping these domains to challenge language hierarchies. These dynamics around language, education and technology complicate simplistic views of their interaction, offering new avenues for minoritised languages to establish a presence in emerging technological spaces. While these new spaces offer exciting opportunities, the chapters also caution against viewing technological spaces as apolitical or assuming that technology alone can address educational challenges. This raises questions such as: how does language learning occur within these technological environments? And how can these new spaces be reimagined as areas of inclusivity and diversity? This section aims to answer these questions and explore the interaction between language and technology in educational initiatives, reiterating the need to navigate multiple, often conflicting priorities and tensions at various levels.

The first two chapters in this section by Thomas and Pradhan highlight the need to use technology for the preservation of non-Western languages. Thomas's chapter "My Phone Won't Teach Me Malayalam" brings into focus

the Eurocentric biases of global language learning apps such as DuoLingo that privilege even fictitious, constructed languages of the West such as Klingon, with less than 100 speakers around the world, as compared to the Malayalam language in India, which has over 34 million speakers. It is this under-representation that the chapter lays out, also alluding to internal language hegemonies in India, where Hindi is represented as the only language from a nation that speaks more than 19,500 languages. Technological advancement does not impact language and linguistic groups equally, and this tension felt by the author as a language learner struggling to find resources to learn their own language makes an effective argument for bringing more diversity in language learning apps.

The second chapter by Pradhan focuses on the Newar community within and outside Nepal and brings to the fore their efforts to add Nepal Bhasa on the Google Translate platform. The problem that Thomas' chapter draws attention to is contrasted with an alternative "solution" provided by Pradhan's chapter through a case study of a collaborative project between Google and the World Newa Organisation. The chapter traces the "technological imagination" of minoritised languages through which traditional language hierarchies are challenged and the "memory" of the language is kept alive for the future. While Thomas' chapter addresses the injustice of not including a dominant Indian language in global language learning apps, Pradhan's chapter demonstrates the positive impact of including a minoritised language in Nepal (spoken by a population of 863,380 according to the 2021 National Census of Nepal) in language education apps, with the objective of overcoming the threats of language endangerment and language death and creating a vibrant future for this language.

The next two chapters draw on studies from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and move our attention to the interaction of educational communities with technology in classrooms. Bashar's chapter on "Unveiling the Barriers" analyses the challenges that persist in the adoption of education technologies (EdTech) in English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms across higher educational institutions in Dhaka, Bangladesh. These challenges are studied in the context of the interaction of teachers and educators with EdTech platforms in the classroom. The chapter brings out the affective nature of the relationship between educators and education technology, where lack of motivation and trust is one of the main reasons for poor implementation of these technologies in education spaces. This chapter also brings out the complications with English-language education since the student body belongs to diverse socio-economic backgrounds and requires differentiated support while integrating technology in the language classroom.

The final chapter in the volume by Dissanayake, Jansz and Schreiber is on "Virtual Teacher Communities in Sri Lanka," which situates this research on language, education and technology within the context of the pandemic. Technology emerged as a crucial stakeholder in education systems during the pandemic and while this led to tremendous benefits for educators, it inevitably

brought up various challenges. This chapter highlights the case study of a virtual Teacher Professional Development (TPD) programme that took place at a state university in Sri Lanka. Challenges related to teacher training and the use of platforms tailored to Western social systems have been brought up through this research. The chapter makes important observations about the need to decolonise approaches to using technology in education, where sociocultural context matters. For instance, it was found that teachers reacted more positively to the use of WhatsApp as a platform rather than other remote platforms due to its user-friendliness, immediacy as well as its familiarity to the users. It is some of these insights from across South Asian nations that bring out the need to adopt technological methods and pedagogies with a non-Western audience in mind, whether it is educators or learners, to overcome some of the teaching and learning challenges in virtual education.

Together, the chapters ahead offer interdisciplinary and critical insights into the complexities of language education in the diverse and dynamic region of South Asia. We hope that these contributions expose the intricate power dynamics that shape language and education practices, and add to the conversations on the need to reimagine language education in ways that are equitable, inclusive and responsive to the diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes of South Asia.

References

Agnihotri, Rama Kant. 2021. "Linguistic diversity and marginality in South Asia." In *Handbook of education systems in South Asia*, pp. 1401–1436. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Anderson, Jason. 2022. "The Translanguaging Practices of Expert Indian Teachers of English and Their Learners." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* ahead-of-print: 1–19.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Edited by John B Thompson. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Language & Symbolic Power. Cambridge: Polity.

Canagarajah, A. Suresh. 1999. *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Chowdhury, Raqib, and Ariful Haq Kabir. 2014. "Language wars: English education policy and practice in Bangladesh." *Multilingual Education* 4: 1–16.

Davis, Christina P. 2020. *The struggle for a multilingual future: Youth and education in Sri Lanka*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Fanon, Frantz. 2021. *The wretched of the earth*. Translated by C. Farrington; Reprinted. Penguin Books.

Gal, Susan. and Judith T. Irvine. 2019. *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gal, Susan. 1988. "Linguistic Anthropology: The Social History of Language. Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds [Review of *Linguistic Anthropology: The Social History of Language. Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds*]." *American Anthropologist* 90 (3): 745–746. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1988.90.3.02a00780

García, Ofelia, and Li Wei. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development. 2020. "New Education Policy 2020 (NEP)".

Groff, Cynthia. 2017. "Language and language-in-education planning in multilingual India: A minoritized language perspective." *Language Policy* 16: 135–164.
Heller, Monica.1995. "Language choice, social institutions, and symbolic domination." *Language in Society* 24 (3): 373–405.
LaDousa, Chaise. 2014. *Hindi is our ground, English is our sky: Education, language, and social class in contemporary India*. Berghahn Books.
LaDousa, Chaise, and Christina P. Davis. 2022. South Asian language practices: Mother tongue, medium, and media. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 51 (1): 289–305.
Mbembé, J-A., and Sarah Nuttall. 2004. "Writing the world from an African metropolis." *Public Culture* 16 (3): 347–372.
Mukherjee, Sibasis. 1997. "Language Planning and Development in India." *Journal of Quantitative Linguistics* 4 (1–3): 176–180.
Nakassis, Constantine V. 2016. *Doing Style: Youth and Mass Mediation in South India*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Ochs, Elinor, and Bambi Schieffelin. 2011. "The Theory of Language Socialization." In *The Handbook of Language Socialization*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444342901.ch1.
Papadopoulos, Dimitris. 2018. *Experimental Practice: Technoscience, Alterontologies, and More Than-Social Movements*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Phyak, Prem. 2021. "Epistemicide, deficit language ideology, and (de) coloniality in language education policy." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 267–268: 219–233.
Pradhan, Uma. 2020. *Simultaneous identities: Language, education, and the Nepali nation*. Vol. 12. Cambridge University Press.
Quijano, Aníbal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 168–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353.
Rahman, Tariq. 2002. *Language, ideology and power: Language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Oxford University Press.
Rahman, Tania. 2010. "A multilingual language-in-education policy for indigenous minorities in Bangladesh: Challenges and possibilities." *Current Issues in Language Planning* 11 (4): 341–359.
Reagan, T.G. 2002. "Language Planning and Language Policy: Past, Present and Future." In *Language in South Africa* , edited by Rajend Mesthrie, 419–433. Cambridge Core. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sah, Pramod K. 2022. "English-Medium Instruction as Neoliberal Endowment in Nepal's Higher Education: Policy-Shaping Practices." *English Medium Instruction Practices in Higher Education: International Perspectives* 71–83.
Sah, Pramod K., and Fan Fang. 2024. "Decolonizing English-Medium Instruction in the Global South." *Tesol Quarterly*.
Sadana, Rashmi. 2012. *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: The Political Life of Literature in India*. eScholarship, University of California.
Shepherd, N. 2002. "Heading South, Looking North." *Archaeological Dialogues* 9 (2): 74–82.
Silverstein, Michael. 1979. "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology." In *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, edited by Paul Clyne, William F. Hanks and Carol L. Hofbauer. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. 1987. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Harare, Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Pub. House.

Part I
Language and Politics

1 Youth Perspectives on Hindi, English and India's New Politics of Language

Becoming Bharat

Abhishek Ranjan Datta

Introduction

In the days leading up to New Delhi hosting the G20 summit in 2023, everyone's attention unexpectedly turned to an otherwise unremarkable aspect of the summit: invitations to the state dinner sent out by the President of India. The invitations, it turned out, were not sent by the President of India but by the "President of Bharat." This immediately triggered intense media speculation that the government was planning to change the name of the country. During the summit, the placard in front of Narendra Modi read "Prime Minister of Bharat"— further fuelling the media frenzy. Some were quick to point out that the country's name, according to the constitution, was already both India and Bharat. There were news articles quoting a senior United Nations spokesperson saying that if India were to apply for a name change, it would be approved (Times of India, 2023). Throughout this time, the government neither confirmed nor denied any such plans but the ruling party's spokespersons on television were happy to point out that Bharat was a more "authentic" name than India—the latter now denounced as a colonial imposition. A senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Bengal went a step further to say that those opposed to the name Bharat should leave the country—threatening that any disagreement over the potential name was "anti-national" (Singh 2023). But just as the whole thing seemed to be coming to a head, there was yet another, if less dramatic, plot twist: there was no official announcement of a name change. The G20 summit wrapped up without any announcement, as did a special session of the parliament. While official invitations from the Presidential Palace continue to be sent in the name of "The President of Bharat," there has been no official name change, and India, as of the time of writing this chapter, continues to remain India.

The jury is still out on what prompted the government to do this, but what is noteworthy here is the entanglement of politics, decolonisation and language. This in itself is nothing new; it is precisely this entanglement that has had profound implications on language identity, ideology, nationalism and education since colonial times. But what this episode reveals, and why it is our starting point, is a noticeable shift in the contours of this entanglement. Hindi

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-3

is increasingly being deployed to generate a specific type of discourse and to achieve specific political goals, just as decolonisation is increasingly becoming more about changing names and less about mitigating inequality. This chapter examines the intersection of Hindi in political discourse and education policy, on the one hand, with the educational experiences of the nation's youth on the other hand, to highlight 1) the distinct political discourse on Hindi generated over the last decade, 2) how this compares against the government's most significant education policy—the National Education Policy 2020, and 3) the widening gulf between Hindi in language politics and policy and in the experiences and aspirations of India's job-seeking youth. This chapter combines analyses of political discourse drawn from new-media reportage and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with ethnographic data from the author's fieldwork in New Delhi to demonstrate how a distinct discourse of Hindi has emerged over the last decade that is redefining the relationship between language and education. This discourse is also deployed in the garb of "decolonisation" to shape ideological work that is not only disconnected from the aspirations and educational experiences of the country's youth but also, more alarmingly, not tied to education policy or implementation. This discourse aims to neither mitigate linguistic inequity nor strengthen the quality of Hindi-medium education—creating a situation today where the championing of Hindi in the name of decolonisation has become divorced from questions of educational expansion, improvement and inclusivity. This chapter highlights how this is a significant divergence that not only hijacks much-needed decolonisation in Indian education but also ignores the material conditions that reinforce inequalities in language education. The reason why "becoming Bharat" is an apt allegory for this chapter is that, just as the name "Bharat," already in the constitution, was nonetheless reappropriated and deployed to do very different ideological work, this new discourse of Hindi is geared towards specific political ends that exclude any meaningful focus on education which, in the long run, bodes ill for the future of language and education in the country.

Language Ideology and Decolonisation

The conceptual framework of the chapter builds on Judith Irvine's (2022) recent appraisal of language ideology. Language ideology is a particularly useful framework in the Indian context because it links linguistic practices with political systems and questions of power. The investment in mapping power and dominance in the everyday use and perception of language also enables the concept of language ideology to bridge sociolinguistics with social anthropology, which is precisely what this chapter does. The use of the term "language ideology" in this chapter encompasses both Heath's (1977) definition of it as a set of "unconscious assumptions…[and] self-evident ideas and objectives a group holds concerning roles of language in social experiences" (p. 193), as well as Silverstein's (1979) slightly more overt "linguistic ideology" which

focuses on the explicit rationalisations used by speakers to justify specific practices and beliefs. Several scholars, most notably Susan Gal and Judith Irvine (2019), have highlighted the significant differences between the two approaches as the former finds ideology in the "background" of social life while the latter focuses on foregrounded articulations. While this is an important distinction, the background and the foreground are not hermetically sealed off from one another. In fact, a major thrust of this chapter is to illustrate the coexistence and interaction between the two. By focussing on national politics and educational policy, the first section of the chapter identifies the language ideology of Hindi in Silverstein's sense of the term. On the other hand, the subsequent ethnographic component of this chapter delves into people's beliefs, experiences and reflections on language which, even though these are still people's overt articulations, give us a glimpse into the unconscious beliefs of young people and their understanding of language and inequality.

Two aspects of Irvine's (2022) discussion of language ideology deserve to be highlighted here. The first of these is implicit in the term "ideology" whose genealogy, steeped in Marxist analysis, is problematic as it is reduced to "false consciousness." As Irvine points out, this presupposes the existence of some "true consciousness" and makes ideology an aberration. This is much like the assumption most dominant linguistic groups have regarding accent—that it is other people who have accents, not they themselves. Instead, Irvine focuses on the multiplicity inherent in the term as a generative and productive way of mapping language ideologies in the plural. Ideology, as it is used here in this chapter, implies that it is one among many other competing beliefs regarding language use, role and value. What is particularly important in Irvine's assessment of the term is conceptualising language ideology as a "partial view of the world," which she explains is partial, "because there are other ways of viewing it; but also partial in the sense of (politically) interested, coming from a specifiable subject position with a point of view and *projects for social action*" (p. 226, emphasis mine). The emerging ideology of Hindi that this chapter maps is similarly "partial" in both senses: it is partial because it coexists with other ideologies of Hindi and competes with them for dominance, and partial also because it is rooted in the socio-political projects of the current government and tied to the ideology of Hindutva[1]. This is where the second significant aspect of Irvine's discussion of language ideology emerges—that language ideology is inextricably linked to social action. She looks at language ideology as a project for social action whose participants "create sociable alliances with other participants… in contrast to some unnamed others" (p. 230). This, Irvine contends, is because language ideology is neither static nor isolated, but constantly shifting and responding to other discourses and forces. Language ideology is thus a formulation that mobilises social projects, which is what this chapter finds with the emerging ideology of Hindi as it mobilises (and is mobilised by) the BJP's cultural politics that seeks to recast the nation and national identity. It is this dynamic capacity of language ideology that enables it to shift and change, and this chapter follows Irvine's call to turn our focus from

talking about "ideology" to "ideological work"—to see ideology not as something that *is* but something that *does* things. It is by investigating the ideological work that Hindi is doing under Hindutva that we can begin to understand what considerations inform this shift and why it is a dangerous development for the future of language education.

Given how the promotion of Hindi is also increasingly entangled with what the Indian government terms "decolonisation," it is important to take a moment and reflect on what this term means here and, more significantly, differentiate it from what it ought to mean. As Bihani Sarkar's (2024) recent article on tradition and decolonisation highlights, the BJP has increasingly consolidated for itself the position of being the "authoritative custodian" of Indian heritage. In doing so, Sarkar notes, it has managed to hijack decolonisation so that "to decolonise now means to 'go Hindutva'" (p. 9). It is precisely this kind of decolonisation that is invoked in the promotion of Hindi by the BJP, and not the substantive decolonisation that is much needed as a counterhegemonic project in the global south, especially in the field of education. The latter is an enterprise that is much more complex and at the very least requires attention to the "socially situated terrain" of language education, the heterogenous schooling contexts within which language education happens, and be vigilant of internal and neo-colonial power dynamics between different linguistic and social groups (see Poudel et al. 2022, for a recent assessment of decolonising language and curriculum in Nepal). As we see in this chapter, the uncritical promotion of Hindi over the last decade is, at best, simplistic as it does not take into account a host of factors and issues crucial for any attempt at meaningful decolonisation. The embeddedness of Hindi in the politics of Hindutva further transforms such decolonisation into a fundamentalist response which, in turn, risks becoming just as oppressive and exclusionary by inflicting on other languages the same epistemic violence that characterised colonial policies on language.

It is also important to keep in mind that the linguistic dimension of educational inequality is just one of many other factors that co-produce/reproduce colonial hierarchies in education (R'boul 2023). As Allan Luke (2005) noted almost two decades ago, the inequalities in today's educational systems in the global south cannot be simply explained away by reference to colonialism alone but must also consider other developments in the postcolonial period that have had as much of a role in sustaining these inequalities, or in some cases, creating new ones. These developments and forces can be both internal, like the specific educational policies adopted by nations after independence and the role of native elites in gatekeeping educational and cultural capital, as well as external, like the impact of globalisation and the challenges and opportunities presented by the dominance of English. Even promoting Hindi to replace English, the former coloniser's language, is not quite as straightforward in the context of India. Several scholars (see Sonntag 2000, Vaish 2005, Punnoose and Haneefa 2018) have shown how the English language has had an empowering effect on historically marginalised communities. Viniti Vaish

(2005) shows how making the acquisition of English skills more accessible augments the ability of certain groups to become employable, concluding that, "English is a tool of decolonization in the hands of subaltern communities [as it can] help them access the global economy" (p. 203). Decolonising educational inequalities is therefore not nearly as simple as replacing the coloniser's language with an indigenous one.

However, the most fundamental reason why this particular kind of decolonisation is misleading and dangerous is because it is not tied to questions of educational equity or expansion. This is precisely what this chapter highlights as we see how the political discourse of Hindi has been uncoupled from questions of improving and/or expanding Hindi education. This divergence in how Hindi promotion is imagined and articulated is dangerous as it emphasises pride in language and cultural heritage while de-emphasising the material inequalities between languages and the resources and opportunities tied to them. Thus, this kind of decolonisation, by failing to acknowledge the materiality of linguistically indexed inequalities in education, offers neither new insights into why such inequalities persist, nor any concrete roadmap for mitigating the disparities in educational outcomes they produce. The ethnographic component of this chapter highlights how young people who have faced these linguistic inequalities in education identify material conditions and resource allocation as two key necessities in bridging this divide, but these are neither to be found in the political discourse on Hindi, nor in the education policies drawn up over the last decade. In fact, it is precisely this promotion of Hindi embedded in the cultural politics of Hindutva but dis-embedded from educational policy and implementation that defines this new ideological orientation of Hindi.

Hindi Language Promotion in Politics and Education Policy

In 2023, the government of India paid one million dollars to the United Nations to promote Hindi in the organisation as part of efforts to make Hindi an official language of the UN. Since 2019, the union government has also vastly expanded the promotion of Hindi in all its ministries and offices, including central government offices in the states (Thomas 2017). The Modi government has also doubled down on all communication between the union and state governments being in Hindi, something that has led to numerous occasions where states in the east and south have had to complain about the lack of English translations (Rajalakshmi 2022). The BJP also routinely projects Hindi as India's national language (rāṣṭrabhāṣā, in Hindi) even though it is only an official language—there being no single national language of the country. This is a particularly thorny subject as non-Hindi-speaking regions and states have long opposed Hindi being raised to the status of national language. The language crisis of the 1960s (see Nault 2012, Bharadwaj 2017) was catalysed by fears of Hindi imposition—a crisis that was only resolved with the compromise of English remaining a co-official language of the union besides Hindi.

However, the BJP's assertive promotion of Hindi over the last decade has become its Achilles' heel when it comes to the party's other desire—to expand its electoral successes beyond the so-called Hindi heartland of northern and central India. BJP politicians and representatives who highlight the government's expanded use of Hindi are therefore equally quick to say that Hindi is not competing with other Indian languages, particularly at the state level. The politics of Hindi is therefore selectively deployed at the national level for specific political gains while a different politics of language operates at the sub-national level. At the national level, Hindi is deployed to mobilise support for the broader cultural politics of the BJP that seeks to recast the nation and its identity, while sub-national negotiations give prominence to regional languages to allay fears of Hindi imposition. The politics of Hindi, and its new ideology, are increasingly rooted in this subtle differentiation of the national from the sub-national, and more invested in cultural politics of national identity than in any meaningful expansion or strengthening of Hindi as a language of education and opportunities. This is because what the BJP terms as decolonisation is in fact a project aimed at national politics, national identity and national culture, wherein decolonisation is defined as a return to the imagined pre-colonial (and pre-Islamic) Hindu "golden age" (Sarkar 2024). The primary arena where this plays out is the cultural—targeting national identity, heritage, history, culture and public discourse to make them explicitly majoritarian and Hindu. Hindi emerges as significant only through its perceived association with Hindu-ness as re-imagined under Hindutva. This "decolonisation," most crucially, is rhetorical rather than pedagogic, with its focus on national culture, politics and electoral gains rather than on education, equitable multilingualism and material inequalities.

It is important to note that the opposition is not so much to the English language as it is to the politics of Nehruvian secularism associated with English—a perceived ideology of English that is co-constructed as the binary opposite of Hindi's Hindu-ness. This relationship between Hindi and Hindu is highlighted, among other things, by the increasing Sanskritisation of the language—a term here that not only indicates the active addition of Sanskrit words (accompanied by the removal of loan words from Persian and Arabic) in the standardised Hindi lexicon but also, closer to M.N. Srinivas' seminal use of the term, the promotion of upper caste and literary variants of Hindi to the detriment of more colloquial dialects of the language (Sivakumar 2016, Banerjee 2023, see also Punnoose and Haneefa 2018). Thus, championing Hindi for the ruling government is only part of its larger project of Hindutva that conflates Hindu nationalism with decolonisation. Moreover, this is also what explains why the greatest thrust in expanding Hindi usage has been in the work of the union government—because the focus is on changing the language, discourse and identity of the state. This promotion is driven, on the one hand, by electoral considerations where the so-called Hindi heartland offers the most parliamentary and state assembly seats—something that is only set to increase if the government goes ahead with the delimitation (redrawing)

of electoral constituencies in 2026 (Kochukudy 2023). On the other hand, the case for Hindi being increasingly made on the basis of cultural identity, national pride and the perception of English as "colonial" and anti-Hindu also saves it from coming into conflict with regional languages and identities at the sub-national level.

One of the effects of this careful and calculated promotion of Hindi is that it does not feature as prominently in the realm of education since the toughest opposition to Hindi from non-Hindi-speaking areas emerges when it becomes a question of education and language mediums in schools and colleges. Education is a legislative subject shared between the union and state governments, with each state holding considerable autonomy on matters of regulating the language mediums and languages taught in schools. As the analysis of the New Educational Policy 2020 will reveal, the ideological work of Hindi over the last decade, including its opposition to English, has been increasingly de-coupled from education and educational policy. Unlike earlier when calls for the promotion of Hindi were intrinsically tied to education and at least sought to mitigate linguistic inequity and the dominance of English (see Nault 2012, Bharadwaj 2017), this no longer appears to be the case as the Hindi of contemporary political discourse appears to have diverged significantly from the Hindi of education policy and implementation.

When it was unveiled in 2019–2020, the National Educational Policy (NEP) was hailed as a game-changer with its key recommendation that students learn in their mother tongue throughout primary school. Language and language education, thus, appear to have been key focus areas of this policy. The recommendation for mother-tongue education is rationalised as leading to better learning outcomes and, more crucially, to alleviate inequality in education. However, neither is this recommendation supported by any sustained plan or financial outlay to implement such a substantial change across the country, nor is the focus on language, beyond this key recommendation, sustained in the rest of the policy. Most significantly, the aggressive promotion of Hindi that we see in the political arena is almost entirely missing from what is arguably the most important educational policy of the last decade. The text of the NEP, running to just over 60 pages, mentions Sanskrit 23 times, English 6 times, but Hindi only once. While the NEP devotes an entire section to promoting Indian languages, arts and culture, and we will return to this shortly, the subject of linguistic inequality or that of promoting/strengthening Hindi education is conspicuous only in its absence.

The NEP is divided into four parts, with one part devoted to school education and another to higher education. Both of these include sections on equitable and inclusive education. The inclusivity section on primary schools, while listing gender, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, socio-economic conditions and disabilities, does not recognise language as constituting a significant axis of inequality. The section on inclusivity in higher education merely mentions "language barriers" accompanied by a cursory recommendation for the development of high-quality higher educational institutions that impart

education in Indian languages. In fact, the document repeats several pre-existing policies without addressing their feasibility or taking into account well-known challenges in their implementation. For instance, despite plenty of evidence over the years that the so-called three-language formula does not work, especially in North India where it collapses into a two-language formula (See Bharadwaj 2017), the policy continues to support its implementation. Interestingly, the policy document goes to great lengths to say that "no language will be imposed on any State," which is unmistakably targeted at allaying fears of Hindi imposition. Thus, the promotion of Hindi, and the government's thrust to make it India's "national language," is barely reflected even in the rather uninspiring three-language formula recommendation. Most importantly, none of these recommendations acknowledge linguistic inequality as it impacts educational outcomes, restricting the question of "language barriers" to an issue of access to education in Indian languages like Hindi and not, as we will hear from youth in the next section, an issue of finding suitable employment and careers for those educated in these languages.

However, the lack of focus on Hindi education does not mean that the current government's Hindutva-infused decolonisation finds no mention in the NEP. The main vision of the NEP says that it is committed to promoting an education system "rooted in Indian ethos" and instilling among students "a deep-rooted pride in being Indian" (NEP, p. 7). The introduction of the document declares that the "rich heritage of ancient and eternal Indian knowledge and thought has been a guiding light for this policy." The ancient universities of Takṣaśilā, Nālandā and Vikramaśilā are mentioned, as are ancient scholars like Pāṇini, Carakā, Suśrutā, etc. Rather predictably, this "great tradition" of Indian learning is exclusively "ancient," i.e. pre-Islamic and pre-colonial, giving us a clear sense of how the cultural politics of Hindutva has shaped this curated genealogy. Pride in India's ancient (Hindu) culture and heritage is the cornerstone of Hindutva and this is how the question of decolonisation is framed, which makes it unsurprising that the policy interprets the need to "decolonise" as a need to restore this Hindu "pride."

In the context of language and education, pride becomes a key concept that bridges Indian languages like Hindi and the ideological work of Hindutva, something that we see even more vividly in the section on "promoting Indian languages, arts and culture" in the third part of the NEP. Not only does the heading of this section itself reinforce a rather simplistic association between language and culture, but the text goes on to say that "language, of course, is inextricably linked to art and culture… culture is, thus, encased in our languages" (NEP p. 53). While this is indisputably true, and preserving endangered languages and cultures should undoubtedly be a priority, what is strange here is that, as a policy document on education, there is neither any acknowledgement of the inequalities of language and language mediums that exist in the country's education system nor any careful or systematic analysis of the reasons why this is so. The overall impression one gets is that the reason Indian languages need to be promoted is to instil "cultural identity" and "pride"

among learners. This renders inequality between English and Indian languages, in the context of education, as a problem of inadequate pride or cultural rootedness and not, as has been repeatedly pointed out in scholarship, a problem of inadequate investment, resources, training and employment opportunities.

This section does identify certain priorities, like the need to train more skilled language teachers, standardise and periodically update the lexicon of Indian languages through dictionaries, incorporate digital technology and the internet to facilitate language learning, and the need for high-quality translation services. However, neither are these suggestions new nor are they particularly specific. The only specific announcement made in this entire section is the establishment of an Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) to facilitate translation from foreign language books in specialised subjects and to provide learning materials to schools and higher education institutions. Once again, such an institution is certainly much needed but, four years on, even this lone concrete recommendation is yet to materialise. The need for technical education in Indian languages is only mentioned in the passing and without any other details, while the document keeps coming back to the connection between Indian languages, culture and pride. On the subject of educational outcomes and employment opportunities—where the disparity between education in English and other languages is the greatest—this section, like the rest of the policy, is completely quiet, save for a short paragraph that says that those educated in Indian languages will find ready employment in the "hundreds of academies, museums, art galleries, and heritage sites [that are] in dire need of qualified individuals."

What emerges from the NEP's discussion of languages is that the relationship between language and education is linked, not to employment opportunities, learning outcomes or mitigating linguistic inequalities, but to cultural identity and pride in India's "ancient heritage." One could argue that the NEP is more a statement of intent than implementation, but the situation is even less promising when we focus on the latter. To begin with, India's budgetary allocation for education, in percentage terms of GDP, is still far below the recommendation of 6% made by the Kothari Commission back in 1966. What is even more startling is when we disaggregate educational spending between the union and state governments. In their analysis of centre-state budgetary allocations on education, Motkuri and Revathi (2023) show how the union government's share of total educational expenditure has actually declined, from 24.9% in 2014–2015 to 17.7% in 2019–2020. They also point out that while states spend about 3% of GDP on education, the union government spends barely 1%. This is despite the fact that education is a concurrent subject and many of the recommendations of the NEP require additional expenditure from the union government to implement them. The authors show how the union government's expenditure on education as a share of its overall budget, after steadily increasing from the 1990s, has actually declined since 2014–2015, noting that "whether the Centre is going to shoulder the required

increase in the education budget [in order to implement the NEP] is a matter of concern." How concerning this is, and in sharp contrast to the many new institutions and training facilities promised in the NEP, can be gauged from the interim union budget for 2024–2025 where grants for higher education funding were cut by Rs. 9600 crores (The Indian Express, 2024). Thus, even the key recommendation of mother-tongue education and the instilling of pride by promoting Indian languages are not reflected in the budgetary allocations made over subsequent years. In the context of Hindi and the talk of decolonisation that dominates political discourse, the contradiction when it comes to education is perhaps best captured by the actions of the government of Uttar Pradesh, the most populous Hindi-speaking state in India that is also ruled by the BJP, which converted thousands of primary and upper primary schools from Hindi to English medium in 2018, and again in 2021 (Business Standard, 2021). The irony of this is further underscored by the fact that this change had absolutely no impact on many of these schools that simply continued using Hindi in the classroom (Mullick 2018). The reason cited for this was the need to "modernise" education in these schools, but what is implicit is the demand for English medium schools as English continues to be associated with employment opportunities, which is the most pressing reason for language inequalities—the inequalities in educational outcomes.

Of Pride and Jobs: Youth Perspectives on Language Inequalities in Education

The topic of language mediums in education came up repeatedly in conversations with my research participants during fieldwork in Delhi between 2022 and 2023. This was for my ongoing DPhil (PhD) project which is an ethnography of aspirants—a term used for young people preparing for India's elite Civil Services Examination (CSE) conducted by the Union Public Service Commission of India (UPSC).[2] Delhi, because of its proximity, is a particularly popular destination for aspirants from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar—four of India's most populous Hindi-speaking states. Many of the aspirants from these states who I interacted with had studied in Hindi-medium schools. Through my interactions with them, I quickly realised that they had a vastly different view of the relationship between language and education than the one we find in political discourse and education policy.

"We are not ashamed of our Hindi medium education," remarked Rakesh, when I asked him about the increasing focus on "pride" and cultural identity in the political discourse on Hindi. Rakesh is an aspirant from Bihar who is also pursuing his postgraduate study at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). "English-medium students from private schools may think of themselves as superior to us, but that is their thinking," he continued to explain, "but we know that there is nothing inferior about the language in which we study." Having studied in a Hindi-medium government school in Bihar, he felt that this focus on pride was an attempt to deflect attention from the real problems

plaguing Hindi-medium education. "Inferior-superior is not a matter of language," he told me, "it is about what happens in these schools- about the textbooks, classrooms, facilities." For Rakesh, the problems were much more complex and multi-dimensional than what is highlighted in either politics or policy, with the overall neglect of education in government schools being his chief concern. "In Bihar, government schools, besides a few in the big cities, lack proper infrastructure… whether the board over the gate says English-medium or Hindi-medium does not matter," he said. He went on to tell me how schoolteachers are not to blame either as most of them are doing their best to teach in the given circumstances. Rakesh recounts how his teachers, most of them having studied in Hindi-medium themselves, would put in a lot of effort in finding creative ways of teaching them, in contrast to the textbooks assigned to them that had several mistakes in them and often did not explain things clearly. Rakesh, in fact, told me that when he got to know his teachers better and in a more personal capacity, he realised how they were also victims of the inequality between language mediums. "Those who have studied in Hindi-medium have only two options in Bihar," he said, "either you get a government job or become a schoolteacher."

Ankit, another aspirant from Bihar, said the same things about his school education, even though he went to a government school that was technically English medium. There was a big push, he told me, in the 1990s to make schools in Bihar English medium, and just like the recent initiative implemented in Uttar Pradesh, many previously Hindi-medium government schools were overnight expected to switch to English as the medium of instruction for all subjects. "It was an English medium school only in name," Ankit told me, "most teachers still teach in Hindi." Just like Rakesh, Ankit too felt that the problem was not of language mediums but of the lack of investment in school infrastructure and educational facilities, not just in government schools but also in the vast majority of smaller private schools that lure parents in with the promise of English education for their children but end up exploiting their desperation. He told me that he had met well-educated and "intelligent" people after coming to Delhi who had studied in different state language mediums, particularly from South India, and that this was entirely because their schools, even if they were not English medium, had the capacity, facilities and resources to educate properly. He gave his own example to highlight how, despite coming from an English-medium school, he felt unprepared for private sector jobs and careers because he was neither confident about his English proficiency, nor his ability to navigate the complex world of private sector workplaces. "UPSC and state service are my only options," he told me, "otherwise I will just have to go back and find some small [low-paying] job back home which has no future." When I asked him about recent efforts to make Hindi the national language and its promotion to decolonise the country, he laughed and said that this is just "netālogoṃ kī bāteṃ" (a politician's talk) because no matter what they say or decide, the ground reality remains the same. He asked, "Tell me, are there any big private schools for rich people that

teach in Hindi-medium? Do these politicians send their children to these schools?" When I could not come up with a satisfactory reply, he laughed and said, "You see, everyone wants an English-medium education so that they can find jobs, be successful." English, he said, was the desired language of education, not because anyone loved the language or was under some colonial influence, but simply because it was the language favoured in jobs, especially in the private sector. "The same government that is saying everyone should study in Hindi because it is our national language," he added, "they are also the ones bringing private sector into everything, so what future will the Hindi-medium kids have when companies want you to know English?" What he said next is perhaps best conveyed in its Hindi original, "agar aṃgrejī kī ġulāmī sac meṃ haṭānī hai to private sector mēṃ hindī lagā do… bolo TCS, Infosys, Accenture ko hindī meṁ kām karne ke liye" (If you really want to do away with colonial legacy and English domination, then promote Hindi in the private sector… ask TCS, Infosys, Accenture to do their work in Hindi).

As we can see from both Rakesh and Ankit's educational experiences and views on language, it is not questions of pride or cultural identity, but of employment opportunities that dominate the concerns of India's job-seeking youth. Language becomes a significant talking point only in the context of the unequal educational outcomes that different language mediums produce, and even in this, the difference was not attributed to the languages themselves but the gap in quality, infrastructure and resources—precisely the things that are glaringly missing in both political discourse and education policy when it comes to Hindi. Young people from smaller cities and towns repeatedly expressed how they felt unprepared for employment. Many said that the reason they are preparing for various government recruitment examinations was because government jobs are the only place where their education in Hindi had some value. But even here, many said that those attempting recruitment examinations in Hindi had an uphill task. "At the interview stage [the final stage of the CSE recruitment process], Hindi-medium students are at a disadvantage," Sudarshan, a CSE teacher with over 20 years of experience at a leading coaching institution, told me, "because they don't have the confidence that English-medium students have." Like everyone else, Sudarshan, a Hindi-speaking man from UP, found nothing wrong with the language itself. He too identified this lack of "confidence" as a result of the poorer quality of education found in Hindi-medium institutions. "It is unfortunate," he added, "but most of our toppers are those who give the exam in English." He went on to tell me that this "confidence" was not something that they could teach at the coaching institutions, and when I pushed him to tell me more, he simply said that this was a matter of "background" and "exposure."

In my previous research on private English training centres (ETCs) in Delhi, I observed how this lack of confidence was the most common reason cited by young people for joining English classes to improve their employment and career prospects (Datta 2022). A significant number of those who would come to learn or improve their spoken English were those who had studied in

non-English medium schools and found themselves at a disadvantage in the urban job market. Like Sudarshan, they considered this "lack of confidence" as stemming from their lack of exposure or not being from the kind of "background" that would give one an edge in terms of career prospects. "Background" here is a thinly veiled reference to marginalisation as it encompasses inequalities of caste and class but turns them into a matter of "individual deficiency" and puts the onus on the individual to overcome it. This "lack of confidence" was not only an affective embodiment of the precarity that those without English proficiency experienced as they struggled to find jobs and stable careers, but it was also relational and relative since one's confidence was measured against the perceived confidence of those who spoke "fluent English" and, by association, had access to better jobs and futures (see Datta 2022, also Cayla and Bhatnagar 2017). In turn, the confidence of those who spoke fluent English, like the teachers at such ETCs, was built on the desirability of English as a form of cultural capital that was sustained in no small part by places like elite private schools, HEIs and even the private English training centres that constantly reinforced the relationship between English and good quality education and professional success. The "background" and "exposure" that people talk about are just bywords for this form of capital embedded and embodied by the English language—serving as symbolic capital for privilege and value. A lack of English becomes a lack of confidence because English is associated with superior quality education (see LaDousa 2007). While this is undoubtedly a consequence of colonial prejudice against native language education and the selective valorisation of English in education, employment and social mobility, what ultimately sustains this value distinction is the inequality of resources and opportunities between English and other languages. Thus, any meaningful attempt to decolonise language education in India must begin by addressing this inequality in resources and opportunities. This would require, on the one hand, investing substantially more resources in non-English language education and, on the other hand, strengthening the associated educational outcomes and employment opportunities for these learners so that the non-English medium educated can realise their aspirations and achieve tangible socio-economic mobility. But, as we have already seen, resource allocation and educational outcomes are the two topics that find no mention in either the political discourse on Hindi or the educational policy of the country. In the garb of instilling pride and cultural identity, the decolonisation championed in the name of Hindi is merely shying away from the more substantive changes needed to tackle linguistic inequality and the dominance of English.

Distinct from what one may be led to believe about Hindi and its future by exclusively focussing on political discourse over the last decade, talking to Hindi-medium educated aspirants in Delhi revealed a very different way of understanding the relationship between language, education and inequality—leading to a very different conceptualisation of the Hindi language. The ideology of Hindi that emerged from my ethnographic encounters diverged from

both political discourse and educational policy in three distinct ways. As already highlighted, the first of these is the question of pride and cultural identity. In all my interviews and group discussions with Hindi-medium-educated youth, no one identified the inequalities and obstacles they faced as a consequence of inadequate pride or rootedness in their linguistic identities. In fact, it was one of my respondents, Somesh, who brought my attention to this divergence between political discourse and what he considered "ground reality." He observed how the promotion of Hindi in the political arena had less and less to do with the question of education and employment of young people with each passing day. "unkī hindī aur hamārī hindī do alag cīzēṁ haiṁ," (their Hindi and our Hindi are two different things), he told me and went on to say how the politics of language was not something that he found interesting because it did not speak to his experiences and struggles. Another aspirant, Kavya, added how the role of the government should not be promoting pride but providing resources and facilities to strengthen the value of that language. This was the second thing that my ethnographic foray revealed which was an acute awareness among young people of where the real inequality between languages lies and, consequently, the ways in which meaningful decolonisation of language and education should unfold. Their understanding of the challenges facing Hindi was centred on Hindi as a language of education and opportunities, and they kept coming back to the question of investment and resources. The ideology of Hindi that emerged from these conversations was of a language that was not merely the victim of a colonial mindset or the prejudice of English-speaking elites, but also a victim of institutional neglect and political double-speak.

This brings us to the third and most significant finding from my ethnography—the fact that Hindi medium-educated aspirants identified this divergence—both the political discourse of Hindi and the lack of focus on education and educational outcomes—as harmful for both their own futures and the future of the language. Somesh, the aspirant who first identified this as a matter of diverging priorities in the promotion of Hindi, told me that talking about the language without talking about jobs and employment was only going to make things worse for people like him. Rakesh, the aspirant from Bihar, went further to remark how the decision to implement mother-tongue education in primary schools, even if implemented properly, would only weaken the standing of the non-English medium educated because they would be even worse prepared for the changing job market. What emerged from these conversations was that changing the language of education alone would not do much unless it is accompanied by adequate allocation of funds and resources and a similar push in the employment sector. Most aspirants, including those who studied in English-medium schools, felt that forcing mother-tongue education in government schools, where the relatively poor send their children, would further entrench the hierarchy of language mediums as the wealthy and affluent would simply continue to educate their children in private schools. The latter would grow up learning English while the former would be

compelled to learn English separately or additionally in order to secure jobs. This is precisely the fear that led Ankit to say that if the problem of language continues to be seen the way it is in politics and policy, then the burden of India's unequal multilingualism would fall even more on its poorest and most marginalised, while the system of privilege and value associated with English, which plays such a pivotal role in securing stable employment and socio-economic mobility, would simply remain unchanged.

Conclusion: A Dangerous Divergence

There is undoubtedly significant dissonance when we compare the political discourse and educational policy on Hindi with the experiences and opinions of Hindi medium-educated youth. The focus in politics and policy regarding Hindi is distinctly different from the ways in which young people, at least from this ethnographic study, talked about language. What this chapter has worked towards is to tease out this divergence and argue that the discourse of Hindi that has emerged in the last decade risks exacerbating it further. Hindi under Hindutva is increasingly shaped by the ideological work to which it is deployed and the political projects in which it is rooted. Identifying the reasons why it has taken the exact shape it has should make for very promising future research, but it is likely a telling consequence of a political party and governing leadership that simultaneously embraces the majoritarianism and revisionism of Hindutva and a thinly veiled neoliberal economic agenda sweetened with limited welfarism, while also aspiring to make political inroads into non-Hindi-speaking Indian states. What this chapter highlights is how this ideology is neither the only ideology of Hindi, as evidenced by the different understanding of language expressed by young aspirants in Delhi, nor is it ultimately aimed at mitigating language inequalities and achieving substantive decolonisation. Hindi, in discourse and policy, is increasingly viewed through the lens of cultural authenticity and identity while its relationship to education is weakened and that to educational outcomes is almost entirely erased. On the other hand, the experiences and aspirations of those who are otherwise proud of their Hindi-speaking identity and education are overwhelmingly focussed on this very relationship between education and employment. As respondents like Somesh and Ankit point out, this is a dangerous divergence as the emerging ideology of Hindi is increasingly divorced from the tangible and material concerns of resources and opportunities. What is even more alarming is that this ideological shift is being presented as decolonisation. However, even as this new ideology seeks dominance, the very fact that youth in Delhi were able to articulate a different view of language highlights how there are other competing ideologies that might well be able to mount a formidable challenge to this new discourse of Hindi. Just as in the case of the "becoming Bharat" episode, not everyone is convinced that superficial changes in the name of decolonisation will fix the complex and material problems of linguistically embedded educational inequalities.

Notes

1 Hindutva is the political ideology espoused by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its mentor organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, "Hindutva, translated as 'Hinduness,' [and] refers to the ideology of Hindu nationalists, stressing the common culture of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. … Modern politicians have attempted to play down the racial and anti-Muslim aspects of Hindutva, stressing the inclusiveness of the Indian identity; but the term has Fascist undertones." (Brown, Garrett W, Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan. 2018. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, 381. Oxford: Oxford University Press.).

2 Fieldwork for this was conducted in 2022–2024 and focussed on neighbourhoods in Delhi that had a particular concentration of private coaching institutions that offered courses to help aspirants study and prepare. Old Rajinder Nagar (ORN, as it is called by most aspirants) in central Delhi is considered the epicentre of civil service preparation and attracts aspirants from across the country who come here to enrol in one of its many coaching institutions and live in rented accommodation in and around the neighbourhood. There are other similar places, often dubbed "aspirant localities," dotted around Delhi, usually close to the city's many university campuses—Mukherjee Nagar, Jamia Nagar, Munirka and Satya Niketan being a few of the important ones.

References

Banerjee, S. 2023. "Narendra Modi's spree of re-naming terminology and re-inventing himself through `Sanskritization'." Countercurrents.org, October 6.

Bharadwaj, V. 2017. "'Language of power or 'fringe language'?: English in postcolonial India, 1946-1968." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 247: 13–31.

Business Standard. 2021. "15,000 Uttar Pradesh schools switch over to English medium of instruction." April 13.

Cayla, J., and K. Bhatnagar. 2017. "Language and Power in India's 'New Services'." *Journal of Business Research* 72: 189–198.

Datta, A.R. 2022. "More than Language: The Work of an English Training Centre in Delhi." *Third World Quarterly* 45 (4): 810–826. doi:10.1080/01436597.2022.2136069.

Nault, D.M. 2012. "English in India's National Development: Hindi-Dravidian Politics and the Retention of a Colonial Language." *Asian Englishes* 15 (1): 68–87. doi:10.1080/13488678.2012.10801320.

Gal, S. and J.T. Irvine. 2019. *Signs of Difference: Language and Ideology in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heath, S.B. 1977. "Social history." In *Bilingual Education: Current Perspectives*. Vol. 1: Social Science, 53–72. Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Irvine, J.T. 2022. "Revisiting Theory and Method in Language Ideology Research." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 32 (1): 222–236.

Kochukudy, A. 2023. "If BJP cannot win South states , it'll make them irrelevant — through delimitation." *The Print*, June 5. https://theprint.in/opinion/kerala-konnect/if-bjp-cannot-win-south-states-itll-make-them-irrelevant-through-delimitation/1611474/

LaDousa, C. 2007. "Of Nation and State: Language, School, and the Reproduction of Disparity in a North Indian City." *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 (4): 925–959.

Luke, A. 2005. "Foreword: On the Possibilities of a Post-postcolonial Language Education." In *Decolonisation, Globalisation*. [Online]. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters.

Motkuri, V. and E. Revathi. 2023. "Expenditure on Education in India: Centre–State Allocations." *Journal of development policy and practice* 8 (2): 194–208.
Mullick, R. 2018. "Govt-run English medium schools in UP still in Hindi mode." *Hindustan Times*, April 9. https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/govt-run-english-medium-schools-in-up-still-in-hindi-mode/story-fsRBhsNLVOsp9KCOiBSAsL.html
Poudel, P.P., L. Jackson and Tae-Hee Choi. 2022. "Decolonisation of curriculum: the case of language education policy in Nepal." *London review of education* 20 (1). doi: https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.20.1.13.
Punnoose, R. and A.P.M. Haneefa. 2018. "Problematising Hindi as the 'Self' and English as the 'Other'." *Economic and political weekly* 53 (7): 19–22.
Rajalakshmi, T.K. 2022. "Linguistic imperialism: BJP pronouncements on promoting Hindi spark outrage." *Frontline*, May 16.https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/linguistic-imperialism-bjp-pronouncements-on-promoting-hindi-spark-outrage/article38492154.ece
R'boul, H. 2023. "English and the Dissemination of Local Knowledges: A Problematic for South-South Dialogue." In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and the Global South/s.* 1st edition, 147–157. Routledge.
Sarkar, B. 2024. "The Politics of Memory: Tradition, Decolonization and Challenging Hindutva, a Reflective Essay." *Religions* 15 (5): 564–.
Silverstein, M. 1979. "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology." In *The Elements*, edited by P. Clyne, W. Hanks and C. Hofbauer, 193–248. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
Singh, S.S. 2023. "Those opposing India's name change can leave the country: BJP leader Dilip Ghosh." *The Hindu*, September 11. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/those-opposing-indias-name-change-can-leave-the-country-dilip-ghosh/article67292073.ece
Sivakumar, R. 2016. "Sanskrit and Indian Heritage: Whose Language is it Anyway?." *The Wire*, July 11. https://thewire.in/politics/sanskrit-heritage-politics-government
Sonntag, S.K. 2000. "Ideology and Policy in the Politics of the English Language in North India." In *Ideology, Politics, and Language: Focus on English*, edited by T. Ricento, 133–149. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
The Indian Express. 2024. "Education Budget 2024 Updates: UGC, IIMs face budget cut; here's what Sitharaman presented." February 2.
Thomas, M. 2017. "By quietly expanding the role of Hindi in government, Narendra Modi is playing with fire." *QUARTZ*, April 18. https://qz.com/india/962056/by-quietly-expanding-the-role-of-hindi-in-government-narendra-modi-is-playing-with-fire
Times of India. 2023. "'If we get a request like that…': UN spokesperson on India vs 'Bharat' debate." September 7.
Vaish, V. 2005. "A peripherist view of English as a language of decolonization in post-colonial India." *Language policy* 4 (2): 187–206.
Government of India. 2020. National Education Policy. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

2 Language Textbooks as a Site of Conflict in India

The Phenomenon of "Erased Curriculum"

Mohini Gupta

Introduction

In April 2023, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in India announced that it would remove chapters on Mughal rulers from Class XII history textbooks. While this announcement led to outrage among most civil society groups, it was lauded by right-wing politicians who are actively erasing the legacy of the Mughal rule in India through practices such as renaming cities and roads across the country (Jaswal 2023; Mateen 2023; Mansoor 2023). The decision to remove this chapter from the history textbooks, among others, was justified as a form of "syllabus rationalisation" in order to "ease" the workload on students after the pandemic (Johny 2023). But is there more to the rationalisation process than meets the eye?

Over the years, textbooks in India (and around the world) have remained a conflicted political battleground—a space where ideology meets education. Educational theorist Michael W Apple calls education a "site of conflict about the kind of knowledge that is and should be taught" (Apple, 2009, vii). Textbook creation, therefore, is as much a form of gatekeeping as it is a means of education. It is this understanding of textbooks as a live ground for political controversies that my research is based upon.

During the course of analysing language textbooks for my doctoral research, I found that chapter excisions were not limited to the history textbooks that had caused substantial protests in the country. The content of the NCERT Hindi textbooks had also been changing drastically every few months, without much notice. While these changes have been taking place under the garb of post-COVID "syllabus rationalisation," this chapter investigates whether there are visible patterns in terms of what gets erased from, and what remains, in language textbooks in India. What are the changes seen within language textbooks, more specifically Hindi-language textbooks, created by the NCERT in India between 2020 and 2024? What are the motivations behind changing the content of these textbooks and how does the "rationalisation" process take place at a national level? How is this connected to the New Education Policy in 2020, and do these excisions align with the government's vision of the

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-4

nation's future in education? What role does the Hindi textbook in particular play in shaping the "ideal" citizen of a country that is increasingly dominated by narratives of religious nationalism?

As a doctoral student, my project on studying language and shame in the Indian education system initially set out to dig deeper into "hidden curriculum" (Philip Jackson 1968, *Life in Classrooms*), a concept that investigates the ideology entrenched within the curriculum beyond the stated goals and aims of the textbook. My aim was to understand the role of language policy and curriculum in creating a sense of "postcolonial shame" (Timothy Bewes 2010) associated with the "mother tongue" within the Indian education system. The "curriculum" of a school, as we know, includes textbooks, syllabi, assessment and examinations, sports, dance, music, physical education as well as teaching and learning practices in the classroom. The discovery of the "erased" chapters in language curricula during my research was purely incidental. In this chapter, I argue that it is not only "hidden curriculum" but also "erased curriculum" (term mine) that we need to look out for in textbooks to determine political ideologies and motivations that come through within the conflicted sites of textbooks in India. There is a dramatic educational shift still underway in the country and has not been studied academically from a sociolinguistics perspective and this chapter seeks to fill this gap.

This chapter will focus on Hindi-language textbooks through a close document analysis of the language and contents of the textbooks provided during the formative years of a student's life. The analysis will also entail a comparison with previous versions of these textbooks, as available on the NCERT website. The classroom years for analysis have been chosen based on the "list of rationalised content" publicly available on the NCERT website, as it has only been released for Classes VI–XII. The reason behind selecting Hindi as the language under scrutiny, beyond my personal capacity as a native Hindi speaker, is its complex position in the nation. Hindi has historically been used as a tool for creating a sense of "national" identity, often at the cost of other languages and dialects in the nation, and at the same time, also constantly struggles to remain at par with English, socially and economically.

The chapter will navigate theories across sociolinguistics, critical pedagogies, and language politics, to understand the moment in which current language textbooks are being created in India. It will examine patterns in the "syllabus rationalisation" process to shed light on the evolution of Hindi language textbooks as a battleground for political ideologies, given its symbolic importance as a proposed "national language" of the nation. The aim of this chapter is also to understand how the politics of textbook creation and language teaching ultimately impact language socialisation in the classroom. Given that this process is still unfolding in the contemporary political landscape of the nation, this is a first attempt at an academic study on the syllabus rationalisation process by the NCERT in India and its sociolinguistic implications in the classroom.

Why Language Textbooks?

According to Edward Sapir (1933), language is a "great force of socialisation, probably the greatest that exists." Given the close connection of language with social identity, language textbooks are an integral part of the socialisation process in schools. Students are, on one hand, socialised into the uses and forms of a language in the classroom; but on the other hand, are also socialised "through" language to become familiar with cultural and societal practices and expectations in their environment (Ochs and Schieffelin 2011). It is through the material that is selected and the knowledge that is legitimised through language textbooks that students start forming their worldview towards and *through* the languages they learn. In this sense, language textbooks have a greater impact on students as they "help in *constructing* social reality" for them (Rahman 2002, 64; emphasis mine). In this chapter, I choose to focus on language textbooks given that they are even more directly linked to reproducing ideologies in the classroom than other subjects, and very little attention is paid to their role in this process in public consciousness (as compared to, for instance, history textbooks as noted above).

Language ideologies have been defined as "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979). This means that any set of beliefs or opinions about a language by its speakers is broadly classified as language ideology. This could include language and policy, language and education, language and class and caste, language attitudes, language and nationalism, multilingualism, and so on. This chapter brings into focus the ideologies about, and through, language that are perpetuated through the school curriculum. I argue that it is important to understand language ideologies propagated through textbooks to reveal the circumstances under which chapters have been deleted and retained, based on the motivations of politicians and curriculum developers in the country. Schools are, as we know, "key sites for the production of language ideology" (Ladousa 2014, 21), and it is this reproduction of ideologies through the curriculum that this chapter seeks to uncover through the contemporary "rationalisation process" by the central government body of curriculum creation in the nation—NCERT. The ideologies perpetuated by NCERT are significant because these textbooks are used by over 20,000 schools in the country (Mateen 2023) and impact the shaping of the worldviews of millions of Indian children. By "erasing" certain chapters from the textbook, who is made to feel included and excluded in the classroom? Why does the Hindi textbook play a unique role in this aspect, given its complicated position in the linguistic and political history of India? What do these textbook excisions say about the covert and overt messages being sent out to teachers and students of language? These are some of the questions that this chapter seeks to engage with.

Textbooks are also the most tangible manifestation of language policy at the national level and feed directly into reproducing political and social

ideologies of the state within the walls of the classroom. In the South Asian context, education systems have been perceived as "key channels to manufacturing national identity and citizenship" (Mohammad-Arif 2005), given that textbooks have been such a visible battleground for promoting political ideologies with every new government. They become a physical and metaphorical "site" of conflict for political parties, and what is constantly wagered in the process is the authenticity or legitimacy of the information in textbooks. This is ironic because, in India, there is a strong "textbook culture" (Kumar 2015), wherein the knowledge of the textbook is considered the highest form of knowledge. Education legitimises the knowledge that is selected to be taught in schools through a nexus of policy and curriculum frameworks at the Central level of the government (even though education is on the concurrent list and is managed by both central and state governments as of 1976). The printed word goes unchallenged within the walls of educational institutions and creates a deep impact on the socialisation process of students, despite the fact that it has repeatedly been proven to be politically compromised. Many times, a textbook might be the only book that a student reads, or can afford to read, and this makes the responsibility of selecting material for textbooks even more crucial. The next section brings a historical perspective on Hindi textbooks in particular, to contextualise their position in the nation's history, before delving into specific texts that have been erased and retained in today's Hindi textbooks in the further sections.

The Hindi Textbook: A History

Harcourt Butler, the Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (who served between 1918 and 1921) remarked in the early 1900s that his textbook committee was "under the influence of the ultra-Hindu section who are now writing primary textbooks in Sanskritised Hindi which the people cannot understand" (Robinson, Francis 1993 in *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923*, as quoted in Rai 2001, 31). This brings up two strands of issues with the Hindi textbook in its history—the accessibility of the register of the language the textbook is written in (whether it is Sanskritised or not); as well as its political affiliations. The rest of the chapter will engage with these two strands of issues with Hindi-language education.

Hindi as a language developed from its earlier form as Hindustani, a combination of the Hindi and Urdu registers, which was in turn an amalgamation of Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Braj, Awadhi and Khari Boli. A movement to distinguish Hindi from Urdu within Hindustani started towards the end of the 19th century and led to the development of Hindi in the form that it exists today. Alok Rai notes how the process of the fashioning and promotion of Hindi at this time was characterised by its "elective affinity (with Sanskrit) and elective disaffinity (with Urdu)" (2001, 78). It is this idea of Hindi as forming an identity of its own, with Sanskrit at its root, that continues to distinguish

Hindi as a "standard" language today. One of the reasons for doing this was that Hindi started being perceived as a "symbolic instrument" for rebelling against English and colonisation in the build-up to the freedom movement (Kumar 2015, 144). It is with this historical baggage that we must contextualise the registers of Hindi that are used in contemporary textbooks, as Sanskritised Hindi in particular was hailed as a symbol of "national integration" during the independence movement and in the post-independence era as well (Kumar 2015, 159).

The second reason that this process took place was the association of the language with the Hindu religion. At a time when British rule was based on a divide-and-rule policy between the Hindus and Muslims, the two communities were pitted against each other and language became a core part of their communal identities. Sanskrit with its affiliation to ancient Hindu scriptures was claimed by the Hindus, and Urdu due to its affiliations with Arabic, the language of the religious text Quran, was claimed by the Muslims. This separation was even further strengthened after the partition of India and Pakistan, when Urdu was declared to be the national language of Pakistan (despite being spoken by a minority of the population—a decision that precipitated the Bengali language movement in East Pakistan that led to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971). Hindi was envisioned to be the national language of India during the time of Indian independence as well, but this proposal was resisted by states, especially in the South of India, and this remains an issue of debate until today.

In fact, for right-wing Hindu nationalist parties, Hindi has always been a "major source of pride" (Jaffrelot 2009, 218) because of its proximity to Sanskrit, the classical language of ancient India. The majoritarian politics of right-wing parties is practised with the "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" (Ayres 2009, 18) correlation and promotes a simplistic dichotomy between Hindi as an "Indian" and "traditional" language and English as the "Western" and hence "modern" language, which comes with postcolonial connotations. There is a constant conflation of Sanskrit and ancient Indian culture, in a misguided attempt to paint all of India with one single brush. As recently as in 2020, the national education policy of India placed a disproportionate focus on encouraging Sanskrit and Hindi learning in schools. The incumbent government also considers the "English language" to be a colonial demon which continues to oppress other linguistic communities, without considering the benefits that it has brought to many marginalised communities within India; or evaluating the hegemonic domination of the Hindi language when it comes to other languages and dialects across the country as well.

In the 1835 Minute on Education written by the English official Thomas B Macaulay, it was claimed that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (1835 Minute on Education, 3). There is almost a direct attack on this statement in the 2020 Policy, which claims that Sanskrit "possesses a classical literature greater in

volume than that of Latin and Greek put together" (Government of India, 14) and accords it a special importance in education. This statement of support is evidenced in implementation as the Government spent 22 times more on Sanskrit education, than five other classical languages (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Odia and Kannada) combined in 2020 (The Wire Staff, 2020). Language teaching has, in the past, been seen playing a role in spreading "religio-cultural consciousness" (Kumar 2015, 153), and the current Hindi textbook material contributes to this understanding of language education until today. The textbooks continue to include multiple chapters from Hindu religious texts in praise of gods like Rama and Krishna through poetry written in old Hindi (Braj and Awadhi), which not only makes it alienating for a heterogenous body of students because of its religious associations but also the unfamiliarity of the classical language used in contemporary texts.

The Politics of Textbooks

"Curriculum is the core of school education. All the activities in school revolve around its curriculum" (Government of India 2020)—these are the opening lines of the New Education Policy of India, issued in July 2020. In India, school curriculum is guided by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), prepared by the pan-India body, the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). NCF in turn develops these guidelines based on inputs from the National Education Policy (NEP), released and revised by the Government of India. Until today, India has seen three revisions to the NEP and five revisions to NCF, with the most recent NCF for school education having been released in 2023.

The focus on "indigenisation" and a sense of going back to a "golden" past is evident in educational curriculum guidelines in both India and Pakistan, according to Mohammad-Arif (2005). This trend continues today with the Government of India (2020) that emphasises the importance of learning about inculcating "pride in Indian heritage" and "preservation and promotion of India's cultural wealth," as noted briefly in the previous section. Mohammad-Arif (2005, 15) refers to the stated aim of the BJP government in 1999, when Minister Murli Manohar Joshi insisted on the "Indianisation, Nationalisation and Spiritualisation" of Indian school education by removing the "Three Ms": Macaulay, Marx and Madrasa (reflecting anti-colonialist, anti-leftist and anti-Muslim views). In fact, the 2020 policy has been revised under the rule of the BJP government at the centre in India and follows some of the same principles until today.

The National Curricular Framework (NCF) of 2005, on which most of the current textbooks are based, since the most recent NCF only released in 2023, lays out clear guidelines for language teaching in schools. There is a repeated mention of using students' multilingualism as a resource and strategy in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to use their students' mother tongues in

classroom discussions, in order for them to feel "secure" and "accepted," and so that no child is left behind due to their linguistic background. Language learning in the mother tongue is encouraged in order to inculcate the "bank of memories and symbols inherited from fellow speakers" and as "the medium through which knowledge is constructed and closely tied to thoughts and identity of the individual" (NCF 2005). These statements go beyond the "indigenisation" argument for students to focus on learning in the mother tongue, so that they can develop multiple capabilities and absorb study material more effectively, without feeling left behind (especially for students from minoritised communities). There is now a new NCF, released in December 2023, but the contents of this framework are beyond the scope of this chapter, especially because the new textbooks based on this NCF have not been published yet.

This chapter thematically analyses current Hindi language textbooks used in schools, which are still based on the previous NCF of 2005. The textbooks in focus are Class V–VIII NCERT Hindi textbooks, but other textbooks are used as reference when relevant. The current Hindi textbook series published by NCERT is titled "Rimjhim" (Pitter-Patter) for Classes I–V and then "Vasant" (Spring) for Classes VI–VIII. NCERT is a centralised government body that produces national textbooks for all subjects, established in 1961 to assist the Ministry of Education in "formulation and implementation of policies in school education" (Mohammad-Arif 2005, 152). The contents of the book have been revised based on NCF 2005, as laid out in the introduction of the book written in 2007 (Table 2.1).

The current iterations of the textbooks as available on the NCERT website have been reprinted as recently as 2022. This means that the version of the book has changed even during the course of conducting this analysis, as the textbook used for analysis at the start was purchased in 2020 and was the 2017 reprinted edition. The new versions of the textbooks have removed at least 4–5 chapters from the old versions, making them substantially shorter. This is a decision based on the pandemic, since NCERT did take a decision to "lighten" school textbooks for the 2022–2023 session owing to learning disruptions caused by COVID-19 (Samantaray 2021). According to the NCERT Director Sridhar Srivastava:

Table 2.1 Hindi textbooks used in the analysis

Class	*Title*	*Publisher*	*Examination Board*	*Year (Reprinted)*	*Pages*
V	Rimjhim 5	NCERT	CBSE	2022	152
VI	Vasant Bhaag 1 (Part 1)	NCERT	CBSE	2022	108
VII	Vasant Bhaag 2 (Part 2)	NCERT	CBSE	2022	108
VIII	Vasant Bhaag 3(Part 3)	NCERT	CBSE	2022	100

> Though we are in the process of making our National Curriculum Frameworks, the development of new textbooks may take some time to come out. But given giving children the opportunity for speedy recovery in their learning continuum, NCERT needs to take a step towards rationalization of its syllabi and textbooks for the next year across the stages. [sic]
> (Samantaray 2021)

In fact, a list of rationalised content is available on the NCERT website (NCERT, "Rationalisation of Textbooks"). The following sections highlight the chapters that have been removed and retained in the current iterations of the Hindi textbooks by NCERT, to understand patterns of "erasure" in the politics of language textbooks today.

What "remains"?

This section discusses what is retained in NCERT Hindi textbooks in their current iterations, specifically around the religio-cultural consciousness created by the materials in these textbooks as well as the obscurity of the language in which they are written. Let's begin with the first thought. The section on the "history of the Hindi textbook" has already discussed the Sanskritisation of Hindi in language textbooks. While this phenomenon was observed in the early 1900s, it is no different today. Chapters in contemporary textbooks continue to include chapters written in a language that seem inaccessible and complex to students belonging to primary school.

Consider the example of a chapter in the Class VII textbook, titled "miṭhāīwālā" (The sweets-man) written by Bhagwati Prasad Vajpayee. This chapter traces the story of a man who dresses up as a seller of toys, then flutes and then sweets and sells his goods to children at almost no price. Later it is revealed that the man had lost his family and loved spending time with children and hence pretended to sell things at an almost negligible price to make them happy. The currency mentioned in the text is the old currency of "paisa" and may not be familiar to the children of today. There are quite a few Sanskritised, high vocabulary words used in the text, including *snehābhiṣikt* (full of love); *aṁtaravyāpī* (spread out inside/inclusive); *kṣīṇ* (diminished/wasted); *ājānulambit* (long until the knees), which would add to making the text laborious to understand. Consider the following two Hindi lines extracted from the first paragraph itself, followed by my translation of the lines "*uske snehābhiṣikt kaṇṭh se phūtā huā gān sunkar nikaṭ ke makānoṁ meṁ halchal mach jātī.*" (Hearing the song that broke out from his love-filled throat, there would sprout an excitement in the nearby houses).

This chapter is eight pages long and includes long-winding and complex sentences that would not appeal to a young reader. The sentence construction in "galiyoṁ aur unke aṁtaravyāpī chote-chote udyānoṁ meṁ khelte aur iṭhlāte hue baććoṁ kā jhunḍ use gher letā aur tab vah khilaunewālā vahīṁ baithkar khilaune kī petī khol detā" (The bunch of children who were playing and

strutting about in the lanes and the little-little gardens within them surrounded him and then that toy-seller would sit right there and open his case of toys) is quite complex and not easy to follow, in addition to the inclusion of difficult words and phrases. This is evident in the fact that the chapter uses words like "*udyān*" for garden instead of "*bagīcā*" or "*bāġ*." The former is the more formal alternative while the other two words are the more colloquial substitutes and would sound more familiar to students. The term "*snehābhiṣikt kanṭh*" for a "love-filled throat," used in a different sentence, is also quite a convoluted albeit flowery way of describing the sweetness and affection in the toy-seller's voice; the word for throat once again is the more formal one instead of the colloquial "*ġalā*." It is this choice of vocabulary that could serve to alienate the reader of this text from the textbook, and ultimately, the language.

A second example of this phenomenon is the chapter "van ke mārg meṁ" (on the way to the forest) from the Class VI textbook. This chapter has been taken from a set of poems from the *Kavitāvalī* written in the Braj bhasha dialect of Hindi by the 16th-century saint and poet Tulsidas about the mythical figures of Rama and Sita proceeding for their exile in the forest. The first line of the poem starts with "*pura teṁ nikasī raghubīr-badhū, dhari dhīra daye maga meṁ ḍaga dvai*" (From the town left Ram's wife (Sita), taking courage, she proceeded two steps (i.e. a short distance) on the way).

The language in this text is different from the standard and contemporary Hindi that students are used to studying and includes Braj vocabulary that would need to be explained by a teacher in the classroom. Out of its 12 words, only 2—*pur (*place*)*, *meṁ* (in)—are identical to modern Hindi. One word, *badhū* (modern *vadhū* meaning "bride") can easily be recognised. Three further words are also close, such as *nikasī* (modern *niklī* for "having left"), *daye* (modern *diye* for "given"), *dvai* (modern *do* for "two"), but not so easily recognisable for a Class VI student.

The remaining six words, that is half of the total, are either higher, Sanskritic *(raghuvīra* which is another word for Rama) or dialectal Braj bhasha words (*teṁ*, *dhari*, *dhīra*, *maga*, *dhaga*). Even the well-known figure Sita is referred to by a difficult Sanskritic epithet (*raghubīra-badhū* or "the bride of the Raghu clan's lord"). This further alienates the poetry in the text from the students' circle of accessibility or relatability. The textbook ends with a glossary of difficult words, and many have been explained in this section but at the same time, it does not lend itself to sounding familiar to students reading it. In addition to that, there is also a strong alignment of this chapter with Hindu religious texts since this poem is referring to the Rāmāyaṇa, the Sanskrit epic that narrates the life of Rāma, the prince of Ayodhya.

This brings us to analysing the second aspect of the Hindi textbooks, which is the building of a religio-consciousness among the students through these textbooks. The Class VII textbook mentioned above continues this religious association with a chapter "Bhor aur barkhā" (Morning and rain). This is a set of poems by the 16th-century Hindu mystic poet Meerabai, who is famously known for her devotion to the Hindu deity Krishna.

This too is written in Braj bhasha and includes unrecognisable words and syntax, which would serve to alienate a Class VII reader. The Class VIII textbook continues in its praises of Lord Krishna, particularly through the chapter "sudāmā ćarit" (Sudama character sketch) by the elusive 16th-century poet Narottam Das in a form of "early Hindi" (Snell 1986, 599). This poem exalts the generosity of King Krishna towards his impoverished childhood friend Sudama, when the latter knocks on his door asking for his help. The language of this poem is also difficult to understand given the context of contemporary Hindi speakers today. The first two lines of the poem are "*sīsa pagā na jhaṁgā tana meṁ, prabhu! jāne ko āhi base kehi grāmā/dhotī phatī-sī laṭī dupaṭī, aru pāṁya upānaha ko nahiṁ sāmā*." (His head neither has a turban, nor does his body have a kurta, Lord! No knowledge of which village he comes from/He is wearing a torn dhoti and a cloth, his feet do not have shoes).

These lines describe the physical state in which Sudama had arrived at Krishna's house. Even though there is a glossary of some words at the end of the text, it is difficult to understand and relate to the poem due to words such as *jhaṁgā, āhi, laṭī, aru* or *upānaha*, which are extremely distant from contemporary Hindi words.

The same textbook contains one more chapter on Krishna, "Sūrdās ke pad" (songs by Surdas), which is a set of poems written by 16th-century Bhakti poet Surdas who has come to be well-known for his works devoted to Krishna. There are two stanzas in the text, one where Krishna talks to his mother and complains about his hair not being long enough; and the other where *gopīs* (female cowherds and lovers of Krishna) complain to Krishna's mother about him stealing butter from their houses. This is also written in Braj Bhasha, and there is a glossary at the end to support the reading process for words like *ajahuṁ* (today itself), *benī* (braid), *hvai* (will be), *kāṛhat* (combing the hair), *pachi-pachi* (again and again), *paiṭhi* (having gone inside), *sīṁke* (vessel for yoghurt and milk), *dhoṭā* (boy). This is the third old Hindi text in the same textbook (the third one is "Rahīm ke dohe" or couplets by Rahim which are discussed later), which is even more than in other textbooks. This amplifies the sense of distance created between the students and the textbook through the difficulty of its language as well as the affiliation with Hindu religious imagery and symbolism, as there is an abundance of these texts across Hindi textbooks for primary school students.

What is "erased"?

The above section has shown which chapters remain in NCERT Hindi textbooks, and this section will elaborate on patterns of erasure in Hindi textbooks. While the analysis of "remained" chapters was along the lines of evaluating the relatability of the language and content of the textbooks, a study of "erased" curriculum looks at the content of the chapters that have been removed as well as the identity of the authors whose works have been removed from current textbooks.

Let's start with the story of Hamid Khan. A Class IX chapter "hāmid khaṅ" by S. K. Pottekkatt (in the NCERT Hindi textbook "Sanchayan") is about the writer and his friendship with a restaurant owner, Hamid Khan, in the city of Takshashila (or Taxila, now in Pakistan). The chapter opens with the news of communal riots breaking out in Taxila, and the writer, who lives in the Malabar region of South India, prays that Hamid Khan's restaurant is safe from the fires. This leads into the story of an unexpected past friendship between the writer and Hamid Khan during the former's travels to Taxila and breaks down many myths around the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims as friends and brothers. The bond between them is shown to be deep, and in fact, even though Khan had been surprised that the writer was open to eating food from a Muslim's hotel, the writer proudly explained how there was peaceful co-existence between the communities in his region and this was not an issue he thought about at all. This was refreshing for Khan, who seemed to be used to a certain level of distancing or discrimination as a Muslim by the Hindu community.

In contemporary times, when communal tensions are rising in the country due to strong majoritarian politics practised by right-wing political groups, reading a story like this in a Hindi-language textbook could be transformative. The chapter "hāmid khaṅ" is one of many chapters that have been removed from Hindi textbooks in the last few years. The chapter was in the textbook until 2019 but has been removed in the newest version of the Class IX "Sanćāyan" textbook after a process of "syllabus rationalisation" during the pandemic. In fact, this textbook contained only six chapters, and now contains only four, after the removal of "hāmid khaṅ" and "diyē jal uṭhē" (the lamps lit up) by Madhuker Upadhyay. The latter is about the preparations for the Dandi March by MK Gandhi during the freedom struggle, and the contributions of leaders beyond Gandhi who made the resistance to the salt tax under British rule successful, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and Abbas Tyabji. One could read into the removal of this chapter as an attempt to erase the traces of chapters that valourise leaders such as Nehru, one of the stalwarts of the political party that is the current opposition party in the nation. The incumbent government continues to accuse him as a leading figure responsible for all the ills that plague the nation today according to them—but this could be a speculation.

In the same vein, it is worth mentioning that while this text is about the friendship between a Hindu and Muslim man, the writer of the story is still a Hindu writer. There is very little representation of Muslim authors in the Hindi textbooks across the board. In the Class VIII textbook, the only Muslim author whose story was included in the textbook was Ismat Chughtai, one of the most well-known Urdu novelists of the 20th century. Her story "Kāmćōr" (shirker) is a light-hearted and amusing story about a home in which all the staff is dismissed, and the children in the house are asked to perform domestic chores in place of them. This leads to a series of comical encounters between all the family members, until the children decide never to work again. This story has now been taken out of the textbook, leaving no other Muslim author

in the textbook at all. It is worth observing that the language of these texts is actually much closer to the colloquial and contemporary Hindi that students of this age group are expected to understand, more than the classical Hindi texts which remain in abundance in the textbooks, but this brings us back to the point of Hindi's elective affinity with Sanskrit, and disaffinity with Urdu to distinguish its own identity. Some of these erasures could be understood through that lens as well.

The only Muslim author who remains in the Class VII Hindi textbook is the historical figure, Rahim. Rahim, or Khanzada Mirza Khan Abdul Rahim, was a court poet during the rule of the Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century. His *dohas* or couplets are well-known as an important piece of writing in the evolution of the Hindi language as it exists today and hence are a crucial part of the Hindi textbooks. While Rahim's couplets remain, it is quite unbelievable that a 16th-century Muslim court poet is the only Muslim author represented in a Hindi textbook at this stage. If we look into the Class VI textbook, there is only one Muslim writer included in the textbook and that is the famous lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi. His poem "sāthi hāth baṛhānā" (partner, extend your hand) is a wonderfully crafted poem about teamwork written in Hindustani, which was also adapted into a Hindi movie song with the same title in the movie "Naya Daur" (1957; dir B. R. Chopra). The song was brought into the mainstream through Bollywood, especially on account of its being sung by two of the most famous singers in the country, Asha Bhosle and Mohammed Rafi. This poem remains a popular choice for students to learn and sing in the classroom and remains an important chapter in the textbook.

In the Hindi textbooks, there is a clear attempt to include themes of "unity in diversity" around the country. This is particularly conspicuous in the Class V Hindi textbook, where there are deliberate attempts at exhibiting the festivals, cultures, dresses, foods, and traditions from diverse regions and groups in India. It is worth noting that this textbook too contains only one Muslim author, Jeelani Bano, a contemporary Urdu writer. Her story "ēk din kī bādshāhat" (the emperorship of one day) is about children in a household claiming "emperorship" for one day, where all the rights of authority are taken away from their parents and grandparents and transferred to them.

While this may be the only Muslim author included in the Class V textbook, the same textbook also contains the only reference to a Muslim festival in the story "īdgāh" (the site of Eid) by the renowned Hindi-Urdu writer Premchand. The story follows a young boy who is walking towards the Eidgah with his friends. He decides to spend his Eid money on a pair of kitchen pliers for his grandmother, while his friends buy sweets and toys for themselves from the city. Including this story could be seen as an attempt to create a secular understanding of the country, but the interesting part about this is the placement of this chapter. The chapter occurs immediately after a poem by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, titled "Khilaunēwālā" (the toy-seller). This is a rhymed and musical poem about a young boy imagining what he will buy from the local toy seller, and talking to his mother about his dreams of buying a sword and destroying

evil, following in the footsteps of Lord Rama from the Indian epic Ramayana. Even though there is an attempt to include a religiously diverse set of texts in the book, there could be a subtle message read into the placement of these two chapters together, a part of its "hidden curriculum" that betrays its politics.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the "hidden" and "erased" aspects of Hindi-language textbooks in contemporary India by contrasting them with what "remains" in these textbooks. The idea behind this analysis is to investigate the processes behind selecting and legitimising the material in Hindi language textbooks today, especially within the context of the recent "syllabus rationalisation" process by the NCERT. Using these textbooks as evidence, the chapter looks at how language education can serve as a medium to disseminate ideas about the nation, and more importantly build a religio-cultural consciousness aligned specifically with Hindu religious and cultural values.

Language textbooks, even more than other subject textbooks, become a site for the reproduction of national and political ideologies specifically because of the direct impact of language on the creation of students' worldview. It is due to the impact of language socialisation—a process wherein students are socialised both into and *through* language, as discussed above—that cementing a certain kind of "cultural nationalism" is possible through language textbooks. The process of language socialisation is especially interesting to study in terms of the Hindi textbook in India, given the complex history of Hindi as a language that has been attempting to create its own identity since the late 19th century, and has been used as a symbol of national integration since the days of the freedom struggle against the British. Its old insecurities of distinguishing itself from the language Urdu, and defining itself through its closeness to Sanskrit continue to play out in the current textbooks. Chapters in Hindi textbooks today include language that is heavily Sanskritised, and NCERT's "erased curriculum" includes chapters in a language that is arguably closer to colloquial Hindi but have been removed nevertheless for other reasons.

The sections above have shown which chapters have been "erased" from Hindi textbooks, and how representative (or non-representative) of religious minorities the textbooks are in their current forms, as well as what "remains" in the textbook and what that says about the intended messaging of the textbook. This contrast makes the point about the subtle messaging through the text even clearer and once again begs the questions—Whom are these textbooks created for? Who are they including and excluding as their reader? While "unity in diversity" remains a key theme in Hindi textbooks, there only remains a tokenistic commitment to this theme, and even that sometimes is undermined by the ordering of the chapters in the textbook as noted above in the case of Premchand's chapter on the festival of Eid. These textbooks then not only alienate students because of their distance from the language spoken and understood by the youth today, but also because of their religious associations

which will inevitably create a distance for a heterogenous body of students in the classroom. There are multiple chapters in every Hindi textbook that have been taken from Hindu scriptures or are in praise of Hindu gods such as Rama and Krishna, and this will reinforce the "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" theme in the textbook, which is even more dangerous in today's political climate in the country, dominated by a Hindu majoritarian political narrative.

Some of the other chapters that have not been mentioned in this chapter are centred around freedom fighters and the others are focused on bringing out the diversity of languages, cultures, festivals and food across different states in India. It is the idea of instilling a sense of nationalism that is quite strongly present in Hindi textbooks, much more than any other language textbooks, for instance, the English textbook in particular. This chapter argues that Hindi textbooks today continue to be preoccupied with teaching more than just the language, especially after the "syllabus rationalisation" process has made it easy to remove chapters without any questions or explanations. It is under the garb of this process that these changes are occurring slowly in the Hindi textbook, and this "erased curriculum" is important to track and analyse as it will hugely impact the socialisation of students in the language classroom in the future.

References

Apple, Michael W. 2009. *Ideology and Curriculum*. Third edition. New York, N.Y.: Routledge Falmer.

Ayres, Alyssa. 2009. *Speaking Like a State: Language and Nationalism in Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bewes, Timothy. 2010. *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*. Course Book. . Translation/ Transnation. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Government of India. 2020. NewEducation Policy (NEP). Available on https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf.Last accessed 20th January 2025.

Jaswal, Srishti. 2023. 'Mughals, RSS, Evolution: Outrage as India Edits School Textbooks'. *Al Jazeera*, 14 April 2023. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/14/mughals-rss-evolution-outrage-as-india-edits-school-textbooks. Last accessed 3rd February 2024.

Jackson, Philip. 1968. *Life in Classrooms*. New York, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2009. 'The National Language'. In *Hindu Nationalism : A Reader, Course Book*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Johny, Rita Maria. 2023. 'NCERT drops chapters on Mughal Empire from Class 12 history books. Kapil Mishra says 'Akbar…'. *Hindustan Times*, 4 April 2023. Available on https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/ncert-drops-mughal-empire-chapters-kapil-mishra-says-akbar-101680590093526.html. Last accessed 9th May 2023.

Kumar, Krishna. 2015. *Politics of Education in Colonial India*. London.

LaDousa, Chaise. 2014. Hindi Is Our Ground, English Is Our Sky : Education, Language, and Social Class in Contemporary India. *Ebook Central*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Mansoor, Sanya. 2023. 'India's School Textbooks Are the Latest Battleground for Hindu Nationalism'. *TIME*, 6 April 2023. https://time.com/6269349/india-textbook-changes-controversy-hindu-nationalism/. Last accessed 3rd February 2024.

Mateen, Zoya. 2023. 'India History Debate after Chapter on Mughals Dropped'. *BBC News*, 20 April 2023. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-65229515. Last accessed 3rd February 2024.

Mohammad-Arif, Aminah. 2005. "Textbooks, Nationalism and History Writing in India and Pakistan." In *Manufacturing Citizenship [Electronic Resource]: Education and Nationalism in Europe, South Asia and China*, edited by Véronique Bénéï. London: Routledge.

National Curriculum Framework. 2005. "National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)." Available on https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/nc-framework/nf2005-english.pdf

National Council of Educational Research and Training website. 'Rationalisation of textbooks'. Available on https://ncert.nic.in/rationalisation-textbook.php. Last accessed 3rd February 2024.

Ochs, Elinor, and Bambi Schieffelin. 2011. "The Theory of Language Socialization." In *The Handbook of Language Socialization*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444342901.ch1.

Rahman, Tariq. 2002. *Language, Ideology and Power : Language Learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Rai, Alok. 2001. *Hindi Nationalism. Tracts for the Times (New Delhi, India)*. Hyderabad, A.P.: Orient Longman.

Snell, Rupert. 1986. "Ronald Stuart McGregor: Hindi Literature Form Its Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century. (A History of Indian Literature, Vol. VIII, Fasc. 6.) Viii, 239 Pp. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984. DM 98." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49(3):599–600. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00045456.

Samantaray, Nita. 2021. 'NCERT decides to "lighten" school textbooks for 2022–23 session amid COVID 19 disruptions'. *Times Now News*, 28 December 2021. Available on https://www.timesnownews.com/education/article/ncert-decides-to-lighten-school-textbooks-for-2022-23-session-amid-covid-19-disruptions/844233. Last accessed 3rd February 2024.

Sapir, Edward. 1933. "Language." *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 9: 155–169.

Silverstein, Michael. 1979. "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology." In *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, edited by Paul Clyne, William F. Hanks, and Carol L. Hofbauer. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

The Wire Staff. 2020. 'Centre Spent 22 Times More on Promoting Sanskrit Than Other 5 Classical Languages Combined'. *The Wire*. 17 February 2020. Available on https://thewire.in/government/sanskrit-language-promotion. Last accessed 20th January 2025

Textbooks cited

'Rimjhim'. Class 5 Hindi textbook. *National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)*. Available on https://ncert.nic.in/textbook.php?ehhn1=ps-18. Last accessed 9th May 2023.

'Vasant'. Part I. Class 6 Hindi textbook. *National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)*. Available on https://ncert.nic.in/textbook.php?fhvs1=0-17. Last accessed 9th May 2023.

'Vasant'. Part II. Class 7 Hindi textbook. *National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)*. Available on https://ncert.nic.in/textbook.php?ghvs1=0-20. Last accessed 9th May 2023.

'Vasant'. Part III. Class 8 Hindi textbook. *National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)*. Available on https://ncert.nic.in/textbook.php?hhvs1=0-18. Last accessed 9th May 2023.

3 The Challenges of Literacy Acquisition and Linguistic Proficiency in Multilingual Educational Landscape of Pakistan

Azka Syed

یہ دستورِ زبان بندی ہے کیسا تیری محفل میں
یہاں تو بات کرنے کو ترستی ہے زبان میری
Ye Dastoor-e-Zuban Bandi Hai Kaisa Teri Mehfil Mein
Yahan To Baat Karne Ko Tarasti Hai Zuban Meri
What is this custom of silencing that exists in your congregation?
My tongue yearns to speak in this gathering.

The art of meaning-making is a whimsical one. These verses by Allama Iqbal, Pakistan's national poet, can be interpreted in multiple ways, from universalism, romantic love, love for deity and exploration of self in an increasingly isolating world. I, however, find these verses to vividly resonate with the challenges of linguistic representation, development and acquisition in Pakistan. In a country which is home to more than 70 languages spoken as mother tongues, there is rarely space for using these languages in terms of reading and writing, especially in most official settings and the more critical focus for this chapter—the education system. Currently, the Pakistani education system is dominated by two major languages that are used as medium of instruction (MOI), as well as taught formally as mandatory subjects: English, the nation's official language, which is used in most urban schools, and Urdu, the nation's *lingua franca*, which is used in both rural and urban schools. Thus, the major curricula development and pedagogy are done within these two languages. It is, however, essential to note that Urdu, despite being the national language of Pakistan, is the mother tongue of merely 7 percent of the entire population. For the remaining population, Urdu is the second while English is the third language they encounter. Within this rich multilingual landscape and a population of 235.8 million, the challenge of elevating the country's literacy level remains a crucial aspect of Pakistan's development policies. According to the latest consolidated and official report about literacy rates, which was published almost nine years ago, most of the country's population resides in rural areas, where the literacy rate is 51 percent (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2015). In most of Pakistan, languages such as Punjabi, Sirai'ki, Pashto, Dhatki, Kashmiri are spoken. In such circumstances, one can't help but wonder, what is this custom of silencing that exists in this nation, and how does this impact the people?

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-5

This chapter explores the interrelation of multiple languages and literacy skills within the diverse linguistic context of Pakistan through a case study of The Citizens Foundation (TCF) schools across the Punjab province. Despite Pakistan's linguistic diversity, this chapter notes that in TCF schools, the process of literacy teaching relies on the immersion of students in Urdu, their second language, with minimal exposure to their first language. This lack of exposure often goes unnoticed due to the disliked yet highly prevalent rote learning approach to Urdu or English, which enables students to achieve satisfactory assessment results. Given these circumstances, this study also raises the question of how to support teachers in literacy education within Pakistan's complex linguistic context.

In addition, this chapter draws the links between the shortcomings of literacy acquisition and pedagogy and the colonial history of Pakistan's linguistic landscape. It highlights that, while the immediate reaction to the notion of decolonising language education in Pakistan might be to challenge the hegemony of English, the complexity of Pakistan's colonial history and multilingual landscape problematises the idea of "decolonisation" itself. By drawing attention to the hegemony of a native language and tracing the history of Urdu's rise to a hegemonic language in colonial India and, by default, modern-day Pakistan, this chapter aims to problematise the question of decoloniality in education and pedagogy in Pakistan and question whether Urdu is dominating other mother tongues in much the same way that English dominated indigenous languages during the colonial period. It seeks to facilitate the discourse around language, education and decolonisation in Pakistan by foregrounding the sociolinguistic realities of the country and providing potential reasons for the stark gaps in linguistic proficiency and literacy acquisition. Moreover, the chapter urges the need to rethink our role as educationists and practitioners in the postcolonial Global South and to develop alternative frameworks to address these layered complexities.

Education, Decolonisation and Language

When we talk about decolonising and reforming the education system to include marginalised voices and the masses, it is rooted in the sentiment of upheaving a pre-existing system. For the people in postcolonial Pakistan, the intersectional nature of systematic shortcomings—whether it be in the form of inaccessible healthcare, abject poverty, social or political corruption, gender imbalances and more—requires the acknowledgement of our history and lived realities, before launching into a long-term plan of "development" laid down by Western definition of the word. When I first began questioning the education system in Pakistan, language was nowhere near a question of critical interest to me. It was only after my time as a student of Comparative Literature that I understood the significance of language as a tool of power and maintaining hegemony, and how it was vital in perpetuating colonial rule across many regions of the world. In the Indian Subcontinent too, the co-opting of

colonial languages by the colonised was interlinked with the necessity to survive in this new world order. American writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin (1979) spoke of this co-opting as a means of survival, commenting that "people evolve a language in order to describe and thus control their circumstances, or in order not to be submerged by a reality that they cannot articulate. (And, if they cannot articulate it, they *are* submerged.)."

Here, it is crucial to note that during the colonial era, the indigenous people of the Indian Subcontinent faced constant duress when it came to articulating in their own mother tongues. As the hegemony of English cemented itself in official, legal and professional settings, followed by the systematic introduction of linguistic hierarchies of Urdu and Hindi to integrate the local populations within the British governance, it was not long until the indigenous languages were pushed to margins and relegated to languages of daily conversations among the speakers. This phenomenon is a key aspect of colonisation, which aimed to control the social, economic and mental production of the colonised. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) observes the relation of language and colonialism and writes about how in a modern society with a developed language, a child would experience harmony between the aspects of social immersion, speech and written words, all three of which are foundational for developing a child's sensibility and make sense of their experience of life. The colonial imposition of a foreign language on the indigenous people, and suppressing the native languages as spoken and written caused a rupture in the harmony which helps to maintain a person's understanding of the world. This rupture, which began in colonial India, continues to plague the society and the education system of Pakistan in the present.

Colonisation, Linguistic Diversity and Education in Pakistan

The process of suppressing the usage of indigenous languages in the pre-Partition Indian Subcontinent was a long one, and in fact, did not start off as a direct attempt to stifle them. Rather, East India Company, an English joint-stock company that later came under the British crown, assumed military and administrative control in the Indian Subcontinent and thus set off the beginning of colonial rule there, emphasised the usage of local languages in an attempt to conduct successful trade with the Indian traders. The East India Company sensed that "efficient Indian administration rested on an understanding of Indian culture" (Viswanathan 1989), and thus, many early members of the Company supported the usage of vernacular languages, engaging with local cultures, and even intermarriages with the local Indian women. However, in 1784, the Pitt's India Act officially declared the transfer of East India Company's administrative power to the British crown, after which the language preferences of the administration changed, "thereafter espousing a more Anglicist policy" (Durrani 2012).

This shift in languages was further cemented officially within the Indian Subcontinent with the passing of the English Education Act of 1835, which resulted in English becoming the MOI. This upheaval of the formal education

system in the Indian Subcontinent was underscored by the Westernisation of curricula, an emphasis on promoting English values, and a reduction of funding for vernacular language education. The Indian literary scholar Madhukar Krishna Naik traces the earliest reflections of this educational ideology to Charles Grant, a British politician, member of Parliament and Chairman of the British East India Company. Naik (1992) notes that Grant argued "to introduce the language of the conquerors" as it seemed "to be an obvious means of assimilating a conquered people to [the British]" (17). Therefore, through this systematic exclusion of language education, and the prolonged discouragement and preventative efforts of indigenous languages' usage in professional settings such as offices, courts and governing bodies, it was only natural for the formal development of these languages to be stunted (Nettle and Romaine 2000).

Considering this brief insight into the institutionalisation of colonial English in the Indian Subcontinent, one may fall victim to the presupposition that in modern-day Pakistan, English hegemonises the education system. Such a treatment of the colonial language in language-related discourses may tend to shift the attention from another essential factor within the linguistic landscape of Pakistan, that is, the hegemony of Urdu over the multiple regional languages spoken in the country. Pakistani academic Tariq Rahman delineates the complex case of Urdu's hegemony over regional Pakistani languages as a phenomenon stretching back to the end of the nineteenth century. Over time, the language

> started emerging as a symbol of Muslim identity. After that the Muslim League [the leading political party representing Muslims of the Indian Subcontinent], and other Muslim corporate bodies and groups, supported the teaching of Urdu for political reasons even if they wished to acquire English for utilitarian ones.
>
> (2000)

This was not an isolated incident, much like most others that emerge in the wake of colonisation. Urdu's rise as a hegemonic regional language as well as a representative of the Muslim identity was a long-strung process that began as a means of consolidating pedagogical education in Urdu and Hindi instead of the precolonial Persian and Sanskrit.

Initially an offshoot of the Persian language, as it was also written in the same Persian *nasta'liq* script, Urdu was learnt by Indian Muslims and Hindus as a by-product of learning Persian. Its spread among the common and semi-literate people came about through the "simple books explaining the rituals of Islam and stories about saints and prophets which were circulated from the eighteenth century onwards" (Rahman 2000). Additionally, poetry was a unique method of the informal spread of Urdu as a conversational and literary language, albeit it remained under the shadow of Persian, which was considered the elite and hegemonic language. Eventually, it became so that Urdu became a conversational language in areas of northern India, populated by middle- and upper-class people.

The decision of ousting Persian from administrative and legal circles, and its replacement with Urdu, was a calculated move done through the process of "acquisition planning," which is a governmental policy to increase the number of language users. The first step to this, in colonial Subcontinent, was the shift to formal means of learning Urdu; that is, promoting Urdu to the status of medium of instruction in schools and universities across the Subcontinent. This was initially done through the Thomason experiment, which was a systematic introduction of Urdu-medium schools in Agra, Aligarh, Bareli, Etawah, Farrukhabad, Manipur, Mathura and Shahjahanpur, by James Thomason, the son of an East India Company chaplain. To counter the people's resistance to Urdu learning, which was overshadowed by the prestige of Persian, the British provided incentives, such as paying Urdu teachers and students to teach and learn the language, respectively. Moreover, a significant establishment in the proliferation of Urdu was the Fort Williams College, which was essential for the training of civil servants and future leaders.

Rahman (2000) highlights the underlying goal of this establishment—"symbol of Raj itself"—was to ensure that the "students destined to exercise high and important functions in India, should be able to speak the oriental languages with fluency and propriety." Teaching in Urdu, or Hindustani as the British called it, was politically significant because it was considered the "literary language of the Musalmans [Muslims] and of Hindus educated on Musalman [Muslim] lines." Interestingly enough, because the formal teaching of Urdu was imbued with Western education, the language became associated with Western modernisation. Subjects like mathematics, accounting and history were emphasised in Urdu schools as compared to Persian schools. Moreover, the gender balance in education would tip in favour of Urdu medium schools, which was another indicator of modernity (Rahman 2011). With the strengthening of colonial rule and the association of Urdu with possibilities of getting government jobs and ascending the socio-economic ladder, it was natural for people to forego their focus, if any, on developing the scripts for standardising the obscure regional languages, or on actively pushing for the inclusion of formal education of regional languages. It is to be noted that languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, etc. also had established professorships in Fort William College; thus, these languages had considerably developed canons and pedagogical practices. However, given our focus on the crisis of pedagogy in lesser-known regional languages, and that too of modern-day Pakistan, Urdu is at the nexus of our examination to understand the current crises of linguistic and literacy acquisition in Pakistan.

Therefore, the position of Urdu is very distinct from other languages spoken in Pakistan. Most of the regional, vernacular languages in Pakistan, such as Punjabi, Sirai'ki, Pashto, Dhatki, Kashmiri and more, vary from place to place. Even more particular to note is how most vernacular languages spoken in rural regions of the country do not have formal scripts, which limits the usage of these languages to only listening and speaking. Thus, there are few, if any, ways of developing literacy skills in most of the mother languages in

Pakistan. Even if there are scripts, there is rarely formal literacy training in these languages within a school system, except for a select few, such as Pashto and Sindhi. The lack of a formal writing system of these languages can be considered a symptom of the colonial era, wherein the hegemony of colonial language restricted the growth of indigenous languages by relegating them to vernacular usage only.

Thus, 76 years after the independence of Pakistan from British colonial rule, the country still struggles to find solutions to the pervasive development concerns that echo the postcolonial repercussions of the years-long occupation, out of which literacy education is a major one, and the focus of this chapter. Literacy is considered essential for developing nations, such as Pakistan, given its crucial role in contributing to a country's socio-economic growth. Within its rich, multilingual landscape, literacy acquisition and linguistic proficiency is an underdeveloped skill in Pakistan, which is reflected through the current overall literacy rate of 62.3 percent. This means that "an estimated population of 60 million is illiterate in the country" (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, n.d.). For a country that has been a sovereign state, independent from British colonial rule since 1947, such a condition of literacy rates raises a scarlet flag, one that indicates deep-rooted challenges to the country's development.

The challenges of literacy acquisition run rampant, because the gap between the mother tongues of literacy students and the *lingua franca* of Pakistan is a significant one. Its significance is exacerbated by the research-backed argument that a child must be taught in their most familiar language during their early years of formal education (UNESCO 2003; Cummins 1992, 2000). The most familiar language is often the mother tongue, which is also called the first language or L1. Given the statistics, it is safe to assume that Urdu is the second language or L2 for most language learners in Pakistan. Where multiple languages exist within a young learner's surroundings, including the mother tongue, Urdu, English, and even other regional languages spoken by people around them, the issues of language learning and development are compounded. In *Science and Human Behaviour* (Skinner 1965), American psychologist B.F Skinner provides the explanation of language development, terming it as a process that occurs through principles of learning, including association, reinforcement and the observation of others. This principle would translate to the language-learning practices in early years education in Pakistan, had the education system been adequately equipped with effective language pedagogy.

If we circle back to the fact that the Pakistani education system is split into two categories based on MOI, that is Urdu and English, it is also to be observed how these categories reflect socio-economic associations with these languages. These categories are marked by a distinct disparity between the socio-economic statuses of the schools, as "Urdu medium schools are normally the state schools providing free education to the poorer communities while the English medium schools are private fee-paying schools for the economically well-off sections of society" (Shamim & Rashid 2019). This disparity, having carried on to the present from the colonial era, where the educated elite were the primary

recipients of Westernised education in English, may not be the same as it was in the 1900s, but it underscores the stratifying impacts of using English as MOI. These impacts echo the colonial sentiments of cementing the colonial language as a symbol and source of power. Pakistan is also one of the many postcolonial nation-states that have co-opted the human potential of language as a meaning-making semiotic tool, relegating many speakers to a position of speechlessness and silencing that I mention in the beginning (García 2017).

In addition to the dilemmas of MOI and mother tongues being different, there is no proper standardisation of Pakistan's curricula across the country, at least up until now. There are two main education systems, the nationally mandated one, and the privately offered Cambridge system. The former consists of 12 years of education spread across four levels: primary (grades 1–5), middle school (grades 6–8), matriculation (grades 9 and 10) and intermediate (grades 11 and 12). The latter is associated with the United Kingdom's Cambridge education board and offers O and A levels qualifications through Cambridge International Education (CIE) exams, and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) exams. Some elite private schools in the country, such as Froebel's International School and Karachi Grammar School, also offer Pearson Edexcel board and International Baccalaureate (IB) qualifications. Amidst this variegated terrain, the Single National Curriculum (SNC) was officially introduced in 2021, under the tagline One Nation, One Curriculum, to unify the various curricula of Pakistan. However, despite efforts, there has not been a uniform implementation of the SNC across Pakistani schools, and given how it is still an ongoing process, one cannot determine its success or failure at this point in time. Within such a situation, addressing concerns of literacy from the decolonial perspective often gets subsumed by larger policy issues and thus remains a struggle for policymakers and educationists.

The Interrelation of Multiple Languages and Literacy Skills in The Citizens Foundation (TCF) Schools

My research about languages, linguistic proficiency and literacy acquisition is born out of Baldwin's (1979) thoughts on the people's inability to articulate in a colonial language as reflective of their "submersion" in postcolonial Pakistan, fraught with social, economic and political complexities of the 76 years old nation-state. The use of L1 for developing L2 literacy and oracy skills is thus undeniable, especially in the context of Pakistan. However, for the nation to reach a level where the L1 education system is implemented uniformly to combat challenges in L2 literacy acquisition and linguistic proficiency, it is critical to understand how grassroots-level education for foundational literacy really looks like. In an attempt to do so, this chapter explores a case study of The Citizens Foundation (TCF) schools across the Punjab province of Pakistan. Choosing these schools was paramount to acknowledge how education and its concept looks for the masses in Pakistan, given the schools' focus on enrolling students from lower socio-economic strata of the country.

The Citizens Foundation (TCF) is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the cause of accessible education to the less privileged in Pakistan. Established in 1995, the organisation is now considered to be a leading figure in the field of education, with around 1921 schools across Pakistan, especially in rural and remote areas (The Citizens Foundation, n.d.). TCF schools were established out of the need to bring the "school to the child," instead of making the child go to school. This was the result of recognising the issues of mobility, especially for girls within the conservative Pakistani society, and lack of financial resources for the majority of population. Thus, most schools host students who belong to rural and urban slums and remote villages of the country. The students belong to working-class families, where both the parents are often illiterate and speak only their mother language in homes. There is a limited culture of educational exposure, though this has been observed to slightly shift over the years.

TCF schools, while unique in their structural and pedagogical approaches, are reflective of the majority of student population across Pakistan which can be categorised as "less-privileged." In addition to TCF schools, government and private schools operating in less privileged areas underscore the larger student population whose educational journeys are fraught with complexities of socio-economic, social, cultural and political issues. Having grown up in Jauharabad, a small, remote town located in Central Punjab, I have observed these issues in schools around me, most of which were operated from a house in a neighbourhood, and by teachers who have mid-quality education provided by local colleges or universities only. Drawing on these observations, as well as my research which forms the basis for this chapter, it would not be an exaggeration to posit the student population of TCF schools as significantly similar to most students of other less privileged schools across the country, as far as their background is concerned. I would still avoid generalisation to ensure that this research and its foundational arguments do not attempt to cage in the rich diversity of Pakistan when it comes to mapping its educational landscape with respect to linguistic usage. It is more to help provide the readers with a clearer understanding of the status of language and literacy learning for the majority of Pakistan's students with respect to their socio-economic backgrounds. While the concern of L1 or mother language differing from L2 may be traced in students at elite schools of Pakistan as well, this chapter emphasises the research about students from less privileged areas, whose access to advanced pedagogy, literacy training and capacity building through supplemental practices is extremely limited given their surroundings. Situating my research within this particular setup circles back to the beginning of this chapter, and echoes my argument about the institutional flaws of the pre-Partition colonial era, that remain intact one way or another, and serve to disadvantage the already-disadvantaged populations in Pakistan.

Pakistan's richly variegated linguistic landscape and its history as a British colony makes it ideally suited (not the most fortunate of situations to be in) for the purpose of the study which this chapter explores. I acknowledge the

limitations of my research, both in terms of the areas I have been able to explore so far, as well as the consolidation of the ever-growing data I come across. Therefore, I focus my research on early years and primary grades (Grade 1 and 2) of TCF schools mostly in Central and Northern Punjab, across schools in seven localities, which include both cities and villages. These localities include Rawalpindi, Kasur, Kot Momin, Khushab, Narowal, Bhalwal and Gujjar Khan. Among the 13 schools I have visited in these localities, none of the L1 of the students is Urdu. Rather, the L1 of the students included a rich variety of Punjabi dialects including Majhi, Kangri, Dogri, Potohari, as well as Pashto and Dari in a school in Rawalpindi where most of the student population was of Afghan refugees. My research methodologies included classroom observations during Urdu periods for grades KG, 1 and 2, focus groups with foundational literacy teachers after classroom observations, and inspection of Urdu and English notebooks of students from the aforementioned grades. The classrooms included around 18–25 students on average, and I observed two classrooms per school. Instead of individual interviews with teachers, I conducted focus groups with literacy teachers to determine their experiences and facilitate a collaborative conversation, which was successful in providing me with the answers to the key question about the linguistic proficiencies of students with respect to L1 and L2. For the focus groups, insights from a minimum of 4 teachers and a maximum of 12 teachers were taken, whereas around four notebooks were inspected from each class.

Within the diverse linguistic landscape of the localities I visited, I narrowed down my research to three main questions about literacy acquisition in Urdu, which is an L2 for these students. My first question is about the connectivity of a student with Urdu outside of their schools, both in terms of literacy (reading and writing) and oracy (listening and speaking). My second question underlines the effectiveness of literacy assessments taken for Urdu and whether the progress was surface-level or if there was only an approach of rote learning to attempt these assessments. Thirdly, a significant portion of my observations is dedicated to uncovering the teachers' approach to teaching foundational Urdu literacy, and how their use of TCF resources reflected their understanding of Urdu language teaching. This last question was essential to address because, for most teachers I encountered, Urdu was not L1.

In this chapter, I attempt to delineate major issues that act as barriers to literacy acquisition and proficiency in L1 and L2 for most students. As I established earlier, Urdu is the L2 for most of the Pakistani population, and this is what this chapter largely explores as well. My exploration of English literacy acquisition will not be a focus of this chapter.

The Challenges of Language and Literacy Acquisition

However, before I delve into my case study that examines the challenges to literacy learning in Pakistan, it is necessary to understand how developing literacy (reading and writing) and oracy (listening and speaking) skills in mother

tongue or L1 assists the literacy skill development in L2. Knowledge and skills are transferable from one language to another. Much evidence suggests that L1 literacy helps literacy development in the L2 (Bialystok 2002; Cummins 1991). Collier's (1989) research, done through studying standardised test results, presented evidence that L2 learners who were literate in their L1 performed better and took less time to develop L2 literacy skills as compared to the L2 learners who were not literate in their L1. Moreover, as far as oracy skills are concerned, linguistic kinship between L1 and L2 through phonetic association, lexicographic knowledge and in some cases, grammatical rules, can accelerate the learning of L2. Santiago-Garabieta et al. (2022) expand on this further by stating that even with no linguistic kinship, L1 can foster L2 oracy skills by allowing students to engage in dialogues and recognise phonetic associations.

One of the basic rules of language learning is language immersion, which involves consistent exposure to the language being learned, be it in terms of literacy or oracy. In the schools I visited, the process of literacy teaching hinged entirely upon the complete immersion of the student in Urdu, their L2. In addition to the teacher speaking in Urdu, the softboards, books, noticeboards inside and outside the school, as well as labelling of items such as dustbins, stationary boxes, etc., were all a mix of Urdu and English. There was no presence of the mother tongue in either written or spoken forms. All of the schools I visited were in areas that hosted populations of Punjabi speakers. For schools with students speaking Pashto, there was only exposure to the language in its spoken form because these schools were located in the Punjab province, and Pashto is a language primarily used in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Despite its standardised script, Pashto is not found much in written form in Punjab as there are only minority users of the language in this province. Therefore, I focus on student exposure to Punjabi literacy and oracy and relegate my consideration of Pashto only to its oracy given the conditions of my research.

As far as the written form is concerned, it is important to note that Punjabi and its various dialects are often written in the *Shahmukhi* script, which is the same script as Urdu. The Punjabi script in *Shahmukhi*, while written like Urdu, deviates slightly from this script as there are phonetic differences between the two languages. Zahid Hussain, a professor of Punjabi language and literature at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) in Pakistan, mentions how these phonetic differences have been submerged within the use of Urdu script for Punjabi, and make it difficult for the learning of Punjabi literacy (A. Syed, personal communication 2022). Moreover, Punjabi script is rarely used in Pakistan for official communication, despite being the most widely spoken language in the country with about 39 percent of the population being speakers of Punjabi or its dialects (Pakistan Census 2017, ctd. in Translators without Borders, n.d.). This discrepancy, birthed out of a long and complicated history of language-based conflicts, systematic

linguistic oppression and exclusion of linguistic identities, finds its roots back in the 1880s when the British colonial rulers annexed the province of Punjab. With this annexation,

> the question of a language policy became evident, as the vernacular terms used by the officers in correspondence were often unintelligible to their superiors. The Board [of Administration] proposed that Urdu should be used as the official language of Punjab, since it was already being used in Northern India where they were established.
>
> (Rahman 2007)

Moreover, an underlying prejudice against Punjabi regarding its "rurality" hindered its usage in professional settings. "Letter after letter reveals that most British officers assumed that Punjabi was a rural patois of which Urdu was the refined form" (Rahman 2007). After Partition, these prejudices never quite went away, despite efforts by language activists. In a detailed article, columnist Ishtiaq Ahmed presents historical evidence of Punjabi revivalist efforts in the 1980s and their eventual waning. A glaring aspect of Punjabi's lack of development is attributed to how the use of Punjabi language was banned for the members of the Punjab Assembly, the state legislature (Ahmed, 2020). Therefore, Punjabi never got a chance to be developed extensively for official use.

Minimal Exposure to L1 and Urdu Literacy and Oracy in Schools

Keeping these critical historical facts about language development and exposure to literacy of mother tongues, it is clear that the students I observed in TCF schools had minimal exposure to L1 literacy in their schools. Even outside of schools, there is no exposure to L1 literacy. Oracy, however, is extensively present within the students' homes and neighbourhoods. Their day-to-day communications include the usage of L1. This is what causes a vivid discrepancy between the students' learning of Urdu literacy and oracy, and the language they actually spoke outside of their schools. For them to learn and gain proficiency in Urdu as their academic grades progressed, the conceptual hindrances may start early when they are exposed to this L2 without a smooth transition from their L1 to L2. While learning does occur, there is a slow progression in the development of literacy skills, which, within the TCF curricula development, is divided into the categories of listening, speaking, reading, writing, phonics and grammar. In my classroom observations, which I conducted periodically over the course of two years, I realised that there was not sufficient development of literacy skills across the aforementioned six categories. Upon interviewing teachers and conducting focus groups in Kot Momin, Kasur, Bhalwal[1], Rawalpindi[2] and most recently, Taxila[3], it was discovered that this insufficiency stemmed from the lack of exposure to

Urdu oracy outside of schools, lack of parental support in learning Urdu, given their own inability to use that language, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted student learning progress as their access to their schools, the main hub of exposure to Urdu, was halted.

These insights lay down the issue of linguistic proficiency and literacy acquisition and retention in Urdu for these early and primary-grade students. Their mother tongue, while a source of rapid and effective oral communication, is not supported by the MOI of their schools, thus presenting the glaring gaps between the student's circumstances for sustaining the skills beyond the school and the literacy skills taught to them in the school. This gap expands further when students start learning English alongside Urdu, as is the requirement of TCF schools. This compounds the concerns regarding effective teaching and learning of literacy skills, which are the source of knowledge acquisition in other subjects as well. This sort of alienation—often unaddressed within our overall efforts to combat "bigger issues" like sustaining school enrolment rates, reducing dropout rates, convincing parents to let their girls study, etc.—highlights how the very basis of education for masses is fraught with colonial complexities and hinders educational growth for the majority in the country.

Bias in Learning Methods and Assessment Results

Another major reason this alienation from L1 goes unnoticed is the student assessment result. It has long been an issue in Pakistan's education system that the students, due to their inability to understand basic concepts in Urdu or English, rote-learn information provided in their books and other supporting materials. Exams are more a test of memory than conceptual clarity, which "hamper the development and modernisation of Pakistan's educational landscape" (Javed 2020). Statistical data further supports this fact by underlining how "only 24 percent of children from the poorest quartile are at a level where they can read a simple story in Urdu," thus highlighting how rote learning only serves to impoverish foundational literacy (ASER Report 2023). This brings us to our second question about the effectiveness of literacy assessments, and how they reflect the students' literacy acquisition or the lack thereof. Because my study is focused on uncovering the root causes of hindrances to effective foundational literacy learning in Urdu, I sought to understand the assessment process in early years and primary grades 1 and 2 in TCF.

TCF actively discourages the use of rote learning and memorisation in their classrooms by employing extensive use of Concept Check Questions (CCQs) or Essential Questions (EQ) to assess student understanding of the topic. These questions, often included within the teaching or used in discussion activities, highlight the driving concepts behind a certain topic. For instance, in a lesson about Urdu alphabets in the early years, an essential question would be something like "Why is the sequencing of alphabets significant?" The goal of such questions is to provide the student with clarity about why they are

studying a certain topic, and how it is important for them both inside and outside of their schools. However, given that this assessment approach does not require students to write something down in their notebooks, it is met with scrutiny from the parents. This was discovered through focus groups with teachers conducted in all 13 schools that I visited. The teachers mentioned that the scrutiny arose from the parents' concept of education being associated with writing and "filling notebooks upon notebooks with written work" (Syed. A, personal communication, 2022). The more a student wrote, the better they would be learning, or so was the concept prevalent in the parents' minds. To combat this scrutiny, teachers, in some cases, would take the liberty to make the students skip out on oral assessments as mentioned in their teaching guides, and make them copy the work written on board or in their textbooks. As a result, the student would parrot the information instead of grasping the concepts through questioning and discussions, and this would reflect in their assessment.

This claim found evidence in one of my visits to a Rawalpindi TCF school in October 2023. There, I conducted a reading activity in Grade 2, where the students were simply required to read the chapter out loud. Before beginning, I asked the students to read the title of their book, which was *Gainda* (trans: Marigold), the Urdu name of a flower. While the students could read the book title, none of them was able to answer when asked about the meaning of this title, despite this information being expanded upon in the teaching guides provided to the teachers. This not only reiterated the concerns regarding information regurgitation and the effectiveness of assessment techniques but also put into question the teachers' adherence to the pedagogical principles which were detailed in research-backed, learner-centric teaching guides provided to them. Harkening back to the beginning of this chapter where we discuss the inclusion of English as the MOI and standardisation of Urdu across the colonised Indian Subcontinent reveals the reason why this system of rote learning in pedagogy comes up time and again, despite numerous efforts to curb it. Because the "objective behind educating Indians was solely to breed a set of individuals who could become the medium of communication between the natives and the colonialists," there was never a focus on introducing pedagogical practices that were considered a learner-centric approach (Shahzad 2017). Even as time progressed and pedagogical research advanced, the education system before and after 1947 in Pakistan could not recover from its initial destabilisation. Due to a variety of education systems (Matric and Intermediate as state systems, Cambridge CIEs and IGCSEs as international education board systems), lack of uniformity in teaching practices across the country's schools, and the mammoth population to be taught, it is long before we come to a uniform solution that can help our students break out of the scaffold of information regurgitation. Such a concern plagues the essential learning of foundational literacy and linguistic proficiency and aggravates the apprehensions about the barriers students face in understanding and acquiring necessary knowledge.

Pedagogical Practices and Knowledge Dissemination

This leads us to our third overarching question regarding pedagogical practices and knowledge dissemination in the context of TCF schools. For this, considering the general profile of TCF teachers serves as the foundation for my observations. My goal during the classroom observations was to disregard that which I knew of the teachers beforehand to avoid generalisation and addressing any bias which I may have. To expand on this further, I would first like to break down the approach I took while analysing teaching practices for Urdu foundational literacy teaching. The first step here was to unpack what pedagogy meant in the particular context I was operating in. Because my research focuses on decolonisation of language pedagogy in the multilingual educational landscape of Pakistan, I understand pedagogy as a "site of decolonisation" which "affects and is affected by larger structural, contextual, local, and geopolitical forces" (Shahjahan, Estera, Surla & Edwards 2022). For pedagogy to be considered a "decolonising" force, it is essential for it to acknowledge the postcolonial complexities in Pakistan's education system, work actively to dislodge the pre-existing and embedded colonial practices in pedagogy and reform the very basis of classroom instruction through learner-centric approaches that include the intricacies surrounding a student in majority of Pakistani classrooms.

Therefore, my first line of action was to understand whether or not the teachers in TCF schools I was observing had been trained using socially constructivist teaching methods. Social constructivism in pedagogy resonates with the postcolonial necessity to reframe instructional practices while keeping in mind the student's context. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky argues that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivism in pedagogy argues for a learning environment where the child is facilitated by the teacher instead of being provided with information entirely by the teacher. Through this method, the child makes meaning on their own, drawing upon their existing experiences in order to understand new information. This is the very argument that this chapter has been advocating for in terms of language learning, linguistic proficiency and literacy acquisition in more than one language; that is, a child's ability to learn in L1 must be acknowledged before they are made to transition to L2. Considering that my focus is on language and literacy pedagogy, it is the social constructivist lens through which I observed pedagogical practices in TCF classrooms. My areas of observation included the teaching guides and the teacher's delivery of the lesson plans.

Firstly, the teaching guides followed the principles of learner-centric practices, which are considered crucial in helping to decolonise the education system. Bailey (2019) claims that teacher-centred instructional approaches are likely to disempower students; on the other hand, learner-centred practices are

apt to empower students. This empowerment comes through the agency of being able to make meaning on one's own instead of hoarding knowledge through rote learning or memorisation techniques. TCF teaching guides followed a standardised pattern where the knowledge building was focused on learner's ability to understand new words, question existing information, develop ideas and share the knowledge with their peers. It was the transference of information from the teaching guides to the students that compelled me to question whether the instructional practices employed by the teachers reflected the attempts of pedagogical reforms.

In 2022, during a classroom observation of grade 1 Urdu literacy class in Kasur, I noted three major things during the lesson delivery: firstly, all the students were not engaged in the class because the teacher would only question the students in the front row. Secondly, the teacher wrote the Urdu alphabets ٹ، ٹ، ڈ، ڈ on the board and asked the students to read them after her. There was no debrief or questioning activity that occurred beforehand, that would help the students connect the letter sounds with the alphabets written on the board. Lastly, the teacher did not comply by the activity written in the teaching guide and ended the lesson a lot earlier than the duration of the class asked for. During my one-on-one conversation with the teacher, the teacher claimed that adhering to the teaching guide would take her time and she wanted the students to be able to fill their notebooks to present written work. She was also sceptical of the teaching guide activity, asking me to understand the constraints of classroom management that she had to deal with in addition to teaching. The latter concern was echoed by two more teachers, one in a Rawalpindi school and another in a Khushab school. In a Gujjar Khan school, the teacher, a speaker of the Punjabi dialect, was unable to phonetically join the alphabets together to form the word درخت (trans: tree), because in her L1, there was no extensive use of diacritics (symbols added to letters in order to indicate pronunciation).

It is essential to note here that the teachers receive extensive training and refreshers every week in TCF schools so that they are well-equipped and up-to-date with the latest pedagogical practices. Keeping this in mind, as well as viewing data provided by school principals that proved the occurrence of these trainings, this issue of non-adherence to instructional plans presents a dilemma where there is a resistance from the teachers to adapt to this new and foreign system of teaching, which resembles nothing that they have experienced as students themselves. This added layer of complexity compounds the pre-existing issues of literacy acquisition and linguistic proficiency for students who are already struggling to adapt to their MOI which is Urdu in the majority of the cases. Students are expected to understand and use the official school language for learning from the first day of school, even though they do not use it at home. Eventually, students may learn to copy, repeat and even memorise their teacher's words and sentences. But without understanding, they are not able to use the words and sentences to build new knowledge (UNESCO 2018). However, within these observations, the question arose: are we

burdening our teachers, who themselves are a product of the very colonial education system we challenge, with the mammoth task of decolonising literacy education through advanced techniques? I would reserve this for a chapter of its own, but it is a pressing query that leads me to wonder if it is about time to reconsider our role as educationists and practitioners of the postcolonial Global South and develop alternative frameworks to address these multifaceted complexities.

The Way…. Forward?

The discussion in this chapter about linguistic connectivity and immersion, student approach to literacy learning, and pedagogical complications for foundational literacy only scratches the surface of things to consider about language education in a postcolonial, multilinguistic nation-state like Pakistan. These insights indicate the intersections of challenges that plague language and literacy pedagogy in Pakistan.

For instance, this chapter's exploration of the students' lack of exposure to L1 underscores a critical gap in the way literacy is taught to most of the students in Pakistan. Given there is rarely any phonetic kinship that a student can build on to facilitate their learning of L2, literacy acquisition in L2 remains ambiguous and prone to declining ability in the usage of the language. To hinder this digressive factor in literacy pedagogy, one turns to implementing effective ways of knowledge assimilation and assessments, which are, as examined above, spoiled with the concept of rote learning to obtain passing marks. Combined with the challenges and unforeseen shortcomings in imparting effective teacher training, such as resistance to newer pedagogical methods as was seen in some TCF teachers, this scenario further expands the gap between the learners and efficient literacy acquisition, thus making the case study of this chapter a reflection of the entrenched crisis of literacy education in Pakistan.

To develop sustained literacy skills in generations to come, one has to reorient their approach to adopt effective reforms within literacy pedagogy. One such example is TCF's exclusive Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) programme that is operational in 19 schools in Sindh province, for the past three years. According to UNESCO (2014), Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is a step towards

> re-envisioning learning so that it centres on the critical thinking and wider social skills needed in a rapidly changing world. And it's about challenging power dynamics in the learning environment so that students can direct their own learning in ways that are meaningful to them.

This programme enables student literacy development in their L1, which are Sindhi and Dhatki, before progressing to L2 (Urdu) in Grade 2, and eventually introducing English as the grades progress, a holistic approach towards incorporating L1 in literacy curricula and using it to facilitate the learning of

L2 and even L3. The teachers themselves are specifically hand-picked to ensure that they know L1 thoroughly so they can impart the knowledge to students effectively. The programme has so far yielded positive results as per the context it operates in, thus presenting a ray of hope and one potential method of effectively decolonising the pedagogy of foundational literacy.

Language activism, albeit limited, is gaining traction in literary circles with the acknowledgement of how colonialism has led to a marginalisation of regional languages of Pakistan. However, it is not just activism, but the awareness of linguistic representation in the education system which is the first step towards recognising the complications that arise in literacy and knowledge acquisition for the masses in Pakistan. To echo Thiong'o's sentiments about language, as well as to extract from my own insights about students' exposure to L1 literacy, it is imperative to strive for a system of education that promotes harmony between a learner's social surroundings, the language they speak and the words they write, for the learner to truly gain knowledge and make sense of it in relation to the world. That is the only way of reclaiming one's identity and progress as a human, a community and a nation. To be able to think, speak, read and write in the language one is born with is vital to sustain literacy and provide avenues for growth in other languages. It is the way people can talk back to the colonial forces that sought to submerge them, and even now, attempt to speak on their behalf. After all, there must be a step, however small, towards actively understanding and decolonising our education system and dismantling the custom of silencing the multiple tongues that yearn to speak in our congregations. It is the only way forward to linguistic inclusivity, sustained literacy and positive progress in education policy in Pakistan.

Notes

1 In February 2022, for all three localities.
2 In October 2023.
3 In November 2023.

References

ASER. (2023). *Annual Status of Education (ASER) Pakistan*. Karachi: ASER.

The Citizens Foundation. (n.d.). *About Us*. The Citizens Foundation. https://www.tcf.org.pk/

Ahmed, I. (2020). *Why Punjabis in Pakistan Have Abandoned Punjabi*. Fair Observer. https://www.fairobserver.com/region/central_south_asia/ishtiaq-ahmed-pakistan-punjab-south-asian-languages-punjabi-language-world-news-16791/#

Bailey, E.K. (2019). Resetting the Instructional Culture: Constructivist Pedagogy for Learner Empowerment in the Postcolonial Context of the Caribbean. In: Blackman, S., Conrad, D., Brown, L. (eds.) *Achieving Inclusive Education in the Caribbean and Beyond*. Cham: Springer.

Baldwin, J. (1979). If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is? Archive. nytimes.com. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-english.html?_r=1

Bialystok, E. (2002). Acquisition of literacy in bilingual children: A framework for research. *Language Learning*, 52, 159–199.
Collier, V. (1989). How long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23, 509–531.
Cummins, J. (1991). Conversational and academic language proficiency in bilingual contexts. *Reading in two languages. AILA review*, 8, 75–89.
Cummins, J. (1992). Bilingualism and second language learning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13, 50–70.
Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Michigan: Channel View Publications.
Durrani, M. (2012). Banishing Colonial Specters: Language Ideology and Education Policy in Pakistan. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics (WPEL)*, 27(1).
García, O. (2017). Translanguaging in Bilingual Education. In: García, O., Lin, A., May, S. (eds) *Bilingual and Multilingual Education. Encyclopaedia of Language and Education*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02258-1_9
Hussain, Zahid. (2022, October). Personal Interview.
Javed, A. (2020). *Rote learning*. DAWN.COM. https://www.dawn.com/news/1588376
Language data for Pakistan. (n.d.). Translators without Borders. https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-data-for-pakistan
Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. Mofept.gov.pk, mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/NjQ4ZTg2NjItOWM2NC00Y2IxLTkzMDgtMjU2OTFhMjA4NzNh.
Naik, M.K. (1992). *The Pagoda Tree: From the Beginnings to 1857*. A History of Indian English Literature.
Nettle, Daniel, & Romaine, Suzanne. (2000). *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2015). *Pakistan Literacy Rate: Rural*. CEIC. https://www.ceicdata.com/en/pakistan/vital-statistics-sex-ratio--literacy-rate/literacy-rate-rural
Rahman, T. (2007). Punjabi Language during British Rule. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 14(1). https://punjab.global.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/sitefiles/journals/volume14/no1/14.1_Rahman.pdf
Rahman, Tariq. (2000). The Teaching of Urdu in British India. *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 15.
Rahman, Tariq. (2011). Urdu as the Language of Education in British India. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, XXXII(2).
Santiago-Garabieta, M., Villardón-Gallego, L., García-Carrión, R., & Duque, E. (2022). The Development of L2 (Basque) Oracy Skills Through Dialogic Literary Gatherings. *Sage Open*, 12(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079894
Shahjahan, R.A., Estera, A.L., Surla, K.L., & Edwards, K.T. (2022). "Decolonizing" Curriculum and Pedagogy: A Comparative Review Across Disciplines and Global Higher Education Contexts. *Review of Educational Research*, 92(1), 73–113. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543211042423
Shahzad, F. (2017). *Colonial impact on our mindsets*. The Express Tribune. https://tribune.com.pk/story/1533047/colonial-impact-mindsets
Shamim, F., & Rashid, U. (2019). The English/Urdu-medium divide in Pakistan: Consequences for learner identity and future life chances. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 6(1), 43–61.
Skinner, B.F. (1965). *Science and Human Behaviour*. New York, NY: Free Press.
Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
UNESCO. (2003). *Language Vitality and Endangerment*. Paris: UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2014). *MTB-MLE: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education; Lessons Learned from a Decade of Research and Practice*. Bangkok: UNESCO.
UNESCO. (2018). *MTB MLE resource kit: Including the excluded: promoting multilingual education*. Bangkok: UNESCO
Viswanathan, G. (1989). *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

4 Mother tongue-based education and Indian teachers' views on language policy reforms by the Bharatiya Janata Party

Kusha Anand

Democratising language education

The National Education Policy (NEP) of India was revised and approved in 2020 and aims in order to promote multiple languages within education, aligning with Tollefson's (2013) concept of "democratic reform" in educational language policymaking, addressing the challenges of creating a "democratic," "socially just," and "progressive education policy" in a socio-political country like India (Sah and Fang, 2024; Mahapatra and Anderson, 2022; Lall and Anand, 2022). The stated goal of NEP 2020 is to "promote multilingualism[1] and the power of language in teaching and learning" (p. 5) as a basic tenet influencing the policy is crucial in policymaking in India. The reason for this is that national policy documents have never so openly promoted multilingualism as a teaching technique across all curriculum disciplines.

According to the NEP 2020, "…young children learn and grasp nontrivial concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue"[2] (p. 13). It also offers a few other suggestions to promote and capitalise on multilingualism, most of which are broadly in line with what is commonly known as Mother Tongue-based multilingual education (in the extant literature (Benson, 2019; Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023; UNESCO, 2018). This means that home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language (as stated on page 13) is preferred to be the medium of instruction (MOI) till grades 5 and 8. The policy also recommended that textbooks should be made available in local languages, bilingual teaching-learning materials, as well as classroom interaction should be in the mother tongue. As a result, the knowledge of the "local language" should be encouraged (GOI, 2020, p. 9). The policy's stated objective for language teaching is "…must be improved to be more experiential and focus on the ability to converse and interact in the language and not just on the literature, vocabulary, and grammar of the language" (GOI, 2020, p. 54). According to Kalra (2016), 50% of pupils in 10 out of 29 Indian states may speak different languages at home and at school. This suggests that extra effort is needed to address the children's initial literacy learning needs, such as in curriculum creation, teacher training, materials development, etc. The fact that some governments (like Kerala and Karnataka) have decided to make

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-6

teaching the majority language mandatory while disregarding minority languages only serves to exacerbate this problem. On the other hand, the Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority (n.d.) reports that other states have formally embraced a multilingual teaching strategy that considers minority languages (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023).

In addition, for the purpose of further democratisation the policy suggested the creation of software in Indian languages, translation of materials, use of gamification as well as applications, easy access to digital resources, and documentation of Indian languages on a web portal (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023). The author agrees with Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) on the underlying ambiguities and concerns of these policy suggestions. First, regarding the concern of conceptualisation, the policy (p. 13) uses terms "mother tongue," "home language" or "local language" interchangeably without acknowledging the differences in these terms. Second, blind expectation from teachers to have competency in local language is concerning as it is not checked at the grassroots level as well as there could be issues of native/proficient. Finally, Mahapatra and Anderson also raised the concern over policy overemphasis on teachers' ability in a particular language instead of their ability to use multilingual strategies within their classrooms. Such overemphasis is predicted to "dilute" the linguistic identities (Agnihotri, 2014). As an example, the Bihar government was largely unsuccessful in language education in three predominant languages spoken in this state: Maithili, Magahi and Bhojpuri. Scholars such as Mahapatra and Anderson (2023), Lall and Anand (2022) and many others claim that the NEP 2020 is filled with blind spots and does not provide grassroots solutions to the enactment of language reforms. This chapter adds evidence base on the use of mother tongue for foundational literacy and numeracy skills. It will present the views of school teachers from Delhi, Assam, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Punjab regarding the implications of the usage of mother tongue or regional language in English-medium schools.

Regional linguistic hierarchies in India

As already reflected on linguistic diversity in India via NEP 2020 policy reforms, the democratisation of language education was also needed due to regional linguistic hierarchies in India. The focus of this section is particularly on the regional linguistic hierarchies in Delhi, Assam, Rajasthan, Karnataka and Punjab.

Delhi is a cosmopolitan city where languages overlap, with Hindi acting as a lingua franca and unifying language (Kalra and Dutt, 2020; Nag, 2020). English proficiency is viewed as advantageous in a linguistic hierarchy where English is used for teaching and is frequently correlated with socioeconomic standing (Boruah and Mohanty, 2024). Assam has a diverse linguistic variety including Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and other native languages that all contribute to the state's unique culture and complicated social fabric (Kalra and Dutt, 2020; Nag, 2020). With its diverse population of languages, Assam faces

difficulties while implementing English Medium Instruction (EMI) in the context of Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and other regional languages (Boruah and Mohanty, 2024). Rajasthani and Hindi are the most common languages in the historically and culturally rich state of Rajasthan, shaping the linguistic hierarchy in the region (Kalra and Dutt, 2020; Nag, 2020). Karnataka is also a linguistically vibrant state with a diverse population that speaks Kannada as its native language and other regional languages like Tulu and Konkani (Kalra and Dutt, 2020; Nag, 2020). Finally, Punjab, with its distinct sociolinguistic dynamics, is characterised by the predominance of Punjabi, a potent sign of cultural identity and a strong cultural marker (Kalra and Dutt, 2020; Nag, 2020). Punjab, Rajasthan and Karnataka offer distinct linguistic contexts in which the predominance of Hindi, Kannada and Punjabi collides with English's function as an instructional language (Boruah and Mohanty, 2024). The above-mentioned studies highlight the complex linguistic landscapes that these varied Indian states have, highlighting the significance of language in forming local identities and promoting cultural diversity (Lall and Anand, 2022; Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023). These research sites were thus selected initially for the author's co-authored book ((Lall and Anand, 2022) to cover diverse language identities. We also selected these states in order to capture how different core political parties—Bharatiya Janata Party, Aam Aadmi Party and Congress—in India have used language policy as "political football." Scholars (such as Lall and Anand, 2022; Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023) also shed light on the linguistic nuances inside these states, demonstrating the complex interactions between language, identity and governance. Due to the exclusivity of each site, the author used the contrast of context approach to emphasise the uniqueness of each case and to preserve the contextual integrity of each case (Skocpol and Somers, 1980 cited in Anand, 2023).

The semi-structured interviews were used to understand teachers' views on whether teaching in a student's mother tongue or native tongue can improve their foundational skills as well as promote decolonising language teaching and social justice. The fieldwork which was conducted online due to the COVID-19 restrictions with the help of a local partner in these states' diverse social landscapes, is essential to understanding the specifics of the research and to identify the distinct ways that language politics shows up in these states' different social groups and political parties (Lall and Anand, 2022). To help readers understand their linguistic habitus, teachers' specific language details are also included in footnotes. Thematic analysis of teachers' interviews is categorised below as "linguistic equity-pedagogy nexus," "pedagogical deficit," and "neoliberal-accountability pedagogy."

Linguistic equity-pedagogy nexus

Overall, teachers criticised the policy reform regarding the use of mother language as a teaching tool because of the linguistic equity-pedagogy nexus. Teachers discussed inclusion and equity for all students while discussing policy

changes. Most teachers agreed that although it will take time, the use of mother tongue can indeed improve elementary students' skills in language expression and subject knowledge. Teachers also feel that it is overall a successful strategy for supporting linguistic minorities by giving priority to mother tongues or regional languages, thus leading to decolonisation and social justice.

However, a few teachers expressed dilemmas in the usage of a student's mother or local tongue considering the linguistic habitus[3] of a child. A male teacher of a multilingual[4] government school teacher from Assam expressed low confidence in students' linguistic habitus migrating from private schools to government schools. He used English-medium schools as an example, citing how the lack of emphasis on students' mother tongues by the teachers affects their ability to read newspapers in that language. He further stated, "*They can converse in mother tongue but cannot read a book written in vernacular language. They even cannot write in mother tongue (Bengali)*" (Male teacher 3 from Silchar [Assam]). A multilingual[5] Guwahati-based female from private school teacher discussed the challenges of teaching content subjects in her own tongue since she thinks students struggle to understand because of their linguistic habitus (Female teacher 7 from Guwahati [Assam]). Similarly, another private school teacher[6] from Guwahati expressed her worry about the disparity in mother tongue usage. She clarified that the students in her class are diverse and have a range of language abilities. Since English is a unifying language, she uses it as the medium of teaching for everyone. On the other hand, integration is challenging for newly admitted students who do not speak English. Therefore, in a multilingual classroom, children experience cultural alienation (Female teacher 8 from Guwahati [Assam]). Despite teachers' efforts on decolonisation and social justice, they are facing language proficiency variability and promoting linguistic hegemony.

In Karnataka, a small number of teachers in government schools have voiced concerns about rote learning when instruction is conducted in English and have criticised the emphasis on the English language in private schools (Male teacher 1[7] from Bangalore [Karnataka], Male teacher 3[8] from Bangalore [Karnataka]). Teachers believe that in order to promote linguistic diversity, social justice and reduce linguistic hierarchies, all languages should be embraced. A few Karnataka government school teachers, however, also highlight that the main root of linguistic inequity is the comprehension of mother tongue, which varies from place to region, and therefore recommend that regional language be given priority (Male teacher 3 from Bangalore [Karnataka]). A multilingual teacher at a private school had a similar concern about the students' diverse linguistic habits in the classroom. She said,

> […] in Bangalore is – there are people, who don't know Kannada at all and there are people who don't know Hindi. If I teach students of my class in Kannada, then only part of the students could understand. Similarly, if I teach in Hindi, then only a part of the students would understand. This could be done if we divide students of any class into

> different sections on the basis of the language of their choice. But this would result in employment problem in schools. Because different teacher with language efficiency is required for different section. So there would require more number of teachers.
>
> (Female teacher 6[9] from Bangalore [Karnataka])

In addition to the language habitus, students from other states who move to Karnataka may find it challenging to pick up Kannada. A female educator recommended that the focus of instruction be on the local or regional language, as this facilitates communication, a sense of belonging and recognises linguistic diversity (Female teacher 8[10] from Bangalore [Karnataka]).

A male teacher from Punjab who works for a private school revealed that their rigorous policy of only using English as the language of instruction may sometimes hinder some students' learning (Male teacher 3[11] from Chandigarh [Punjab]). Different linguistic habituses lead to unequal experiences, according to a few Delhi government school instructors. One of them said,

> I teach science, then lots of work has to be done with them. Because children from English medium are quite vocal and to an extent dominate, and other students start feeling…like in a group…that he/she is very intelligent and maybe I am 'Buddhu' (unintelligent). They use various strategies, like we make peer groups to work with these children as they belong lower socio-economic status.
>
> (Female teacher 9[12] from Delhi)

Teachers make the case for the need for equitable pedagogy. They underlined how crucial it is to adopt instructional strategies that promote linguistic equity to establish supportive and welcoming settings for each and every student, regardless of their language habits. Additionally, they highlighted that equitable pedagogy—as conceptualised by Cohen, 1994; Slavin, 1983—should be a dynamic educational process that emphasises both the context in which effective teaching strategies and procedures are used as well as their recognition and implementation. However, when it is applied in a way that ignores contextual factors, such as linguistic proficiency variations among pupils, it may reinforce prejudice and inequality in the classroom, as seen in the scenario above (Cohen and Roper, 1972). Moreover, it would reduce the risk that knowledge would be memorised and allow students to acquire new ideas and perspectives (Banks, 1993; Brooks and Brooks, 1993).

Pedagogical deficit

Besides teachers' dilemmas of using a language in classroom, they also share issue of pedagogical deficiency offering significant insights into the difficult obstacles that teachers encounter due to a lack of teachers who are proficient in local languages. This lack of proficiency in the local language severely

impedes teaching as well as learning, resulting in inequitable learning opportunities. Teachers who struggle with this deficit face a number of obstacles, including the inability to effectively explain complex concepts, the difficulty to encourage a better comprehension of the topic and the impediment to fruitful student–teacher interaction.

According to a Karnataka-based government teacher, it is excellent when students are able to understand content in regional or vernacular language. But the number of qualified instructors is already in short supply; these teachers must be competency-driven and focused on teaching (Male teacher 2[13] from Bangalore [Karnataka]). The shortage of teachers teaching regional languages affects even Karnataka's private school teachers. A multilingual teacher shared, *"…I can't speak with you in Kannada, there are many teachers who are Bengali, Tamil, Telugu in our school, all of them cannot teach in our regional language in cosmopolitan cities like Bangalore*." She also thinks that *"this idea would work in rural areas, but not in big cosmopolitan cities like Bangalore"* (Female teacher 1[14] from Bangalore [Karnataka]).

Teachers' language efficacy and habitus are another pedagogical deficit that was mentioned in addition to the teacher shortage. A Karnataka private school instructor voiced doubts. She said,

> If you ask me to teach in their (students) mother tongue, I will find it very difficult. Though I know Kannada and little bit Hindi, but I would find difficult to find out different terminologies of my subject in local languages. I am very comfortable teaching in English rather than regional language/mother tongue. Even I am very much hesitant in teaching with my mother tongue, i.e., Konkani.
>
> (Female teacher 6[15] from Bangalore [Karnataka])

Lastly, in terms of pedagogical deficit, teachers expressed a lack of training in delivering inclusive education. She thinks that code-switching is quite frequent in their classroom.

> What I believe is we should have this inclusive education. See, subjects are connected. Suppose I am teaching Hindi, and Hindi is such a tough language, many times, words are too tough for children to understand. Naturally, we must resort to the English language. So, we try to connect subjects; it is not like it cannot be connected. Subjects should be connected to each other as it makes the learning process easy for both the teacher and the student.
>
> (Female teacher 6[16] from Bangalore [Karnataka])

The concerns of teachers make it obvious that pupils from different language backgrounds will face difficulties. Moreover, this would create spaces where specific language expressions are restricted and result in linguistic hegemony in schools where certain languages would be the most common.

Neoliberal-accountability pedagogy

Finally, the issue of neoliberal accountability pedagogy explores the challenges teachers encounter in putting language policy reforms into practice, focusing on the importance of the English language and parental expectations in particular. There has been a great deal of discussion regarding the links between the neoliberal political and economic reforms and the school accountability system (see Lall and Anand, 2022; Lipman, 2004; Luke, 2004; Apple, 2001; Hursh, 2007).

In the eyes of neoliberalism, human and societal activity is most rationally and efficiently arranged when it is integrated into the real or imagined structure of the capitalist market. In the case of for-profit educational initiatives, the market literally takes over teaching and learning. Teachers, students and the school community are taught to view themselves as essentially different and in a state of perpetual rivalry (Saltman, 2005; Au, 2011). Individuals are taught to view themselves as human capital sellers in a world where winners and losers constantly exist, and the losers' "inefficiencies" are solely their own fault. It also appears that this restructuring of education around a business model is imposing an ideological boundary on education. The competitive nature of education is greatly exacerbated by the test-based accountability system, which sets schools, teachers and students against one another in an attempt to achieve higher rankings and higher test scores (Saltman, 2005).

Teachers in Assam's government schools said they would rather use English because most parents have asked them to help their children become fluent speakers of the language (for instance, Male teacher 10[17] from Silchar [Assam]). Teachers in government schools also mentioned that, as a result of globalisation, parents continue to favour English.

> At least some 50% of the students are benefited with this English medium. It's a fact. So why to rollback? So, learning the local languages or regional language or mother tongue is certainly the most essential thing. So, more emphasis can be given on it as a subject instead of namesake having a third language. So, if we give more emphasis, I think a mother tongue as a medium at this juncture may not be very good idea. It's like, unless we have change in attitude. Now, rolling back to mother tongue maybe a bit uneasy thing, at least for majority of the people.
>
> (Male teacher 6[18] from Bangalore [Karnataka])

Not only government schools, in fact the private school teachers from Karnataka shared the same sentiment, she said,

> If precisely speaking first, second, and third grade is OK, but from the 4th grade onwards, I think the child should be exposed to English speaking because they have to compete with the outside world. If they only keep

> giving emphasize on their mother tongue, they will not be able to post themselves confidently to the outside world, so probably only at the primary level mother tongues can be emphasized.
>
> (Female teacher 3[19] from Bangalore [Karnataka])

Another private school teacher shared that,

> English is more of a global language, so government should not think of completely removing it from the curriculum. As we know India is very diverse and many languages are spoken in India, I think English may be an option to bridge this communication gap between people of different languages. So, I think English is necessary too.
>
> (Female teacher 7[20] from Bangalore [Karnataka])

Even private school teachers from Rajasthan agree with the usage of English. She thinks that "…only English language can be helpful for children's growth and not the languages like Sanskrit. But not only private schools, parents of this era also thinking the same way" (Male teacher 3[21] from Jaipur [Rajasthan]). There are significant concerns about linguistic and cultural relevance as well as equity in the classroom raised by these standardised accountability measures for teachers.

The opinions of teachers allude to a few conceptual insights. First, as reviewed in theme 1 decolonisation should be reflected in language training and education by reflecting the diverse range of linguistic identities and subjectivities (Phyak and Costa, 2021). Second, the social justice paradigm (Randolph and Johnson, 2017), which tackles the issue of resource distribution in Indian schools, makes equity evident in theme 2. The disparity in funding between rural and urban communities in various states makes this a crucial issue for educators. The social justice framework also makes clear that, in order to reduce educational disparities, accountability methods must be scaled back as seen in theme 3. As per a decolonial perspective, teachers' views suggest that there is a need for constructing spaces for belongingness and promoting language justice, which could only be achieved by emphasising varieties of language through translingual praxis. This approach rejects "nationalist and neoliberal ideologies that position languages and their users unequally" (Sah and Kubota, 2022, p. 143).

Translingual practice-based framework—is this the way forward?

In response to the teachers' views, this chapter suggests a translingual practice-based framework by Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) for the implementation of the NEP 2020's multilingual policy in schools. Translingual praxis refers to the pedagogical strategy that uses different languages at once based on the habitus of children in a classroom. It is because the framework has integrated multiple theories by famous scholars (see Anderson, 2018; García and Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2013; Omidire and Ayob, 2020) on translingual practices,

which are ideal for the diverse context of India, where pedagogical practices are inherently translingual (as claimed by scholars such as Anderson, 2017; Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021) as seen above. Furthermore, the curriculum in the majority of Indian states exposes children to at least three languages (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023). The most important feature of this framework is its adaptability to community needs and concerns within a broadly defined policy change; this is especially evident in its acceptance of local affordances and solutions, perhaps reflecting on teachers' linguistic habitus. It is known as a "multilingual formula," according to Agnihotri (2014), and it symbolises social practice in the identical way that language—in its broader sense—has always been used throughout the vast majority of India, if not all of it. Four pedagogical concepts, which can be supported across the educational system from teacher preparation to curriculum and materials development and school management, form the foundation of the LFL framework: language inclusivity[22], language equity[23], first or native language support[24], and cognitive independence[25]. Although the framework seems relevant, Mahapatra and Anderson (2023) claim that there are challenges in the implementation of this framework which are political will, teacher training and motivation of school stakeholders.

The framework in the author's opinion identifies and values linguistic variety at its core. Within the context of decolonisation, it strongly rejects the historical impositions of dominant colonial languages. By acknowledging and recognising a range of languages and dialects, the framework actively opposes linguistic hegemony and fosters an environment where a diversity of linguistic expressions is appreciated (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023). In addition to acknowledging linguistic inclusion, valuing languages within the context of decolonisation and social justice also acknowledges the unique cultural identities that are deeply embedded in each language. It could also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the diverse cultural situations present within educational systems.

As rightly said by Mohanty (2023, p. 156), *"Languages are resources, not burdens, in multilingual societies."*

Notes

1 Multilingualism is defined as "the ability of communities or persons to meet the communicative requirements of themselves and their society in normal daily life in two or more languages in their interaction with speakers of any of these languages" (Mohanty, 2019, p. 17 cited in Mohanty, 2023).

2 According to Mohanty (2019, p. 157), "…for a child home language is defined as an experienced variety or language(s) used in the family, whereas MT [Mother Tongue] is a generic term for a common mutually intelligible form of language across families, neighbourhood, and regions." Mohanty (2023, p. 157) also states that there are different notions of Mother Tongue and sometimes misconceived in classrooms in order to "ignore and invisibilize the languages and cultural practices children bring to school." NEP (2020, Section 4.9) describes MT. It characterises MT as the language that helps students learn more effectively and as a tool for how they think.

3 According to Bourdieu and Thompson (1991, p. 12), a habitus is a group of dispositions acquired during socialisation that make an agent more likely to act and react in specific ways. Through habit, people form ideas about how to act and react in their day-to-day existence. According to Bourdieu (1986), linguistic capital is defined as a subset of cultural capital that denotes "the capacity to produce expressions à propos, for a particular market."
4 Bengali, Hindi and English.
5 Assamese as mother tongue, Hindi, and English.
6 She speaks Assamese as mother tongue, Hindi, and English.
7 He speaks Malayalam as mother tongue, English, and Hindi.
8 He speaks Kannada as mother tongue, Hindi, and English.
9 She speaks Konkani, English, Kannada, and Hindi.
10 She speaks Kannada as mother tongue, English, a little bit of Hindi and Telugu.
11 He speaks Hindi, English and Punjabi.
12 She speaks Hindi and English.
13 He speaks Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi and English.
14 She speaks Telugu, Tamil, English, Kannada and Hindi.
15 She speaks Konkani, English, Kannada and Hindi.
16 She speaks Konkani, English, Kannada and Hindi.
17 She speaks Bengali as mother tongue, Hindi, English and a bit of Assamese.
18 He speaks Kannada as mother tongue, Telugu, Hindi and English.
19 She speaks Pattegari, English, Kannada and Hindi.
20 She speaks Urdu, Hindi and English.
21 He speaks Hindi as mother tongue and English.
22 In a school, all languages should be welcomed and given equal consideration. Even while curriculum-defined evaluation and outcomes-oriented goals may require students to adopt certain language habits, teacher participation in class discussion should always take precedence over language choice (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023).
23 Establishing a classroom community that neither prioritises nor excludes any language reduces the risks that dominant languages may pose to the identity, self-esteem and rights of learners (and their families). The eradication of this risk has the potential to increase learners' motivation to study and master these languages (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023).
24 According to Mahapatra and Anderson (2023), students are provided with resources (e.g., expository texts, bilingual dictionaries/electronic translation, multilingual wall charts, etc.) and mediation (i.e., support from peers, teachers, and parents/caretakers) as needed to enable access to curriculum content and skill development beyond the classroom.
25 It is acknowledged that language competency and cognitive development can be separated in order to guarantee equal (or as equal as naturally practicable) access to learning for students who are less capable in a dominant classroom language. Students are provided with opportunities to demonstrate their comprehension of curriculum content in their preferred languages whenever feasible. This includes during formative and summative assessments (Mahapatra and Anderson, 2023).

References

Agnihotri, R.K. (2014). Multilinguality, education and harmony. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *11*(3), 364–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2014.921181

Anderson, J. (2018). Reimagining English language learners from a translingual perspective. *ELT Journal*, *72*(1), 26–37. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccx029

Apple, M.W. (2001). *Educating the 'Right' Way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Au, W. (2011). Teaching under the New Taylorism: High-stakes testing and the standardization of the 21st century curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *43*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2010.521261

Banks, J.A. (1993). The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education. *Educational Researcher*, *22*(3), 4–14.

Benson, C. (2019). L1-based multilingual education in the Asia and Pacific region and beyond: Where are we, and where do we need to go? In A. Kirkpatrick, & A.J. Liddicoat (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia* (pp. 29–41). Oxford: Routledge.

Boruah, P.B., & Mohanty, A.K. (2024). Social Construction of EMI in India: Situating EMI within the Multilingual Education Paradigm. In *English as a Medium of Instruction in South Asia* (pp. 76–93). Oxford: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The force of law: Toward a sociology of the juridical field. *Hastings LJ*, *38*, 805.

Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and Symbolic Power: The Economy of Linguistic Exchanges. In J.B. Thompson (Ed.). G. Raymond and M. Adamson (trans.). Cambridge: Polity, in association with Basil Blackwell.

Brooks, J.G., & Brooks, M.G. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for constructivist classrooms*. Arlington, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Canagarajah, A.S. (2013). *Literacy as translingual practice: Between communities and classrooms*. New York: Routledge.

Cohen, E.G. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classrooms* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, E.G., & Roper, S.S. (1972). Modification of interracial interaction disability: An application of status characteristics theory. *American Sociological Review*, *37*, 643–657.

García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education*. Palgrave Pivot.

Government of India. (2020). National education policy 2020. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

Hursh, D. (2007). Assessing No Child Left Behind and the Rise of Neoliberal Education Policies. *American Educational Research Journal*, *44*(3), 493–518. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831207306764

Kalra, R., & Dutt, A.K. (2020). Exploring linguistic diversity in India: a spatial analysis. *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map*, 391–403.

Kalra, M.B. (2016). Preserving heritage languages through schooling in India. In P. Trifonas, & T. Aravossitas (Eds.), *Handbook of research and practice in heritage language education* (pp. 819–836) . Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-38893-9_7-1

Lall, M., & Anand, K. (2022). *Bridging neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism: The role of education in bringing about contemporary India*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Lipman, P. (2004). *High Stakes Education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. New York: Routledge Falmer. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203465509

Luke, A. (2004). Teaching after the Market: from commodity to cosmopolitan. *Teachers College Record*, *106*(7), 1422–1443. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00384.x

Mahapatra, S.K., & Anderson, J. (2023). Languages for learning: A framework for implementing India's multilingual language-in-education policy. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *24*(1), 102–122.

Mohanty, A.K. (2023). Multilingualism, mother tongue and MLE. *Language and Language Teaching*, *12*(23), 155–167.

Nag, S. (2020). 'Linguistic Provinces' to 'Homelands': Shifting Paradigms of State-making in Post-colonial India. In *Interrogating Reorganisation of States* (pp. 249–281). India: Routledge.

Omidire, M.F., & Ayob, S. (2020). The utilisation of translanguaging for learning and teaching in multilingual primary classrooms. *Multilingua*, *41*(1), 105–129. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0072

Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority. (n.d.). SC/ST education. http://opepa.odisha.gov.in/website/SCSTEdu2.aspx

Phyak, P., & De Costa, P.I. (2021). Decolonial struggles in indigenous language education in neoliberal times: Identities, ideologies, and activism. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, *20*(5), 291–295.

Randolph Jr, L.J., & Johnson, S.M. (2017). Social justice in the language classroom: A call to action. *Dimension*, *99*, 121.

Saltman, K.J. (2005). *The Edison Schools: Corporate schooling and the assault on public education*. New York: Routledge.

Sah, P.K., & Fang, F. (2024). Decolonizing English-Medium Instruction in the Global South. *TESOL Quarterly*.

Slavin, R.E. (1983). *Cooperative learning*. New York: Longman.

Tollefson, J.W. (2013). Language policy in a time of crisis and transformation. In J.W. Tollefson (Ed.), *Language policies in education: Critical issues* (pp. 11–34). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203813119.

UNESCO. (2018). *MTB-MLE resource kit: Including the excluded: Promoting multilingual education*. UNESCO Bangkok Office.

Government of India. (2020). National education policy 2020. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

Mahapatra, S.K., & Anderson, J. (2022). Languages for learning: a framework for implementing India's multilingual language-in-education policy. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *24*(1), 102–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2022.2037292

Skocpol, T., & Somers, M. (1980). The uses of comparative history in macrosocial inquiry. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *22*(2), 174–197.

Anand, K. (2023). *Teaching India–Pakistan Relations: Teachers' attitudes, practices and agency*. UCL Press: London.

Sah, P.K., & Kubota, R. (2022). Towards critical translanguaging: A review of literature on English as a medium of instruction in South Asia's school education. *Asian Englishes*, *24*(2), 132–146.

Anderson, J. (2017). Translanguaging in English language classrooms in India: Why, when and how? ELTAI Conference, Kochi, India.

Anderson, J., & Lightfoot, A. (2021). Translingual practices in English classrooms in India: Current perceptions and future possibilities. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *24*(8), 1210–1231. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1548558

Mohanty, A.K. (2019). Language policy in education in India. In *The Routledge international handbook of language education policy in Asia* (pp. 329–340). Routledge.

5 Unofficial Bilingualism in English-Only Policy Context

A Postmethod Pedagogy for Difficult Circumstances in Rural Government Schools of Tamil Nadu

Jenifer Deivanayagam and Bhavani Sanjeeviraja

Introduction

Tamil Nadu is considered a model state in terms of its welfare schemes, which reach all sections of the people. As per the state's Human Development Report, Tamil Nadu is one of two advanced states with a negative net migration rate. This is primarily due to its education system: its literacy rate, one of the highest in the country, has grown from 62.66% per the 1991 census to 80.33% per the 2011 census. It has relatively low school dropout rates. Even Dalit students have lower dropout rates compared to other states (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2017). Despite this "success" in education, the use of English medium instruction in government schools in Tamil Nadu has remained an issue of concern. English-medium education has proliferated in Tamil Nadu, with most private schools offering only English-medium schooling. With the overall perceived value attached to English as a means of social mobility, these English-medium schools are becoming quite popular. This is evidenced by the increase in private schools from 4.16% in 2002–2003 to 18.96% in 2011–2012 (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2017). As per the ASER 2014 survey (ASER Centre, 2015), all over India, enrolment in private schools increased to 70% in 2014 compared to 2004. This is primarily due to the preference of parents for English-medium schools (better quality of education), which were only offered by private schools at that time. In Tamil Nadu, the government schools were predominantly Tamil-medium, with one section dedicated to English-medium instruction in each class in select schools. The increase in private school enrolment of 73% for students in the age groups of 6–14 in the state (Jain & Ramya, 2015) has led the government to start English-medium schools to prevent drop-out rates and provide subsidised English education.

In addition to the issue of dropouts from government schools, there is also the issue of social justice, which is where English education in India is concerned. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (2016, 2019, 2020, 2022) advocates for public schooling in India to be entirely converted into English-medium schools because such seduction has been historically denied to the backward and scheduled castes of India. By making government schools follow a regional medium of instruction, the burden of preserving Indian languages, tradition

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-7

and culture is thrust upon the poorer sections of society who study in government schools. In contrast, the elites (upper castes such as Brahmins and others) continue to reap the benefits of English education offered by private and Christian missionary-run schools. The poorest masses, who actually need English for social mobility, are left behind. He requests political leaders to make government schools English-medium so that the *Bahujan* (backward masses) can access English. Thus, we might say that in also keeping with such a philosophy, English-medium instruction has been introduced in government schools in many states, including Tamil Nadu.

In these English-medium schools, official policy dictates that all the subjects, let alone the English language, be taught in the medium of instruction. However, the students do not have enough English proficiency to learn solely through the language. Therefore, teachers use Tamil to teach not only subjects such as science and social science but also English. This chapter elaborates on why English teachers in rural government schools use Tamil to teach English against official policy—effectively following a practice of what we term "unofficial bilingualism." It elucidates how they employ Tamil unofficially to navigate this "difficult circumstance of English Language Teaching (ELT)," wherein the students do not have English at the level expected of the textbooks and official education policy. It finally explains how this phenomenon of "unofficial bilingualism" aligns with the three parameters of "postmethod pedagogy" proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2001).

This chapter argues that the English medium of instruction, with its English-only teaching policy, is a "difficult circumstance" in rural government schools. To navigate this difficulty, the use of L1 in L2 teaching, as a form of "unofficial bilingualism," is prevalent as a "postmethod pedagogy" in government schools, where English is taught using Tamil. The chapter contextualises this phenomenon by studying select rural government schools in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu. It classifies how teachers use Tamil unofficially in the teaching of English. In doing so, it implicates the challenges of English education in rural government schools at the periphery. It also contributes to teacher education in terms of appropriate methodologies required, the role of teacher autonomy, the use of multilingual practices, the propagation of successful strategies, and the bridging of practice and research in the educational context of rural Tamil Nadu.

Difficult Circumstances in ELT, Unofficial Bilingualism and Postmethod Pedagogy

This chapter propounds the phenomenon of "unofficial bilingualism" grounded within the conceptual framework of "difficult circumstances in ELT" (West, 1960; Smith, 2011; Anderson, 2021) and explains it as a form of "postmethod pedagogy" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, 2014). The concept of "difficult circumstances in ELT" describes situations that may be detrimental to teaching English, such as large classrooms, crowded seating, inadequate

infrastructure, teachers with limited English proficiency and challenging weather (West, 1960, p. 1). The concept became a research agenda in Smith (2011), who reiterated that classroom obstacles, unmanageable classrooms and untrained teachers affected English language teaching globally. Anderson et al. (2021) argued for reformulating the concept of "difficult circumstances" to include issues of policy and advocate studying successful classroom practices through inclusive context-specific approaches. In this chapter, we argue that the official policy of English-medium instruction qualifies as a difficult circumstance for ELT. Data on Tamil Nadu from the National Achievement Survey showed that 90% of students' school language is the same as their home language (compared to 78% at the national level). This indicates the widespread use of the mother tongue in instruction regardless of whether the school follows English-medium of instruction or not (*Ministry of Education*, 2021). The teachers, therefore, use their mother tongue (Tamil) to teach English.

The data collected from our fieldwork sheds light on how Tamil is used to make "sense" in an English classroom. The teachers do not hesitate to use L1 in their classes; in fact, using L1 and English together is perceived to be normal, and using only English is odd and counterproductive. However, since the official policy is to teach in English, the bilingual method of teaching English through Tamil is practised unofficially. We term this bilingualism, which emerges out of the necessity of the classroom context but is also restricted by official policy, as "unofficial bilingualism." The concept differs from the related term of "guilty translanguaging" (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2018), which describes contexts where teachers do not favourably view the development of bilingual competence among their students nor believe in the use of translanguaging to help in learning.

In contrast, "unofficial bilingualism," as practised by the teachers in this study, is associated with a certain degree of teacher agency. The teachers interviewed for this study fully understand the importance of the role L1 plays in their classroom and use bilingualism with some conscious effort. Their agency takes the argument to focus on the notions of method and postmethod in ELT. Kumaravadivelu (2014) notes that method is the core of ELT and is intimately related to teacher agency, particularly in the postcolonial context. This theory serves to explain how "unofficial bilingualism," as an act of teacher agency in the postcolonial context of Indian ELT, qualifies as a postmethod pedagogy. Postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) is a "3D system" consisting of an interface between the three parameters—Particularity, Practicality and Possibility.

Particularity advocates that language teaching must be context-sensitive: customised to the teachers who transact the methods, the learners to whom the methods are directed, the goals of the classroom curriculum, the institutions in which the teachers and learners are hosted, and the socio-cultural atmosphere in which they are situated. Practicality aims to address the divide between theorising and actual classroom practice. Applied linguists typically propound ELT theories, while teachers carry out actual classroom practice.

The former's theories sometimes prove irrelevant to the ground realities of classroom practice, while the latter's practice throws up challenges that need adept theorising. Practicality aims to bridge this gap between the applied linguist and the classroom teacher. Possibility argues that classroom teaching of language must prove to be radically transformative for the learners as well as the teachers. It must provide for the identity formation of individual learners and teachers and be a means of social transformation. We argue that "unofficial bilingualism" is a form of postmethod pedagogy, as it aligns with the three tenets of Particularity, Practicality and Possibility, through a discussion of the interview data collected from teachers.

The concept of difficult circumstances provides the background for using L1 in the classroom despite official policy mandating teachers not to do so. The concept of postmethod pedagogy provides theoretical justification and legitimises this use of L1. It enables the argument for making "Unofficial Bilingualism" official, reconciles classroom practice with official policy and discusses its implications for classroom policy and teacher education.

Discussion of Methodological Approach

The data for this chapter was gathered for a larger study on understanding bilingual practices in government schools in Tamil Nadu. Three rural government schools in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu were chosen for this study: Panchayat Union Middle School Malangadu, Panchayat Union Middle School Rangapuram, and Government High School Panamarathupatti. All these schools are situated in rural areas and are managed by their respective panchayats. Unlike the schools in Salem city, these rural schools lack extensive facilities. A fieldwork of three months' duration was conducted at these three schools.

This study employed two research methods—classroom observation and telephone interviews. Three English teachers' classes at the upper primary level (6,7,8) were observed and recorded in the form of video recordings, particularly to study the teachers' use of bilingualism in transacting their lessons. Attention was paid to specific instances of the teachers' use of learners' L1—Tamil. This was then thematically categorised and analysed according to the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). For this analysis, three teachers' classes were taken to study how L1 is used in these classrooms to facilitate learning among low-proficient learners.

In addition, in-depth semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with 20 teachers of English from government schools across Tamil Nadu on their use of bilingual practices to supplement classroom observation. To understand the teachers' backgrounds, they were asked to reflect on their own experiences and the challenges they faced as learners of English. Additionally, their perceptions of the students' backgrounds were also asked. The responses provided a comprehensive picture of their general social conditions and their impact on their classroom experiences. Of the 20 teachers interviewed, this

chapter uses interviews with 5 teachers from Salem to contextualise the field site. Illustrative quotations from these five teachers are incorporated into this chapter, alongside scholarship supporting their statements. For ease of reporting, the study relies on data from eight teachers in total—three for the classroom observation and five for the telephone interviews.

The teachers are numbered from T1 to T8. Teachers 1–3 are those whose classes were observed, and teachers 4–8 are those whose interviews are used for this study. The information gathered from the classroom observations and the telephone interviews with teachers are presented in a narrative format. They ultimately serve to describe the "Unofficial Bilingualism" prevalent in the English-medium classrooms of these rural government schools as a postmethod pedagogy necessitated by the difficult circumstances surrounding it. The following section provides illustrations of L1 practices carried out in the schools. In tracing parallels between the practices from the classroom observations and the information provided in the interviews, a cross-section of classroom practices in three schools of Salem is matched with the practices across multiple districts of Tamil Nadu. All Tamil words used in the teachers' responses are italicised.

English-Only Policy: A "difficult circumstance" in Rural Government Schools of Tamil Nadu

In its broader use, language policy may refer "to decisions about language made by individuals or groups on many different social levels" (Richards & Schmidt, 2016, p. 320). These could be to encourage/discourage the use of particular languages in specific instances. Language policies may be overt and covert—the former being explicit and formal, while the latter is informal, implicit and unstated. The L1 is not usually considered a potent source for classroom teaching by those involved in the policymaking and administration of ELT in India. This attitude has to do more with the unfavourable historical attitude towards L1, which is a characteristic of the field of English Language Teaching in India (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 309).

In India, states like Andhra Pradesh have converted all government schools to English medium instruction to make English available to the masses. Tamil Nadu has partly converted many of its schools to English medium. However, this has often been critiqued by some who fear the loss of the regional languages to the hegemony of English. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd (2016, 2019, 2020, 2022) critiques those who argue for a mother-tongue medium of Education. He says that certain elite sections argue that English destroys Indian languages, so government schools should have regional languages as the medium of instruction. Moreover, most private schools are English-medium, so why should government schools catering to poor students not also be English-medium?

Ialaih's arguments reflect the ground reality that rather than acting as a bridge between socio-economic classes, English itself has created a division "between those who can speak English, and those who cannot" (Graddol, 2006, p. 9). Simply put, like the "haves" and "have-nots," there are the "speaks" and the

"speaks-not" English social categories. Indian society is entering an era where "not to have English is to be marginalised and excluded" (Graddol, 2006, p. 10). For sections such as the middle class, "it is their keen familiarity with the benefits bestowed by an English-medium education and with the economic marginalisation and social indignity suffered by those who cannot speak fluent English" (Graddol, 2006, p. 88) which drives them towards English-medium instruction. Ilaiah's (and others) advocacy of English education for the lower-middle classes and the poorer sections is laudable. Nevertheless, practical difficulties prevent the realisation of this ideal vision of English education as social mobility.

In the English medium school context of rural Tamil Nadu, which is the study's field site, lessons are supposed to be taught only in English. Tamil is not supposed to be used. This overt English-only language policy is a "difficult circumstance," especially as students are first-generation learners of English from families of low socio-economic status. Their parents have had limited schooling, with most employed as daily wagers in weaving, farming and mill-work. Only a few of them could even sign their name. Prabhu (T5) says that around 90% of parents are uneducated but eager to help their children. But alas, they do not have the education to help them.

Considering the "rural" as marginal in terms of English, "children in village schools are less likely to hear English being spoken or see it on signs or advertising" (Graddol, 2006, p. 88). In urban areas, English, in its various semiotic forms, is more visible on the main roads than on alleyways. Likewise, in rural areas, English is used more in rural areas near highways and not in the interior villages. While the rural schools attempt to increase the use and availability of English within their campuses to offset its scarcity outside, with English-medium instruction being a major addition to this initiative, this policy also runs into on-ground difficulties. Govindaraj (T8) says that the students use Tamil to process a piece of information and make sense of it. On the link between the rural location and English, he elaborates:

> They are struggling. It depends on the surroundings. We live in rural areas. They all speak only in Tamil. Only in school do we teach English. And even English classes last only about 40 minutes. Even if we try to converse in English, they'll not grasp it (*manasula pathiyathu*). Once English class is over, other subjects like maths, science, and social science will be taught in Tamil.

Iqbal Judge notes that teachers teaching in semi-urban or rural areas or even among SES classrooms might be required to teach English in the regional language. All English teachers in India might have, at some other point in their careers, relied on the use of the L1 to teach the L2, i.e., English. Oftentimes, such use might go against institutional policies of strict L1-only policy. In such cases, teachers use L1 as a last and necessary resort and might claim or cite the practical difficulties of following such official policies to the dot (Khanna & Sahgal, 2012, p. 33).

In rural government schools, especially at the primary level, there are only one or two teachers per school who handle all the subjects. These teachers may or may not be proficient in English. Teachers at the primary level may not also have a degree in English. Apart from this, the teachers, as non-native speakers of English (i.e., for whom English is a second language), might not be as proficient as required. In a study on upper primary school teachers in Tamil Nadu by Cambridge Assessment, most scored only a B1 per the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Only a handful got C1. As per European standards, B1 was "the minimum language requirement for an English teacher," though C1 was preferred (Graddol, 2006, p. 95).

Moreover, Tamil Nadu abides by the No Detention Policy of the Right to Education Act, 2009. As per this act, students will not be held back a year, irrespective of their results in the annual exams, until their eighth standard. In this scenario, for example, students who do not have English proficiency at the primary level are promoted to Upper Primary. In such cases, even if the teachers have a background in English, they struggle to impart English skills as the textbooks are considerably above the level of the learners' proficiency. The National Achievement Survey (NAS) data for Tamil Nadu reports a score of 43 for the ability of the students to "read, comprehend, and respond to texts immediately in English" (Ministry of Education, 2021). Similarly, the ASER Rural Report of 2022 (ASER, 2023) shows that only 37.3% of class 6 students could read simple sentences such as "What is the time?" and "This is a large house." The number is 44.9 % and 57.8 % for classes 7 and 8, respectively. What is worrisome is that 22.2% of Class 6 students could not read even simple words. Moreover, the percentage declines further for the lower classes. The textbooks, therefore, do not match the students' proficiency level, making it difficult for both the teachers and the learners to achieve the learning outcomes.

Officials such as the Block Research Teachers (BRTs) inspect the schools and provide direction. When the teachers were asked about these BRTs' stance towards using Tamil, each teacher had different information. Meignanamani (T4) says they were instructed that English teachers only use English. Conversely, Prabhu (T5) opines that since the BRTs know the ground reality, they understand if the teachers use Tamil. Vishnupriya (T6) says the officials tell them to teach bilingually until the primary level. After the sixth or seventh standard, the teachers are told to use only English. Thus, there is a clear policy of English-only instruction, but some leeway is given to teachers to use the mother tongue. However, such word-of-mouth approval does not address the difficulties of learning English. For instance, students' fear of the English language is a commonality in multiple teachers' accounts. Yamini (T7) says that the children are fearful of the language:

> The thing is, at an elementary level, what happens is the teacher handles all five subjects. So, the teacher will be focusing on all the subjects. And one subject will be in English. They are learning all the subjects in their

> mother tongue. So, naturally, the children are fearful towards the language. But when it comes to middle school, we have teachers for all the individual subjects, Math, Science, Tamil, and Social Studies, and we have teachers for different subjects. English at the primary level is taught as a subject. But when the subject teacher handles it, English is taught as a skill, as a language.

Vishnupriya's (T6) answer further elaborates on the fearful reaction of children to English:

They will have a very strange look at the teacher and the classroom. You can see a lot of emojis on their faces. If they understand, we can see it in their eyes. If they are not comfortable, they will be blinking like anything. That's the reality.

She says that in such a context, bilingualism is used to show the students that English is not that hard. Thus, we see that the mother tongue provides a means of emotional protection to assuage the fear of English.

Without this use of Tamil, students would not learn anything at all. Meignanamani (T4) says her students will be "at a zero level." Her students are already scared of English; she says they will be more scared if the teaching is completely in English. This might go to the extent where their chances of continuing education would be uncertain. Prabhu (T5) says the primary reason for such fear is probably because the students think that English is something grand. They have that awe-struck feeling. He admits that even he had that awe as a student. He says: "If you speak five minutes continuously in English, I would look at you with awe." Govindaraj (T8) says that if he were to speak only in English, his students, after listening for five minutes, would say, "Sir, we don't understand anything. Please speak in Tamil." Vishnupriya (T6) says that only 4–5 students will understand if spoken to in English, and the rest will not understand anything. Moreover, they will not answer and will sit simply. Hence, the teachers first explain in Tamil and then shift to English. Thus, Tamil is used as a scaffold upon which English is introduced and taught to the students in stages.

When asked about their own experiences of learning English and being taught bilingually, teachers admit that they, too, feared the English language as school students. Vishnupriya (T6) says, "English class itself is scary. Till the 5th, we would not understand it, no. English teacher we would be afraid of. *Aiyoo* English. What will we do?" In addition to their feelings towards the English language, we notice that the teachers' proficiency in English is also not on par with the level normally expected of a teacher. Meignanamai (T4) states that they mostly studied everything in their mother tongue. In English, slightly laced with errors, she says:

> Being a kid where I didn't have any opportunity to open my mouth in English at home and my surroundings where I grew up, I wanted my class children to also meet up with such an experience because they are

> in the same position. They don't have support from home or any other chances, no? So I encourage them, and I give them a stage. Even if I take a class, one day class, I make them involve [sic]… all of them to come in front of the class.

We see that the teachers do commit small errors in speaking. This underscores the observations made by Graddol (2006) that English teachers are themselves not proficient enough. It also qualifies as one of the difficult circumstances that West (1960) and later Smith (2011) note in their respective definition of the concept. The reasons for this could be varied. Prabhu (T5) says no one asked them to speak in English throughout their school life: "Even in college, we only realised on our own that we had to speak in English. Same in teacher training, we didn't try." Their teachers used only Tamil to teach English. They read in English and explained in Tamil. And because they were in the Tamil medium, they would never expect much from English. Moreover, they would have an "aversion" towards English. The lack of external guidance and delayed internal motivation could be a reason for Prabhu's low proficiency levels among English teachers. However, Prabhu exercises his agency by using his past experience to motivate himself to teach his students. Since he did not have much knowledge of vocabulary in his school days, he emphasises the teaching of vocabulary for his students. He gives them a lot of picture-oriented vocabulary activities. He says, "Take this word hour – they say 'an hour,' right? I only recently learned that we should use 'an' before vowel sounds because I was taught that 'an' was used before the letters a, e, i, o, u." This shows us that the use of bilingualism as a learning-teaching strategy, while a common phenomenon for many decades in Tamil Nadu, is also an absolute necessity due to the lack of proficiency of the students, their fear of English, and the teachers' own lack of training and proficiency.

There has always been confusion regarding the use of L1 in the English classroom among experts and teachers alike. Prominent second language acquisition theorists, such as Stephen Krashen and Jim Cummins, believed that the use of the mother tongue or L1 in the English classroom would be detrimental to the learning of English for two major reasons: that it could interfere with the mastery of the language; and that the use of L1 could potentially reduce the exposure to English in the classroom given that in most second language learning contexts, any input in English the students are given is within their classrooms. But information from the fields also illustrates this confusion. Govindaraj (T8) says,

> If we just say it all in English and move on, the students will not understand anything. I prefer using both languages, even when people observe my classes. There are two kinds of people (officials) with two different mindsets. One says, "Use Tamil meanings also so that the students understand." The other kind says, "Why are you using Mother tongue? Speak only in English". There is confusion.

To reconcile this confusion, we argue that these instances of using the mother tongue to navigate language learning challenges in such "difficult circumstances" is a form of postmethod pedagogy on the part of the teachers. Postmethod pedagogy can be seen as part of a larger work of scholarship emanating within Indian (and postcolonial) ELT that accedes importance to the role of the teacher in the classroom and allows for greater autonomy of teaching method and theory. We will see illustrations from our study that provide evidence for this claim.

1) ***L1 and making "sense" in the English classroom***

The use of L1 is reported through the different functions they perform and the contexts in which they are performed. We identified several functions both inductively and deductively. The various contexts of L1 use are all primarily linked to the "making sense" function in the English classroom. Its sub-classifications include translating, eliciting answers, building on students' knowledge, and teaching new vocabulary. These are the major functions that illustrate how L1 is used for meaning-making in English classrooms where learners lack proficiency. Kumaravadivelu also advocates for home language support to help learners access the curriculum until they develop sufficient English to move on to EMI. He says that,

> The first language is perhaps the most useful, and the least-used resource students bring to the L2 classroom, a fact which has been largely overlooked. This is partly due to two interrelated factors: the theory and practice of established methods discourage the use of L1 in the L2 classroom, and the political economy of English Language Teaching, which promotes the interests of prenative speakers of English who do not normally share the language of their learners.
>
> (Kumaravadivelu, 2006)

Kumaravadivelu suggests that the learners should also be treated as a source of cultural knowledge. The learner's cultural knowledge in L1 can be used in classroom discussions. This will benefit not only the classmates but the teacher as well. To illustrate this, take this instance from the classroom observation: Teacher 8 refers to the girls in the class who have plaited their hair to explain what a pigtail is. "Plait"(*Jadai*) is used as an equivalent to "pigtail." T8 gives the following illustration to explain the word "impact." She first gives the Tamil meaning of the word—*Thaakam*. Then, she gives the analogy of rain and its aftermath: broken trees and water stagnation and calls it the impact of the rain, using the L1.

2) ***Translation as an immediate resource***

The teachers use translations of varying degrees for a range of functions such as explaining, instructing, illustrating, managing the classroom, eliciting answers, motivating the learners, providing feedback, and so on. Teachers 1 and 2 extensively rely on the direct translation of sentences

uttered in English to ensure that the learners fully understand. They utter sentences/phrases in English first and translate them immediately, and they do it spontaneously, owing to their experience using such a strategy. The following are some examples of direct translations provided by the teachers:

> Why won't it be possible? *yen possible illa?*
> But the sage did not think about it. *Atha pathi avaru think panala.*
> It is a curious case for him. *Avaruku ithu curious case ah iruku*
> Does the computer have a brain? *Brain iruka?*
> What do you think of these words? *Idha pathathum ungaluku ena thonuthu?*
>
> These direct translations help learners acquire the English equivalents of the Tamil words and phrases over time. However, there is a risk of students not paying attention to the English sentences and actively substituting them with Tamil counterparts since the teachers will be translating anyway. Nevertheless, translation is one of the most effective, direct and oldest language teaching tools that aids not only in the mastery of the target language but also has been proven to develop the metalinguistic awareness of the learners.

3) ***Building on student's knowledge***

Vishnupriya (T6) says that she uses the L1 to build on the learner's knowledge:

> While taking grammar classes, if we are teaching verbs, I use Tamil to make him familiar with action verbs and be-form verbs. I explain by bringing *Kadantha kalam, nigal kaalam, erantha kaalam* (past, present and future tense). Students then understand better. If you give an example in Tamil, they will understand it better because they know Tamil grammar already.

This inductive method of language teaching makes the learners think while eliciting answers from them. Vishnupriya also says she teaches with an example or a contextualised and simplified meaning instead of directly giving the Tamil word. This allows the students to say the word in Tamil and helps with learning. If exposure to the language is given, it will "do wonders inside the child," she says.

To illustrate what "voyage" is, T2 asks a series of questions in Tamil to tap into the students' existing knowledge. Q1. What do we call it when we travel by bus or train? Q2. What do we call the action/process of going from one place to another? Q3. We go to Ayyappan Kovil, Tirupati, and all; what do you call that? (cultural-specific reference) Q4. Do we call it travel? She states that, similarly, when people journey on a ship, it is called a voyage. The teacher is able to draw parallels only because she uses Tamil,

which makes the students participate. The teachers draw answers from the students to make learning collaborative. In cases where the students cannot comprehend the questions, they rephrase them in Tamil and revisit the question stated in English to ensure the students understand. Prabhu (T5) shows a picture of a caterpillar and asks what it is. The students say it is "*pulu*" (worm). To elicit the word "caterpillar" from the students, she asks a series of questions pointing to the wall in the classroom, then the ceiling, and then a pillar (*thoon*) and provides the first letter of the word as a cue to make them guess the word. She also makes several other interesting parallels between Tamil and English words, such as *eli* (rat) for Queen Elizabeth. The cultural and contextual knowledge the students bring to the classroom is accessible only in L1. Moreover, the comparison of the linguistic features of the two languages and the building upon what is already known in L1 help learners engage with the two languages in meaningful ways. This can also lead to "cross-linguistic transfer"—the transfer of linguistic skills across languages as proposed by Cummins (2008).

4) ***Vocabulary teaching***

Vocabulary teaching extensively happens by providing Tamil meanings or equivalents to English words unknown to the learners. The teachers also use bilingual dictionaries to help the learners find the words' meanings. Yamini (T7) explains that they follow ALM (Active learning methodology) where the child has to read the text and find the meaning of the words using a dictionary.

> We use a bilingual dictionary. At first, they'll stick to Tamil meanings, but when they reach the 8th standard, they start using English meanings. I'm making my students write three new words and their Tamil meanings, along with a sentence each in English using those three words. The following is an example of a teacher making the learners look up an unknown word from the lesson's title for the day.

Govindaraj (T5) states that he always writes down the important words and provides Tamil meanings to them. He states that this exercise helps the learners infer the meaning of sentences. The following exchange illustrates how teachers provide meaning for unknown words while teaching a text:

T: A tragic story of a sage. What is the meaning of the word sage? Do you have a dictionary? Get the dictionary and find out the meaning of the word sage
(Students find the meaning together in groups.)
S: Miss, *gnani* (sage)
T: You are right. *Gnani.* (Writes the English meaning on the board)
T: A wise man. *Knowledgeable man nu solrom illaya? Tamil la nyani nu solrom, okay?* (We say, knowledgeable man, no? In Tamil, we say gnani)

The teachers also contextualise the new words for the learners in ways they can understand. They do this in many ways, including providing the Tamil equivalent, as in the following case:

T: What does gobble mean?
S: Reading the glossary meaning
T: Sometimes the food you like the most…you eat it and gobble it. *Takku takkunu eduthu mulunguvinga la? Athu than*. (People will eat swiftly, no? That is it).

Meignanamani (T4) says that if she teaches a story and the students have a page of text with the words they know the meaning of, it can be explained in English. But when the children learn a text for the first time, she introduces it in their mother tongue. She says it is only then that they will comprehend quickly and not forget easily. Yamini (T7) says that if the teacher tries to convey or teach the vocabulary in English for a single word, it will take at least 5 minutes. But if the teacher uses Tamil, it will take less than a minute. If the child does not understand, then Tamil can be used. She also says that when they learn in Tamil, they can learn it effectively (*Unarvu poorvamaga*). What is to be noted is that all these vocabulary teaching strategies are unique to the respective teachers, designed specifically to cater to the needs of their learners, and are carefully tested through trial and error. They do this despite not having received adequate in-service or pre-service training in teaching bilingually. This "particularity" is one of the reasons why we claim unofficial bilingualism as a postmethod pedagogy. Let us discuss this in detail.

Particularity, Practicality and Possibility

We claim that Unofficial Bilingualism in the rural Tamil Nadu government school context arises from the three parameters of postmethod pedagogy: particularity, practicality and possibility. It exhibits *Particularity* because the teachers interviewed believe using L1 is an effective way of supporting the learning of English among low-proficiency learners, i.e., in that particular context. They asserted that it helps in better comprehension and active participation in the class. To illustrate, one of the teachers, Vishnupriya (T6), says that she prefers a mother-tongue medium of instruction in schools, at least till the primary level. Prabhu (T5) states that while he acknowledges the importance of using Tamil, he also wants to ensure that his students use English more. Tamil, if and when used, should be used in a focused manner to introduce English. According to him, a ratio of 50:50 for the use of English and Tamil and a 75:25 ratio of use in favour of English in higher classes is optimum. He strongly believes that the use of Tamil should not be increased in higher classes.

Meignanamani (T4) believes that using Tamil to teach English is the correct method for government schools to convey the concepts that need to be taught. This need does not, however, arise in private schools. However, for

government school children, the mother tongue is the only weapon that helps them understand the subject and makes classroom teaching successful. The students are simply unaware of the vocabulary. In an English-only method, whatever the teacher does, be it simplifying the lesson, enacting them, singing the poems, and so on, only up to 80% of the children can understand. If the lesson is taught bilingually, then 100% of the students will understand. It normally takes time for a government school student to develop their English skills. Helping students achieve a level of proficiency also takes a lot of time. Meignanamani says, "If he (a student) comes to me in the fifth standard, by the eighth standard, he will be able to write this small about his village and describe this on his own."

The practice of Unofficial Bilingualism aligns with the tenet of *Practicality* as it bridges applied linguistic theory with classroom practice. While interviews with teachers show their unfortunate lack of understanding of bilingual pedagogy, they do practise it in their classrooms. Since there is no official sanction for bilingual methods, the teachers are not given any training to use two languages in classroom instruction and assessment, but they continue to do so. Unofficial bilingualism is, therefore, a proactive measure to address classroom issues and social, political and cultural factors that affect L2 education.

Advancements in the field of bi/multilingualism and translanguaging have now shown that the L1 is, in fact, very useful in imparting second language skills (Lewis et al., 2012; García & Lin, 2016; Wei, 2018). Teaching English using Tamil would help tap into the first language schema and help bridge the known knowledge with the unknown new information. Studies such as MultiLiLa (British Council, 2020) in India have also shown the same. Judge argues that deliberate and conscious planned use of the L1 can be a potent resource for L2 in the classroom (Khanna & Sahgal, 2012, p. 34). Moreover, such use of L1 performs the role of scaffolding or supporting material, translating into a symbiotic relationship between the L1 and the L2. Judge, however, only promotes the L1 as an aid and a tool for scaffolding meant to be gradually reduced as the content taught proceeds.

But even this can be illustrated in the interviews. Explaining how she uses Tamil, Meignanamani (T4) states that if a student does not know the meaning of some words, she explains them in simple English. She determines if the explanation has been understood based on the students' responses. By giving real-life examples from the surroundings in Tamil, the student is made to comprehend. The teachers point out that this kind of pedagogy helps all students, especially those categorised as B and C-grade students. Bilingualism is especially beneficial for the average students and the late bloomers, according to Meignanamani (T4). Vishnupriya (T6) agrees that the students would have knowledge of what they learned in their mother tongue.

Finally, unofficial bilingualism functions according to the tenet of *Possibility* as it provides for the identity formation of teachers and students. Unofficial bilingualism, as a teaching method followed by individual teachers, implies the exercise of teacher agency as it is the method that is considered the "core of

ELT" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). All control of ELT lies with the control of language teaching methods. In this context, the teacher's agency in deciding what method to implement is severely restricted by the textbook and a non-contextual, generalised official language teaching policy determined by powers far removed from the ground reality. Their use of unofficial bilingualism is a radical act. Unofficial bilingualism enables the identity formation of the students and accords them self-respect by its reconceptualisation of language into a form of bilinguality. Such a process abandons the concept of "a language" and embraces humans' innate capability for "multilinguality" (Agnihotri, 2007). It is transformative for the learners as bilingualism equates their mother tongue, Tamil, to English and treats the two as fluid and flowing into each other. Such an act that equates language to multilingualism will neutralise power and hierarchy between languages (Agnihotri, 2007).

The preceding passages delineate how the teachers' use of bilingualism arises out of the particular needs of the specific school contexts. It is customised for the particular context, and it is infinitely more practical in linking theory to praxis. The phenomenon of unofficial bilingualism bridges the current theory on multilingualism and translanguaging with classroom practice and, therefore, fulfils the criteria of a pedagogy of practicality. Unofficial bilingualism makes social change, mobility and identity formation possible by enabling students from socio-economically weaker sections to learn English through their language. Strategic use of the L1 to enable students to learn English encourages learners' independence and identity formation. Therefore, all three tenets of postmethod pedagogy are seen in the use of bilingualism in schools. Thus, casting the practice as a form of postmethod pedagogy, we advocate legitimising the bilingual method through official policy.

Conclusion

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2005 says students

> enter the school not only with thousands of words but also with full control of the rules that govern the complex and rich structure of language at the level of sounds, words, sentences, and discourse. A child knows not only how to understand and speak correctly but also appropriately in her language(s).
>
> (NCERT, 2005, p. 37)

The NCF's approach may be termed multilingual in its pedagogy of English as a second language. The goals for a second-language curriculum are twofold: attainment of basic proficiency, such as acquired in natural language learning, and development of the language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy. This argues for an across-the-curriculum approach that *breaks down the barriers between English and other subjects, as well as English and other Indian languages* ((NCERT,

2005, p. 30). While agreeing that English must be given a place alongside Indian languages, the NCF states that this must be in a scenario wherein the other Indian languages provide support to learning/teaching English. In schools where English is the medium of instruction, "other Indian languages need to be valorised to reduce the perceived hegemony of English." It also emphasises that "the relative success of 'English medium' schools" stand testimony to the fact that any language is best taught "through exposure in a meaningful context" (NCERT, 2005, p. 38).

Work on multilingualism in the Indian context by Agnihotri (2007, 2014, 2020, 2022) helps argue that the bilingual method of teaching English should be regularised, and proper training should be given to teachers to teach bilingually. Agnihotri's work collectively proposes a "Pedagogy rooted in Multilinguality" to bridge the gap between the elite and the masses with respect for the languages of all learners. Agnihotri proposes that separate classes to teach the grammar of different languages be abolished in favour of a single language period, where language awareness is taught. A multilingual medium of instruction will help navigate the marginality arising out of the language hierarchy that any monolingual medium of instruction, including English, produces. Multilinguality should be the basis for curriculum planning. English will be essential, but only in the context of multilingualism and pluriculturalism. He proposes that teachers be trained to teach multilingually through specialised, short-term training programmes.

In addition to such multilingual classrooms, introducing bilingual textbooks and other materials would also be a good initiative. Doing so would address concerns of inequity and marginality in language education. A bilingual method of teaching English to students of government schools will ensure social justice by reducing inequity in terms of access to English. The Tamil Nadu government has already distributed bilingual storybooks to the school library collection. It also uses the Tamil equivalent of terms in English in books issued to newly formed English medium schools to help with the transition. Several states in India, including Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana, already use Bilingual textbooks. However, the aim is to help the students transition to full English instruction in the coming years. However, Bilingual textbooks in any form are helpful for the learners to comprehend better. They also improve metalinguistic awareness and reduce the affective factors as they normalise the use of both languages, therefore ensuring better language skills.

References

Agnihotri, R.K. 2007. Towards a pedagogical paradigm rooted in multilinguality. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, *1*(2), 79–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/19313150701489689

Agnihotri, R.K. 2014. Multilinguality, education and harmony. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, *11*(3), 364–379.

Agnihotri, R.K. 2020. Examining the linguistic dimension of draft national education policy, 2019, *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 9, *LV*(19).

Agnihotri, R.K. 2022. Language as a space for scientific enquiry. *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 6, *LVII*(32).

Anderson, J. 2021. Eight expert Indian teachers of English: A participatory comparative case study of teacher expertise in the Global South. PhD diss., University of Warwick. Warwick WRAP. http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/159940

Anderson, J., & Lightfoot, A. 2018. Translingual practices in English classrooms in India: Current perceptions and future possibilities. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *24*(8), 1210–1231. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1548558

Anderson, J., Padwad, A., & Smith, R. 2021. Language teaching in difficult circumstances. In: Mohebbi, H., & Coombe, C. (Eds.), *Research questions in language education and applied linguistics*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79143-8_21

ASER Centre. 2015. *Annual status of education report (rural) 2014*. https://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202014/fullaser2014mainreport_1.pdf

ASER Centre. 2023. Annual Status of Education Report (Beyond Basics) 2023. https://asercentre.org/aser-2023-beyond-basics/

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

British Council. 2020. *Multilila*. https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/multilila_key_findings_and_recommendations_-_english.pdf

Cummins, J. 2008. Teaching for transfer: Challenging the two solitudes assumption in bilingual education. *Encyclopaedia of Language and Education*, 1528–1538. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3_116

García, O., & Lin, A.M.Y. 2016. Translanguaging in bilingual education. *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02324-3_9-1

Government of Tamil Nadu. 2017. *Tamil Nadu human development report 2017*. State Planning Commission.

Graddol, D. 2006. *English next India: The future of English in India*. British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/pub_english_next.pdf

Jain, A., & Ramya, M. 2015. 73% more children in pvt schools than 10 years ago. *The Times of India*. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/73-more-children-in-pvt-schools-than-10-years-ago/articleshow/45878061.cms

Kancha, I. 2016. Brahmin groups lead movements against English education – but they have benefitted the most from it. *Scroll.in*. https://scroll.in/article/816679/brahmin-groups-lead-movements-against-english-education-but-they-have-benefitted-the-most-from-it

Kancha, I. 2019. Countering hypocrisy of ruling class on English medium education in Government Schools. *Countercurrents.org*. https://countercurrents.org/2019/11/countering-hypocrisy-of-ruling-class-on-english-medium-education-in-government-schools/

Kancha, I. 2020. Macaulay is very relevant today and helps Dalits, OBCs join the global economy. *The Wire.in*. https://thewire.in/education/macaulay-english-medium-new-education-policy

Kancha, I. 2022. Public intellectuals must end their hypocrisy on English education for the masses. *The News Minute*. https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/public-intellectuals-must-end-their-hypocrisy-english-education-masses-163851

Khanna, A.L. & Sahgal, A. (Ed.) 2012. *Essential readings for teachers of English: From research insights to classroom practices*. Orient Blackswan.

Kumaravadivelu, B. 2001. Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, *35*(4), 537–560. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588427

Kumaravadivelu, B. 2006. *Beyond methods*. Yale UP.

Kumaravadivelu, B. 2014. The decolonial option in English teaching: Can the subaltern act? *TESOL Quarterly*, *50*(1), 66–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.202
Lewis, G., Jones, B., & Baker, C. 2012. Translanguaging: Origins and development from school to street and beyond. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, *18*(7), 641–654. https://doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2012.718488
Ministry of Education, Government of India. 2021. National achievement survey 2021. https://nas.gov.in/nas2021report
NCERT. 2005. *National Curriculum Framework*. https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/nc-framework/nf2005-english.pdf
Smith, R. 2011. Teaching English in difficult circumstances: A new research agenda. In T. Pattison (Ed.), *IATEFL 2010 Conference Selections*. IATEFL. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/people/smith/smith_r/tidc_-_a_new_research_agenda.pdf
Richards, J.C., & Schmidt, R.W. 2016. *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833835
Wei, L. 2018. Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics*, 39(1), 9–30. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx039
West, M. 1960. *Teaching English in difficult circumstances*. Longmans.

Part II
Language and Inclusivity

6 Kerala's Language Directive and the Erasure of Gendered Teacher Identities

Manisha Bhadran

Introduction

In January 2023, the Commission for the Protection of Child Rights in the state of Kerala in India issued a directive stating that schoolteachers may no longer be addressed as "sir" or "miss" but only using the gender-neutral and generic term "teacher" ("Teachers to be Addressed" 2023). The abolition of the use of gendered terms is also the elimination of an exclusionary and binary form of address that marginalises individuals who identify as non-binary. Drawing on the directive, this study critically examines the effectiveness of a gender-neutral address in ensuring a gender-just environment for students and teachers. It delves into the significance and limitations of this directive in the socio-cultural milieu of the South Indian state of Kerala. It seeks to answer the question of whether gender neutrality, when imposed on addresses between teachers and students, becomes tantamount to gender erasure. Additionally, the study aims to propose alternative methods of integrating gender-equitable language use into the language classroom.

Background

Only a decade has passed since the Indian legal framework transitioned from the binary and cisnormative conceptualisation of gender to the recognition of persons whose gender identity differs from their sex as assigned at birth. In 2013, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment constituted an Expert Committee to study the problems faced by the transgender community in the country and to recommend affirmative steps to ameliorate the same ("Welfare" 2017). In 2014, the Supreme Court of India, in the case filed by the National Legal Services Authority of India (NALSA) demanding the legal recognition of persons across the gender spectrum, drew upon the recommendations submitted by the Expert Committee and created the legal category of "the third gender" ("NALSA vs. Union of India" 2024). The ruling recommended including the third gender in the category of Other Backward Communities (OBC), thereby qualifying them for reservation in education and employment (*Times of India*, April 15, 2014). However, this recommendation of the apex court has not been implemented even after a decade (Arora 2023).

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-9

Challenges remain in the legal rights of gender minorities, including the right to abortion and the right to protection against workplace harassment, owing to the gendered and exclusionary language in which these laws are phrased (Pandey 2024; Mishra and Shivam 2023). Legal measures ostensibly intended to secure equal rights for individuals across the gender spectrum have fallen considerably short of their purported aim. For instance, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019, faced flak for its limitations in ensuring the dignity of transgender persons (Sinha 2019; Tandon and Mahajan 2019).

In 2023, two documents were released with the aim of promoting gender justice in the use of language. In August 2023, the Supreme Court released the "Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes" to discourage the use of stereotypes about women in legal judgements and pleadings (*LiveLaw*, August 16, 2023). In November 2023, the Women and Child Development Ministry of India introduced "The Guide on Gender Inclusive Communication," encouraging administrators and educational institutions to adopt gender-inclusive language (*Times of India*, November 29, 2023). Both these documents target the gender violence implicit in language and attempt to promote the use of gender-inclusive language sans stereotyping and prejudice.

In the education sector as well, amendments have been made in favour of gender inclusivity, but these have elicited mixed responses with regard to their efficacy. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, now renamed the Ministry of Education, discusses the inclusivity of the third gender, addressing the gender gap in education and setting up of a "gender-inclusion fund" ("National Education Policy" 2020, 26). The NEP has however invited criticism for its tripartite conceptualisation of gender as male, female and transgender as opposed to the understanding of gender identities as falling across a spectrum (Sharma and Babbar 2020). In addition, the NEP makes no provision for the inclusion of queer teachers in the school system. Maherchandani (2022, 5) raises a pertinent question when he asks: "If the system does not allow a teacher who does not align with the cis-heteronormative structures, how would they be able to provide equitable and fair access to transgender/queer students that the present policy speaks about?"

With a similar focus on ensuring an inclusive environment for queer *students* in schools, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), in 2021, released a teacher-training manual titled *Inclusion of Transgender Children in School Education: Concerns and Roadmap* (*Firstpost*, November 2, 2021). The document highlighted the importance of gender-neutral uniforms and gender-neutral toilets in schools. However, owing to severe social-media backlash over parts of the manual that discussed caste patriarchy, puberty blockers, etc., the manual was taken down by the NCERT (Datta 2021).

The examination of laws at the intersection between gender neutrality and the education sector necessitates the study of national as well as state-specific laws since education in India is in the Concurrent List with legislative

authority for both the Parliament and the State Legislatures to enact laws pertaining to it. Given that the directive on the gender-neutral address of teachers, which is the object of study of this chapter, was issued by the state of Kerala, it becomes essential to establish the framework of gender-related legislation within the state before embarking on the aforementioned analysis.

Over the past decade, a series of measures aimed at advancing gender justice was adopted by the government of Kerala. In 2015, the Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala, released the State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala aimed at ensuring justice, dignity, freedom of expression and participation in decision-making processes irrespective of gender identity ("State Policy" 2015). In recent years, two government schools have made headlines for implementing policies that uphold gender neutrality. The Valayanchirangara Government Lower Primary School, in 2021, took a pioneering step by introducing gender-neutral uniforms, and the government-aided Senior Basic School at Olassery, in 2022, mandated that teachers be addressed solely as "teacher," thereby eliminating gendered terms like "sir" and "miss" (*Deccan Herald*, November 22, 2021; *Indian Express*, January 8, 2022). The latter set the precedent for the 2023 directive, which forms the locus of this study, requiring all schools across the state to follow the gender-neutral address of teachers.

Despite the numerous laws enacted by the Kerala government to promote gender justice, gender discrimination persists, especially against gender minorities. Dialogue and negotiation continue among teachers, institutions and lawmakers on matters of gender justice. For instance, some educational institutions continue to mandate female teachers to wear jackets over their clothing to avoid the male students' gaze, in spite of the clarification offered by the Higher Education Minister of Kerala that no dress code may be imposed on teachers in colleges and universities (*New Indian Express*, November 13, 2021). Similarly, despite legal protections for gender minorities, transgender educators continue to face various forms of institutional discrimination. In 2022, Aneera Kabeer, a transgender teacher, sought legal assistance for euthanasia due to challenges in securing stable employment in the teaching profession (*OnManorama*, January 11, 2022). Her former teaching employment had been terminated upon disclosure of her gender identity. Such injustices highlight the need to scrutinise even such laws as purportedly uphold gender justice so as to determine their efficacy in fostering respect for gendered realities and rights.

Gender, Language and Critical Pedagogy

The existing body of research on linguistic interactions in classrooms is predominantly comprised of studies that examine how various forms of teacher–student addresses in Europe and the United States impact students' perceptions of their educators. Critical work on gender and language classrooms by scholars Jane Sunderland and Lia Litosseliti (2002) has examined how identities emerge through discourse. Similar analyses by Abolaji S. Mustapha (2013),

Joan Swann (2003), Lewis Davis and Megan Reynolds (2018), and Thomas Kral (2022) engage with gender as a binary construct and examine how teaching material, teacher talk and institutional policies impact "boys and girls." These studies are based on the conceptualisation of gender as a binary.

In the context of Indian classrooms, research on gender is limited to the examination of prevalent gender stereotypes harboured by educators and their manifestations in educational settings. Gender stereotypes in teaching materials in India are examined by Suzana Košir and Radhika Lakshminarayanan (2023) while those practised by teachers are studied by Sonali Rakshit and Soham Sahoo (2023); and Durga Lakshmi G. S. and Geetha Janet Vitus (2022).

Moving beyond heteronormative and binary classroom spaces, Joshua M. Paiz, with Junhan Zhu, (2018) and Elizabeth Morrish (2002) examine the possibilities of voicing their own homosexual identities in the classroom, while Christy M. Rhodes (2019), Lal Zimman (2017), Paiz (2020) and Kris Knisely (2022) offer directions to teachers on how to "queer" the English language classroom. Studies have also been conducted to identify and critique the misuse of specific gender-neutral terms, like Latinx, alongside the development of guidelines on the appropriate use of gender-inclusive language across diverse social settings (del Río-Gonzalez (2021, 1020).

As critical gaps remain at the intersection of language policy in education and gender inclusivity, particularly in the specific socio-cultural and linguistic context of the state of Kerala, this study attempts to investigate the possible implications of the aforementioned language directive on the gender identity of educators. I also analyse the limitations and ramifications of establishing gender-neutral addresses and alternatively propose the introduction of gender-inclusive language practices.

In this study, I undertake a discourse analysis of the text of the 2023 directive, released by the Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, prohibiting the address of teachers in Kerala using gendered terminology. The analysis aims to uncover the underlying assumptions of the directive regarding the teacher–student dynamics and to highlight the inherent paradoxes within the directive. I also employ the method of critical social research, which involves "addressing the interrelationship between data, theory, epistemological presuppositions and socio-political context" (Harvey 2022). I analyse the efficacy of the directive, considering multiple determinants, like the socio-cultural context of Kerala, the dynamics of the language classroom and the linguistic imperatives of subject formation.

Drawing on Louis Althusser, Judith Butler and bell hooks, I examine whether the gender-neutral address of teachers hinders a gendered form of interpellation of the teacher and an engaged form of pedagogy in the classroom. Althusser (2001, 115) argues that "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects." Individuals are thus positioned within certain roles, identities, or subject positions when addressed by ideological state apparatuses like the school. When the government proposes that

gendered teachers living gendered realities be addressed solely using gender-neutral terms, ideology here attempts to reconstitute a gendered individual as a gender-neutral subject.

If gender, as Butler (2010, 191) proposes, is constituted through performance, "a stylised repetition of acts," where do repeated speech acts of gender-neutral address by students in a classroom, as proposed by the government directive, position a teacher who may identify as a gendered individual? Butler considers all speech acts as sites of power. Gender-neutral address of teachers, imposed by the government, is therefore an attempt to render a teacher into a genderless category. It invalidates the lived experience of the teacher as a gendered subject even within the four walls of the classroom. In the context of higher education, Katie Rose Guest Pryal (2010, 62) criticises the "genderless, sexless professorial façade" assumed by educators in the classroom. bell hooks argues that such an idea of a neutral education is an unrealistic one. "No education is politically neutral" (hooks 1994, 37). The subjectivity of the teacher, along with their pedagogical approach, is informed by their unique and gendered lived experiences.

In her discussion on "engaged pedagogy," bell hooks (1994, 35) emphasises the importance of the social reality of a group and the need to acknowledge it in teaching practices.

> If the effort to respect and honor the social reality and experiences of groups in this society who are nonwhite is to be reflected in a pedagogical process, then as teachers—on all levels, from elementary to university settings—we must acknowledge that our styles of teaching may need to change.
>
> (hooks 1994, 35)

hooks' argument in the context of a white supremacist society may be transposed with acute validity to the context of a cisnormative patriarchal society. The power structure of such a society engenders diverse experiences for gendered bodies. An engaged form of pedagogy foregrounds the acknowledgement of such socially constituted subjective experiences in the pedagogical process. It also embraces a multicultural classroom and celebrates it for its differences, which are drawn upon as possibilities for the exchange of different perspectives (hooks 1994, 40).

In a similar manner, feminist pedagogy also foregrounds subjectivity and advocates for a safe and equitable environment for the exchange of experiences within the classroom (Granger and Gerlach 2023). It underscores the subjective experiences of both the teacher and the students, which would invariably encompass gendered dimensions (Harmat 2020, 26). In a language classroom that thrives on the exchange of perspectives drawn from the unique subject positions of the teacher and the students, the imposition of a gender-neutral subjectivity on the teacher would dampen the efficacy of the learning process.

Contrary to feminist pedagogy, which places emphasis on the subjective, gendered experiences of individuals, queer pedagogy challenges the very notion of a *fixed* gender identity that would generate a distinct modality of experience for individuals of a certain gender (Luhmann 1998, 123; Neto 2018, 591). It advocates for avenues of expression and learning that transcend gender categories. Queer pedagogy, however, also highlights the "representational absence" of LGBTQIA in discourse and their invisibility in language (Luhmann 1998, 123; Neto 2018, 590). "To be gay or transgender is part of the identity of an individual and as such, should be included in the day-to-day just as ethnicity, religion, and many other aspects should be" (Neto 2018, 591). Such inclusion of gender in quotidian practices requires the creation of a safe environment for the expression and validation of an individual's gender identity, as opposed to the insistence on a gender-neutral stance.

In this chapter, the theories of subject formation proposed by Althusser and Butler and the principles of engaged, feminist and queer pedagogies constitute the framework for examining the Kerala government's proposal for the gender-neutral address of teachers. I argue that gender-inclusive addresses, as opposed to gender-neutral addresses, foster a gender-just classroom environment beneficial to both students and teachers. A gender-inclusive approach facilitates the recognition of teachers as gendered subjects while simultaneously encouraging the transformation of classrooms into safe spaces for the expression of gendered experiences. In the following section, I examine the directive's implications for educators, who are gendered subjects in a cisnormative patriarchy, and for the language classroom, in which the subjectivity and lived experience of students and teachers are drawn upon for language learning practices.

Gender-Neutral Addresses in Classrooms of Kerala

A critical analysis of the multifarious implications of the directive prohibiting gendered addresses of teachers necessitates a closer inspection of the etymological origins of the terms such as "sir," "miss" and "ma'am," commonly employed in Indian classrooms. The etymological origins of the terms "sir" and "miss" point to the power imbalance between the male and female embedded in these terms. While "sir" is rooted in knighthood, "miss" is drawn from the era prior to the Education Act of 1944, when only unmarried women were permitted to teach (*BBC News Magazine*, May 14, 2014). Though replacing the word "miss" with "ma'am" eliminates the etymological disparity in power between the feminine and the masculine nouns, the relative superiority of the teachers established in relation to the students through addresses like "sir" and "ma'am" also makes the continuing use of these words undesirable for many academicians (*BBC News Magazine*, May 14, 2014). The ban on the address of teachers as "sir" or "miss/ma'am" therefore, at once, eliminates the linguistically unequal references to men and women, the use of hierarchical salutations, and the exclusion of gender-queer teachers.

Certain culture-specific nuances associated with these forms of address in the state of Kerala are relevant to this discussion. Among speakers of Malayalam, the language spoken by the majority in the state, the term "teacher" is traditionally gendered and used to refer exclusively to persons perceived as female, while their male counterparts are addressed as "sir." For speakers of Malayalam accustomed to the use of "teacher" as a gender-specific term for addressing and referencing female educators, through the implementation of this directive, a noun conventionally perceived by the community of Kerala as feminine has been radically redefined as gender-neutral. This is in contrast to the refashioning of words like "actor"—formerly used only to refer to individuals perceived as male—as a gender-neutral term that encompasses persons of all genders. Although it is likely that the directive may have only considered the meaning of the English word "teacher" in its instruction, it inadvertently subverts the trend of adapting terms traditionally seen as masculine to encompass all genders, thereby decolonising the use of the term.

Replacing gendered binaries such as "sir/ma'am," "sir/miss" or "sir/teacher," as is common in Kerala, with the gender-neutral term "teacher" challenges the normalisation of binary, cisnormative and exclusionary forms of language use. Such a challenge to binary modes of gender representation within the school system aligns with the objective of promoting awareness on inclusivity, as stated in the "State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala 2015" (2015, 11). The introduction of a gender-neutral form of addressing teachers, however, is not without its challenges. This study aims to explore the challenges that may be faced in the implementation of this directive while also highlighting its potential as an initial step in acquainting students with the usage of gender-just language.

While the legal implementation of gender-neutral language is crucial in avoiding misgendering, ensuring inclusivity, and according to the fundamental human right of dignity to all individuals, there are challenges to the implementation of gender-neutral addresses, as opposed to occupational titles. A review of the evolution of gender representation in the English language reveals that the generic use of masculine terms such as "man" and masculine occupational titles like the "chairman" was critiqued in the 1980s and 1990s and replaced by gender-neutral terms (Sunderland and Litosseliti 2002, 4). While sharing a similar objective, the directive of the Kerala government discussed in this paper is also distinct from such linguistic amendments. Unlike archaic terms that assign gender to occupational roles, such as "air hostess" or "chairman," the term "teacher" is already and inherently gender neutral. Hence, the primary objective of the directive is solely to modify the gendered manner of *addressing* teachers in Kerala.

In this study, I argue that the gender-neutral address of a teacher, if established as an inviolable rule and practice, especially in a language classroom, stands in stark opposition to: (a) the interpellation of the teachers as gendered subjects; (b) the recommendations put forth by LGBT linguistics; (c) critical pedagogical practices and the dynamics of a language classroom; (d) the

conception of the teacher–student relationship as discussed in the National Education Policy 2020 as well as the directive banning gendered addresses; and (e) the sheer rationale of practicality in the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala. Each of these will be examined separately in the following paragraphs.

In order to examine the gender-neutral address of teachers against the logic of interpellation in subject formation, I would like to initially assert that, within the framework of a classroom environment, especially a language classroom which serves as a locus of exchange of ideas in conversational form, the use of pronouns to refer to each other is imperative. While a teacher may be *addressed* using the gender-neutral occupational title "teacher" and the gender-neutral second-person pronoun "you" by the student, using which third-person pronoun should the teacher be *referred to* by the student, if such a reference may become necessary in the course of classroom interactions? Linguist Lal Zimman (2017, 94), even in his advocacy of gender-neutral language in scenarios where an individual's gender identity is irrelevant or not stated, insists that "Unless a speaker goes to lengths to avoid using a pronoun in reference to someone, they will eventually be faced with a choice about which pronouns to use." Drawing on the ordinance on gender-neutral address, then, is a teacher to be referred to using the gender-neutral pronoun "they" in its singular form in all contexts?

Althusser's (2001, 115) argument that an individual becomes a subject when they are "hailed" or called upon by the ideological structures like the school aligns with the conceptualisation of subject-formation elucidated by Butler (2004, 130) when she says, "[I]n some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails." If the address is vital in constituting our subjectivity, the gender-neutral address of a gendered teacher in a classroom at all times would hinder their interpellation as gendered individuals.

In his study of transgender linguistics, Zimman (2017, 101–102) states that language operates as the primary site of transphobic violence and yet also offers a platform where one's identity can be celebrated. If language is the primary site of identity affirmation, the exclusive use of gender-neutral pronouns such as "they/them" to refer to people who prefer to be referred to using male or female pronouns ("he/him" or "she/her") or other neopronouns threatens their gendered subjectivity. Elizabeth Morrish (2002, 192) evokes Butler's theory of performativity of gender to raise the question of lesbian visibility as a teacher inside the classroom and asks: "(H)ow can we 'be' a lesbian in a context in which the lesbian does not exist?" This question raised in the context of sexual orientation can be extended to gender identity to ask: "How can a person be gendered in a context in which gender must remain neutral?"

While the use of the gender-neutral pronoun avoids the misgendering of a person whose preferred pronouns are unknown to the speaker, in the context of a classroom where there is an extended period of familiarity and communication, continual use of gender-neutral pronouns is tantamount to the erasure of gendered selves. Maherchandani (2022, 5) argues that no queer teacher

must be forced to "'hide' their gender/sexual identities… in a dominant cis/hetero-normative structure." Although a gender-neutral environment shakes the oppressive cis/hetero-normative structure of schools, it continues to promote the invisibility of gender as a mark of identity. Examining the misuse of the gender-expansive term Latinx as a gender-neutral term, Ana María del Río-Gonzalez (2021, 1020) suggests:

> Do not use Latinx when referring to transgender people who identify within the gender binary unless they themselves use the label. Bundling those who have had to fight (quite literally) for their right to define their own gender identity into a genderless category is a microaggression.

With the Kerala government's directive to follow gender-neutral address, using which third-person pronoun must a transgender or cisgender teacher whose preferred pronoun is "he," "she" or a neopronoun, and not "they," be referred to by the students in a classroom? If the government order necessitating gender-neutral addresses overrides their right to be addressed using the pronoun they identify with, the order engenders an act of misgendering, which enacts structural and linguistic violence on the gendered selves. In addition, as del Río-Gonzalez (2021, 1019) suggests, extending the gender-neutral pronoun "they" to refer to persons of all genders is also an affront to the persons who identify as "they." Against the backdrop of these challenges, the government of Kerala's directive in favour of gender neutrality seems to fall short as it preempts a gender-just form of interpellation.

This directive on gender-neutral address may also be examined within the broader frameworks offered by critical pedagogies. Correra and Hall (2021, 31), in their discussion on identity politics in the educational ecosystem, emphasise the need for teachers to "recognise the value and impact of identity as entrenched within society, yet also create appropriate spaces for discourses of difference to be articulated, examined, and questioned…" They further elucidate this argument as follows: "As educators, we continually draw from our own experiences inside and outside the classroom when we think about how we as a society understand and respond to issues of diversity in practice" (Correra and Hall 2021, 32). Within a highly patriarchal framework, such personal experiences are gendered, entailing diverse forms and extents of challenges encountered by individuals of different genders. It is based on this premise that Dewsbury and Brame (2019, 2), in their discussion on inclusive education, argue thus:

> To understand students' voices, we must recognise and understand our own. This is to say, our accrued experiences from personal and social histories matter to how our relationships with our students develop…
>
> … Understanding how our at-birth identities has [*sic*] informed our social and professional pathways is a key component of understanding inclusive behaviors writ large.

Dewsbury and Brame's observations on one's at-birth identities are also relevant to the identities that one embraces, such as gender identity. By acknowledging their own gender identity and comprehending its situatedness within cisnormative, patriarchal structures, a teacher will be able to recognise their own biases and ideological positions that influence their pedagogical approaches as well. Subsuming the gender identity of the teacher in a language of gender neutrality, on the other hand, deems their gender identity as irrelevant to the classroom. This is in stark contrast with the assumptions of critical pedagogy.

The critical pedagogical practitioners of engaged pedagogy advocate for celebrating differences and diverse experiences within a multicultural classroom and those of feminist pedagogy foregrounds subjectivity and learning environments where both students and teachers can safely share their experiences. Queer pedagogy, as well, stands in opposition to the imposition of gender-neutral addresses, inasmuch as it vehemently champions the representation of gendered subjects in language and discourse.

In these critical pedagogical approaches, it is imperative for educators to acknowledge their own subject position, embrace the diversity of students' identities, and foster an environment conducive to the safe expression of identities, experiences and perspectives. These approaches aim to decentre conventional Western classroom dynamics of hierarchy and replace such hierarchical power structures with relationships characterised by equality and mutual respect. The insistence on a gender-neutral form of address precludes the possibility of broaching questions of identity, selfhood and experience in the classroom. Such an insistence on neutrality stands in stark contrast to these pedagogical approaches that embrace and celebrate diversity and use such diversity as opportunities for the exchange of knowledge.

The 2023 directive on gender-neutral address is, similarly, at odds with the Indian pedagogical and socio-cultural conception of classroom dynamics, as well. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will examine the text of the directive as well as extracts from the New Educational Policy 2020 in order to ascertain the classroom dynamics and teacher–student relationship envisaged in the documents, before comparing them with those established by the gender-neutral address of teachers.

The 2023 directive on gender-neutral address by the Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights reads thus:

> Teachers to be Addressed, Irrespective of Gender, as "Teacher"
>
> …
>
> The Commission for Protection of Child Rights has issued instructions to the effect that teaching faculty should be addressed as "teacher" irrespective of their gender. "Teacher" is the most suitable word to address the teaching faculty respectfully …
>
> It is teachers who lead the way in building a new generation and a virtuous world. Hence, words like sir, madam, etc., to address teachers do not meet the conceptualisation of the image or equal the term

> "teacher". Addressing them as "teacher" will maintain equality, increase their closeness with students, and enable the students to experience a feeling of protection. All teachers should become service-volunteers who identify the abilities of students and encourage them through their loving interventions to scale new heights…
>
> ("Teachers to be Addressed." 2023)

Even in its liberal interpretation of gender justice, the directive reflects a conventional Indian conceptualisation of the teacher. The teacher is envisioned as a multifaceted figure, who is protective and respectable, an equal and supportive companion, and a mentor who recognises students' strengths and motivates them to excel.

Similarly, the New Education Policy 2020 also describes the teacher thus: "Teachers truly shape the future of our children - and, therefore, the future of our nation. It is because of this noblest role that the teacher in India was the most respected member of society" ("NEP 2020" 2020, 18). The teacher is expected to serve as a role model for the students ("NEP 2020" 2020, 20). Many schools in the state conduct *pada puja* on *Guru Purnima* every year, where students touch the feet of their teachers as a sign of respect and gratitude. The practice is widely criticised by liberal thinkers who contend that a teacher is merely a paid employee of the school responsible solely for delivering lessons to students and that such glorification of teachers leads to abuse of power and mistreatment of students. While the Western conceptualisation of the teacher exists as its counter-current, the decolonised conception of the teacher as *guru* persists in the country and finds echoes even in the state educational policy documents of Kerala.

The requirement to address teachers using gender-neutral terminology, by logical extension, perceives them as gender-neutral, objective bearers of knowledge whose gender identity, subjectivity and character do not play a role in their occupational space. However, this creates an internal paradox within the same document, the 2023 directive, which also encourages teachers to love, inspire, protect and bond with the students. For teachers to cultivate a relationship with students that is protective, nurturing, and also equitable, requires the *person* of the teacher, with their subjectivity and experiences, to be involved in the classroom. The classroom dynamics envisaged by this directive is paradoxical inasmuch as it promotes a gender-neutral objective persona of teachers and, at the same time, an affectionate subjective persona.

While gender-neutral occupational titles are essential as well as feasible in formal spaces, gender-neutral addresses raise questions of the feasibility of implementation. An insistence on absolute gender neutrality could conflict with the use of gendered but inclusive salutations such as Mr./Ms./Mx. prefixed to names. In the cultural context of India, where persons older than the speaker are conventionally addressed only with markers of respect, such as "sir/ma'am" in a formal context, addressing the teacher by their name would also be considered disrespectful and inappropriate. In Kerala, as in numerous

other regions across the globe, the given names of persons are also often gendered. If taken to its logical extreme, an insistence on gender neutrality could potentially translate to a ban on the use of personal names in the work environment, an outcome that could be considered absurd. In addition, when viewed as an initiative aimed at raising awareness, the proposal for gender neutrality has limited potential in a world where gendered identities continue to inhabit the informal spaces of these students and where parents, siblings and relatives are addressed using gendered terms.

Drawing on the work of Zimman (2017) and del Río-Gonzalez (2021), I argue that, as opposed to and in addition to gender neutrality, gender inclusivity presents a more pragmatic solution for execution in the classroom and is more embracing of the gender spectrum. del Río-Gonzalez (2021, 1019) states that while gender-neutrality "completely erases gender from a gendered language, thereby exacerbating the invisibility of gender diversity," gender-inclusivity "explicitly decenter(s) the gender binary and increase(s) the visibility of gender diversity." Although Zimman argues for the use of gender-neutral language in contexts where gender is irrelevant or not explicitly stated, he reifies del Río-González's argument that gender-inclusive language explicitly recognises gender as non-binary. Gender inclusivity, as opposed to gender-neutrality, may foster a healthy gender acceptance and curiosity among students. The linguistic practice of replacing the gender-neutral with the gender-specific could stimulate meaningful discussions in the language classroom on gender itself.

Gender-Inclusive Language Learning

Although the government of Kerala's advocacy of gender-neutral addresses constitutes a progressive effort towards the recognition of gender justice and the sensitisation of students to the gender spectrum, addressing the problem of exclusionary "address" is only a legal kickstart to creating awareness. Using the directive as a point of departure and drawing upon the directions offered by Zimman, Rhodes, Paiz and Knisely, gender-inclusive language may be introduced in classrooms in Kerala. While not explicitly mandated in the English syllabus prescribed by the state, it is customary among teachers to request students to introduce themselves, typically as an icebreaker and to foster familiarity shortly after their enrolment in the school. When educators introduce themselves at the outset, they may be advised to state their names and respective pronouns so as to subtly familiarise students with the idea that pronouns should not be "presupposed" by others based on an individual's external presentation but should be determined "*solely* by self-identification" (Zimman 2017, 89–92; emphasis in original). Students may also be encouraged to state their pronouns as part of their self-introduction, if they are comfortable doing so.

Challenges to such a proposition of self-identification would emerge within the organisational paradigm of schools in Kerala, where uniforms,

toilets, and often even seating areas are separate for "boys" and "girls." The school handbooks, especially those of private institutions, articulate these rules and regulations in explicitly binary terms. While these rules the students encounter and follow in their daily lives may hinder their understanding of gender inclusivity, these can be repurposed as valuable material for gender sensitisation. In language classrooms, at the high school level, students may be encouraged to engage in discussions on these rules, deconstructing their binary structures and subsequently reconstructing these rules in gender-inclusive formats. Through an engagement with the school rules they take part in, students may be familiarised with the use of unbiased language. Although such a critique of school rules may face institutional backlash, the classroom practice proposed would be in standing with the state government's policy of raising awareness in students of non-binary identities and respectful engagement with them "starting with the upper primary level" ("State Policy" 2015, 11–12). Therefore, notwithstanding the potential institutional resistance, the practice would foster a critical worldview in students and encourage the use of gender-inclusive language, legally backed by the state's proposed gender-just policies.

Implications for Language and Education in South Asia

This study has explored the potential shortcomings of gender-neutral addresses while simultaneously emphasising the imperative of adopting a gender-inclusive approach in the educational milieu of the South Indian state of Kerala. I have scrutinised a governmental directive advocating gender neutrality and examined its ramifications within the specific cultural and educational fabric of Kerala, in which a teacher occupies a highly revered position. A gender-inclusive approach should also be suited to the cultural and educational landscape of a place and South Asian countries should devise policies that resonate with their unique cultural contexts. In this context, I have argued for the need for a gender-inclusive strategy, one that also remains acutely aware of the environment it operates within.

Against the backdrop of the cultural and linguistic milieu of the state of Kerala and the multiple connotations of the word "teacher," this study explored the limitations of the directive on *gender-neutral* language and the challenges that may be encountered in implementing it, while acknowledging its significance as a preliminary attempt towards acquainting students with gender-just practices of language use. The findings of the study support a nuanced approach: advocating for state policies that promote *gender-inclusive* language while maintaining cultural sensitivity. This framework of combining linguistic reform with cultural awareness is applicable to the broader South Asian context where respect for educators and evolving gender norms co-exist. Future research and policy initiatives in this domain should consider such a balanced approach to navigate the complex interplay of language, gender and culture in educational settings in South Asia.

References

Althusser, Louis. 2001. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Publishers.

Arora, Tanya. 2023. "Reflecting on Transgender Rights in 2023: Have Legal Recognition and Advocacy Efforts Broken the Cycle of Discrimination and Ostracism?" *Citizens for Justice and Peace*, March 31. https://cjp.org.in/reflecting-on-transgender-rights-in-2023-have-legal-recognition-and-advocacy-efforts-broken-the-cycle-of-discrimination-and-ostracism/

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.

Butler, Judith. 2010. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Correra, Elaine and Doris Hall. 2021. "Identity Politics and the Politics of Learning: Challenges to Teaching in a Culture of Fake News, Alternative Facts, and Multiple Truths." *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 20 (4): 30–47. doi: 10.14434/josotl.v21i4.33038

Datta, Sayantan. 2021. "NCERT Removes Teacher-Training Manual on Transgender-Inclusive School Education After Backlash." *The Wire*, November 10. https://thewire.in/lgbtqia/ncert-removes-teacher-training-manual-on-transgender-inclusive-school-education-after-backlash

Davis, Lewis and Megan Reynolds. 2018. "Gendered Language and the Educational Gender Gap." *Economic Letters* 168: 46–48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2018.04.006

del Río-Gonzalez, Ana María. 2021. "To Latinx or Not to Latinx: A Question of Gender Inclusivity Versus Gender Neutrality." *AJPH: Opinions, Ideas & Practice*111 (6): 1018–1021. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306238

Dewsbury, Bryan and Cynthia J. Brame. 2019. "Inclusive Teaching." *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 18 (fe2): 1–5. doi:10.1187/cbe.19-01-0021

Granger, Kimberly and David Gerlach. 2023. "Critical Feminist Pedagogy in English Language Education: An Action Research Project on the Implementation of Feminist Views in a German Secondary School." *TESOL Quarterly* 0 (0): 1–24. doi: 10.1002/tesq.3272

Lakshmi G.S., Durga and Geetha Janet Vitus. 2022. "Maintaining Gender-Neutral Classrooms: A Glimpse to the Desired Teacher Competencies." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6 (4): 189–194. http://journalppw.com

Harmat, Gal. 2020. *Intersectional Pedagogy: Creative Education Practices for Gender and Peace Work*. London: Routledge.

Harvey, Lee. 2022. "Critical Social Research: Re-Examining Quality." *Quality in Higher Education* 28 (2): 145–152. doi: 10.1080/13538322.2022.2037762

Hooks, Bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Knisely, Kris. 2022. "The Gender-Just Language Education Project." Materials, presented in a webinar hosted by *CERCLL*, May 11.

Košir, Suzana and Radhika Lakshminarayanan. 2023. "Do Visual Constructs in Social Science Textbooks Evince Gender Stereotypes and Bias? A Case Study from India." *Gender and Education* 35 (1): 69–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2022.2144626

Kral, Thomas. 2022. "Gender in Language Education." PPT presented at the webinar organized by *British Council*, September 14. https://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/default/files/gender_in_language_education.pdf

Luhmann, Susan. 1998. "Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing." In *Queer Theory in Education*, edited by William F. Pinar, 120–132. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Maherchandani, Ajay. 2022. "Inclusion of Queer Persons and NEP 2020." *Economic & Political Weekly* LVII (51): 5. https://www.epw.in/journal/2022/51/letters/inclusion-queer-persons-and-nep-2020.html

Mishra, Ipsita, and Vyom Tripathi Shivam. 2023. "A Decade on, the Law against Workplace Sexual Harassment is in need of Queer, Gender-neutral Updates." *Scroll.in*, May 18. https://scroll.in/article/1048494/a-decade-on-the-law-against-workplace-sexual-harassment-is-in-need-of-queer-gender-neutral-updates

Morrish, Elizabeth. 2002. "The Case of the Indefinite Pronoun: Discourse and the Concealment of Lesbian Identity in Class." In *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*, edited by Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland, 177–192. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Mustapha, Abolaji S. 2013. "Gender and Language Education Research: A Review." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 4 (3): 454–463. doi:10.4304/jltr.4.3.454-463

"NALSA (National Legal Services Authority) vs. Union of India". 2024. *South Asian Translaw Database*. Accessed 15 February, 2024. https://translaw.clpr.org.in/case-law/nalsa-third-gender-identity/

"National Education Policy 2020". 2020. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

Neto, João Nemi. 2018. "Queer Pedagogy: Approaches to Inclusive Teaching." *Policy Futures in Education* 16 (5): 589–604. doi: 10.1177/1478210317751273

Paiz, Joshua M. 2020. *Queering the English Language Classroom: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. Sheffield: Equinox Publishing.

Paiz, Joshua M., and Junhan Zhu. 2018. "Queering the Classroom: A Teacher's Action and a Student's Response." *TESOL Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.371

Pandey, Shashank. 2024. "A Case for Transgender Abortion Rights in India." *Jurist*, February15.https://www.jurist.org/features/2024/02/15/a-case-for-transgender-abortion-rights-in-india/

Pryal, Katie Rose Guest. 2010. "Intimate Pedagogy: The Practice of Embodiment in University Classrooms." *Assuming Gender* (2): 62–77.

Rakshit, Sonali, and Soham Sahoo. 2023. "Biased Teachers and Gender Gap in Learning Outcomes: Evidence from India." *IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper Series* (14305). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3837757

Rhodes, Christy M. 2019. "A Practical Guide to Queering the Adult English Language Classroom." *Adult Learning* 30 (4): 160–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159519840334

Sharma, Shreya, and Karan Babbar. 2020. "If NEP 2020 Wants Gender Inclusion, Why Is It Ghosting LGBTQIA+?" *The Quint*, August 16. https://www.thequint.com/news/education/if-nep-2020-wants-gender-inclusion-why-is-it-ghosting-lgbtqia#read-more

Sinha, Roshni. 2019. "Issues for Consideration: The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019." *PRS Legislative Research*, July 31. https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/bills_parliament/2019/Issues%20for%20Consideration%20-%20Transgender%20Bill%202019_0.pdf

"State Policy for Transgenders in Kerala, 2015." 2015. Department of Social Justice, Government of Kerala. https://translaw.clpr.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/State-Policy-for-Transgenders-in-Kerala-2015.pdf

Sunderland, Jane, and Lia Litosseliti. 2002. "Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations." In *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*, edited by Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland, 1–39. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Swann, Joan. 2003. "Schooled Language: Language and Gender in Educational Settings." In *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, edited by Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff, 624–644. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Tandon, Tripti, and Aarushi Mahajan. 2019. "Reclaiming Rights: Transgender Persons Bill and beyond." *The Leaflet: Constitution First*, December 4. https://theleaflet.in/reclaiming-rights-transgender-persons-bill-and-beyond/

"Teachers to be Addressed using the Gender-Neutral Term 'Teacher'". 2023. Kerala State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Jan. 11. https://kescpcr.kerala.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/12.pdf

"Welfare of Transgenders." 2017. Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India. https://pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetail.aspx?PRID=1498266

Zimman, Lal. 2017. "Transgender Language Reform: Some Challenges and Strategies for Promoting Trans-Affirming, Gender-Inclusive Language." *Journal of Language and Discrimination* 1 (1): 84–105. https://doi.org/10.1558/jld.33139

7 Multilingualism and globalisation in remote trans-Himalayan India

How topography and place-experience impact language learning

Saurav Goswami

Introduction

English in India remains a postcolonial index of economic access and professional growth, and learning English is a heavily textured phenomenon. Scholarship has addressed professional and class mobility through English, and to a lesser extent through Hindi, in urban locations. But what happens with language learning, professionalisation and identity work when learners are located away from the urban(ising) mainstream of India? This chapter looks at high altitude remoteness as a variable impacting—and impacted by—language learning, in the context of globalisation. The work in this chapter elicits experiences of multilingualism among four professional adults in remote trans-Himalayan India and explores how a sense of place might explain the learners' language learning journeys. The high-altitude location of the study offers much-needed nuance in our discussions around language learning and identity, English-driven modernity, and decolonial discourses in contemporary South Asia. The findings contribute to an important topic in applied linguistics: how do materially situated and localised approaches to teaching English help plurilingual learners optimise meaning-making? I first locate the study in the immediate ecology of the Himalayan territory of Leh-Ladakh, India. Next, I describe the participants' individual language journeys. Finally, I offer an interpretation of what the learners say about multilingualism, location, identity and industry in postcolonial India, and their ramifications for English teaching at graduate and professional programmes for remote locations in India.

Regional context

This essay builds around fieldnotes and data from classes at a private graduate institution that I have called *Entrepreneurs for the Himalayas* (EFH). EFH is a 12-month graduate programme in entrepreneurial leadership for the Himalayan region, established in 2017. It is located in the trans-Himalayan territory of Leh-Ladakh (11,480 feet), which refers jointly to the capital and largest city (Leh) and the union territory of Ladakh. While geologists describe Leh-Ladakh as a high-altitude cold desert, it is often referred to as "little Tibet."

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-10

Orientalist and esoteric descriptions of Leh-Ladakh as an eternal Shangri-La still persist from colonial narratives about Leh-Ladakh. Since 2010, Leh-Ladakh has been commoditised as a spiritual tourism destination with "Buddhism as our USP" (Williams-Oerberg, 2020) and has been attracting an increasing footfall of local and foreign tourists. Each summer, tourists visit its bare mountains (engaged in their "raw play of light," studied in Dasgupta, 2019) dotted with monasteries and glacial lakes. Ladakh's famous lunar landscapes give way to bucolic seasonal pastures for yaks and dzo. Signs of acute mountain sickness (AMS) are frequently reported among tourists.

The region faces challenges like uncontrolled urbanisation, scarcity of water resources due to depleting glacial meltwater, unpredictable natural disasters (Field & Kelman, 2018) including droughts, flooding and mudslides, as well as threat to natural fauna. Unsustainable tourism contributes to the economy but adds to cultural anxiety. Buddhist philosophy and ethics are often brought together to explain environmental crises, which are seen as the "wrath of an agentive sentient landscape" (Butcher, 2013, p. 103). Buddhist associations and lamas often prescribe monastic practices of atonement to chthonic beings and spirits of the water, air, mountains and glaciers (Ozer, 2010). Bordering Pakistan and Tibet, Leh-Ladakh's geopolitical importance is seen in the heavy national defence presence in the territory. Leh is markedly more urbanised than other districts in the territory, and despite its altitude, air and road travel connect it to a few cities in India. Heavy snowfall cuts all its highways off from other Indian cities mid-October through March, undergoing "isolation from the main transportation routes or corridors, potentially making supply of resources more costly and unreliable" (UNCTAD, 2023). In this season of human isolation, the critically endangered snow leopard descends to prowl on the lower reaches of the mountains.

Remoteness as an index

Here it will be fruitful to debrief the term "remote" and how it frames this chapter on language learning. A close reading of the interview data revealed that the most conspicuous variable in the professional, personal and language learning experiences of the participants is their location in the geography of India. Very importantly, "remote" as a descriptor for this location was generated by the participants themselves. I have chosen to frame this chapter around this participant-generated descriptor. Remoteness is a construct in human geography, international relations and economics that has been framed in relative terms (Bocco, 2016). While a universal theory of the remote is undesirable, the United Nations posits the "remoteness index" as a composite construct measured as geographical distance adjusted for connectivity: "We could therefore have an economy that is remote but well connected" (Cantu-Bazaldua, 2021, p. 5). Leh-Ladakh's remoteness shows seemingly conflicting features—it is a high-altitude region with an extremely challenging climate; and yet a busy tourism destination not untenably far from urban

centres of north India. Its remoteness is being modulated "through targeted investment in infrastructure and greater participation in cultural and political networks" (Cantu-Bazaldua, 2021, p. 5). The choice of remoteness as a frame allows for participants—rather than the researcher—to guide the discussion section on language learning. It allows for *place* as a vital anchor for our considerations on globalisation. It also troubles simplistic binaries of centre/periphery that must be considered in our explorations of the decolonial in Indian education policy.

Ladakh was granted the status of a Union Territory of India in 2019, but over 2023–2024, demonstrations erupted in Leh, calling for statehood, and land and job reservations for indigenous Ladakhis (Rathore, 2023). An accruing anxiety about locals losing land and jobs to the "outsider" has become much more prominent. Van Beek (2000) has critiqued the way Leh-Ladakh has been unilaterally narrativised by non-Ladakhi sources as an example of fragility, and of resistance to development. While resistance to settler-colonial tactics, and suspicion towards uncontrolled urbanisation are salient features of Ladakh's contemporary politics, it is important to reject oversimplifications. These complex ethno-geographic loci—the remoteness, ecological fragility, cultural erosion and political importance—of Leh-Ladakh come together to frame experiences of language learning considered in this chapter.

Language and place in the Himalayas

English language learning in the Himalayas has been linked to high-altitude tourism and discourses of language commodification by linguistic anthropologists (Heller et al., 2014; Heller & Duchêne, 2016), while applied linguists have sought to unravel English learning, professional aspirations, identities (Sharma, 2018, 2021) and processes of tourism destination-making "characterised by hybrid multilingualism" (Sharma 2021, p. 117). Macpherson's (2005) study on Himalayan Buddhist nuns noted that learning English could pose threats to identity and called for teachers to invest in "more explicit education, training, and experience in intercultural communication and identity development issues" (Macpherson, 2005, p. 605). Broader work on individual identity in Leh-Ladakh has debated whether globalisation corrodes local identity through a monoculture of consumerism (Norberg-Hodge, 1999), or offers new, intersecting avenues for the articulation of dialogical selves. Ozer et al. (2017) for instance, observed the dialogical construction of selfhood among Ladakhi college youth and reported a complicated process of globalisation-based acculturation which is agentive and heterogeneous. The specific role of language learning in these identity negotiations has not been explored in these studies.

Additionally, human geographers and sociologists have extensively studied the dialectic of place. Tuan (1975) saw place as "a centre of meaning constructed by experience" (p. 152) and as an ordering unit of space and mind.

He proposed that human geography should consider the experiential aspect of place, rather than space, as a meaningful variable in research. He defined the construct of places as lying midway between "points in a spatial system," and "feelings" (p. 152). Human beings orient themselves and respond to this construct at many levels, apprehending the home, the neighbourhood, the region, the nation, etc. To excavate place experience, Tuan also defined the concept of topophilia—a neologism from Greek *topos*, meaning place, and *philia* meaning affinity—as "the human being's affective ties with the material environment" (Tuan, 1974, p. 93). Since Tuan, interdisciplinary scholars have explored the phenomenological aspects of place, and its elusive meaning in late modernity (Relph, 2020; Sharma, 2019). Developing a consciousness of place experience could help us understand language learning as a phenomenon at the level of the region, particularly for ecologically and politically sensitive regions.

Contexts for the institution

The participants of this study are local Ladakhis who aspire to remain in the region. They are L1 users of Ladakhi, a vulnerable Sino-Tibetan language with 14,952 native speakers (Government of India, 2011). Ladakhi is also called Bodhi/Bhoti by Ladakhi Buddhists to mean Ladakhi written in the Tibetan script. They are L2 users of Hindi and L3 users of English. The centre for writing and communication at EFH was staffed by two in-house tutors and worked with cohorts of 50 students each year. The present study is in the context of a series of writing classes that were offered over a duration of six months in 2021–2022 and were led by these two facilitators. These classes aimed at introducing writing as an act that critically engages with the world and contributes to meaning-making, rather than simply as a skill for meeting professional benchmarks. Canagarajah (2021) maps out "the locus of semiotic repertoires, labelled as 'spatial repertoires'" (p. 6), which means the complete landscape of objects, rhetorical situations, and relations which learners enter into, while practising language. At EFH, the pedagogy involved using objects and topics in the environment inside and outside the classroom, to explore new attitudes towards the act and labour of the spoken and written word, positioning them as very human habits—in how they inscribe and challenge histories of communities, and build strong professionals and organisations. The approach used in these writing classes was a multilingual and multiliteracies-based paradigm, helping students to see writing across many modes and forms ("multimodal and multi-form," as defined by the New London Group, 1996). The study asked:

1 How do the participants speak about geographical place in their language learning journey?
2 What place do English and the other languages have in the participants' lives?

Research design and participants

I conducted semi-structured interviews with four participants recruited from a convenience sample of students at EFH—two self-identified as male and two as female (see Table 7.1). They had all graduated from the programme by the time of the study. All had been exposed to English as a subject in school with one of them having been educated with Ladakhi as medium of instruction, and Hindi as second language, and the other three having completed school with Hindi as medium language of instruction. While all four participants were born, and had spent most of their lives, in the valleys of Ladakh (Table 7.1), each had travelled to neighbouring states. They inhabited multiple language modes (Grosjean, 2001) in different spheres and drew on them in different capacities in situated contexts to make meaning.

Participant profiles

Chostar

Chostar (28) spoke Ladakhi and enjoyed learning English in school. He had picked up Hindi from watching television and listening to Bollywood music. By the time of the study, Chostar had had rich job experiences, where he was able to put his multilingualism to good use. One such opportunity came when, to partially fund college, he took up a job at a customer services centre that needed English speakers. Another was his job as a guide with a trekking company. During the pandemic, when tourism had stalled, Chostar collected funds and rations for several families in his village. At the time of the interview, Chostar had been volunteering as a translator, guide and programme administrator for a France-based organisation that offered medical camps in remote Himalayan villages. He would listen to the French doctors speak in "not very good" English, make sense of their decisions, and translate them into Ladakhi for the villagers, and Hindi for administrators; and vice-versa. He wanted to improve his Tibetan and learn more French, because of such emerging work opportunities. Chostar wanted to keep trying new things but was focused on setting up a sustainable hostel in Leh in the near future.

Dolkar

Dolkar (25) had grown up in the Markha Valley, a basecamp for a famous trek (17,500 feet). She learned Ladakhi from her grandfather, and Classical Tibetan at school, where she enjoyed her calligraphy classes. Hindi and English were offered as subjects at high school, and she also began with elementary Korean online during the pandemic, having spent a lot of time listening to K-pop and Korean drama shows. Dolkar had a deep affinity for Ladakhi as her "mother tongue" and was as deeply connected to Markha Valley as a space. A storyteller and folklorist, Dolkar dipped into the lore of Ladakh to make sense of the climate and cultural crises that it faced. She had her own small business to

Table 7.1 Backgrounds of Participants

S. No.	*Participant*	*Age*	*Gender identity*	*Region of Ladakh*	*Profession*	*Languages*	*Years studying English as a subject*	*Years studying Hindi as a subject*	*Years studying Tibetan formally*
1	Chostar	28	Male	Leh (11,480 feet)	High-altitude trekking guide, entrepreneur	Ladakhi, Nubra dialect, Changthang dialect, Hindi, English, French (learning)	11	5	3 (Classical Bhoti)
2	Dolkar	25	Female	Markha Valley (10,500 feet)	Entrepreneur	Ladakhi, Classical Tibetan, Hindi, English, Korean (learning)	11	8	10 (Classical Bhoti)
3	Zasal	24	Female	Leh (11,480 feet)	Entrepreneur, student	Ladakhi, Classical-colloquial Tibetan, Hindi, English	8	0	13 (Classical Bhoti, colloquial Tibetan)
4	Dorjey	25	Male	Siachen Valley (11,700 feet)	Farmer	Ladakhi, Nubra dialect, Classical Tibetan, Hindi, English, French (elementary)	8	3	8 (Classical Bhoti)

make products from local herbs (chamomile, juniper, wild rose, etc.) and fruits (such as almonds, sea buckthorn and apricots) of the Markha Valley. Dolkar strongly disapproved of unsustainable tourism in Leh-Ladakh. She would want to remain a part-time entrepreneur and teach at high school.

Zasal

Zasal (24) grew up in Leh. She knew Ladakhi natively and learned colloquial and Classical Tibetan, and English, at a Tibetan-run school. Zasal spent three years in Chandigarh for her undergraduate studies in computer science and recounted that integrating with non-Ladakhi students through English and Hindi was important for her overall sojourn there. She had acquired Hindi extramurally and could not read. Zasal had had difficulty picking up and staying consistent with spoken English, until she joined EFH. Her greatest discovery since EFH was her love for writing in English, which she felt she had never experienced before. At the time of the interview, she had applied for a bachelor's degree in education and looked forward to becoming a schoolteacher. Zasal was fascinated by Korean and Japanese cultures, about which she learned while watching shows and listening to music online. She was a professed Buddhist and felt that staying in touch with her religion was crucial and would one day love to write on philosophy in Tibetan and English.

Dorjey

Dorjey (25) grew up in a tiny village close to the Siachen glacier (20,062 feet), a politically contested area that was the reason for two wars between India, Pakistan and China. The Siachen Valley evokes vivid associations with border vigilance and patriotism and of oropolitics (Sircar, 1984). Dorjey learned Ladakhi, Hindi and English, and picked up elementary French from the France-based sponsors of his school. His Tibetan was weak. He dropped out of school and volunteered with the Ice Stupa Project (The ice stupa project, 2022; Palmer, 2022) and later with the Snow Leopard Conservancy, which sought to strengthen conservation efforts for the elusive apex predator of the trans-Himalayas (Watts et al., 2019). Dorjey, and in fact all students at EFH, had a deep love and reverence for the snow leopard. At the time of the interview, Dorjey had been setting up a pair of solar-powered dryers that could be used to process vegetables for his own project—a small business that created mountain-sourced nutritional food products for winter sustenance. Dorjey wanted to continue farming and experimenting with mountain agriculture in the future, while finding ways to supplement his income.

The interviews were approximately 60 minutes long in English, Hindi and (sparingly) Ladakhi. The transcribed data were sifted for patterns and thematically categorised into preliminary codes. Based on these categorisations, responses of participants were axially compared, and more specific codes were generated. In the results and discussion, stress in the verbatim extracts has been underlined.

Results

The remoteness of Leh-Ladakh

The participants saw language learning in terms of the remoteness and climatic conditions of Leh-Ladakh. Chostar described remoteness via an assessment of climatic features, and in terms of access to healthcare, telecommunications and education. Dorjey explained how solar power was an asset for drying soup vegetables in such altitudes. Barley is a symbol of high-altitude agriculture (Sharma, 2021), and Dorjey must speak about its relevance to his customers. Dorjey's experience of English is thus connected to his profession as a farmer in high-altitude fields. He needed English to articulate his food policy for Ladakh to his stakeholders: "Even to convey my message on Instagram, I have to have good English." Barley could be marketed to tourists, travellers and mountaineers as a time-tested, nutritious, and authentically Ladakhi grain. At EFH, Dorjey would benefit from learning how to "language" barley—the material conditions of its agriculture and production, its connection to climate and altitude, and its symbolism for the Ladakhi people.

At EFH, writing classes attempt to be deliberately multisensory and critical. Dolkar recounted how a writing task had students look at a bunch of sea buckthorn, a common edible medicinal plant in the region, and write about it. She described the multisensory experience as interesting if bewildering: "I was like where should I begin? Like where should I end, what should I write? This sea buckthorn that I see every day going here and there… what is special about this (laughs)?" Dolkar also evaluated others' divergent perspectives towards the *topos* of Ladakh, and their meaning for being Ladakhi:

> Some outsiders found Ladakh very boring. They said, "Oh, this mountain has been like this for a whole year. And now I'm getting bored of looking at it", and some Ladakhis would get offended and be like, "How can you say this… the mountain is so beautiful! In the winter it is covered with snow, in summer, it's like this…" So I think different people have different perspectives.

Dolkar and many Ladakhis looked at the fixity and changeability of a mountain as a beautiful thing. This natural self-making (*rangjon* in Ladakhi: Dasgupta, 2019) of Ladakh's topography was an important factor of Dolkar's life in language. She constructed Ladakh as a place "out of such elements as distinctive odours, textural and visual qualities in the environment, seasonal changes of temperature and colour" (Tuan, 1975, p. 153). English therefore gave students access to one another's subjective registration of place.

Zasal deployed climate and language behaviour to index identity and isolation in Ladakh: "I think it's fine speaking Ladakhi in Ladakh, but then I think we need to also know what the other part of the world is doing because we are very far from other parts of the world." The geographical inaccessibility of

Leh-Ladakh from mid-October through March generated time for winter-specific cultural practices, such as prayer, meditation, weaving, etc. Zasal pointed out how Ladakh's isolation has been changing due to the snowballing need to know the world. English and Ladakhi became compasses to navigate this historical moment. She invests both Ladakhi and English with epistemic potential, where Ladakhi offers access to local history and tradition, and English offers access to global contemporaneity and modernity. Although these languages appear as discrete systems, indexing separately and differently, Zasal's translanguaging and code-mixing indicate an osmotic rather than a watertight relationship between her languages.

Chostar's language learning was structured along an annual calendaring of seasons. He planned to exploit his sequestration at home, and his mother's availability to teach him Classical Tibetan: "There's nothing serious I'm doing in winter. So I have a pretty good bit of time in winters, and my mom is good at Bodhi. So I'm thinking about learning it right now." He also strategised to invest his time in French. This winter-specific calendaring of language learning was as much a necessity as it was an affordance of remoteness that characterised Leh-Ladakh. The participants experienced and mobilised language learning for fulfilling their professional and individual needs using materials and situations that are available to them in their location.

Binary idiom of insider/outsider

All four participants referred to the experience of learning English in terms of their sociocultural and linguistic identity as Ladakhis, and their geographical place-identity as Ladakhis living in Ladakh. Both Chostar and Zasal articulated a binary of home ("we," "here," "any Ladakhi," "locals") and the beyond ("outside people," "non-Ladakhis," *"gyagarpa"*[1]), each mapping out a separate set of sociolinguistic attitudes to English learning: English improvement or English comfort, good and bad, respectively. These attitudes return to the "need," and usefulness, of learning English that might empower Ladakhis. Zasal noted how "most Ladakhis say they wanted to improve [their] communication skills." In contrast, Chostar "would say the outside people have much more experience in the corporate world, and just because of that I think they are much better."

Both Chostar and Dorjey recounted a complication that had arisen in the EFH due to the sudden impact of the COVID pandemic. The cessation of travel meant that non-Ladakhis weren't able to arrive in Leh in time for the EFH year to commence, and had to participate online—with extremely unreliable internet coverage—leaving only local Ladakhis to join classes in person. Chostar spoke about a bifurcation of the local and the outsider cohorts, where he wished they had "bonded." Dorjey confirmed this, linking it to English learning: "That just closed so many doors in getting to know each other. If those things didn't happen then we would have had better experience and better English language skills." All four participants thought that English had

the potential to bridge gaps with the outside, and the only way to improve it was through sustained usage with non-Ladakhis. Both Dorjey and Chostar articulated the desire, and the need, for "bonding" to practice English.

Having experienced it personally, Zasal felt strongly about the efflux phenomenon, that is, Ladakhis sojourning out of Ladakh for study:

> I think English is very important because when students go outside to study from here to Delhi and Chandigarh, they couldn't express themselves [in English] and they start making their friends with their own Ladakhi group. And then I think they learn very less because they have been staying together since a lot of time in their school together and then also in this same area. So that's why they start making their own circle in Ladakhi, and maybe with some outsiders, but then they speak in Ladakhi, or Hindi only. So I think their growth stopped there.

She projected bonding between the insider and the outsider as necessary to not just learn English, but to "grow." The contrary impulse to remain isolated ("their own circle in Ladakhi") was under critique ("they learn very less"). The participants evidently looked at English use through the prism of insider/outsider; of "us" Ladakhis and "them" non-Ladakhis. There is a sense of disquiet in this binary, which is further complicated by the role of tourism and urbanisation.

Languaging tourism

The demands of late capitalism generated an "ambivalence toward tradition and transformation as a result of tourism" (Sharma, 2021, p. 116) and its linguistic manifestations. The participants expected both local hosts and travellers to respect the traditional ways of living in Leh-Ladakh. Chostar felt that visitors who choose Ladakh for tourism "are not interested in knowing Ladakh…They're not getting into our authentic traditions." Dolkar reported similarly on the "very large numbers" of tourists that "are going to Pangong, they are going to Nubra Valley. They are bringing their own cars. The hotels in Leh are overpopulated." She reasoned that an uncontrolled influx of irresponsible tourists had become a massive liability; "But we can't blame [tourism] because Ladakh depends mainly on tourism. Tourism is the backbone of Ladakh's economy, but I think there should be some limitations like, 'These things you can do, and these you just can't do.'"

Chostar also recalled that travellers "were quite quite good before the pandemic, and they were really helping not just the big hotels, but the small homestays in villages income. Every house can be a homestay!" These trekkers and travellers would "go into houses, make dinner, some *momos* and other things together, learn traditional songs. They would get the whole experience of Ladakh." He insisted that using local dry toilets, that make little use of water, is part of "the whole experience" of Ladakh. The desire for immersion and cultural sensitivity that Chostar observed in a few travellers, and not in others, is important. Chostar believes in sustainable tourism—investing in

homestays rather than large hotels, participating in the lives of communities, learning Ladakhi culture and cuisine. He saw urbanisation and mainstream tourism as a portent for the Himalayas: "Now I feel like what Leh is facing now, Spiti will face very soon. Very soon, yeah." Chostar frequently visited Spiti Valley for his project, and because of a general love toward a comparably remote place. The geographic and cultural similarities between the two places possibly made Chostar extend his topophilic affinity to Spiti Valley. His fear of the chokehold of tourism and infrastructure investment from private corporations, which had begun to wrangle Ladakh already, was valid.

Tradition and modernity appeared to rub against each other in many ways. Chostar assessed the merits and demerits of a paved motorable road that had been inaugurated recently in a village near Markha Valley:

> I have thought about [this road]. I don't like it. Some say, "Yeah, it's good because sometimes we have medical problems and we have to carry things on horses and stuff like that. It's difficult to get a person to the hospital." Others say, "Yeah, only for four months we could earn something. And now there is a road. There's no tourist over here and we have to depend on other things."

What followed after this was both a poignant and alarming projection of what could possibly happen:

> Since students are young, their generation are moving away from the villages, not staying in the villages. I would feel like the old people will also not stay, don't want to stay at the villages. And it would be like an empty valley.

Overall, the participants appeared to be negotiating two contrary social imperatives, one to preserve an ethnolinguistic identity; and another to open up to the world beyond. As the prime beneficiary of the urbanisation process, the figure of the tourist emerged as the consummate outsider in Leh-Ladakh, although the participants had many examples of sensitive and responsible travelling.

Language as a tool in daily life

For all his workplaces, Chostar retrospectively saw English as a steering tool towards financial stability and professional success. At his customer services job, "I got a bonus point because my English was good." At the trekking company, English conversation offered him organisational mobility:

> I even got my own group from Germany, and we had a very good relationship. When they were in lockdown, they were supposed to come to Ladakh for another trek. But they couldn't come. But they all collected money from their friends who had trekked with me… and they sent me a big amount to help others.

Heller et al. (2014) and Sharma (2021) observed that tourism workers rely on language capital and communication skills to traverse complex relationships such as the ones Chostar shared about. Chostar's language brokering for the French doctors he had been volunteering for in his village similarly allowed him to multilingually navigate the changing realities of Leh-Ladakh and Spiti Valley. English and French appeared to allow Chostar to access the outside. His self-efficacy in English was historically maintained ("When I was in school I was only good in English. I was not good even in the local Bodhi, or Hindi"). However, he lamented the attrition of classical Tibetan in his life, except at home, and in monasteries, where sacred writing and iconography brought Classical Tibetan back:

> But now I really feel like I need to learn Bodhi as well, you know, because I'm not really religious and stuff, but I feel bad when I go to monastery or something and there is a script, some of my friends are reading and I'm not able to read it. Although I belong here.

Dolkar, who is more religious, echoed his feeling of loss:

> I did study the small prayer book I used to carry. So right now I think I forgot most of the Tibetan language I knew earlier. Now I only see Tibetan or Ladakhi in local newspapers. So rare. That is also so rare. I read it in the scriptures while doing my prayers, or while attending teachings by some renowned monks or nuns… at that time only I think I'm connected to the Ladakhi or Tibetan language.

All participants spoke about writing in particular. Dolkar assessed writing in English this way:

> I think [writing in English] is really important if we are starting a business. Like, we have to do marketing and we have to do branding. So we should have or we <u>need</u> good writing skills. After EFH, the investors asked my entrepreneur friends to write about their impact stories- the story why they started. Also, I want to document the ancient stories of Ladakh- there are so many stories! I'm very interested in documenting them before they're lost. So I mean if I am good in writing I can document those, I can record it verbally, orally from the people in the villages and I can put it down in words [in English].

She shared one incident she witnessed where a *lha-mo*, a female oracle who channelised a water spirit (called *lu*), was angered by the pollution of water in a brook, and threatened to cause a flood. Retribution is part of the theodicy of Vajrayana Buddhism. Whenever human activity leads to *dip*, broadly meaning defilement or pollution, chthonic deities such as *lu* demand atonement through "purification rites and virtuous acts" (Ozer, 2010). Stories such as these, embedded in the

mythic, would be mobilised through writing in English to articulate a climate politics. Dolkar thought aloud about her own writing practices:

> So I personally prefer writing over talking. I used to write journals. Whenever I go to places, I would write two to three pages about that place. So if I see something beautiful, something interesting, I can't speak to a person about that. "Oh, this is beautiful, the sun, the moon."

In both Zasal and Dolkar's cases, writing allowed more privacy than speaking, and for semiotising complex interior, as well as social, realities disallowed by speech in English. It allowed more time to compose, and perhaps "more learner control over attentional resources as well as more need and opportunity to attend to language both during and after production" (Williams, 2012, p. 322). The diglossia that characterises Ladakhi (it is written in the "high" Classical Tibetan, and Ladakhis cannot understand Tibetan without instruction), impinged on the participants' writing practices. Dorjey claimed that the difficult alphabet was a major reason he struggled with reading: "For me to read my own language, like my own script, I have to read each and every letter and then I have to make words…it takes me too much time."

Zasal preferred focusing on English in the EFH writing classroom:

> I don't think that's [Ladakhi writing] important. For me like- I think English is important because uh- these days it's important everywhere, wherever we go… In Ladakh, English is not needed to survive, but then I think <u>for me</u> it is important.

I have surmised that given Zasal's extensive exposure to Classical and colloquial Tibetan, and Ladakhi, she was more comfortable in them than any of the other participants. That might be why she prioritised English over the other languages she inhabited. About multilingual instruction at EFH, Chostar said:

> Personally I didn't feel like instructors should be explaining things in Ladakhi. I just I just want to get <u>rid</u> of this Ladakhi <u>circle</u>. Even if I'm not getting 100/100, but I just want to get used to hearing it [English]. So someday I can get the 100/100.

All participants expressed similar ideologies of preferring writing in English.

English helped the participants in telling the stories of their lives and businesses by involving the written word—to their local stakeholders, investors, tourists, competitors, the government, and even to themselves, in multiple forms: in social media, through presentations, drawings, emails, essays, photographs, and performance. They agreed that writing classes should involve the immediate surroundings of Ladakh, and allow students to experience its many offerings, that is, a pedagogy that sees "communication as an activity that involves objects and environmental affordances" (Canagarajah, 2021, p. 2).

A discussion on the questions

Geographical place in language learning

The participants treated their geospatial location as integral to their linguistic investments. They had "strong visceral feelings" (Tuan, 1975, p. 152) of place and produced the complicated remoteness of Leh-Ladakh in conversation. They spoke of practices such as calendaring language learning along seasonal variation as a necessity, as well as an affordance, of high-altitude remoteness. The identity work of the participants involved negotiating a "localising" imperative, and a "globalising" need to sustainably open up to the world beyond. The binary idiom of insider/outsider that was deployed by them, takes on immediacy in the backdrop of the widespread political mobilisations for statehood, and the rising angst about settler-colonial practices, as of 2023 (Rathore, 2023). However, all participants were doubtful of an insular Ladakh that resists infrastructure and development (van Beek, 2000), and nobody sought to retreat to an orientalist golden era (van Beek, 2008), or to maintain any "ageless allure" (Wismayer, 2014). Instead, they monitored the march of global and postcolonial modernity in the region. Human geographers point out that time mediates how space is understood, especially in remote locations where "globalisation and time-space compression processes have challenged the very idea of distance and even geography" (Bocco, 2016). At the historical moment of post-pandemic globalisation, Leh-Ladakh was being (un)made through capitalism as much as through language, and the participants looked at this moment dialogically. Their answer to decolonisation is prismatic and localised.

The participants articulated a deep affinity for the *topos* of Ladakh and made topophilic extensions to other trans-Himalayan regions like Spiti Valley. They critically used people's subjective registration of landscapes (Relph, 2020) to align with local terrain and to explain it in English. Topophilia modulated language learning in Leh-Ladakh. Such an affective element came from knowing the place "as one person knows another" (Tuan, 1975, p. 152). Whereas industrial monoculture (in van Beek, 2000, Norberg-Hodge, 1999) transacts in space, "place, by contrast, is the past and the present, stability and achievement" (Tuan, 1975, p. 165). Tuan's concept of the region (1975) as a level of place experience frames the participants' language learning as a literally "regional" phenomenon, embedded in a heterotopic and changeable (Relph, 2020) *topos.* This consciousness of place and remoteness as changing constructs impinged upon what languages were chosen/necessitated for learning, and what was said in those languages about the realities of place.

English and other languages

The multilingualism of Ladakhis was tied to circulations of global capital, specifically through tourism, which the government saw as revenue-generating, and also a development strategy for politically unifying borderlands in

Himalayan regions in general (Chettri, 2022), and often through oropolitics (Sircar, 1984). Since economic liberalisation in India, the tourism industry in mountain and border regions has been prone to "terrorism, economic slowdowns, fleeting nature of global capital, tourist habits and new trend destinations, potential future weather or climate changes and recent natural disasters" (Pelliciardi, 2010, p. 17). Local trekking tourism and farmed production necessitated the deployment of heteroglossic language uses. Tourism demanded sharing, and catering "authenticity" to the tourist-outsider, and English allowed the participants to handle such demands. Dorjey used English to reach a modern, climate-aware, culturally sensitive global traveller looking for powerful, realistic cultural motifs, like barley and the Siachen Valley. Chostar built meaningful relationships through English (and French), that also opened up material assistance (Sharma, 2018) during the crippling COVID pandemic. Zasal wielded English as a tool for learning and growth through intercultural interfacing, both inside and outside of Ladakh. In their study on globalisation-based acculturation, Ozer et al. (2017) report that Ladakhi sojourners in cities outside Ladakh cultivate hybrid and multicultural selves. Zasal's case illustrates the role of language in building these dialogical selves. In their language use, the participants participated in varying degrees in the commodification and territorialisation (Sharma, 2018, 2021) of Leh-Ladakh as a tourist destination, while simultaneously resisting it. The languages of the global North were compasses—necessary for professional growth in tourism, and communication with the world.

The multilingualism evidenced in this study also had a role in community identity work. Ladakhi and English had different epistemic potentials; Ladakhi was needed for cultivating roots into history, culture and religion, and English gave access to global contemporaneity and modernity. All languages were marshalled to work out a politics of climate, animal conservation and regional identity. Dolkar's story of the *lha-mo* (the oracle for a water spirit) in English presented a climate praxis drawing from local Ladakhi lore.

The participants saw writing as a site for language learning, which allowed them to mobilise different skills and selves. Writing made language manifest, notwithstanding the complications of Ladakhi orthography and grammar. The participants' regret about not being able to write effortlessly in Classical Tibetan showed their understanding of writing as social practice: writing keeps culture alive and is participation in the social life of the language. Specifically for EFH, two contrary orientations were apparent in the participants' beliefs about writing classes: First, a monolingual orientation, where they felt that writing training should equip them in standard English. Second, a plurilingual orientation, where, given the sense of loss and cultural erosion through the attrition of Tibetan, and Anglocentric and hegemonic linguistic practices in India, they felt that writing in many languages would help.

Most importantly then, the participants present critical insights into linguistic decoloniality in India today. Their narratives evinced no direct opposition to English (and Hindi) as foreign or colonial languages that must be

banished. While maintaining their heteroglossic multilingualism, the participants believed that English was the most important language in the Ladakhi context, a key to their entrepreneurial work, and their desire to develop socially transformative opportunities, products and services for marginalised communities in the Himalayas. Extending from Jayadeva (2018) and Dickey (2012), all participants resolutely identified as an urban English-speaking middle class in India. Parallel to Chakraborty (2022), a pure vernacularism for Tibetan, and anti-English postcolonial national identity is absent. If English is the language of the global, Macpherson's (2005) misgiving about threats to identity in high-altitude societies from learning it was not directly illustrated in this study. Recent psychological studies have found no negative correlation between psychological well-being and cultural globalisation (Ozer et al., 2021) and have shown complex and ambiguous identity work being done by students, such as the linguistic kind reported here. The study alerts scholars of language towards the need for reimagining decolonial praxis in terms of empirical findings from language learners in remote settings.

Conclusion

The political and developmental imaginaries of Ladakh today are "a local project and product" (van Beek, 2008), but have clashed with the "outside." The difficult negotiations with globalisation and tourism, tradition and modernity, all constitute Ladakhi imaginaries of decoloniality. We must consider and learn from these imaginaries as we continue to develop our ideas about decolonisation in language learning, and in education in South Asia. As Heller and McElhinny (2017) remind us, literacy was made essential for modernity in postcolonial India. Literacy and industry initiated the remote communities of the new nation-state into "particular globalising modes of government and governmentality" (p. 199). The Ladakhi professionals considered in this study strategically exerted their English literacy and multilingual repertoires to control their relationships with place, industry, the local and the global. Specific, and often contrarian, impulses appeared to drive their language choices and generated different streams of modernity in Leh-Ladakh.

The four multilingual professionals in this study had been experiencing their languages through, because of, and in spite of, high-altitude remoteness, and pressures on it from globalisation in late modernity. Their consciousness of place and remoteness as a changing construct impinged upon what languages were chosen/necessitated for learning, and what was said in those languages about the realities of place. They evidently wanted to remain part of the employable urbanity that the English language capital allows professionals in India. We must return to these desires to enrich, or even alter our theoretical projects around the decolonial. Certainly, as speakers of threatened languages, and religious minorities in a politically sensitive region, they constantly made decisions about what it meant to be Ladakhi and to learn English. They welcomed multisensory learning in English, involving materials, environments,

situations and themes that immediately concerned their lives. The study shows that we should invest in pedagogies that situate language learning in place experience and *topos*, and help students make the most of their semiotic and spatial repertoires (Canagarajah, 2021) to communicate about complex realities of region, politics, profession and culture. It also presents empirical evidence and theoretical challenges to scholarly discussions of what decolonial praxis consists of, especially in the language learning classroom.

Future studies could explore important questions: What differences exist between constructions of language learning between generations of learners in Leh-Ladakh? To what extent are Western tourists and Indian military presence in the region involved in such experiences? How do the religious orthodoxy in Ladakh, some of whom are Western-educated, respond to the linguistic ecosystem? How is the insider/outsider idiom viewed by non-Ladakhis at EFH? What do gender identity and labour do to language learning in the era of gig economies? Additionally, the impact of high-altitude lived experiences such as seasonal affective disorder, and acute mountain sickness, on language learning would be pertinent. It is also crucial to enquire about the paucity of Ladakhi instructors at institutions teaching languages in the region. As institutions such as EFH continue to proliferate in Indian higher education spaces, ethnographic enquiries of these spaces would yield more perspectives into how language training plays a role in discursive productions of the self and the social. Perhaps one step towards the "decolonial" will consist of making language education truly multilingual, multisensory, driven by learners' professional needs, and immediately embedded in the realities of place.

Note

1 A Ladakhi term that translates to "people from the plains" and is used to refer to people outside Ladakh. Chostar invokes this term, though he is uncomfortable using it: "So the most common word that we use for the outsider is *gyagarpa*."

References

Bocco, G. (2016). Remoteness and remote places: A geographic perspective, *Geoforum*, *77*(2016), 178–181.

Butcher, A. (2013). Keeping the faith: Divine protection and flood prevention in modern Buddhist Ladakh, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, *17*(2), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-01702002

Canagarajah, A.S. (2021). Materialising semiotic repertoires: Challenges in the interactional analysis of multilingual communication, *International Journal of Multilingualism*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2021.1877293

Cantu-Bazaldua, F. (2021). Remote but well connected? Neighboring but isolated? Measuring remoteness in the context of SIDS, *United Nations Conference on Trade and Development*. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ser-rp-2021d10_en.pdf

Chakraborty, P. (2022). Postcolonial theory and the challenge of caste: Nationalism and the case of "English" in India, *Interventions*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2022.2029531

Chettri, M. (2022). Emptying the landscape: Outsider place-making, tourism and migration in Sikkim, India, *Landscape Research*, 10.1080/01426397.2022.2134560
Dasgupta, A. (2019). *Rangjon (2019-present)*. https://anujadasgupta.com/rangjon/
Dickey, S. (2012). The pleasures and anxieties of being in the middle: Emerging middle-class identities in urban south India, *Modern Asian Studies*, *46*(3), 559–599.
Field, J., & Kelman, I. (2018). The impact on disaster governance of the intersection of environmental hazards, border conflict and disaster responses in Ladakh, India, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, *31*, 650–658.
Government of India. (2011). *Language: Census of India 2011*. Census India, https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/C-16_25062018_NEW.pdf
Grosjean, F. (2001). The bilingual's language modes. In J. Nicole (Ed.), *One mind, two languages: Bilingual language processing* (pp. 1–22). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
Heller, M., Pujolar, J., & Duchêne, A. (2014). Linguistic commodification in tourism, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *18*(4), 539–566.
Heller, M., & Duchêne, A. (2016). Treating language as an economic resource: Discourse, data and debate. In N. Coupland (Ed.), *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical debates* (pp. 139–156). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Heller, M., & McElhinny, B. (2017). *Language, capitalism, colonialism: Toward a critical history* (pp. 192–226). University of Toronto Press.
Jayadeva, S. (2018). Below English line: An ethnographic exploration of class and the English language in post-liberalization India, *Modern Asian Studies*, *52*(2), 576–608.
MacPherson, S. (2005). Negotiating language contact and identity change in developing Tibetan-English bilingualism, *TESOL Quarterly*, *39*(4), 585–607.
Norberg-Hodge, H. (1999). Consumer monoculture: The destruction of tradition, *Global Dialogue*, *1*(1), 70–77. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/consumer-monoculture-destruction-tradition/docview/211520562/se-2
The New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures, *Harvard Educational Review*, *66*(1), 60–93.
Ozer, S. (2010). The understanding of karma and etiology in Buddhist Ladakh in relation to the theory of locus of control, *Ladakh Studies*, *26*, 6–13.
Ozer, S., Bertelsen, P., Singla, R., & Schwartz, S.J. (2017). Grab your culture and walk with the global: Ladakhi students' negotiation of cultural identity in the context of globalization-based acculturation, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *48*(3), 294–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022116687394
Ozer, S., Benet, V., & Schwartz, S.J. (2021). The challenge of being both local and global: Bicultural identity integration among indigenous Ladakhi youth in Delhi, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *52*, 680–700. doi: 10.1177/0022022121 1025760
Palmer, L. (2022). Storing frozen water to adapt to climate change, *Nature Climate Change*, *12*(2), 115–117.
Pelliciardi, V. (2010). Tourism traffic volumes in Leh district: An overview, *Ladakh Studies*, *26*, 14–23.
Rathore, V. (2023, February 12). What's driving the protests against the centre in Ladakh? *Scroll*. https://scroll.in/article/1043580/whats-driving-the-protests-against-the-centre-in-ladakh
Relph, E. (2020). Landscape as a language without words. In S. Brunn & R. Kehrein (Eds.), *Handbook of the changing world language map* (pp. 3141–3154). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02438-3_77
Sharma, B.K. (2018). English and discourses of commodification among tourism workers in the Himalayas, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, *22*(1), 77–99.
Sharma, A. (2019). Giving water its place: Artificial glaciers and the politics of place in a high-altitude Himalayan village, *Water Alternatives 12*(3), 993–1016.

Sharma, B.K. (2021). Language, ethnicity, and tourism in the making of a Himalayan Tamang village. In J.E. Petrovic & B. Yazan (Eds.), *The commodification of language: Conceptual concerns and empirical manifestations.*

Sircar, J. (1984). Oropolitics: A dissertation on the political overtones of mountaineering in the east-central Karakoram, 1975–82, *Alpine Journal*, *89*(333), 74–79.

The ice stupa project. (2022). Artificial glaciers of Ladakh. http://icestupa.org/. Accessed 1 December 2022.

Tuan, Y. (1974). Topophilia: A study of environmental perceptions, attitudes, and values.

Tuan, Y. (1975). Place: An experiential perspective, *Geographical Review*, *65*(2), 151–165. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. http://www.jstor.com/stable/213970

UNCTAD. (2023). Overcoming the tyranny of distance to achieve sustainable development. https://sdgpulse.unctad.org/remoteness/. Accessed 12 February 2023.

van Beek, M. (2000). Lessons from Ladakh? Local responses to globalization and social change. In J.D. Schmidt & J. Hersh (Eds.), *Globalization and social change* (pp. 250–266). Routledge.

van Beek, M. (2008). Imaginaries of Ladakhi modernity. In R. Barnett, R. Schwartz & D. Ronald (Eds.), *Tibetan modernities: Notes from the field on cultural and social change*. Brill.

Watts, S.M., McCarthy, T.M., & Namgail, T. (2019). Modelling potential habitat for snow leopards (Panthera uncia) in Ladakh, India. *PloS One*, *14*(1), e0211509.

Williams-Oerberg, E. (2020). Buddhism: A unique selling proposition (USP) in Ladakh. In C. Bruntz, B. Schedneck & M. Rowe (Eds.), *Buddhist tourism in Asia*(pp. 227–246) . University of Hawaii Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824882822-014

Wismayer, H. (2014). In Ladakh, India, history and myth, past and present, melt into one. *Washington Post*, 31 July, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/in-ladakh-india-history-and-myth-past-and-present-melt-into-one/2014/07/31/03f59ca4-11dd-11e4-98ee-daea85133bc9_story.html

Williams, J. (2012). The potential role(s) of writing in second language development, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *21*(4), 321–331.

8 Future of madrasa education in Bangladesh

Between competition, integration and modernisation

Charza Shahabuddin

Introduction

> I haven't finished studying, but when I do, my aim is to become a maulana or a mufti. As you can see here, those who give the keynote speeches, the ones you're hearing now, I could become like them, be the host, welcome guests to a large religious gathering like this. […] English? No I don't speak English.
>
> Interview with Muhammad Sihabuzzaman during the Biswa Ijtema organised by Tabligh Jamaat (Tongi) in 2020. He studies at the Barassa Siddiqi Senior Madrasa

Bangladesh is tackling the major challenge of educating its youth, who account for 28% of the population. With a population of 171 million, 91% of whom are Muslims, the madrasa system appears to be a viable alternative to mass education, low teacher salaries, basic infrastructure and religious education for the devout rural population of Bangladesh. However, the heterogeneity within the madrasa system, divided into government-recognised and funded alia madrasas and underfunded *qawmi* madrasas, suggests significant differences in standards between schools. In particular, the everyday politics of language are crucial: inadequate knowledge of English is common in the general stream, and for a section of the Bangladeshi elite, speaking Bangla is considered to have limited use. Madrasa education prioritises religious topics; students can read Arabic, but they are not proficient in speaking it, except for reciting the Qur'an by heart.

The students in the madrasa education system face multiple levels of educational inequalities, including but not limited to the issues related to languages spoken and their fluency, inadequate English teaching and learning, limited school curricula, and the risk of unemployment after leaving school. Given that Bangladesh is confronted with the challenge of providing more than 40 million students with access to quality education—compounded by the lack of well-trained teachers, well-equipped buildings and real job opportunities—education remains a significant challenge for its young people. Educational inequalities in Bangladesh are further intensified by the bifurcated education system: private schools that teach in English and madrasas that focus on Arabic

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-11

and religious topics. The madrasa system often attracts families who see the potential for their children to become local religious leaders. Unfortunately, this career path is not unlimited. Moreover, the separation of men and women in schools, based on selected *hadiths* that place women in a weak position, reinforces the basis of a segregated society. These issues pose a significant challenge to education in Bangladesh.

This chapter explores the experiences of language education in Quranic schools in Bangladesh. First, it examines the linguistic disparities in the quality of education, particularly the need for young Bangladeshi students to be proficient in both Bangla and English. Second, it analyses the disparities in educational quality, outcomes and job opportunities for students in Islamic education. Finally, it emphasises that the madrasa is a contested site, providing a safety net for some and the basis of a segregated society for others. Overall, this chapter highlights the interlinkages between linguistic inequalities and their consequences for education in Bangladesh.

Educational diversity in Bangladesh: more opportunities or more inequalities?

Since its adoption in 1972, Bangladesh's constitution has guaranteed free and compulsory education for all. When the Awami League came to power in 2008, the government promised the highest budget allocation for education, 100% net enrolment in primary schools by 2011 and the elimination of illiteracy by 2017. In fact, since 2010, primary education has been free in Bangladesh. Thanks to the implementation of several financial incentives, this young nation has made impressive progress in the sector of education, with a 98% enrolment rate in 2015. But not all of Bangladesh's youth—45.9 million out of a population of 174 million—are in school. Providing more than 40.34 million students (Bangladesh Education Statistics 2021) with access to quality education, well-trained teachers, well-equipped buildings and real job opportunities remains a major challenge.

This very large number of students explains the plurality and diversity of school types that have been established in recent decades. In 2017, 74% of the 18.6 million students enrolled in primary education attended government schools. The remaining primary schools, numbering more than 50,000, are spread across community schools, non-governmental organisations, madrasas and kindergartens (Asian Development Bank, 2018). Bangladesh's education landscape has therefore gradually evolved to adapt and offer different streams, including public schools, private schools, NGO-run schools and Catholic schools. The specialised system with education for the disabled and Sanskrit and Pali, the English medium system, and the technical/vocational system are part of this education sector.

In addition, equal opportunities are not evenly distributed, given the number of actors involved. The social and cultural conditions of families continue to determine the path taken by young students, and the education system

remains one of the most unequal sectors. For example, there are at least 14 types of providers in primary education, 11 types of examination in secondary education, and about 93.62% of secondary schools are privately run. The coexistence of a private system and an English medium system jeopardises the ideal of equal education for all. Families with low social and cultural capital are attracted by the fact that their children could become *hafiz*, the one who memorises the Qur'an and could master Arabic, the language of truth (Anderson, 1991), which is sacred to Muslim believers.

Madrasa education itself is divided into several sub-sectors, with two major types. *Alia*, meaning higher in Arabic, madrasas are recognised and funded by the government and since they have been reformed, they teach both religious and secular subjects. *Qawmi* madrasas, meaning national in Arabic, on the other hand, operate autonomously and the government has no right or desire to control the content of the curriculum. Madrasa education focuses on religious issues, students can read out Arabic, but they are not proficient in speaking it, except reciting the Koran by heart. Apart from *alia* and *qawmi* madrasa, there are also subdivisions between primary level education, called *ebtedayee*, and preprimary madrasa, called *furqania*. Then the madrasa is divided between *dakhil*, secondary level; *alim*, upper secondary level; *fazil* bachelor; and *kamil*, master level. Within each stream, the teaching of English, Bangla or Arabic is unequal and creates more inequalities. In fact, a large part of Bangladeshi students have a poor command of at least one of these three languages.

Bangladesh has also achieved excellent enrolment rates for girls: 77% in 2022, up from 41% in 1998 (World Bank). This is largely due to the opening of madrasas to girls since the 1990s, thanks to the implementation of various financial incentives. Some of the most successful policy initiatives include the Food-for-Education programme, which has sent students to school in exchange for portions of rice and wheat for the poorest families (Ahmed & del Ninno, 2022; Arends-Kuenning & Amin, 2004), or the nationwide Female Secondary School Assistance Project, which has helped achieve gender parity (Khandker, Samad, Fuwa, Hayashi, 2021). Although secular education is free, for many parents, madrasa education, by separating male and female spaces, guarantees the preservation of their child's *izzot*, or honour, and helps to reassure them. Already, 1.5 million girls in the country attend madrasas (Brookings, 2015).

Like most educational institutions, madrasas vary widely and many need financial support. In addition, the infrastructure is often dilapidated, and teacher training is not always adequate. These problems are particularly evident in *qawmi* madrasas, which are mainly funded by donations or charge minimal fees to families. In *alia* madrasa, the Bangladeshi government pays 80% of the salaries of teachers and administrators. It also makes a significant contribution to their development expenditure, providing scholarships and books, and allocating a substantial sum for the construction of additional private madrasas. Many graduates of the madrasa system go on to higher education, the labour market or religious careers. However, all these jobs are limited in number, leaving 75% of graduates unemployed (Barkat, 2011).

Career prospects are even more limited in girls' madrasas, especially *qawmi* madrasas. The young students have no other choice but to become teachers in *qawmi* madrasas, strictly supervised by men. Furthermore, the lack of female teachers results in fewer courses and an irrelevant curriculum. Despite important progress in girls' enrolment in secondary education, systematic gender differences in educational quality and performance persist. Strong gender preferences for boys can distort intra-household allocations (Asian Development Bank, 2019). In many conservative villages, a significant percentage of girls drop out of school due to child marriage. NGOs working to improve gender equality in schools also tend not to focus on supporting girls' madrasas. Creating a tolerant and inclusive society by educating young boys not to mix with girls from an early age and teaching them that women's primary role is to reproduce doesn't guarantee women's rights or an equal society in the long run.

Apart from a few excellent institutions, another major problem faced by madrasa students is their language skills, especially in English. In fact, in the schools with the least resources, some teachers or students even find it difficult to express themselves in Bengali, and the level of Arabic, Farsi and Urdu is not much better and remains basic. The issue of language learning is not specific to madrasas. English medium students from affluent families find it increasingly difficult to express themselves in Bangla, while Bangla medium students are afraid to speak English. While efforts to improve access to education for all are worthwhile and despite their promises, only 2% of gross domestic product is spent on education (World Bank, 2022), the second lowest in South Asia. Improving net enrolment doesn't necessarily guarantee that Bangladesh will achieve universal literacy. In fact, 73% of third graders are not proficient in reading Bangla (National Academy for Primary Education, 2019), and weaknesses in English and mathematics are more pronounced.

Research questions and methodology

The aim of this chapter is to focus on a seemingly contradictory narrative that both praises and criticises mass education and the madrasa system. Although Bangladesh is a pious society, the religious education system and madrasa students are still stigmatised in several ways. The issue has nothing to do with the ability of the students, but rather with the means used to educate them and the lack of reflection on their careers after secondary education. Teachers are often not trained in all subjects, parents are unable to help with homework, and in general, apart from a few madrasas that have technological facilities such as new computers, material resources are lacking.

Because of their social background, the huge inequalities between big cities and small villages, and their lack of social connections, they don't have access to quality jobs reserved for the political and economic elite. The reformed *alia* madrasas students have an extra workload than students in the secular system because they must juggle between religious and secular subjects. In terms of

careers, the brightest *alia* madrasa graduates can now go on to university, but for the rest, there is no choice but to pursue religious careers. Even if the students are not directly politicised, their teachers are. Teaching staff from *alia* madrasa are sympathetic to Jamaat-e-Islam (the political Islamist party) and the *qawmi* madrasas are under the umbrella of Hefazat-e-Islam (an ultra-orthodox coalition of *qawmi* madrasa students and teachers) or Islamists groups alike. One of the consequences may be that teachers choose not to focus on, or simply omit, the teaching of texts by Hindu authors or references to a multireligious past. This means that the existence of these parallel education systems not only creates an unequal society but also one that can become intolerant of differences with other religious traditions and the integration of women. Are we addressing the issue of providing quality and equitable education to the young generation in Bangladesh so that they can become good citizens and find jobs?

The data were collected between January 2019 and July 2023 in four main locations in Bangladesh: Raeganj, Rasulpur, Dhaka and Tongi (during the Biswa Ijtema). The students, staff and teachers were selected randomly during the gathering of the Biswa Ijtema organised by the Islamic proselytisation group Tabligh Jamaat. They were also selected according to their link or work with the members of Nijera Kori, the grassroots organisation that empowers rural women and men through the formation of autonomous landless groups. I used semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews, borrowing from the ethnographic method for certain descriptive and analytical studies, unstructured conversations supported by secondary sources and a documentary on the Biswa Ijtema that I made. I conducted 35 in-depth or semi-structured interviews with primary, college and high-school students, and 22 interviews with teachers and staff, all former madrasa students, imams and preachers. At Dhangora Girls Alia Madrasa, I had meetings with the administration and was able to observe a Bangla class. I also visited Dhangora Mohila College where I attended a Bangla class thanks to the assistant teacher. I then went to Rasulpur thanks to Nijera Kori and visited the Rasulpur Darus Sunnah Al-Islamia *qawmi* madrasa and the Gausia Rezvi madrasa. In both Dhangora and Rasulpur, I also conducted group interviews with groups of young girls and then individual interviews with a total of ten girls enrolled in the general education system. In addition, I used 12 semi-structured interviews and participant observation mostly in the posh and privileged areas of the capital city (Bashundara, Baridhara, Gulshan and Banani) and nearby Dhanmondi for the Bangla medium students. The interviews took place in Bangla which were fully transcribed verbatim and then translated into French and English.

Linguistic disparities in the quality of education: the need for proficiency in both Bangla and English

In the following sections, I discuss some of the educational and linguistic challenges in the Bangladeshi education system, particularly in relation to the ambivalent use of Bangla and English.

The ambivalence of the use of Bangla within the Bangladeshi elite

After Bangladesh's independence, the new government led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman played a major role in the deliberate effort to replace English with Bangla. The language movement of 1952 shaped the 1971 Liberation War against West Pakistan. Both West and East Pakistan were Muslim-majority nations, but Bengali nationalism defended an essentially secular nationalist spirit. As a result, today Bangla remains the main language spoken in the country. For the cultured Bangla-speaking intelligentsia, language is not just a means of communication. It also represents the spirit of the Bengali Renaissance movement. It symbolises the art, literature and poetry inherited from Tagore and Nazrul, as well as the transmission of Satyajit Ray's cinema. An Indo-Aryan language with a 44-letter alphabet, Bengali has become the sixth most widely spoken mother tongue, with 240 million native speakers. It is also the seventh most spoken language in the world in terms of total number of speakers.

Most students attend Bangla-medium schools run by the government and the private sector. All courses are taught in Bangla, except for English and Religious Studies, where both Bangla and Arabic are used. Some of the most prestigious institutions in Bangladesh such as the Viqarunnisa Noon School & College Ideal School and College in Dhaka are Bangla-medium institutions. However, the quality of mother-tongue teaching in primary education in Bangladesh has been neglected: two-thirds of Class III students and three-quarters of Class V students failed to meet the desired benchmark in Bangla (National Student Assessment, 2022), the language in which they are supposedly comfortable expressing themselves but are clearly unable to read and write well.

Bangladesh was born and remains a multiethnic and multilingual country, with the Bengali language crossing many regional boundaries. This has led to the emergence of variations and dialects of modern Bengali in Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Chittagonian, another sub-branch of the Indo-Aryan language, is spoken by about 13 million people in southern Bangladesh, in the Chittagong area. Another Indo-Aryan language, Sylheti, with an alternative script for writing, is spoken by 11 million people, mainly in the Sylhet area of the Barak Valley in Assam. Most of the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK are of Sylheti origin. Varendri, Rajbangshi, Manbhumi, Rarhi, Sundarbani and Goalpariya are also spoken in Bangladesh. While UNESCO has celebrated 21 February as International Mother Language Day since 1999 in honour of Bangladesh's language movement, the same nation has not bothered to protect the languages of tribal peoples. The disappearance of indigenous languages in Bangladesh is linked to several socio-political and cultural reasons, as well as the unconsciousness of language planning and policymaking (Awal, 2019). The specificity of Bengali linguistic nationalism shaped the spirit of a certain secular elite, the post-war 1971 generation of artists and intellectuals, bearers of a certain conception of secularism.

Bangladesh has also inherited the prevalence of the British colonial mindset coupled with the need to adapt to a globalised world, which explains the English medium system in Bangladesh. The system is subdivided between English-medium schools, which follow the British Edexcel or Cambridge International curriculum and examinations, and English-medium schools, which follow the national curriculum. A large proportion of pupils in English-medium schools have a worrying level of Bengali. In many middle-class families, speaking Bangla is now perceived as backward.

Nawsher, living in the diplomatic area of Dhaka, told me back in 2019 :

> Oh yes! I don't even notice it, it's just easier because the kids go to English medium schools. We've always had so many foreign guests, and basically everyone and everything we read is in English. The international school here is great, the eldest is even learning French. The kids are going to study abroad, you know that the elder is in Canada!

She owns a successful jewellery business and comes from one of the wealthiest families in Bangladesh.

In many affluent Bangladeshi homes, you can now hear parents and children preferring to speak English at home. They are proud to speak in English, and even prouder to speak in Bengali with a posh English accent. Many of the upper and upper-middle classes have a certain identity complex about the use of Bengali, seeing it as unfashionable and preferring their children to speak English, since they have the financial means to send them abroad, or at least the hope of doing so. As the most influential international language of communication, English schools are also more in demand for skilled employment. Bangladesh has not yet achieved self-sufficiency in English education, but English remains the other widely spoken language in the country.

The ambivalence of teaching English in both Bangla medium and the madrasa stream

"I've been learning English for many years, I even watch shows in English, but I don't know, I can't really practice and I'm not comfortable speaking in English, especially the grammar…" told me one of my cousins, a very good student who was been learning English since he was a kid. Despite the growing awareness among the youth to master English, a large number of Bangla medium students feel apprehensive about speaking in English. Despite the shift from the traditional grammar-translation method to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, students are not confident in practicing English.

Numerous factors such as student anxiety, the gap between the classroom culture and the learning culture in secondary and higher education, the need for more classroom teachers, inconsistent language in education policy, the mismatch of curriculum and materials with assessment, and the quality of teachers show that the main obstacle for students trying to learn English is the curriculum in their schools (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). English is taught in

higher secondary (HSC) level; however, almost 70% of the teachers say that English is not used in everyday life. Thirty-three percent of Bangla medium teachers report that they use English always and 66.67% of them mention they use both English and Bangla as medium of instruction, while 82.14% mention it to be a mixture of Bangla and English (Parvin, Haider, 2012).

The issue of English language proficiency is not specific to the Bangla medium and remains a critical issue for the madrasa system. English is now part of the curriculum in most madrasas, and some madrasas have established separate English departments. This is partly a result of the prevalence of commissioned research in the donor-dominated English for development scene in the global south, including Bangladesh (Hultgren, Erling, 2016, pp. 257–271). The other reason is that the madrasa education system is carefully planned to ensure that those who graduate from a madrasa are able to face the challenges of the world. However, the English language skills of madrasa students remain weak compared to students of other educational institutions in Bangladesh. The advanced and appropriate way of teaching the English language is not as thoroughly maintained as compared to other public and private institutions, especially those following Bangla Medium, English Version and English Medium Schools and Colleges.

Within *qawmi* madrasa, the mastery of the language and the quality of teaching by the teachers is quasi-inexistant.

> "English… No, I don't know how to speak English […]," told me Rafiqul Nabi Islam, back in 2020 during Biswa Ijtema, one of the largest religious gatherings organised by Tabligh Jamaat which claims to be apolitical. "We learn Bangla, English, Maths, Farsi, Urdu, Arabic, next year inshallah I will be able to speak Farsi, Urdu I can roughly speak Urdu," another student told me.

During our various interviews, the oral expression—simple vocabulary, grammatical errors, errors of agreement—coming from *qawmi* madrasa teachers suggested an inadequate level of training for teaching. The value of mastering English is increasingly explored as English is crucial for international low/semi-skilled economic migration in such a globalised world (Erling et al. 2015). However, a large portion of students is not able to speak in English simply because it is not taught and is not supposed to be used by young students in *qawmi* madrasa. "To follow my religion, I do not need to speak English. I need Arabic, Farsi, Urdu" told me Muhammad Zakir, a *qawmi* madrasa teacher from Bogura during a religious gathering in 2020. "I'm doing *imamoti* and I teach my students to follow the rules of Allah. He has explained and give many messages for us to be living according to his knowledge and true principles. […] His love language was Arabic," he added. For the *qawmi* madrasa-minded followers, not learning English is in fact a religious, reflexive and alternative ground. It is a way for them to resist economic success and Western development programmes, mostly rejecting English as a language of development (Chowdhury, 2022).

Disparities in educational quality, outcomes and job opportunities for students in Islamic education

The explosion of Koranic schools since the 1990s, and their diversity and the plurality of madrasas, poses a further challenge to ensuring quality education and job opportunities for students. This section will discuss some of these challenges.

The necessity to introduce secular subjects alongside religious subjects

The religious distinction between *din* (religious) and *duniya* (secular) is illustrated in the debate over whether madrasas should include modern subjects in their curriculum. This discussion is not new, although it has come to the fore again after 9/11 and the assimilation between madrasa and the Taliban. To meet this challenge, in 2011, Bangladesh received an external fund of $100 million to reform *alia* madrasas with English, mathematics and science to make them more open to Western values and ideals (BBC 2011). While some consider the curriculum reform of the *alia* to be a success, the diversity and lack of control don't guarantee that the changes have been fully implemented. The reality is that the curricula for the different levels of the *alia* framework are only announced on paper and most general courses are not advertised. Higher mathematics is rarely offered at the *dakhil*, SSC, and alims, HSC levels, and economics, political science and sociology are hardly offered at all at the *fazil*, bachelor's level (Haque, 2019, p. 21). In *alia* madrasas curriculum, the removal or omission of texts written by non-Muslim authors and the questioning of evolutionary theories pose risks to society. In fact, the texts studied in Bangla textbooks are in practice not controlled by the government.

> "Geography– science, it has all been discovered from the Quran. More attention is given to these sections by government madrasas. And in the qwami madrasa, there are four subjects: one is *Quran tafseel* on *hadith*, *fiqha*, Islamic law on religious controversies, the management of State affairs through Arabic history, as there is for Bangla history. We put more emphasise on the religious side," told me a teacher working in a *qawmi* madrasa in Noakhali back in 2019.

Most *qawmi* madrasa teachers have studied in *qawmi* madrasas themselves and their level of training and qualification is not monitored. Those with more financial means, aware of the disadvantages of *qawmi* madrasa education, send most of their own children to public schools or *alia* madrasas. *Qawmi* madrasas leave little or no room for subjects such as English, economics, history or Bengali literature, as the young student's testimony shows. Some have begun to include these subjects, but because of the highly decentralised nature of the board, it is not possible to gather accurate data. To ensure a viable future for madrasa education, the State must control the content of what is taught and

not leave that into the hands of uneducated and conservative so-called teachers. *Qawmi* madrasas are not a place where the young student can grow a secular-mind, in the sense of tolerance of other religious communities, and respect for gender equality. They must quickly integrate secular subjects into their curriculum; otherwise, the gap between the *qawmi*-educated generations and the English and Bangla-medium students will become insurmountable.

Modernising the *qawmi* madrasa curriculum means adding Bangla, English, History and Mathematics for young children along the religious subjects. However, *qawmi* madrasas do not try and do not look favourably on reforming their curriculum (Bano 2014). "It can be done in 5 years, it's as each one prefers, it can be in 10 years. 12 years. *Inchallah*, my main goal is to achieve my study within 8 years. I will finish my *dawra*, master," told me a 16-year-old student from a *qawmi* madrasa in Gazipur, nearby the capital city. Since 2018, the government has recognised the diploma of Dawra-e-hadith *(hadith* means the words attributed to the Prophet), *Dawra* is the title of the last book of *haditbs*. This diploma is equivalent to the Master's in Arabic and Islamic Studies of the general curriculum. This recognition was presented as a means of integrating students from this field into the job market. However, critics of this measure pointed out that these students would be stigmatised anyway, and no bank, administration or government institution would be the first to recruit them. The Awami League government did that for political reasons with electoral aims, to be in good graces with the powerful Islamist lobby, Hefazat-e-Islam.

For the Deoband *qawmi* madrasa, tradition and modernity are two building blocks. Deobandism can be described as traditional in its reliance on hadith and Islamic law, and modern in its imitation of aspects of the British College at its inception. Modernity in this context needs to be understood in terms of pedagogical innovation. The very birth of Deobandism was an attempt at internal reform and a counter-model for Muslims who were not part of the colonial elite. Gradually, the founders of Deoband introduced other innovations: a fixed programme of study for all students, a series of examinations to assess their progress, official graduation ceremonies, a central library, a salaried teaching staff, and purpose-built structures for study and teaching rather than mosques or houses.

Modernity can also be understood as the need to modernise, in the sense of improving infrastructure, as most madrasas today are not equipped with technology and computer facilities. The students' demands for reform mainly concerned course content, especially the teaching of IT, English or business courses, and material needs: "academic facilities, better living conditions, better food, more books in the library to borrow, more teaching, staff" (Bhuiyan, 2010, p. 53). These demands underlined the evolution in the educational goals of *qawmi* madrasa students: from Islamic religious education for students from modest backgrounds to the need for education in certain secular and modern subjects such as IT or English in order to find a job in the labour market.

Within the Deobandi school, one camp advocates complementarity between modernity and tradition. They defend the idea of a synthesis between modern and traditional knowledge: sciences, social sciences go hand in hand with traditional learning. On the other hand, there are those who support the ascetic tradition, who believe that introspection, piety and the acquisition of Islamic knowledge are necessary for salvation.

Explosion of Koranic schools since the 1990s: diversity and plurality

Madrasa comes from *maktab*, the Arabic word for school. Historically, the first madrasas in the Indian subcontinent were established in 1206 under the Delhi Sultanate to train the administrative staff of the Muslim rulers. Under the Mughal Empire, the very powerful Farangi Mahall family laid the foundations of the Persian-inspired Dars-e-Nizami educational programme, which literally translates as Systematic Programme. After the death of its founder, Mullah Nizam al-Din Sahalwi, the curriculum gradually evolved to include more texts and emphasise the study of rational sciences. It later became "a curriculum franchise for all madrasas" (Moosa, 2015a, p. 83). In 1780, Governor-General Warren Hastings established the Calcutta Madrasa, now known as the *Alia* Madrasa, and used the same curriculum to train competent officers for the Court of Justice and the East India Company. After Partition in 1947, the Government Madrasa-E-Alia was moved to Dhaka and the *alia* madrasas continued to be supported by successive governments. During this period, the teachings and aims of the *alia* madrasas were echoed in the ideology of Maududi's Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan. The *alia* madrasa teaches all secular subjects, such as mathematics, accountancy, Bangla, English and history, as well as religious subjects.

Alia madrasas, higher koranic schools (in Arabic), are under the supervision of the Madrasa Education Board, which is recognised and funded by the government. Their curriculum is the same as that of public schools, but subjects related to Arabic are given a more prominent place and the modalities of selecting texts within different authors are at the discretion of the administration of each madrasa. The curriculum can therefore vary from one school to another. There are at least 10,450 *alia* madrasas operating in the country, teaching 2,409,373 students (BANBEIS, 2016). On the other hand, "the number of *qawmi* madrasas in Bangladesh is anyone's guess" (Riaz, 2008). This means that neither the Ministry of Education nor the four *qawmi* madrasas boards know the exact number of *qawmi* madrasas, the number of students enrolled or the exact number of teachers. However, this number is likely to be around 1.4 million students in over 14,000 *qawmi* madrasas (Prothom Alo, 2019).

On the other hand, the *qawmi* madrasa sector has been booming since the 1980s. *Qawmi* madrasas, public Qur'anic schools (in Arabic), are in reality private, funded by donations from people and are the result of the Deoband tradition. They teach mainly in Arabic, with little or no room for science, commerce, grammar or Bangla literature. Since its inception, the Deobandi seminary has had a pro-poor character and has been seen as a "project of the

emerging middle class" (Pernau, 2003, p. 273). The first mosque in the Deobandi tradition was a small Koranic school in Hathazari, established in 1897, closely followed by the Darul Uloom Muinul Madrasah on the outskirts of Chittagong in 1901. In the interests of standardisation and centralisation, it was not until 1978 that the Befaqul Madarisil, better known as the Bangladesh Quami Madrasah Education Board, was established. *Qawmi* madrasas see themselves as the custodians of authentic Islamic practice, as opposed to other Islamic models (Kabir, 2009), and reject the Ahmadiyya and Barelvis traditions. They derive their legitimacy from their ability to recruit from the most disadvantaged backgrounds because they help the most destitute.

For the *qawmi* madrasas, the version offered to the *alia* madrasas is an abbreviated, diluted and superficial version of the Dars-i-Nizami programme (Roy, Huq, Rob, 2020). In addition, they disapprove of the purpose of study for *alia* madrasa students, criticising their partial training in the study of sacred texts, which is aimed at obtaining positions in the administration, a material concern, whereas for *qawmi* madrasa students faith takes precedence and education is seen as a spiritual commitment. Conversely, Jamaat activists who support the *alia* trend do not believe in studying Islam "for the sake of becoming mosque imams and religious teachers." For them, the architects of the Nizami curriculum have structured their project around the complementarity of *manqulat*, the Islamic religious sciences, and *ma'qulat*, the rational or instrumental sciences, to acquire the skills needed to enter the job market (Moosa, 2015b, p. 210).

Since independence, successive governments have supported the development of this dual bilingual curriculum combining religious and secular subjects. In 1978, under the military dictatorship of Ziaur Rahman (1975–1981), the newly created Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board was conceived as an autonomous institution. His government directly supported the madrasas and recognised their diplomas. Theologically and hermeneutically, the madrasas promoted the full compatibility and teaching of Islamic studies and secular general studies. Under the Ershad government (1982–1990), the equivalence of secular Qur'anic education was granted for political reasons.

Politically, a large proportion of *qawmi* madrasas are under the umbrella of Hefazat-e-Islam. This Islamist organisation, which covers virtually all *qawmi* madrasas, was formed in 2010 after its members, teachers and students opposed the national women's policy. On the contrary, the link between Jamaat-e-Islam and the *alia* tradition goes back to pre-independence politics. The Jamaat ideology can be seen in the most trivial details, such as the young female students of the Dhangora Girls Madrasa school singing the Bengali national anthem, which ends with "Bangladesh Zindabad" (Fieldwork observation, 2020). This detail is relevant given that the Bengali nationalist movement led by the Awami League defined itself during the war with the slogan "Joy Bangla," while the Pakistani army used the Urdu term "Zindabad" during the 1971 war of independence. The madrasa boom is the product of an embedded complex interaction between different political actors and their political agendas.

Due to the demographic development of the country, the introduction of various financial incentives and the level of religiousness of the people, there is now a high degree of plurality and therefore competition between different types of madrasas in Bangladesh. In addition to the search for authenticity and the assertion of one's own orthopraxis and vision of Islam, the competition is linked to the need for state recognition to receive funds and subsidies, starting with teachers' salaries. There are also madrasas for pupils before they enter primary school. They offer four years of basic Islamic education, focusing on memorising the Koran. Other types of Qur'anic schools, belonging to the Khareji, Ahle Hadith Sunnah or madrasas based on the specific cult of a Pir, have been established over the years. The absence of a bridge between the madrasa pathway and technical-vocational education has been criticised (Amin, 2013).

"We follow the rules of the Babajan, Ali Akbar Rezvi, originally from Netrokona, who died in 2018. Qwami madrasa? No, no, they don't get the real teachings of Islam. We don't like them here," one of the main administrators of a Rezvi school in Rasulpur, Cumilla, told me in 2020. This type of madrasa is almost the exception rather than the rule, but it is representative of the diversity of beliefs and teachings in Islam. They are distinguished by their black dress code, their recitation of the prayer by several people without a microphone (as in the time of the Prophet, according to them), and their ban on television (Fieldwork interview, 2020).

Since 2017 and the ethnic cleansing campaign by the Myanmar security forces, nearly a million Rohingya have been living in dire conditions in camps set up in southern Bangladesh. Actors as diverse as Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as local actors such as Jamaat affiliates and jihadist organisations training on the border, have established numerous madrasas, formally (Fieldwork interview, Cox's Bazar, 2018).

Madrasa a contested site: safety net or a segregated society?

Madrasas are one of the most important areas of education in Bangladesh, but it remains a contested space. It is a safety net in that it is free, a source of pride for believers and can provide access to employment. At the same time, the opening of the madrasa to women remains a constraining system, as their employment opportunities remain limited. However, it poses challenges in terms of student's educational gains and employment opportunities.

Madrasa education: free, good for izzot *and provide employment*

"Koranic schools are also cheaper," said Sajeda Begum, a housewife from Rasulpur village in 2020. This illustrates the opacity of information transmission in both systems: some local actors are responsible in the mainstream system for misleading parents into buying voluminous books that are normally free, or in the madrasa system for not telling them that the secular education

system is free. Madrasa education in Bangladesh runs parallel to the mainstream secular education system and both systems offer free education. However, in the madrasa system, there is no need to pay extra tuition fees. The tuition system, on the other hand, has become the backbone of English and Bangla medium schools. It is also much cheaper to build a madrasa than a mainstream school. For the most disadvantaged families, the madrasa system means that they do not have to spend extra money on food and accommodation for their children.

All types of madrasas have introduced the practice of *zaegir*, which means taking on children from disadvantaged backgrounds for their education. *Zaegir*, a solidarity system between villagers, places the child with another family in the village with more financial resources (often already poor themselves). This puts pressure on other families and not directly on the madrasas, but they are told that it is also a way of showing their *iman*, faith. For the small *qawmi* madrasa, depending on the money raised by the *musthi chal* (students are sent out each week to collect rice donations), building a small school is not expensive, but then the money is spent on food and accommodation. Food donations are particularly common during Ramadan, with a focus on orphaned children.

"My brother! He's a thief! He goes to people's houses every day, eats for free and sends these poor children to collect money for their schools," said Kabir Hussein, a farmer member of Nijera Kori. The organisation empowers its members, marginalised people, by prioritising entitlements, rights and accountability over service delivery and ensuring a strong, active voice. The spirit of Nijera Kori goes against the very idea of the *qawmi* madrasa. There, the two brothers have very different views of society and Islamic precepts in Bangladesh. Kabir Hussein is very angry with his brother because he says he is not morally pure, but an opportunist who uses his moral status to take advantage of poor people. However, it's worth noting that Rafiqul's brother eats for free at other villagers' (poor people's) houses because he doesn't have a fixed government salary.

For the most disadvantaged families, sending their children to madrasas is "good for our *izzot*," as a farmer in Dhangora village told me in 2019. "I will be so proud when my children become a *mufti*," told me another villager, a van driver, who enrolled his son in a *qawmi* madrasa in Rasulpur. In many interviews, the idea that madrasa education is a way to gain prestige and a sign of social mobility, that a child educated in Islamic studies will, for example, become a *Hafiz-e-Quran*, the one who memorises the *Qu'ran*. Madrasa graduates have limited career opportunities. They usually take up posts as *imams* in mosques and become teachers in nominally secular schools. Traditionally, they often did both, as many primary schools were located in village mosques. In *qawmi* madrasas, they may also become religious leaders within their communities or teachers within the same stream. Some leave the religious field to help their families or parents work, such as working as labourers, farming or running a tea stall in their home village.

The emigration of Bangladeshi workers to the Middle East and the Gulf since the 1980s has also contributed to the proliferation of madrasas in their home villages. The fact that they speak Arabic, with a strong tendency towards labour migration to the Middle East, and that they can send remittances, confirms that English isn't necessary for their careers. To them, mastering English is important only if you go to an English-speaking country. Otherwise, Arabic is the language of the Holy Book, and it is thanks to Arabic that people in the Middle East respect Bangladeshi migrants. They send private donations to build madrasas in their hometown as a sign of achievement and success. A total of 1.25 million workers have migrated from Bangladesh since 2004, over 73% of whom have been recruited by six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The version of Islam inculcated in these madrasas is highly influenced by the Islamic norms practiced in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain. For the migrants and the villagers, their Islamic orthodoxy is qualified as more authentic because "Arab countries are the true country of Islam" (Fieldwork interview with an *imam* who has been living in Oman for more than 20 years during Biswa Ijtema, 2020).

Anwarul Hossain, a second-year student at Dhaka University, told me during a field interview in 2020:

> I'm studying at Dhaka University in the department of computer science and engineering and I'm very proud to be here. There are actually a lot of madrasa students studying at university now, although it was an uphill struggle to be allowed to sit and pass the exam. I passed it after the reform.

Since 2015, following the reform of the *alim*, higher secondary, and *dakhil* secondary, curriculum, students from Alia madrasas have been allowed to study in several departments at Dhaka University, including social sciences, arts and informatics. There are also profiles of young people who have studied in a madrasa and have switched to the general field in secondary education in order to pursue secular professions, such as in the cinema sector (Fieldwork interview 2020).

Going to school in purdah*: the limits of Koranic education for women*

"Women need to be supervised," Sohail, a *qawmi* madrasa teacher in Dhangora, told me over the phone back in 2019. This did not prevent Maulana Halim from opening a male-run *qawmi* madrasa for girls in Bangladesh at the beginning of the 1990s. Its founder feared that with globalisation and the homogenisation of social values, women would be culturally transformed and eventually educated in the mainstream curriculum. After studying for several years in Saudi Arabia, Maulana Halim proposed a counter-model for education by creating the first all-girls *qwami* madrasa. From the outset, the curriculum of this *qawmi* madrasa did not include all the subjects taught in its counterpart for boys.

Although the school claimed not to follow the Deobandi curriculum, subjects related to jurisprudence, philosophy, logic or Arabic grammar were not taught. Since then, the aim of this type of *qawmi* madrasa has been to teach women in Koranic schools how to become the "ideal Muslim woman." Teachers justify the logic of this pedagogy by saying that women should not hold positions that require these subjects (Begum, Kabir, 2012). Moreover, from the data I've collected, the comments about women who cannot go out without men's permission and whose main function is to procreate are unacceptable. Giving women an education that is limited by men is a way of reinforcing the segregation that exists between men and women, for example in terms of pay, but also, in the most conservative circles, in terms of public space. In too many of the comments received, a woman's role is simply to reproduce, and her education is only to make her a good Muslim, preferably a good son.

The so-called actual secularist government that has been in power since 2009 is not helping to move in this direction by pleasing religious groups, starting with Hefazat-e-Islam. Since 2017, first-graders in the general education system are now learning that the letter "O" stands for "orna," a type of scarf worn by girls and women, instead of "ol," a type of yam, for example, after satisfying the demands of religious groups. For women who have graduated from Koranic schools, career paths are even more limited than for men. The dropout rate is higher among girls, many of whom marry earlier than men. For those who continue, career opportunities are mainly reserved for religious education, where the supervisory role will fall to a man. As for the so-called madrasas, which are supposed to offer an adapted, reformed and modernised curriculum, the same that applies to women and men, women cannot aspire to the same positions as men in the religious field. The rejection of Ayesha Siddiqa's petition by the High Court of Bangladesh clearly demonstrated this restriction.

In 2014, as a recent graduate, a young woman from Dinajpur had applied for a position as registrar of marriage ceremonies, known as *nikah* in Muslim law. However, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs rejected her application on the grounds that the social reality of Bangladesh did not allow her to practice her profession (Mahmood, 2021). For many Muslim families, especially in rural areas, madrasa education for women is the perfect compromise between educating their daughters and preserving their dignity, as they can go to school wearing *purdah*, the veil, that guarantees their modesty and mobility in accordance with Islamic precepts (Asadullah, Wahhaj, 2012). Approximately 77% of girls are enrolled in secondary schools (World Bank, 2022). Girls who graduate from madrasas face a variety of prejudices and barriers to employment in their sectors. Women's education is largely hampered by the prevailing mentality that women should stay at home and care for children and family members while the man in the family earns.

The introduction of the Female Secondary Stipend and Assistance Programme (FSSAP) in 1994, with the support of development partners, has

been successful in increasing female secondary school enrolment and completion and discouraging early marriage. However, child marriage remains a major challenge, especially in remote villages. A survey of the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics in 2023 showed that at least 41.6% of young women in Bangladesh were married before the age of 18 (Jahan, 2024). Their level of education is also significantly lower: the percentage of madrasa students accessing university-level education is very low in general, and even lower for girls and *qawmi* madrasa graduates (although a certain percentage of *alia* madrasa students manage to integrate into universities).

National education plays a legitimising role with the public. Educational institutions, particularly Qur'anic and state schools, have a major impact on the representation of women in public life through the dissemination of sexist stereotypes in school textbooks. Educational practices are embodied in the differentiated content offered to girls and boys, which is validated by the authorities. One significant example is the publication of school textbooks: several studies have focused on the production and dissemination of gender stereotypes in state school textbooks. The stereotypes were analysed in terms of exclusion and misrepresentation, with researchers showing that the majority of those writing the content were men. They are found first and foremost in the representation and division of labour: most of the tasks that fall to women are domestic—while men are associated with power, prestige and wealth exemplified by positions and professions such as landowner or teacher. The insensitivity to gender issues in the content of school textbooks can be explained by the low participation of women in the writing of textbooks, although the total participation of women is not a major problem (Asadullah, Islam & Wahhaj, 2018).

After Hefazat-e-Islam, meaning the protectors of Islam (in Arabic), the *qawmi* madrasa-based Islamist organisation, requested textbook revisions in 2017, not only were poems and stories by non-Muslim writers, including Tagore, replaced by Muslim authors, but depictions of girls in traditional dress in mainstream textbooks were replaced by those in Islamic dress. More generally, gender bias is also present in the public school curriculum, the question of representativeness. Twenty-six percent of teachers in higher education are women. The ratio of male to female students is almost equal among students who have taken secondary and higher secondary examinations in the last five years. However, at the university level, only 36.30% of students are female (Dhaka Tribune, 2023). Women's participation in STEM education is only 37% (UNESCO, 2017), the lowest in South Asia.

The challenge of addressing enrolment and employment prospects is greater for women. However, the problem of finding jobs for all students remains a national problem. More than 650,000 higher education graduates enter the job market each year, but less than half secure employment within 1–2 years of graduation (Klingen, 2019). Sixty-six percent of national university students are unemployed after graduation (Dhaka Tribune, 2021) whereas the informal sector creates significant jobs. There are 160 universities with 1,233,529

students—meaning the rest of the 2 million are not graduates (Bangladesh Education Statistics 2021). Recent allegations that trustees of Bangladesh Islamic University looted funds linked to former Jamaat-e-Islam leaders have highlighted the mismanagement of Islamic education at the university level (Daily Industry, 2024).

"Your voice sounds like honey […] would you give me your phone number?" a *qawmi* madrasa teacher asked me in front of six members of the local organisation Nijera Kori in Dhangora. The villagers were accompanying me to interview one of their children, a *qawmi* madrasa student. His teacher, who came every day to buy tea from one of the villagers' tea stalls, had heard about my visit. At the end of my interview with his pupil, who didn't say a word, and he looked afraid that his teacher would see us, he came to meet me. I was shocked not only by his audacity (he asked for my phone number because he wanted to check up on me), but also by the way he looked at me. It was nothing less than the sexualisation of me. Is this the kind of society we want to bequeath to our daughters? Is this the kind of mentality we want to see in the men we know, who play a crucial role in our current social organisation?

Conclusion

Bangladesh's education system caters to some 40 million students (Global Partnership for Education, 2020) and is divided mainly into Bangla medium, English medium, English version and the madrasa system. In each of these streams, the practice of either English or Bangla is not sufficient. Nearly 16 million people study or teach in madrasas in Bangladesh, where Arabic, Urdu and Farsi are taught. This doesn't mean that all madrasa students are fluent in these languages. This stream has boomed because of the low cost of paying teachers and the construction of buildings that do not meet traditional standards. Successive governments have reformed the madrasa system by integrating secular subjects alongside religious ones.

This study shows that the challenge of modernising madrasa education remains significant due to the plurality and diversity of madrasas, competition among them, and the lack of career opportunities for students. This explains the disparities in educational quality, opportunities and outcomes for students in Islamic education. The current study, therefore, highlights the need to ensure gender parity in higher education, create career opportunities for girls, and provide more resources to prevent early marriages. Achieving these goals likely requires bold state measures. Additionally, Bangladesh's education policies are deeply influenced by its colonial history, affecting its approach to language and linguistic differences. The once-celebrated pride of the elite in their mastery of Bangla and Bengali literature has diminished, replaced by a new economic elite for whom proficiency in Bangla is less significant. The discussion in this chapter reiterates the need to rethink the role of different languages in the rapidly changing world.

The future of education in Bangladesh depends on how public policies address not only economic inequalities but also social ones. The challenge is wider than putting financial means in the madrasa education system; the Bangladeshi decision-makers must take time to have a more holistic and philosophical approach to education and the society they want to create. This starts by going beyond the politically motivated decisions regarding education, and instead prioritising a prosperous future for young people—a future that includes knowledge that ensures personal and spiritual fulfilment and job security.

Bibliography

'1980 Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, Dhaka: June 1981, p. 421' quoted in Emajuddin Ahamed, D.R.J.A. Nazneen, "Islam in Bangladesh: Revivalism or Power Politics?", *Asian Survey*, vol. 30, no. 8, 1990, pp. 798.

'2022 Report on International Religious Freedom', US Department of State, 2022.

'66% National University graduates are unemployed', *Dhaka Tribune*, 11th September 2021, accessed on the 13th of May 2021, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbT6

Abdullah, Mamun, 'Female students benefiting from more opportunities in education', *Dhaka Tribune*, 25th April 2023, accessed on the 21st of May 2024, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbSZ

Ahmed, Akhter U., del Ninno, Carlo, 'The Food for Education Program', FCND discussion papers 138, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Washington, USA, 2022.

Ahmed, Mustak, '1,4 million students in over 14,000 qwami madrasas', *Prothom Alo*, 2019, 24th May 2015. Available here: https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/14-lakh-students-study-in-14-000-Qawmi-madrasas

Ahmed, Samina, *Testimony of Samina Ahmed to U.S Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, International Crisis Group, 19 April 2005, accessed on the 23rd of January 2019, available from: https://urlz.fr/k2GT

Amin, Muhammad Boni, 'Madrasah Education in Bangladesh', *Ideas for Development (IFD) Note Series Note 2*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2013, pp. 2–11.

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed.; London; New York: Verso, 1991, pp. 14–16.

Arends-Kuenning, Mary Paula, 'Sajeda Amin, School Incentive Programs and Children's Activities: The Case of Bangladesh', *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2004. https://doi.org/10.2307/3542052

Asadullah, Niaz M., Islam, Kazi Md Mukitul, Wahhaj, Zaki, 'Gender Bias in Bangladeshi School Textbooks: Not Just a Matter of Politics or Growing Influence of Islamists', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2018, pp. 84–89.

Asadullah, Niaz, Wahhaj, Zaki, 'Going to School in Purdah: Female Schooling, Mobility Norms and Madrasas in Bangladesh', *IZA Discussion Papers* 7059, 2012.

Awal, Abdul, 'Indigenous languages in Bangladesh: A sociolinguistic study', *International Journal of Applied Research*, vol. 5, no. 9, 2019, pp. 318–325.

'Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics', 2022, p. 32.

'Bangladesh, Population Trends', UNFPA, available here: https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/en/node/24314

'Bangladesh Primary education Annual Sector Performance Report (ASPR) 2020', Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Directorate of Primary Education The Fourth Primary Education Development Programme (The PEDP4), August 2020, available here: https://dpe.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dpe.portal.gov.bd/publications/5d3289d5_5d39_49e4_a948_0cc7ad0fc5f0/ASPR%202020%20(1).pdf

Bano, Masooda, 'Madrasa Reforms and Islamic Modernism in Bangladesh', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2014, pp. 911–939. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X12000790

Begum, Momotaj, Kabir, Humayun, 'Reflections on the Deobandi Reformist Agenda in a Female Quomi Madrasah in Bangladesh', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2012, pp. 353–380.

Bhuiyan, Nurul Momen Md, 'Creating Good Muslims: Qwami madrasa Schooling in a Rural Town of Bangladesh', Doctorate in philosophy, University of Brunel, under the direction of P. Froerer, Londres, 2010, pp. 26–53.

Billah, Masum, 'Who are the middle class in Bangladesh?', *The Business Standard*, 4th October 2020, available here: https://www.tbsnews.net/feature/panorama/who-are-middle-class-bangladesh-141073

Bossavie, Laurent, 'Low-skilled temporary migration policies: The case of Bangladesh', In *Background paper to the World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies*, World Bank, April 2023, pp. 4–21.

Chowdhury, Qumurul Hassan, 'English and Development: Voices from a Rural Bangladeshi Madrasa', *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2022, pp. 413–432.

Chun, Nathalie, 'Middle Class Size in the Past, Present, and Future: A Description of Trends in Asia', ADB Economics Working Paper Series, Asian Development Bank, 2010, p. 2.

Dasgupta, Probal, 'Judges and Grammarians in Britain's Liberal Pedagogic Performance: a Diglossic Approach to Colonial Bengal', *Droit et Cultures*, vol. 67, 2014, pp. 151–186.

'GAL Country profile Bangladesh', UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, December 2021, available https://www.uil.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/files/2022/03/GAL%20Country%20profile%20-%20Bangladesh_0.pdf

'Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP)', The World Bank, 2022, available here: https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/se-xpd-totl-gd-zs

'Graduation of Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal from the least developed country category', General Assembly, United Nations, 11th November 2021, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbJw

Hultgren, A.K., Erling, E.J., Chowdhury, Q.H., 'Ethics in language and identity research', In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*, edited by S. Preece. Routledge, 2016, pp. 257–271.

'Institutionalising diaspora linkage the emigrant Bangladeshis in UK and USA', 'Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment', International Organization for Migration, 2004, available here: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/diaspora_linkage_bangladeshis.pdf

Jahan, Nilima, 'An alarming upswing in child marriage', *The Daily Star*, 28th March 2024, accessed on the 25th of June 2024, available here: https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/alarming-upswing-child-marriage-3576476

Kabir, Humayun, 'Replicating the Deoband Model of Schooling: The case of a Quomi Madrasa in a District Town of Bangladesh', *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2009, pp. 415–428.

Khandker, Shahidur Rahman, Samad, Hussain Akhterus, Fuwa, Nobuhiko, Hayashi, Ryotaro, 'The Female Secondary Stipend and Assistance Program in Bangladesh: What Did It Accomplish?', *Asian Development Bank Working Paper Series*, no. 81, January 2021.

Kibria, Nazli, 'Probashi: Histories of the Bangladesh diaspora', *The Daily Star*, 21st November 2021, accessed on the 24th of April 2024, available here: https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/in-focus/news/probashi-histories-the-bangladesh-diaspora-3174751

Kitzan, Laurence, 'The London Missionary Society and the Problem of Authority in India, 1798–1833', *Church History*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1971, pp. 457–473. JSTOR, accessed on the 9th of May 2024. https://doi.org/10.2307/3163569.

Klingen, Nicole, 'Voices of Bangladeshi Youth: Preparing for the World of Work', Blog World Bank, 5th March 2024, available here: https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/endpovertyinsouthasia/skilling-bangladeshs-youth-changing-job-market

Mahmood, Farzana, 'If not Siddiqua, then who?', *Daily Sun*, 16 Janvier 2021, https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/530093/If-Not-Siddiqua-Then-Who

Moosa, Ebrahim, *What is a Madrasa?*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015a, p. 83.

Moosa, Ebrahim, *What is a Madrasa?* Eindburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015b, p. 110.

Ouassini, Anwar, Ouassini, Nabil, "3: "Kill 3 Million and the Rest Will Eat of Our Hands": Genocide, Rape, and the Bangladeshi War of Liberation". In *Genocide and Mass Violence in Asia: An Introductory Reader*, edited by Frank Jacob. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019, pp. 40–58. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110659054-003

Parvin, Rozana, Haider, Zulfiqar, 'Methods and practices of English language teaching in Bangla and English medium schools', *Bangladesh Education Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2012, pp. 51–63.

Pernau, Probal, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth Century Delhi*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 273.

'Poverty rate declined but not the poor', The Business Standard, 21st January 2023, accessed on the 14th of June 2024, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbJE

Rahman, Kazi Nafia, 'Delay in textbook distribution again as Bangladesh aims to avert controversies', *Bdnews24*, 30th December 2023, accessed on the 8th of May 2024, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbJJ

Rahman, Mohammad, Pandian, Ambigapathy, Singh, Mehar, Kaur, Manjet, 'Factors Affecting Teachers' Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching Curriculum in Secondary Schools in Bangladesh', *Qualitative Report*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2018, pp. 1104–1126, https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3220

Riaz, Ali, *Faithful Education: madrassahs in South Asia*, New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008, p. 120.

Roy, Sudipta, Huq, Samia, Rob, Aisha Binte Abdur, 'Faith and education in Bangladesh: A review of the contemporary landscape and challenges', *International journal of educational development*, vol. 79, 2020, p. 102290–.

'School enrollment, secondary, female (% gross) – Bangladesh', The World Bank, Open Data, 2022a, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbRI

'School enrollment, secondary, female (% gross) – Bangladesh', World Bank, 2022b, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.ENRR.FE?locations=BD

'Sector Assessment (Summary) Education', Asian Development Bank, 2021, available here: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/50192-002-ssa.pdf

Siddiqi, Dina M., 'Secular quests, national others: revisiting Bangladesh's Constituent Assembly Debates', *Asian Affairs*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2018, pp. 238–258. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2018.1470793

'Summary sector Assessment: Education', Asian Development Bank, 2021, available here: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/50192-002-ssa.pdf

'Supporting Fourth Primary Education Development Program: Report and Recommendation of the President', Asian Development Bank, January 2024, available here: https://www.adb.org/projects/50192-002/main

Surajit, Sinha, Bhattacharya, Ranjit, 'Bhadralok and Chhotolok in a Rural Area of West Bengal', *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1969, pp. 50–66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23618703.

'Table National Academy for Primary Education, 2019', "They are third graders and yet cannot read Bangla", The Business standard, 23rd November 2019, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbRM

'Transforming Bangladesh Primary Education', *Case study*, Asian Development Bank, 14th November 2024, available here: https://www.adb.org/results/transforming-bangladesh-primary-education

'Transforming education in Bangladesh', Global Partnership Education, 2020, available here: https://urlz.fr/rbJg

'Trustees looted funds of Islamic University', *Daily Industry*, 5th May 2024, accessed on the 21st of May 2024, available here: https://dailyindustry.news/trustees-looted-funds-of-islamic-university/

Xu, Sijia, Shonchoy, Abu S., Fujii, Tomoki, 'Illusion of Gender Parity in Education: Intrahousehold Resource Allocation in Bangladesh', *Asian Development Bank*, no. 1004, September 2019, available here: https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/526891/adbi-wp1004.pdf

9 Language Dialects, Standardisation, and Agency among the Naawa of Nepal

Mark A. Condra

Introduction

"The people of that village are hard to understand. They speak funny and have a different tune" is a common statement among the Naawa people of Sankhuwasabha, Nepal. While they originate from only six villages and have a population of roughly 1,000 (Condra 2021), each of the Naawa villages has a unique accent and linguistic repertoire that distinguishes them from each other. Attempts to write the Naawa language, known as Naget, exacerbate these differences among the speaker community. Efforts to standardise the language have not been well received, and until now, dialect variation among the villages has not been documented. This chapter argues that choosing only one dialect as a regional standard has the potential to reduce speaker agency of non-standardised varieties. Perhaps this would not be a serious concern if Naget was a highly institutionalised language; on the contrary, it is predicted that Naget will be moribund within a few generations. The example of Naget demonstrates that dialects, standardisation and speaker agency among minoritised languages throughout the world are paramount to language in education policy.

While there are strong attitudes towards differing dialects, the Naawa people understand the value of their language being written, and it is something many desire for their community. This should be no surprise, for at no other time in history has reading and writing been such an elementary skill of everyday life (Milroy and Milroy 2012). While Naawa literacy development can contribute to language revitalisation (Grenoble and Whaley 2006), literacy in one's mother tongue has also been demonstrated to have numerous positive effects, including promotion of national language acquisition, enhancement of cognitive development and greater performance in academics (Malone, 2003). Grenoble and Whaley (2006) also linked some of these effects to the increased prestige that communities gain from having a written language. Recognising these benefits, the Nepali government has sanctioned communities with provisions to provide mother-tongue education in schools (Government of Nepal 2015). While mother-tongue language education is an advantage for children, it can also benefit the scores of middle-aged women who are illiterate among

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-12

the Naawa. Among these women, the following comments are widespread: "I wish I knew how to read and write so that I could talk to my kids on social media," and "If I could read the signs when I go to the hospital, I would know where I am going."[1]

While many Naawa people want the benefits of reading and writing, each village also wants to retain agency in their language. With this in mind, this chapter attempts to answer the following questions: Who decides the conventions of writing a language? How do communities with multiple dialects determine the standardisation of their language? As new spatial locations for languages are created, how can acceptance of dialect varieties give members more voice and agency in shaping the future of their language?

Language Ideologies, Education and Colonialism in Nepal

Use of Scripts for Writing Language

If the Naawa language is to be utilised for both formal education and informal literacy instruction, it should be viewed in light of educational language planning and policies in Nepal. Understanding historical language policies gives insight into the language ideologies and attitudes regarding language standardisation. This section will briefly review the social-political context of education in Nepal and discuss the way that colonialism has influenced language ideology in South Asia.

Educational studies on Nepal often begin their examination from the year 1951, when the Nepali Congress party overthrew the Rana regime's authoritarian rule. Prior to this, the government had no public policy on education. Rather, the Rana royals deliberately restricted the public from schooling. This is exemplified by the less than two percent literacy rate of the country in 1951 (Parajuli and Onta 2021). Antecedent studies show glimpses of the royal family's negative attitude towards education. In 1918, preceding the inauguration of Tri-Chandra College, King Chandra Shamsher doubted the benefit of a university in the country (Chudal 2021). Thus, if citizens desired education, India was the primary destination for most of the 20th century (Valentin 2023). This was preceded by a long history of writers and scholars who studied in Benares, India. Many of these individuals became leading figures in writing grammars and standardising written Nepali (Chudal 2021).

During the early years of the Rana reign, the Nepali language was believed to be unfit for use in education (Parajuli and Onta 2021). One reason for this is that the Devanagari script had not been standardised for use in education, not to mention there were no grammars available in the language. In fact, Chudal (2021, 175) states that until 1903, "Neither Hindi nor Nepali had yet produced a standard vernacular." Both of these languages are written in the Devanagari script, a descendant of the Brahmi script (400 BC to AD 300) (Campbell 2013). In time, the Nepali royal family's attitude towards the Nepali language changed, and regardless of a lack of standardisation, the king

approved the *Gorakhapatra* newspaper in 1901 (Pradhan 2020). This was followed by the country's first publishing house in 1913 (Pradhan 2020). The first grammar of Nepali was produced in 1913 and was followed by a flurry of others (Chudal 2021), but it was the Kathmandu dialect that would eventually become the national standard (Pradhan 2020). Yet, over one hundred years after the standardisation of written Nepali, conversations concerning its written conventions still continue (Chudal 2021).

The Devanagari script is a phonetically syllabic script, meaning that each symbol contains both a consonant and a vowel. It would be a significant challenge to adjust this script to the diversity of phonemes that occur in the 123 languages represented in the country, in which, Nepali is estimated to be the mother tongue of only 44.6% of the total population (CBS 2014a). However, according to Bishowkarma and Bishwokarma (2023) of Tribhuvan University, there are at least 17 different scripts being used in the country at present. The ten languages recorded using the Devanagari script are Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avadhi, Newar, Tamang, Rajbansi, Magar and Kirat.[2] Besides Devanagari, the 16 scripts recorded are Mithilakshar, Tirhuta, Kaithi, Sambota, Tamhig, Ranjana, Rong, Srijanga, Akkha, Gurumukhi, Perso-Arabi, Latin, Ol Cemet', Ol Chiki, Ol and Khema. Bishowkarma and Bishwokarma (2023) do not claim to be comprehensive, and this chapter demonstrates that much is still unknown regarding language's specific uses of scripts. Nevertheless, from the languages listed, it should be noted that among those using languages using Devanagari, the first six are classified with the highest language vitality accorded by the Ethnologue (Eberhard, Simons, and Fenning 2023), and eight of the languages have over 500,000 speakers (CBS 2014b). Scripts are symbolic and communicative (Jackson 2020), and it appears that these languages have nothing to lose from adopting the Devanagari script. However, adapting a phonetic script (Devanagari) that was standardised for a specific language (Nepali) to another language that has different phonemes may be challenging for literate minoritised Nepali language communities who are used to using Devanagari for Nepali language literacy practices.

In multilingual environments, language communities may choose to portray their language in relation to the other, sometimes national, languages around them. Pradhan's (2020) research has illuminated the practice of Tharu language textbooks that are written in three languages simultaneously on every page: Tharu, Awadhi and Nepali. All of these languages use the Devanagari script, as the school believed it would be easier for students and language workers to use (Pradhan 2020). Furthermore, it appears from Pradhan's (2020) translation of the Nepal government's 1997 Curriculum Development Centre report, that the Devanagari script should be considered to be the standard for writing minoritised languages in Nepal. While there is no explicit law that states that Devanagari must be used, one language ideology posits that the use of a single script would enhance the ease of learning the national language and, perhaps, increase national cohesion. However, applying a phonetic script to a language that cannot use it phonetically may also

cause some confusion for literacy learners. There are multiple ways that languages have engaged with scripts in language standardisation in Nepal, and each of them reflects a combination of language ideologies.

Colonial Language Ideologies

The concept of language ideologies is thus a significant part of the discussion regarding language standardisation. Piller defines language ideologies as "beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language that are socially shared and relate language and society in a dialectical fashion" (Piller 2015, 4). However, language ideologies are not predictable or static. Some scholars prefer to view them as interpretive filters (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994) that might be better thought of as assemblages of ideologies in competition with each other (Barrett, Cramer, and McGowan 2022). Phyak (2016) identifies nation-state ideology and economic neoliberalism to be two significant colonising language ideologies ubiquitous in Nepal.

In order to understand the distinctiveness of Nepal's language ideologies, especially in regard to language standardisation, it would be beneficial to take a wider look at the debate on language documentation, classification and agency during colonisation. Imtaiz Hasnain (2021) strongly argues that during the colonisation of the Indian Subcontinent, the British Empire used language to administer and legitimise imperial dominion. He levies his aim against colonisers and missionaries who perpetuated hierarchies by shifting from linguistic description of language to classification of them, thereby constructing an "official" knowledge of the Orient. At this time, nation-state ideology sought to make English, and the languages of other lands, "uniform and acceptable to the Victorian sense of propriety" (Milroy 2001).

Contrarily, Gambian native and global Christianity historian, Lamin Sanneh argues that "Missionary promotion of the vernacular… was tantamount to adopting indigenous cultural criteria" (Sanneh 2009, 3). Sanneh (2009) finds the Christian approach to be strikingly different than the Muslim adherence to Arabic. Still, Bosch (2014) concedes that it would have been difficult for missionaries to separate their religious interests from their nation's. And yet, Robert Frykenberg (as quoted in Yeh and Chun 2013) believes that much of the history between missionaries and colonialism is still clouded. Thus, there seems to be some uncertainty about how missionary and colonial enterprises collaborated or conflicted with each other in their language ideology. Introducing agency into the picture seems to provide more answers.

While British colonialism in India produced hegemonic language planning and policy procedures, the role of agency in this period has been an underappreciated topic (Glasgow and Bouchard 2019). The use of agency here refers to "the sociocultural mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2010, 28). During the colonial period, there are several examples of people demonstrating agency by their evaluation of and engagement in foreign narratives. In her study on the role of Colonial India's community agency in regard to the English novel in

India, Joshi (2002) demonstrated how Indian communities adopted the scripts of these novels to voice anticolonial and nationalist views. Two examples from Indian Christian history are also illuminating. The Anglican mission to India disparaged Indian languages and cultures and viewed English education as a key to disintegrating Hinduism (Tennent 2013). But theologian Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh, who was raised a Chitpavan Brahmin and later became a priest in the Anglican church, appropriated Sanskrit and Hindi and their scripts (Young 2010). Again, the philosopher Brahmabandhav Upadhyay was educated in English schools, later became a fierce nationalist and member of the Brahmo Samaj, and constructed Indian Christianity on the foundation of Sanskrit and the Vedas (Tennent 1998). These examples demonstrate that, while British colonialism and the Western church carried strong language ideologies, in some cases community agency was powerful enough to co-opt and contextualise the narratives of the West. Whether this kind of agency is enough to stop neocolonial language ideology is yet to be seen.

Language Policy and Planning in Nepal

While the land of Nepal has never been colonised, it could be argued that the Nepali British Gurkha soldiers' bodies and the minds of many Nepalis have been colonised by Western ideology. The colonisation of the mind can be observed throughout Nepal's education policy history. Towards the end of the Rana reign (1846–1950), bureaucrats were given basic education in Nepali, the royal family was taught in English, and Pandits were educated in Sanskrit, but the rest of the ethnic languages were disregarded and restricted from education (Gim 2020; National Education Planning Commission Report as quoted in Pradhan 2020). During the monarchy-guided Panchayat System (1951–1990), the initial education policy written by the American professor Hugh Wood, depicts Nepal being subsumed into the Cold War (Rappleye 2019). By dismissing the concerns of Nepali policymakers and replacing them with his own Western ideals of education, Wood wrote a policy he believed would deliver the gifts of universal democratic civilisation to Nepal (Rappleye 2019). While Wood's ambitions did not come to fruition, his uncontextualised, top-down approach to education policy in Nepal would continue for decades and is an example of the attempt of the colonisation of the mind.

From the Panchayat period to the current Federal system, authority in education policy has oscillated between the national and the local governments (Carney and Bista 2009). The fact that even now there is not a comprehensive and clear understanding of Nepal's linguistic and ethnic diversity has significantly contributed to this situation (Regmi 2021). During the Panchayat period, the policy was one king, one country, one language, one religion (Hindu) (Phyak 2011; Hough, Magar, and Yonjan-Tamang 2009). In 1990, a new government Constitution provided celebrated provisions for mother-tongue language education, but there appeared to be no support nor follow-through from the national government. Still, language ideology was important

enough that many minoritised languages felt it was a reason to engage in The People's War (1996–2006) (Watters 2019). Thus, while the Government of Nepal sought to build national unity through Nepali education, divergent Nepali identities were the result (Pradhan 2020). It wasn't until the Constitution of 2015 that both legal framework and protection for minoritised languages as modes of instruction were provided (Poudel 2019). As of 2017, the Local Government Operation Act bestows education authority to Nepal's local wards (MFAGA 2017). However, according to Chhejap Lhomi from the Nepal Lhomi Society (NELHOS), even now it appears that these local governments are apprehensive about incorporating multilingual education without a clear understanding of these languages (personal communication). More will be said about NELHOS in the discussion of the standardisation of Naawa textbooks.

In the midst of this battle between the minoritised languages of Nepal and the Nepali language, another language of instruction has mushroomed across the country—English. English as a mode of instruction is a clear example of neoliberal ideology at work. As other regional languages, like Korean and Japanese, are widely offered by language schools in Nepal, it appears that English is immobilising the use of minoritised languages in basic education (Poudel 2019; Gim 2020). While minoritised languages restrict interactions to those within a particular community, global languages like English are bridges to international resources and wealth that exist outside individual villages. Economic neoliberalism seeks to allow the migration of the workforce to geographical regions in need of labour. Travel to these areas often means that people will need to learn another language. Due to scarce local economic opportunities, combined with dreams of fortune and ambition to prove to provide for their family's future, the Nepali Times reported on May 10, 2023, that thousands of Nepalis depart the country each day. Thus, while Nepalis are multilingual, they are leaving their languages as they move away from their villages (Turin 2007). In effect, English can be conceived of as a form of neocolonialism that devalues local languages and involuntarily reduces speaker agency by moving them towards the socio-economic benefits of English (Hough, Magar, and Yonjan-Tamang 2009).

Standardisation of a Minority Language

Modern-day language documentation practices have changed considerably from the colonial approach to decontextualising languages from socio-cultural environments (Costa, De Korne, Lane 2018). Now, the best documentation practices emphasise the discovery and understanding of linguistic environments (Watters 2019). However, since standardisation practices arose in the midst of the creation of nation-states (Costa, De Korne, and Lane 2018), these practices may still carry colonial ideology. Language standardisation has been defined as "the imposition of uniformity upon a class of objects" (Milroy 2001, 531). In written language, this imposition is realised most fully by

regulating the spelling system (Milroy and Milroy 2012). Like any form of technology, standardisation of spoken language into written language alters a society's social practices (Grenoble and Whaley 2006); however, this doesn't happen by merely ordering letters. The core shifts occur in epistemological levels of truth, knowledge and authority (Street, 1995).

For national languages, the goals of standardisation include economic, commercial and political ventures (Milroy 2001), distinguishing speaker identities (Chudal 2021; Pradhan 2020), supra-regional communication (Ayres-Bennett and Bellamy 2021), developing prose (Chudal 2021) and nationalistic processes (Pennycook and Makoni 2007). Like many forms of development, European writing systems were believed to be a form of technology capable of advancing modern ideals detached from social and cultural factors (Coulmas and Guerini 2012; Escobar 2012). Yet, standardisation studies have tended to be dominated by European or English-language case studies (Zhao and McLelland 2022). The standardisation of minoritised languages, however, presents different challenges. Since they have fluctuating social status, as opposed to national languages, the stages of standardisation for minoritised languages are contested and negotiated in light of the benefits they bring, which may prevent the languages from becoming monoglossic (Costa, De Korne, and Lane 2018). In fact, it is argued that a decolonial future of standard languages means a plurality of forms and a diversity of voices (Costa, De Korne, and Lane 2018).

Spolsky (as quoted in Glasgow and Bouchard 2019) proposes five general approaches to standard language ideologies. It would seem most equitable for minoritised languages to adopt the approach that views standardised language as only one variety of language, with spoken varieties having equality. Kristiansen (2016) calls the process of establishing written standards norm-defining, where a strong-norm focus fortifies the idea of a standard dialect, while a weak-norm focus allows for more variety. Strong-norm focuses are seen as characteristics of nation-state ideology (Kristiansen 2016). Thus, while standardisation of writing can be a catalyst for social change and transformation (Ahearn 2004), it should be done in a way that values all of the language varieties.

In any approach that seeks to decolonise language documentation or mother-tongue education, the language's writing system should be recognised as ideologically charged (Coulmas and Guerini 2012). Identifying these ideologies will help remediate their impact on language loss (Sallabank 2012). While the ideologies of the Roman script have been uncovered (Goody 1968), the ideologies of the Devanagari script remain unclear.

Research Methods and Researcher's Positionality

This chapter is an attempt to present the preliminary findings of the study of variation and standardisation of the Naawa language. This section begins with an overview of my research and positionality among the Naawa, describes the context of the Naawa people and their language, and then presents the methodology used for the study.

Researcher Positionality and Research Locality

All researchers bring a particular background to their topic, a lens through which they view their study and an approach to interpreting their findings. Pradhan and Valentin (2019) note the importance of recognising this positionality. As a linguist affiliated with Tribhuvan University, I have been researching the Naawa language since 2019. I view myself as a technical specialist working alongside the Naawa community in language documentation and development. My research is informed not only by several years of observing the Naawa people but also by my experience in learning their language.

I have been learning the Naawa language since my affiliation with Tribhuvan University began in 2019, and I have visited all five of the Naawa villages in Nepal. In documenting the Naawa language, I frequently encountered variation in my elicitation, even among those from the same village. As it turns out, this kind of variation should be expected but is little understood. However, according to Hildebrandt, Jany and Silva (2017), while the most widely spoken languages of the world have received significant attention from scholars interested in linguistic variation, endangered languages have received comparatively little consideration. While Naget may appear to be a small language, Mark Turin (2007, 10) reports that over 1,500 languages of the world's languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers (2007, 10). In other words, at least 20% of the world's languages have less than 1,000 speakers. Furthermore, among the world's 250 Tibeto-Burman languages, it is believed that 123 languages have fewer than 10,000 speakers (Matisoff 1991). Thus, the Naawa speakers and their language are not entirely unique among the language families of the world, or in their sub-family. Instead, these languages have received comparatively little attention, unlike European languages that have undergone standardisation.

The Naawa language should be considered an endangered language (Condra 2021). It is likely that within a generation or two the language will become moribund. However, there is much that this language can contribute to the knowledge of the Tibeto-Burman language family and to the study of minoritised language variation. At present, there are no other linguists working on the Naawa language. Due to the lack of economic viability in the language and the neoliberal market ideologies at work in Nepal, most attempts at standardising this language have come from Naawa primary school teachers. There are both benefits and drawbacks for me as a researcher among the Naawa. My lack of familial relationships means I have no clan or village allegiances that insiders possess, and thus less bias towards one dialect. However, as an outsider, there are many drawbacks, such as I cannot know what it means to be Naawa or speak Naget beyond my experiences and observations. Furthermore, my presence at Naawa schools, homes and worksites also has an effect on the behaviour and conversation of the Naawa people when we are together.

Methodology

Literacy is a cross-disciplinary investigation (Baynham 1995) and so is this study of Naawa dialects and language standardisation. This study applies cultural anthropology approaches alongside language dialectology methods to understand Naawa ideas and attitudes towards language variation and standardisation. The study incorporates common anthropological and linguistic methods such as language learning, linguistic analysis, participant observation, ethnographic interviews and evidential material used in Naawa primary textbooks.

In this study, perceptual dialectology is the core methodology used to understand attitudes and language ideologies. This approach engages non-specialist speakers to understand what they believe are the most significant differences between their language dialects (Preston 2018). Typically, studies of standardisation are more concerned with qualitative analysis, while variation studies, such as dialectology, are more focused on quantitative studies and attitudes of individuals (Zhao and McLelland 2022). This study uses the methodology of perceptual dialectology to understand variation, but it applies its findings to the process of standardisation.

During my years of visiting Naawa homes and meeting extended family and friends, I had heard about the dialect differences among the Naawa. However, it wasn't until May 2023, when I hosted the first Naawa dictionary workshop in Kathmandu, that I began to look into the topic in earnest. As 15, mostly educated, male representatives of the five Naawa villages gathered for a dictionary check, tensions quickly arose, making it evident that writing this language was not going to come easily. This led me to conversations with the NELHOS to discuss how they had handled the topic of standardisation in the four Naawa textbooks that they had published. With two Naawa language assistants, I proceeded to work through each of these books and encountered inconsistencies in spelling and a lack of standardisation in spelling. As I further inquired with NELHOS, they informed me that some of the community schools had rejected their textbooks as the written standardisation did not accurately reflect local pronunciation. In December 2023, I hosted a dialect workshop with another 15, mostly illiterate, women to understand their perspectives on dialect differences. Interestingly, Trudgill (1972) argues that compared to men, women generally speak the more standard or the higher prestige language.

This workshop was conducted in both Naget and Nepali, which I speak at Intermediate and Advanced levels, respectively. To ensure maximum understanding, both I and two Naawa assistants took notes of responses. After the conference was completed, we discussed our notes and the Naawa community assistants wrote summaries in Nepali. The workshop included four different methods to assess speakers' perceptions of dialect differences. The first method, listening for differences, included having participants listen to short audio recordings of Naawa speech representing speakers from all five Naawa villages.

The workshop attendees were assigned to sit together with others from their village. Then two recordings were played for each village for a total of ten recordings, followed by questions asking how they felt about the dialect (e.g. pleasant or rude). While recording group answers to these questions became quite challenging due to the group dynamics, it gave general impressions of dialect perceptions.

Following this, village dialect groups translated three sentences from Nepali to Naget. These sentences were prepared beforehand with prior knowledge of variance in certain pronunciations. The third method had each participant number the Naawa villages on a map from 1 to 5 ("1" representing most similar, "5" representing least similar).[3] The values given to each village by the groups were then added together to find the sum accorded to each village. The group's combined answers showed the dialects that were most similar or dissimilar to their village. The final method used during this workshop was interview questions about the historical travel times[4] between each village and other historical social issues that may have contributed to each village's contact frequency. These additional topics included seasonal travel routes, important monastery and lama locations, locations used for rituals and locations believed to be inauspicious, clan and family relationships, marriage patterns, and seasonal livestock pastures.

Theory

During the dictionary check in 2023, one exasperated speaker exclaimed, "If I don't know how to spell this word, then I know nothing about our language!" The debate was whether a word would be spelled with an "o" instead of an "u." The concepts of language ideology, colonialism and standardisation frame this study; however, a bit more should also be said about sound change, the study of dialects, place and writing as technology.

Sturtevant's Paradox presents a widely held linguistic theory that sound change is regular and causes irregularity in language, but analogy is irregular and causes regularity in language (Anttila 1989). There are a number of fields that explore these changes, but Trudgill (1999) suggests that while these disciplines may use different methodologies, they shed light on the same areas of inquiry. While historical comparative linguistics may use studies in sound changes as a way to categorise languages (Campbell 2013), dialectology is more concerned with why particular variants have occurred in specific locations (Trudgill 1999). The study of dialects contributes to the understanding of how languages change (Boberg, Nerbonne, and Watt 2018), but it suggests that sound change is more often irregular than predictable. In dialectology, words are understood as having unique histories and playing unique social roles that are contingent upon the language speakers. Trudgill (2010) demonstrates that there is a relationship between social change and culture and that linguistic complexity typically arises in simpler, rather than complex societies. Like other Tibetic languages, the Naawa have developed complexity

(e.g. evidential systems and tone) in their language due to social isolation and dense social networks. Dialectology seeks to understand how these have developed differently in the various villages.

Place and space are useful categories that are increasingly being applied to sociolinguistic studies (Hildebrandt and Hu 2017). Applying these social and geographical theories to dialectology provides insight into why variation has risen in specific locations. First, to determine linguistic distance between villages, perceptions of distance and geographical distance are significant (Gooskens 2005). Second, Taun (1977) introduces the connection between perceptions of distance and emotional attachment to place, arguing that the greater the number of emotional ties, the greater the attachment there will be. Thus, understanding place and space can provide insight into why speakers have a strong attachment to their dialects, and which dialects they would be partial to using as a standard language.

Theory on the technology of writing is also important for understanding the role of language standardisation. According to Ong (2012), both spoken and written forms of language are important to human development. However, these forms of communication provide different benefits for speakers. Written language acts as a way of maintaining language, while the spoken form produces variability and additional resources for communication (Milroy and Milroy 2012). There is a tendency for speakers of highly literate cultures to view written standards as correct or moral, but in reality, standardisation of a language is never complete, due to the speaker's agentive use of it (Milroy and Milroy 2012). That being said, standardisation cannot be achieved as a mere add-on to minoritised language documentation (Lüpke 2011). Thus, collaboration with a language community in developing a standard language is paramount (Barton and Hamilton 2000), but language activists also need to understand the theory behind language change, standardisation and the language ideologies of their speakers.

Perceptions of Language Variation

Authenticity among Dialects

"Dangok speaks differently than Kimathangka; they have mixed their speech with Lhomi," remarked one Kimathangka speaker. Still, this statement, and others like it, leaves a lot to be desired when trying to grasp the differences between Naawa village dialects. Ultimately, these statements are used by speakers to claim cultural authenticity, and they serve to construct speaker identity. Typically, these types of statements are levelled against speakers from Pharang, Dangok and Chumswor, but they communicate a specific language ideology: there is a right way to speak the Naawa language. Those who use Lhomi or Nepali words are often labelled as being poor speakers of the language, despite the fact that borrowing is ubiquitous in all of the dialects.

It appears that Naawa speakers have little problem identifying each other's village through their dialects. For the most part, speakers believe that their

Table 9.1 Naawa pronoun variation

Village names	*Pronominal form*
Dangok & Pharang	kʰìraŋ (2p), miɾoŋ (3s)
Pebo & Chumswor	t͡ʃìraŋ (2p), t͡ʃìre (3s)
Kimathangka	kʰèraŋ (2p) , t͡ʃòre (3s)

village dialect is best; however, some individuals have shared that they appreciate some of the oral mediums, such as songs, from other villages. The core differences between the villages can be summarised as differences in the use of honorific words, melody (accent), pronouns and borrowed words. Honorifics are used in Pebo to refer to individuals of both high and low status, while the other villages reserve this only for those of high status. The melody of the villages can be divided into a fast and slow pace. Chumswor has developed a fast melody, that tends to shorten their pronunciation, which is something about which other villages often complain. The differences in pronouns can be seen in Table 9.1, which shows the differences between second-person plural and third-person singular forms. In regard to pronouns, Dangok and Pharang are grouped together, as are Pebo and Chumswor, and Kimathangka is its own variety. Borrowed words are common among all of the villages. Dangok, Pharang and Chumswor all borrow words from the Lhomi language; however, Kimathangka and Pebo are not immune to this. Still, Kimathangka and Pebo appear to borrow more loan words from Tibetan. Lastly, all of these dialects have borrowed bits of Nepali morphology, such as, /-gi laila/ "for" originating from the Nepali /-ko laagi/ "for." These dialects also borrow verbs and nouns from Nepali. In Dangok a common verb structure is /tʰale siken/ "to start," which combines a form of the Nepali word "begin" /tʰale/ and /siken/ "to do," meaning to begin something. Nepali nouns like /gaɖi/ "car" and /səʈak/ "road" are commonplace.

When considering standardising Naget for writing, many Naawa feel that they should use only authentic Naget words. During dictionary checks, some individuals wanted to take out the Nepali loan words and only include historic words—even though not everyone understands historic words, such as/kəmnuk/ "pencil" and /ʃɛnuk/ "pen." Others interested in using Naawa for education argue that the current forms of the language, regardless of borrowing, should be used. All villages appreciated the use of honorific words in the dictionary, and language activists, such as NELHOS, support these words being used in Naawa textbooks. Regarding the use of script, the Naawa have adapted the Devanagari script to use for writing their language. There has been some innovation to express tone, as well as devoiced laterals and rhotics, as these don't exist in Nepali (Figure 9.1). Some speakers also advocate for the use of the Sambhotta script, but at present no attempts have been made to reconcile this with Naget, also institutional work on the standardisation of the Sambhotta script for Tibetan is fragmented and has trouble incorporating dialects (Jikar 2022).

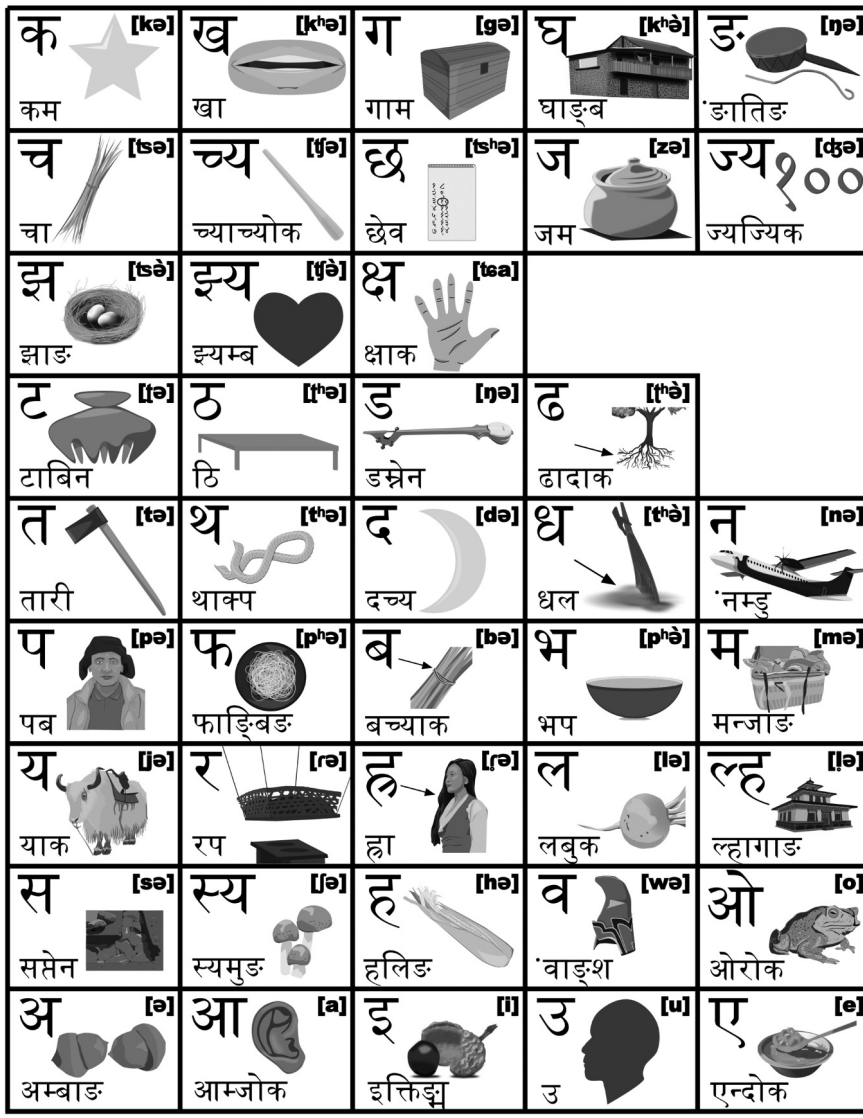


Figure 9.1 Innovations of the Devanagari script for the Naget writing system. Includes international phonetic alphabet symbols for each character.

Source: Josephine Condra.

Learning Dialects through Kinship

"I have visited that village and stayed for several days, so I understand them well," remarked a Pharang speaker regarding the Chumswor dialect. It might appear to outsiders that all of the Naawa villages have regular contact with each other, after all, they are only a day's walk away from the furthest villages. But this underestimates just how demanding and time-consuming life is when raising livestock, farming, and trying to make extra money through trade. The dialect mapping exercise revealed that the dialects that were closest to each other via walking distance (Figure 9.2) were perceived to have the most in common with each other. This is true, with the exception of Kimathangka. While Kimathangka is only a 30-minute walking distance away from Changa, Kimathangka respondents felt that Dangok was the most similar village dialect. In fact, all of the villages rated Changa, and occasionally Pharang, to be the most dissimilar language dialect.

Following geographic proximity, mapping results showed that all of the groups felt that the Kimathangka dialect had the most similarity (Figure 9.3). It appears that all of the villages have individuals who travel often to China (Changa) for trade, but instead of lodging in Changa, most people would return to Kimathangka in the evening, giving them a shorter return trip to

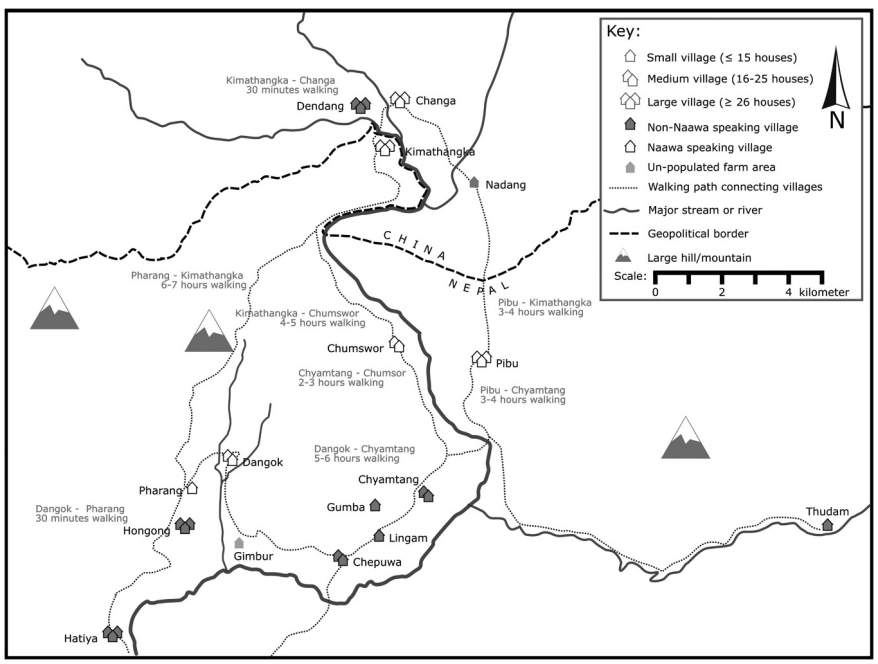


Figure 9.2 Historical travel time between the Naawa villages.

Source: Josephine Condra.

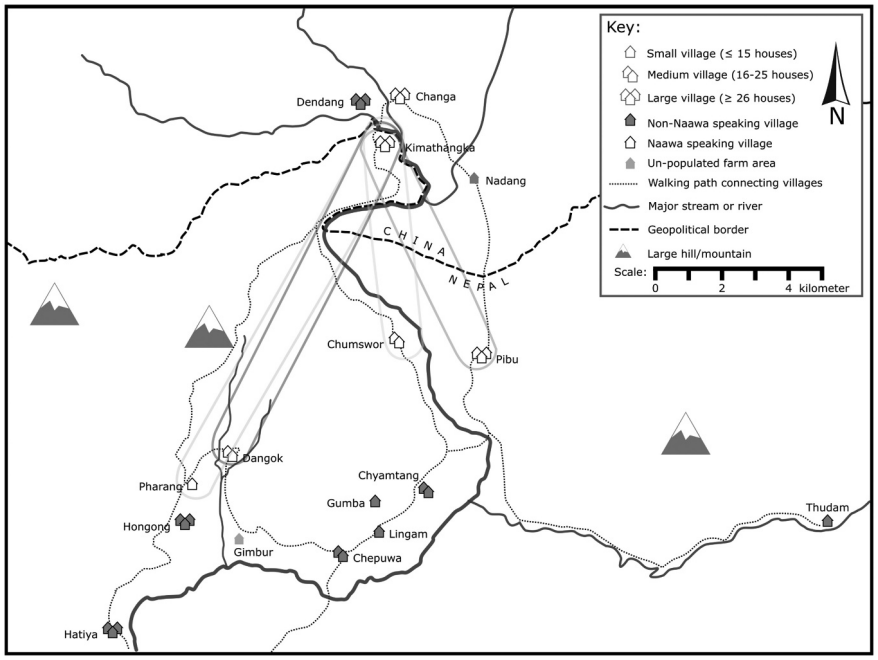


Figure 9.3 All Naawa villages find Kimathangka to be the second most similar dialect to their own.

Source: Josephine Condra.

their villages. The results did not demonstrate any consistent third, most similar dialect. Rather, what became apparent was speakers perceived village dialects to be more similar to their own when they had friends and family living in one of those other villages. After staying in another village for a few days, they would feel they could understand the language innovations more readily. This perception of other village dialects could be called kinship perception, for it occurs by visiting relatives and by forming attachments to place as a result of more emotional ties to it (Taun 1977).

A final note about kinship relationships is in order. Several respondents shared that, while some of their female friends and relatives have married to other villages, this is undesirable for most people. However, women from Kimathangka shared that, in the past, their relatives or friends were married to other Naawa villages, because there were no men of the right tribe for them to marry locally. The concept of tribe among the Naawa is quite strong, and some villages mentioned feeling closer to other villages because of this shared kinship. Another practice Naawa people use to make kinship relationship is called /t^{h}òbu/ "male bond friend" or /t^{h}òmu/ "female bond friend." A bond friend functions as a type of kinship relationship with certain responsibilities and prohibitions. They are especially useful when traveling from village to village and

can increase emotional ties to other villages. Finding food and shelter in another village is not something easily obtained without kinship relationships, thus travel between villages outside of the established travel routes is uncommon, leading to less contact and greater speech variation between villages.

Examples of Variation and Standardisation

Spoken Variation

While discussing language variation among the Naawa, one elderly woman commented, "If earlier generations had written down our language and had a standard form, then we would have one today too." The Naawa people realise that each village has unique spoken innovations. Often, the villages of Kimathangka, Dangok and Pharang are considered one dialect, while the villages of Pebo and Chumswor are another. Changa is often not mentioned unless specifically asked. Table 9.2 demonstrates the differences between village dialects by translating three sentences: 1) Did you see a spider in your dream? 2) Tomorrow, I am going to cut that bull's horn. 3) That is sister-in-law's plate rack. The Naawa responses are written in Devanagari and transliterated into the international phonetic alphabet.

One focus of perceptual dialectology is to pay attention to the differences that the speakers themselves find important (Preston 2018). While comparing and discussing the variation in Table 9.2, the most apparent differences in speakers were nouns, pronouns, adjectives of time, and accents on question particles. To put this in perspective, I once had a meeting with Dangok speakers and Kimathangka speakers, during which I noticed differences in word final nasals [m] and [ŋ] and vowels [u] and [o]. Kimathangka speakers pronounce the third person singular past as [-sum], while Dangok speakers pronounce the same conjunction as [-soŋ]. Thus, the phrase "he opened" in Kimathangka is /pesum/ while in Dangok it is /pesoŋ/. When I first mentioned this variation, the Dangok speakers were incredulous, and I had to ask the Kimathangka speaker for several examples to convince the Dangok speakers that there was a difference. This is an example of variation that is not perceived as a significant difference by Naawa speakers.

Nepali, Tibetan and Lhomi languages all have a significant influence on the Naawa dialects. Some Naawa speakers note that there are words in Nepali that express reality or their feelings more clearly. Unlike Nepali, Tibetan is perceived by the Naawa as a language of prestige and religious significance. This ideology seems to have a stronger influence on speakers from Kimathangka and Pebo who borrow more words from Tibetan dialects. On the other hand, Pharang, Dangok and Chumswor demonstrate significant borrowing from Lhomi. To be sure, in every Naawa village, the lamas have scriptures written in Sambhotta script. However, those literate in Sambhotta script are few, and its literacy practices are restricted to religious functions, as it has been in Tibet (Goody 1968).

Examining the nouns from Table 9.2 does not help in distinguishing village dialects. In the first translation, "Did you see a spider in your dream?" The word for spider is occasionally translated /bəməsɛnɖumə/ and other times translated /sɛnɖumə/, but speakers from the villages claiming /sɛnɖumə/ are also known to produce /bəməsɛnɖumə/ on occasion and vice versa. Thus, it appears this difference may be more of a personal preference. In the discussion of the word "plate" /demaŋ/ and /tʰara/, most speakers admit that /tʰara/ is a Lhomi

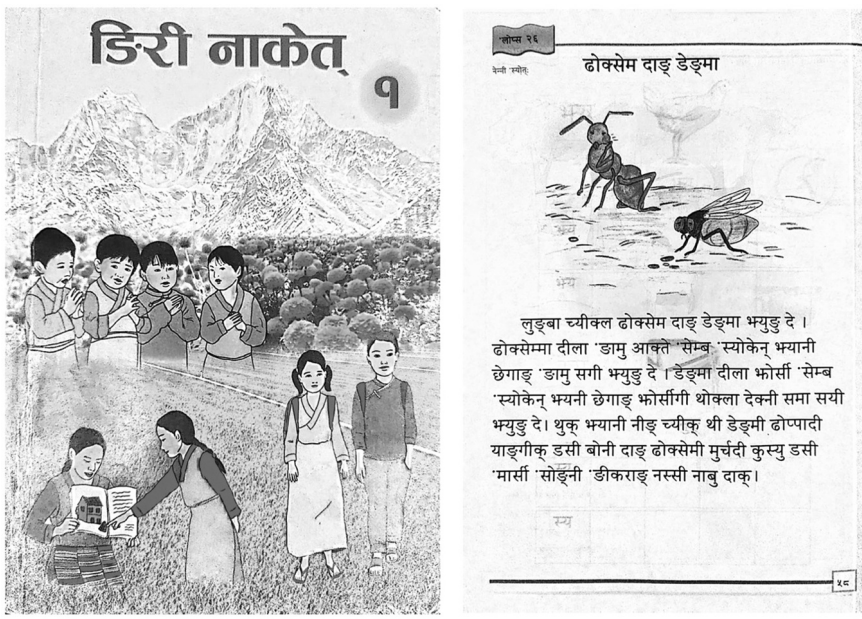
Table 9.2 Comparison of Naget sentences

Naawa	*English*
राङ्ल डिलमल बमसेन्डुम तेन्ज्युङे ? (Kimathangka) /ranlə ŋilumlə bəməsɛnɖumə tɛnʤune/	Did you see a spider in your dream?
राङ्गी डिलमल सेन्डुम धोङ्ज्वाए ? (Dangok) /raŋgi ŋilumlə sɛnɖumə tʰòŋʤae/	
राङ्ल डिलमल बमसेन्डुम डिज्युङे ? (Pharang) /ranlə ŋilumlə bəməsɛnɖumə ŋiʤuŋe/	
झ्योरे डिलमल सेन्डुम धोङ्ज्व ? (Pebo) /ʧòre ŋilumlə sɛnɖumə tʰòŋʤwə/	
झ्योरे डिलमल सेन्डुम धोङ्ज्व ? (Chumswor) /ʧòre ŋilumlə sɛnɖumə tʰòŋʤwə/	
डेस्यु ङ थिलाङगी आच्योक्ती तुम्नी युनोङ्गेन् । (Kimathangka) /ŋeʃu ŋə tʰi laŋgi aʧokti tumni junoŋgɛn/	Tomorrow, I am going to cut that bull's horn.
डारू ङ थिलाङगी रच्योकती ढेनी युनोङ्गेन् । (Dangok) /ŋaru ŋə tʰi laŋgi raʧokti ʈʰèni junoŋgɛn/	
डारू ङ थिलाङगी रच्योकती दुम्नी युनोङ्गेन् । (Pharang) /ŋaru ŋə tʰi laŋgi raʧokti dumni junoŋgɛn/	
डेस्यु ङ थिलाङगी रच्योकती चम्नी युनोङ्गेन् । (Pebo) /ŋeʃu ŋə tʰi laŋgi raʧokti ʦəmni junoŋgɛn/	
डेस्यु ङ थिलाङगी रच्योकती चम्नी युनोङ्गेन् । (Chumswor) /ŋeʃu ŋə tʰi laŋgi raʧokti ʦəmni junoŋgɛn/	
छामी देमाङ ज्योक्सी ल्याका थिदाक् । (Kimathangka) /ʦʰami demaŋ ʤoksi ljaka tʰi dak/	That is sister-in-law's plate rack.
छामी थारा ज्योक्सी लाका थिदाक् । (Dangok) /ʦʰami tʰara ʤoksi laka tʰi dak/	
छामी थारा स्योक्स घोरम थिदाक् । (Pharang)/ ʦʰami tʰara ʃaksə kʰòrem tʰi dak/	
छामी देमाङ स्होक्स क्षाकाम थिदेक् । (Pebo) /ʦʰami demaŋ ʃaksə ʨakam tʰi de?/	
छामी देमाङ स्होक्स लेग थिदेक् । (Chumswor) /ʦʰami demaŋ ʃaksə legə tʰi de?/	

word, and yet, they continue to produce it. In fact, one Naawa speaker shared privately that she felt that the Lhomi language was a more pleasant-sounding language than Naawa, and that's why she sometimes uses Lhomi words. While noun variation doesn't distinguish village dialect, accent variation is clearly distinguishable. The copula "is," /dak/ and /deʔ/ and the question particle /-e/ and /-wə/ are very clearly divided. Kimathangka, Dangok and Pharang pronounce the former examples, and Pebo and Chumswor pronounce the latter. Thus, it is not word choice, but accent that matters most to Naawa speakers.

Standardisation of Naawa Textbooks

NELHOS is a non-governmental organisation that was established by Lhomi people in 2006. As of February 1, 2024, NELHOS has recorded on its website involvement in mother-tongue education projects among the Lhomi, Eastern Tamang, and the Dharai. According to the director of NELHOS Chhejap Lhomi, Naawa teachers approached NELHOS in 2018 with a request to develop mother-tongue literacy books in the Naawa language. The Naawa villages have close geographical proximity to the Lhomi (Figure 9.2). As the Naawa teachers observed NELHOS' work in the Lhomi school, they perceived its value. At present, NELHOS and local Naawa teachers have produced four mother-tongue literacy textbooks (Figure 9.4). While initially



(a) (b)

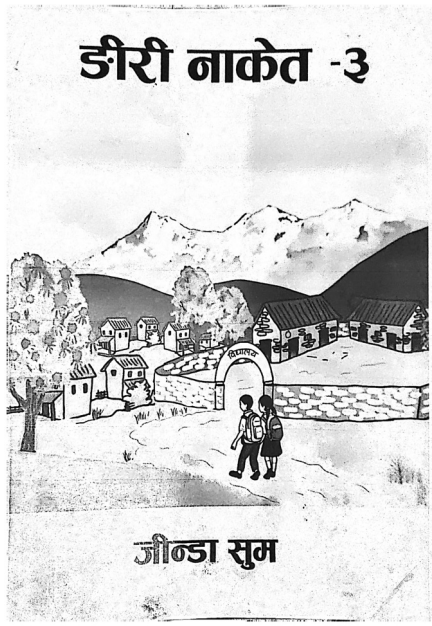
Figure 9.4 Ngiri naket 1 "Our Naget for class one." Book cover and sample story.

published by NELHOS, all of these textbooks are now published by the Bhotkhola Rural Municipality office.

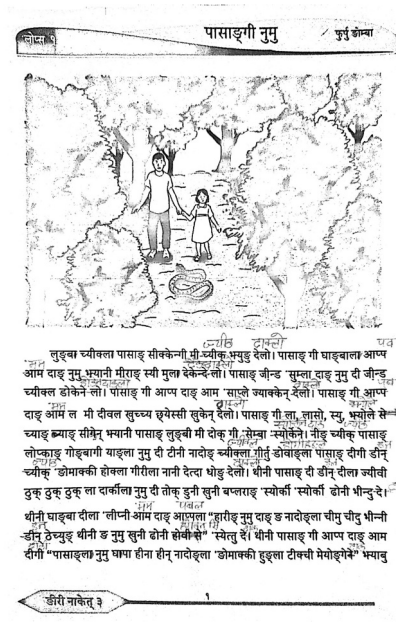
These Naawa textbooks present important insights into the ideologies of Naawa standardisation. They were written by Naawa speakers in conjunction with NELHOS literacy workshops, but the standardisation process differed in a few ways. When NELHOS standardised the Lhomi language, they chose the Lhomi dialect of Thangmuchi (Chepuwa) to be the main dialect. Thangmuchi is geographically central to the Lhomi villages, and many of the women from Thangmuchi also marry to the other Lhomi villages, taking their dialect with them. According to NELHOS, the first Lhomi textbooks received continuous complaints regarding this choice of standardisation, but after some time the written dialect has been accepted by a majority of speakers.

Initially, in conjunction with the Naawa teachers, NELHOS deemed Pebo to be the central Naawa dialect. One of the senior teachers from Chumswor, a strong language activist, was appointed to be the textbook editor. This probably has to do with the fact that Chumswor and Pebo are closely related dialects. However, after completing the Naawa textbooks and distributing them to the schools, the public rejected the textbooks as valid representations of their language. One of the NELHOS staff reported he felt that implementing Pebo as a central written standard had failed (personal communication). For the second Naawa textbook, NELHOS compiled stories from nine different Naawa teachers, representing all of the Naawa villages except for Pharang (Pharang students go to a nearby Lhomi school). However, in this compilation language variation was the accepted standard rather than the Pebo dialect. This allowance for variation can actually be seen as early as डिरी नाकेत् १ "Our Naget 1" (Figure 9.5). In one story, The Ant and the Fly, the Chumswor editor allowed spelling indicative of the Kimathangka / Dangok / Pharang dialect copula दाक् "dak"; however, he also allowed the Chumswor / Pebo dialect copula दे "de." Thus, despite attempts to standardise Naawa, the NELHOS textbooks demonstrate a literacy approach that allows for variation. In an interview with the Naawa textbook editor, he explained that he viewed the textbooks to be "in progress" rather than a final version of the language (personal communication).

Of course, a variational approach to writing Naawa means that communication in written form may be unclear. This was the case when two Dangok speakers reviewed the NELHOS textbooks (Figure 9.5). These speakers were surprised by the amount of variation that existed in the textbooks and frequently complained that the writers had mixed much of the language with Lhomi. The focus of the complaint was that many words were written without a low tone. Words like /pʰindak/ "went," /hatiwə/ "all," and /ʧʰabudak/ "became" were often pointed out. In addition, NELHOS adapted the Devanagari script to represent the closed front rounded vowel /y/, and the closed-mid front rounded vowel /ø/. However, it appears that younger Dangok speakers are losing these rounded vowels from their dialect. Thus, they didn't see the need for the script adaptations.



(a)



(b)

Figure 9.5 Ngiri naket 3 (Our Naget for class three). Book cover and story with edits.

Conclusion

Despite having a desire for a standardised form of writing, the Naawa people have strong emotional ties to their local dialects and have rejected school textbooks that attempted to standardise their language. In order to understand the Naawa language ideologies and the variation in the language, this study was situated within the history of Nepal's education policies and standardisation practices. In the context of the wider Indian Subcontinent, this study incorporated colonial language practices and the possibility of exercising agency against language hegemony. Furthermore, it was posited that while technically a non-colonised country, Nepal has absorbed nation-state and economic neoliberal ideologies that are ubiquitous in education practices. Against this, it was argued that standardisation of minoritised languages should seek to value language variety.

The study revealed: 1) The perceived authenticity of Naget. While some Naawa people perceive authenticity to be related to using only Naawa words, local educators advocate for using modern forms of the language, regardless of mixing with Nepali words. 2) The perceived closeness with other dialects. This began with geographical proximity, showed commonality of the Kimathangka dialect, and then discussed the prominence of kinship relationships in building an affinity for another dialect. 3) The perceived variation between dialects.

This was shown to contrast with actual variation of Naget nouns and instead emphasised dialect accents. 4) The actual standardisation attempts of Naget. NELHOS attempted and failed to implement a central dialect, even though they succeeded in doing so in the Lhomi language. It is still uncertain if the community will accept variation of dialects being written in textbooks, but first impressions seem to point to rejection of this as well.

The Naawa people perceive written language to be a flawless form of language. This seems to arise from Nepali rote learning practices and strict standards for writing global languages, like Nepali and English, whose standardisation arose from nation-state ideology. This desire for a pure written form also seems to arise from Naawa attachment to local villages. This study demonstrates the value of starting with perceptual dialectology for those communities attempting language standardisation. That is, if speakers find affinity with another dialect other than their own then there may be a common candidate for a standard that does not reduce a community's language ownership. This development of a written standard would open a new space for speakers to produce knowledge, contribute to language preservation, and improve education. While access to technology alone does not enable development (Srinivasan 2017), understanding the social-historical practices of writing and language ideology is crucial if the Naawa community is to gain the benefits of a standardised language.

Notes

1 These aspirations are actually multilingual literacy practices and, in some cases, Naawa women will need to learn more Nepali language to perform these tasks.
2 Tamang was listed twice, but varieties were not specified.
3 This map also includes Changa, the Naawa village in China.
4 The participants found it difficult to consider historical travel times rather than current travel times. For example, there is now a foot bridge between Chumswor and Pebo that did not exist 100 years ago. However, the participants repeatedly referenced this bridge in calculating travel times.

References

Ahearn, Laura M. 2004. "Literacy, Power, and Agency: Love Letters and Development in Nepal." *Language and Education* 18 (4): 305–316. doi:10.1080/09500780408666883.

Ahearn, Laura M. 2010. "Agency and Language." In *Society and Language Use*, edited by Jürgen Jaspers, Jan-Ola Östman, and Jef Verschuern, vol. 7, 28–48. Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Anttila, Raimo. 1989. *Historical and Comparative Linguistics*. 2nd ed. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Ayres-Bennett, Wendy, and John Bellamy. 2021. "Introduction." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization*, edited by Wendy Ayres-Bennett and John Bellamy, 1–24. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Perlego.

Barrett, Rusty, Jennifer Cramer, and Kevin B. McGowan. 2022. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge. Perlego.

Barton, David, and Mary Hamilton. 2000. "Literacy Practices." In *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, edited by David Barton, Mary Hamilton, and Roz Ivanic, 7–15. Literacies. London: Routledge.

Baynham, Mike. 1995. *Literacy Practices: Investigating Literacy in Social Contexts*. Language in Social Life Series. New York: Longman Group Limited.

Bishowkarma, Aita, and Babu Ram Bishwokarma. 2023. "Writing Systems of Indigenous Languages in Nepal." *Linguistics & Polyglot Studies* 9 (3): 70–81. doi:10.24833/2410-2423-2023-3-36-70-81.

Boberg, Charles, John Nerbonne, and Dominic Watt. 2018. "Introduction." In *The Handbook of Dialectology*, edited by Charles Boberg, John Nerbonne, and Dominic Watt. Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. Perlego.

Bosch, David J. 2014. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. 20th Anniversary ed. American Society of Missiology Series, No. 16. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Campbell, Lyle. 2013. *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*. 3rded. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Carney, Stephen, and Min Bahadur Bista. 2009. "Community Schooling in Nepal: A Genealogy of Education Reform since 1990." *Comparative Education Review* 53 (2): 189–211. doi:10.1086/597394.

CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics). 2014a. *Population Monograph of Nepal 2011*. Vol. 2. Kathmandu: National Planning Commission Secretariat, Government of Nepal.

CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics). 2014b. *National Population and Housing Census 2011: Social Characteristics Tables (Caste/Ethnicity, Mother Tongue and Second Language)*. Vol. 5. Kathmandu: National Planning Commission Secretariat, Government of Nepal. https://api.giwms.gov.np/storage/36/posts/1692720068_78.pdf

Chudal, Alaka Atreya. 2021. "The Worship of the Goddess of Language: Ram Mani Acharya Dixit's Efforts in Standardization of the Nepali Language in Benares." *Cacow Indological Studies* XXIII (2): 159–194. doi:10.12797/CIS.23.2021.02.07.

Condra, Mark A. 2021. "Naawa (Sankhuwasabha, Nepal) - Language Snapshot." *Language Documentation and Description* 20: 54–63. doi:10.25894/ldd33.

Costa, James, Haley De Korne, and Pia Lane. 2018. "Standardizing Minority Languages: Reinventing Peripheral Languages in the 21st Century." In *Standardizing Minority Languages: Competing Ideologies of Authority and Authenticity in the Global Periphery*, edited by James Costa, Haley De Korne, and Pia Lane, 1–23. New York: Routledge. Perlego.

Coulmas, Florian, and Federica Guerini. 2012. "Literacy and Writing Reform." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*, edited by Bernard Spolsky, 437–460. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Perlego.

Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fenning, eds. 2023. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 26th ed. Dallas: SIL International. https://www.ethnologue.com/.

Escobar, Arturo. 2012. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gim, Suk Jin. 2020. "Nepali Teacher Identity and English-Medium Education: The Impact of the Shift to English as a Medium of Instruction at Nepali Public Schools on Teacher Identity." PhD diss., La Mirada: Biola University.

Glasgow, Gregory Paul, and Jeremie Bouchard. 2019. "Introduction." In *Agency in Language Policy and Planning: Critical Inquiries*, edited by Gregory Paul Glasgow and Jeremie Bouchard, 1–21. Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism. New York: Routledge. Perlego.

Goody, Jack, ed. 1968. *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gooskens, Charlotte. 2005. "Traveling Time as a Predictor of Linguistic Distance." *Dialectologia et Geolinguistica* 13: 38–62. doi:10.1515/dig.2005.2005.13.38.

Government of Nepal. 2015. "Constitution of Nepal 2015." https://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/archives/category/documents/prevailing-law/constitution/constitution-of-nepal.

Grenoble, Lenore A., and Lindsay J. Whaley. 2006. *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hasnain, S. Imtaiz. 2021. "Language Codification: Coloniality, Society and History." In *Language Standardization and Language Variation in Multilingual Contexts: Asian Perspectives*, edited by Nicola McLelland and Hui Zhao, 21–39. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Perlego.

Hildebrandt, Kristine A., and Shunfu Hu. 2017. "Areal Analysis of Language Attitude and Practices: A Case Study from Nepal." *Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication* (13): 152–179. doi:10125/24753.

Hough, David A., Ram Bahadur Thapa Magar, and Amrit Yonjan-Tamang. 2009. "Privileging Indigenous Knowledges: Empowering Multilingual Education in Nepal." In *Social Justice through Multilingual Education*, edited by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Robert Phillipson, Ajit K. Mohanty, and Minati Panda, 159–176. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Perlego.

Jackson, Jane. 2020. *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*. 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge. Kindle.

Jikar (Rouzhuo), Rigdrol. 2022. "Language Standardization for Tibetans in the People's Republic of China." In *Language Standardization and Language Variation in Multilingual Contexts: Asian Perspectives*, edited by Nicola McLelland and Hui Zhao, 203–222. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Perlego.

Joshi, Priya. 2002. *In Another Country*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kristiansen, Tore. 2016. "Contemporary Standard Language Change." *Taal En Tongval* 68 (2): 93–117. doi:10.5117/TET2016.2.KRIS.

Lüpke, Friederike. 2011. "Orthography Development." In *Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages*, edited by Peter K. Austin and J. Sallabank, 312–336. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Malone, Dennis L. 2003. "Developing Curriculum Materials for Endangered Language Education: Lessons from the Field." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 6 (5): 332–348. doi:10.1080/13670050308667790.

Matisoff, James A. 1991. "Sino-Tibetan Linguistics: Present State and Future Prospects." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20: 469–504. doi:10.1146/annurev.an.20.100191.002345.

(MFAGA) सङ्घीय मामिला तथा सामान्य प्रशासन मन्त्रालय [Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration]. 2017. "स्थानीय सरकार सञ्चालन ऐन, २०७४ [Local Government Operation Act, 2074]." Kathmandu. https://mofaga.gov.np/news-notice/1697?fbclid=IwAR27l3yeHnzLEWEjRnJn5sTAwYojwVP3IEuF1TfW6MF7wp77fkrBkTHk124

Milroy, James. 2001. "Language Ideologies and the Consequences of Standardization." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5 (4): 530–555. doi:10.1111/1467-9481.00163.

Milroy, James, and Lesley Milroy. 2012. *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*. Routledge Linguistics Classics. Abingdon: Routledge. Perlego.

Ong, Walter. 2012. *Orality and Literacy*. 30th Anniversary ed. London: Routledge. Kindle.

Parajuli, Lokranjan, and Pratyoush Onta. 2021. "The Politics of Educating the Public: A Brief Historical Sketch." In *School Education in Nepal: History and Politics of Governance and Reforms*, 1–33. Kathmandu: Martin Chautari.

Pennycook, Alastair, and Sinfree Makoni. 2007. "Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages." In *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages*, edited by Alastair Pennycook and Sinfree Makoni, 1–41. Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 62. Clevendon: Multilingual Matters.

Phyak, Prem Bahadur. 2011. "Beyond the Façade of Language Planning for Nepalese Primary Education: Monolingual Hangover, Elitism and Displacement of Local Languages?" *Current Issues in Language Planning* 12 (2): 265–287. doi:10.1080/14664208.2011.584203.

Phyak, Prem Bahadur. 2016. "'For Our Cho:Tlung': Decolonizing Language Ideologies and (Re)Imagining Multilingual Education Policies and Practices in Nepal." PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Piller, Ingrid. 2015. "Language Ideologies." In *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, edited by Karen Tracy, Cornelia Ilie, and Cornelia Sandel. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. 10.1002/9781118611463/wbielsi140.

Poudel, Prem Prasad. 2019. "The Medium of Instruction Policy in Nepal: Towards Critical Engagement on the Ideological and Pedagogical Debate." *Journal of Language and Education* 5 (3): 102–110. doi:10.17323/jle.2019.8995.

Pradhan, Uma. 2020. *Simultaneous Identities: Language, Education and the Nepali Nation*. South Asia in the Social Sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pradhan, Uma, and Karen Valentin. 2019. "Ethnographies of Education and Anthropological Knowledge Production." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.468

Preston, Dennis R. 2018. "Perceptual Dialectology." In *The Handbook of Dialectology*, edited by Charles Boberg, John Nerbonne, and Dominic Watt. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. Perlego.

Rappleye, Jeremey. 2019. "Origins of the Faith: The Untold History of Hugh Wood, American Development Assistance in the 1950s, and Nepal's Modern Education System." *Studies in Nepali History & Society* 24 (1): 105–141.

Regmi, Dan Raj. 2021. *A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Languages of Nepal: A Synopsis.* Vol. I: Tibeto-Burman languages. Languages of the World 61. Muenchen: LINCOM GmbH.

Sallabank, Julia. 2012. "Diversity and Language Policy for Endangered Languages." In The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy, edited by Bernard Spolsky, 100–123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanneh, Lamin. 2009. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture.* 2nded. Maryknoll: Orbis Books. Kindle.

Srinivasan, Ramesh. 2017. *Whose Global Village? Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World*. New York: NYU Press.

Taun, Yi-Fu. 1977. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tennent, Timothy C. 1998. "Building Christianity on Indian Foundations: The Theological Legacy of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861–1907)." PhD diss., University of Edinburgh.

Tennent, Timothy C. 2013. "William Carey as a Missiologist: An Assessment." In *Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things*, edited by Allen Yeh and Chris Chun. Eugene: Wipf & Stock.

Trudgill, Peter. 1972. "Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of Norwich." *Language in Society* 1 (2): 179–195. doi:10.1017/S0047404500000488.

Trudgill, Peter. 1999. "Dialect Contact, Dialectology, and Sociolinguistics." *Cuadernos de Filologia Inglesa* 8: 1–8.

Trudgill, Peter. 2010. "Social Structure, Language Contact and Language Change." In *Sociolinguistics Handbook*, edited by Ruth Wodak, Barbara Johnstone, and Paul Kerswill, 643–682. London: Sage.

Turin, Mark. 2007. *Linguistic Diversity and the Preservation of Endangered Languages: A Case Study from Nepal*. Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

Valentin, Karen. 2023. "Moving to Learn." In *Anthropological Perspectives on Education in Nepal*, edited by Uma Pradhan and Karen Valentin, 198–219. Education and Society in South Asia. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Watters, Stephen. 2019. "Linguistic Identity and Dialect Diversity: A Conundrum with Regard to Magar Kham." In *Language and Identity in a Multilingual, Migrating World*, edited by J. Stephen Quakenbush and Gary F. Simons, 271–299. SIL International.

Woolard, Kathryn A., and Bambi B. Schieffelin. 1994. "Language Ideology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 55–82. doi:10.1146/annurev.an.23.100194.000415.

Yeh, Allen L., and Chris Chun, eds. 2013. *Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things: William Carey and Adoniram Judson, Missionary Pioneers.* Eugene: Wipf & Stock.

Young, Richard Fox. 2010. "Holy Orders: Nehemiah Goreh's Ordination Ordeal and the Problem of 'Social Distance' in Nineteenth-Century North Indian Anglicanism." *Church History and Religious Culture* 90 (1): 69–88. doi:10.1163/187124110X506491.

Zhao, Hui, and Nicola McLelland. 2022. "Introduction." In *Language Standardization and Language Variation in Multilingual Contexts - Asian Perspectives*, edited by Hui Zhao and Nicola McLelland, 1–20. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Perlego.

Hildebrandt, Kristine A., Carmen Jany, and Wilson Silva. 2017. "Introduction: Documenting Variation in Endangered Languages." In *SP13: Documenting Variation in Endangered Languages*, 1–5. https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/items/410df64f-0591-400a-89d9-f68b518b03d3

Street, Brian V. 1995. *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education*.. Real Language. Longman Group Limited.

Part III
Language and Technology

10 Indian Languages and Language Acquisition Apps

My Phone Won't Teach Me Malayalam

Sameer Abraham Thomas

Introduction

Duolingo is a massively popular language learning app offering courses in 39 languages for English speakers. These include European languages like Spanish, German, French and Italian; Asian languages like Japanese and Korean; and even a number of constructed languages like Klingon from Star Trek and High Valyrian from George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Noticeably underrepresented are languages originating in the Indian subcontinent with the sole exception of Hindi. As a long-time user of Duolingo, I wondered why this lacuna exists. Plenty of research has been done on the efficacy of language learning apps (Blake et al. 2020; Tabibian et al. 2019; Huynh, Zuo, and Iida 2016; just to name a few) but no research seems to have been done regarding the language politics of such apps. In this chapter, I hope to draw some attention to such questions and offer some tentative answers. I also want to share my personal experience of using these language learning apps and the challenges and desires I have as an Anglophone Malayali seeking digital solutions to his alienation from his so-called mother tongue, Malayalam. In doing so, I hope to offer an autoethnographic account of the attempt to learn a mother tongue through technology while problematising the category of "mother tongue" in the first place[1].

Language, Technology and Revitalising Mother Tongue

I begin by offering a thick description of my dual experience as being both a representative of a particular millennial subjectivity in the Global South as well as a user of mobile language learning apps. I then perform a qualitative analysis of learning data and reports produced by Duolingo. By closely reading this material, I draw inferences that might explain the underrepresentation of languages originating in the Indian subcontinent which lead me to a hypothesis regarding the same. I end by briefly surveying the status quo of the language learning app landscape in terms of the availability of Indian languages and the user experience of the same wherever available, drawing upon my personal experience.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-14

At the outset, I would like to make certain disclaimers. First, by "Indian languages" I refer to languages originating in what is now the modern nation-state of India. This essentialisation and yoking of language to national character and origin is a sensitive and somewhat crude or artificial convention that is worth challenging. Nonetheless, it is still a globally recognised convention and one that I use for convenience while acknowledging the larger need to problematise it. Second, while I recognise the diversity of apps offering language support and the different ways and means by which they facilitate language learning, I am specifically interested in the kind of gamified language learning of which Duolingo is the most popular example. This is not to say that other kinds of language-learning apps will not come into the scope of our investigation, particularly when looking at the data regarding popular language-learning apps. However, my particular history and engagement with Duolingo leads me to desire and gravitate towards similar learning models. The reasons for this can perhaps be analysed in a separate study but, for now, I will use this admittedly subjective preference as a guiding impulse.

While I was unable to find any existing research looking at language learning apps through a postcolonial lens, my analysis was shaped by the work of Chaise LaDousa, Christina P. Davis and Nishaant Choksi. Their work examining the postcolonial semiotics of students at IIT Gandhinagar was particularly illuminating and gave me a way to interrogate the category of mother tongue through an act of intersubjective identification with one of their interviewees. Their study of language sociology using the methodology proposed by Judith Irvine was fortuitously well-suited to my own project in that they both drew attention to what is left out when talking about language. After all, it is the gaps and absences in language learning apps that interest me in particular.

Language Apps and Diversity in India

The focus of this chapter is on technological objects that cut across national boundaries. Language learning apps are in this sense transnational but the language politics that inform my analysis are very much grounded in the context of the modern Indian nation-state both as a result of my subject position as part of the Global South as well as of the specific languages that I am concerned with. To better understand the political and historical concerns in question, then, it would be helpful to know something about Indian language politics. The linguistic diversity of India is truly remarkable, with the 2011 Census reporting the existence of 19,569 "raw mother tongue returns, which were 'rationalised' into 1,369 mother tongues, and then regrouped into 270 mother tongues (each spoken by more than 10,000 people) and 121 languages" belonging to five different language families (Jolad and Agarwal 2021). Given this diversity, it should not come as a surprise that language was a point of some concern at the moment of the formation of the modern Indian state.

A review of the debates of the Constituent Assembly regarding language sheds much light on the significance of language both at the time of said

debates as well as in their aftermath across the history of Independent India extending to the present day. Rama Kant Agnihotri's 2015 essay titled "Constituent Assembly Debates on Language" is most enlightening in this regard. Agnihotri critiques the attention paid to language by the Constituent Assembly. While language was debated seriously, many questions were left unaddressed as a result of the consensual democratic process that undergirded these debates. Consequently, language issues that concerned majority linguistic communities received a disproportionate amount of attention.

The most significant of these concerns was the question of whether or not India should have a national language. The final decision as reflected in the Constitution was that India should have no national language but should have a list of recognised languages and two official languages, namely, Hindi and English. Simple as this may seem, even so fundamental a question as what "Hindi" is represents a contentious history stemming from religious and cultural divisions: between Hindus and Muslims in the former case, and between North Indian and South Indian cultures in the latter.

A significant element of this debate was the question of whether Hindi or Hindustani was to be the official language. The division of the lingua franca Hindustani into Hindu and Urdu happened on religious lines, with the more Sanskritic Hindi being associated with the Hindu majority of Independent India. Some of the framers of India's Constitution challenged the primacy given to Hindi on the grounds that it was not yet an "advanced" enough language (as per a rather limited conceptualisation of language as Agnihotri points out in his essay) but also that it did not represent the religiously diverse nation. The disproportionate value attached to it and to Sanskrit also irked South Indian representatives for whom Hindi was a relatively alien tongue and Sanskrit no more ancient, literary or "advanced" a language as Tamil. This suspicion of Hindi and the threat of Hindi Imperialism would have a significant afterlife, especially in the South where violent opposition and active protests resulted in English being retained as an official language along with Hindi rather than imposing Hindi alone as the official language on the Southern states.

One consequence of the attention paid to this issue, Agnihotri explains, was the relatively scant debate regarding linguistic minorities including the differently abled who used sign language. A number of languages were listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution but this did not result in such languages receiving any special benefits or provisions, unlike Hindi for whose promotion special directives were given. Instead, Agnihotri suggests citing the observation of G. Austin, they served a more psychological role, offering recognition to communities speaking languages other than Hindi and English. This recognition would be extended to other languages like Sindhi over time, but other than a general prohibition against discrimination on the basis of language, no special provisions were made to ensure the flourishing of non-Hindi languages.

The fear of the imposition of Hindi still has political currency today. Under the BJP government, both Rajnath Singh and Amit Shah have made

statements extolling the value of Hindi for which they have been challenged by South Indian politicians like MK Stalin. This sensitivity is clearly very present in the minds of even these proponents of Hindi; however, they are at the same time quick to assure the public that there is no competition between Hindi and other Indian languages—although Hindi is still given pride of place by virtue of being an official language and for its links with Sanskrit. It is entirely in opposition to English as a supposedly alien tongue that these ministers insist on the need for Hindi to be promoted along with other Indian languages ("Hindi unites" 2023; "Hindi not getting enough prominence" 2015). While there is pushback from the Opposition to this insistence upon Hindi ("Congress to oppose" 2022), the Opposition itself is divided on this issue with RJD leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar going so far as to call Hindi the national language ("Hindi is Our National Language" 2023).

Many of the shortcomings Agnihotri identifies in the Constituent Assembly Debates persist in the most recent National Education Policy, the NEP 2020. In "Language in education: There's power in multilingualism," Agnihotri (2022) criticises the NEP's celebration of Hindi and Sanskrit which is reliant on the reductive idea that some languages are superior to others. Hierarchies are also created between the Indo-Aryan Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages like Tamil despite their history of mutual borrowings. Finally, Agnihotri identifies a similar disservice being done to mother tongues that are reduced to the status of dialects or "*bolti*" rather than being recognised as languages and are then subsumed within Hindi.

The special value given to Hindi nationally has an impact on the international perception of India. The association of Hindi with a certain national character can be seen internationally, for example, when it comes to the overwhelming visibility of Bollywood as a cultural ambassador of sorts over other Indian film industries (although the Tamil superstar Rajnikanth has also had international appeal and South Indian cinema as a whole is becoming more popular if the global appreciation of the 2022 Telugu-language film *RRR* is anything to go by). This manifestation of Indian language hierarchies in the global mainstream may have some influence on the dearth of non-Hindi language options when it comes to language acquisition apps, as we shall see.

Me, Malayalam and the Owl

In the introduction to this chapter, I referred to Malayalam as my "so-called" mother tongue because I never learnt how to speak or read it. I was born and raised in New Delhi, far from Kerala which is the South Indian state that my father and maternal grandparents come from. My knowledge of the language extends to a few very basic questions my Malayalam-speaking relatives would ask me whenever they would meet me during summer vacations in Kerala: "What is your name?" "Have you eaten?" "Which class are you in?," which later became "Are you in college?" "What are you studying?" and then "Do you have a job?" and "Are you married?" Also, "You don't know Malayalam?"

Even in this context, I can only recognise these questions based on vaguely identifying the sounds; I cannot conjugate the verbs involved and if asked to repeat what I was asked, I would either fail or mangle the pronunciation. This inability to converse in the language my extended family is most comfortable with often leaves me feeling alienated when around them. At best, I am bored when meeting family with whom I cannot converse. At worst, I feel like a black sheep, disconnected from my roots, unable to engage with people I love for the affection and hospitality they have shown but whom I can never really know in the way that conversation in a shared language might allow.

Over the past few years, this has made me want to learn Malayalam. Past attempts to learn the language as a child proved ineffective. My parents claimed that I was resistant to the language by which they meant that I didn't pick it up organically. I attribute this to the fact that my parents conversed in English for the most part, and Hindi when communicating with people in Delhi like the maid, the plumber, and our neighbours and friends. They only spoke Malayalam when speaking over the phone to relatives or to each other when they didn't want me and my brother to understand what they were saying. As far as I know, no concerted effort was made to teach me Malayalam, other than an aborted attempt by my grandfather who lived in Kerala and would only stay with us during the winter.

I remember once expressing an interest in learning Malayalam and convincing my parents to buy me an alphabet book intended for small children in which the different characters of the Malayalam alphasyllabary or abugida were set next to images of animals, people and objects that began with the same letter. I hadn't considered the fact that, to read it, I would need to already know how to read the script or the words for the various referents in Malayalam. It was not an ideal learning resource for someone who doesn't know the language, who tended not to care about his cultural heritage, and whose working parents didn't have the free time to read out an alphabet book to their otherwise literate son. The only other experience I had was my grandfather endeavouring to teach me a couple of words. This happened for about a week when I was in school, irregularly, one or two words at a time. My parents made him stop because they thought he was trying to teach me how to swear in Malayalam. They told me one of the words he taught me meant "elephant dung." Personally, I think he was trying to teach me the word for "elephant" but my terrible pronunciation gave my parents the wrong impression. Either way, that was the end of my grandfather's lesson.

I share all this in order to paint a picture of one kind of subject that might turn to language learning apps and the social and historical circumstances within which such a desire is created. My search stemmed from the confluence of a number of factors that I can only gesture at here. In short, they would include the religious, caste and class identities of my parents; the nuclear family structure within which I was raised; the diverse cultural composition of the subcontinent along state lines; the cultural capital that comes with English proficiency in India; and the pragmatic and financial dimension of two

academic historians raising children in New Delhi. In the process of writing this chapter, I realised that my difficult relationship with my supposed mother tongue was the counterpart of my relationship with my true first language, that is, English. This tension between Indian languages and English when it comes to the question of "mother tongues" is one other people share and is wrapped up in the peculiarly postcolonial linguistic reality in the subcontinent.

According to the 2011 Indian census:

> Mother tongue is the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. If the mother died in [the child's] infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person's home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded.
>
> (Government of India 2011)

Why does the mother take primacy over any other caregiver? Why is it a given that the language "mainly spoken" in the person's home in childhood is the one the child feels most comfortable speaking in? What happens when the parents speak different languages? The more questions one asks, the more arbitrary the very idea of a "mother tongue" becomes. What distinguishes the term "mother tongue" from "first language" or "home language" is the way in which it links language to ancestry rather than fluency, preference or familiarity. It is predicated on a normatively heterosexual, monogamous and linguistically homogenous family environment in which raising children is primarily the mother's responsibility. And, ultimately, it is inadequate when used in official policy to describe and regulate individuals whose lived experience differs from this norm.

In "Postcolonial Language Ideologies: Indian Students Reflect on Mother Tongue and English" (2022), LaDousa et al. (2022) examine the way in which students at IIT Gandhinagar (IITGN) conceptualise and articulate the idea of a mother tongue. In doing so, they reveal that the semiotics of the terms by individual subjects are more complex than expected by the state particularly when it comes to the reproduction of colonial distinctions between English and mother tongue. Of particular significance here is an interviewee referred to as "Vikram," the only subject in their study who identified English as being his first language while simultaneously being unable to refer to it as his "mother tongue." Vikram was "raised in Delhi by a father from Kerala and a mother from Delhi whose father had come from Tamil Nadu" and grew up in a household in which multiple languages were spoken (11). In interviews, he talked about how speaking English brings with it associations of being "educated, upper class and intelligent" (12). At the same time, Vikram was perceived as being inauthentic and pretentious by peers for speaking English and was saddled with the expectation of learning Tamil by his older Tamil relatives.

When reading about Vikram, I found myself relating to him on a deep level. I too was brought up in Delhi with South Indian parents with different

backgrounds and was most comfortable with English. I have frequently had my relatives in Kerala express surprise at the fact that I don't speak Malayalam. Some have even urged me to learn it as if it were a duty. After all, it was my "mother tongue" regardless of the fact that my mother spoke to me in English, that the language most frequently spoken in my home was English. To speak Malayalam is to be connected to the culture of the state of Kerala. State identity is a strange thing in that way. On the one hand, it followed me around, marking me as different in Delhi, the city in which I was born and raised. On the other hand, it wasn't enough to have parents who spoke Malayalam, or to eat *avial* and *payasam*, or to be able to distinguish between Mohanlal and Mammootty, the two giants of the Malayalam film industry. Ultimately, I never quite felt Malayali without being able to speak Malayalam.

As with the students at IITGN, "the connection between mother tongue and regional identity here is an example of social indexicality, the process by which languages or features of speech point to an aspect of a person's social identity, as mediated by ideology" (LaDousa et al. 9). I remember vividly being in a congregation with many Malayalis and being unable to raise my hand and be identified as either a Malayali (since I didn't speak Malayalam) or a non-Malayali (since my family was Malayali). My disconnection from my regional identity came with a weakening of my identification as an Indian both in my own eyes and in those of other boys at my school who would refer to me mockingly as "*angrez*" English, classifying me with the coloniser and not the colonised. Less antagonistically, I remember attending an online seminar and hearing a speaker mention off-handedly that no Indians claim English as their mother tongue, effectively erasing my existence in their discourse. As LaDousa et al. note, "simultaneous identification with the nation (via mother tongue) and English is ultimately impossible" (3).

All of this might give the impression that I had no interest in learning any language other than English. This is not the case. I've been using Duolingo to learn Spanish and Swedish for multiple years and, more recently, Japanese. While Duolingo is by no means a definitive language learning aid, other digital language tools like Google Translate and Reverso have made it such that many of Duolingo's blind spots can fairly easily be filled in. Duolingo also has forums to discuss questions and occasionally organises meet-ups where app users can come together to converse in the language they're learning. My earliest memories of using Duolingo are hazy. It is possible that I merely encountered the app while browsing the Google Play Store. The bright green owl mascot Duo immediately catches the eye and presents the app as being friendly and inviting. Today, Duo has some currency as a meme stemming from the app's somewhat aggressive push notifications and email reminders urging users to practise daily in order to extend their learning streak of which it keeps a record. The brand has leaned into this image in a number of ways such as in its official X (formerly Twitter) handle whose posts are written in Duo's voice and are often tongue-in-cheek, acerbic excoriations of negligent users, responses to other posts that draw tenuous links back to the question of regular language

practice, or image macro memes that prominently feature the cheeky green owl. However, in 2015, which is when I first started using Duolingo, this marketing strategy and the meme that informed it were not yet formed. According to KnowYourMeme.com, it was only in 2017 that the image of Duo as a humorously threatening mascot began to be seen on the internet.

After creating an account or linking Duolingo with your existing Google or Facebook account, you are given a choice between languages. Each language comes with a little flag to denote the nation of origin. Constructed languages like High Valyrian and Klingon have icons drawn from the fictional universes in which they are used—a dragon in the former case, the Starfleet logo in the latter. The appearance of the app has changed over the nine years I have been using the app. Earlier, lessons were grouped by topic and arranged in a descending tree with each layer representing a more difficult challenge and multiple bubbles on each layer providing the user with some choice when it comes to the kind of topic or grammatical category they wish to learn or practice. In 2022, this skill tree was replaced with a unicursal path such that only one topic could be attempted at a time. While for the majority of my time using the app, one could make as many mistakes as one wanted in a day, over the past year the system has changed such that you have a limited number of "hearts" which you lose upon making mistakes. After losing all your hearts, you either need to wait for them to regenerate before doing new lessons or do a short practice session to earn one heart at a time.

A number of limitations can be removed by paying for Super Duolingo, the premium version of the app. Along with the removal of the heart system, Super Duolingo unlocks a suite of new exercises aimed at correcting past mistakes and practising speaking and listening. It also allows you to attempt extra difficult lessons once a particular level has been completed. Doing so allows you to unlock a "legendary" flair for the lesson. This means the bubble in question will be coloured gold. This feature used to be available for free earlier, but now one needs to use gems (formerly called lingots), the in-game currency, to purchase attempts. There is an even higher subscription tier called Duolingo Max that includes the use of OpenAI's GPT-4. There seems to have been a clear push towards monetisation such that the app that once aimed to provide free language education now locks features behind a subscription paywall or in-game currency requirements. Currency can be earned by completing goals and challenges but can also be bought with real world currency. The free version of the app also started including short video advertisements after nearly every lesson. In other words, over the years, Duolingo has transitioned from a free to a freemium model of education which is likely linked to the company going public in 2021.

Duolingo's appeal lies in its convenience, affordability, attractive and intuitive user interface, gamified features and variety of exercises. It significantly reduces the barrier of entry into language acquisition. With Duolingo, I didn't need to find an institute or instructor; I just had to download the app onto my phone which is almost always on my person. As mobile internet services

became faster and more reliable, using the app became even less limited by my geographical location. I didn't have to pay any money if I couldn't afford to. The app would send me daily reminders and its use of design elements drawn from video games appealed to me as someone who has played games for years. These include the framing of lessons as challenges, the earning of experience points or XP when completing lessons, the inclusion of leaderboards where you could compare the amount of XP you've earned to that of other learners, the streak system where using the app for even a minute a day would make the number go higher, and the daily challenges that serve as incentives to play just a little longer to earn gems that you could exchange for Streak Freezes that would retain your streak even if you missed a day of practice.

The lessons themselves prioritise trial-and-error over engaging with abstract grammatical rules. Lessons start easy and correct answers are rewarded with chiming sound effects and messages praising your abilities. Mistakes come with reassuring messages, a reduction in the difficulty of the exercise in question, and retries. Languages like Spanish offer a range of exercises that ask you to select the correct option, match pairs, type in answers, transcribe and/or translate short audio recordings, and speak into the microphone for your pronunciation to be evaluated. You can even learn through simple stories in Spanish which incorporate exercises within them. Learning Japanese lacks the oral component but makes up for it with the ability to practise writing characters in the three Japanese scripts, a notoriously challenging task for learners especially given the importance of stroke order. Along the way, one encounters colourful and memorable cartoon characters who offer encouragement, or feature in the stories.

While I would not say I have acquired complete fluency in any of the languages I have learnt, I certainly have enough familiarity with each of them to be able to identify them, translate simple passages, and carry out simple, halting conversations, which is more than I can say for my knowledge of Malayalam. My success and fondness for Duolingo led me to turn to gamified app-based learning to reconnect with my heritage only to find a dead end, at least as far as Duolingo is concerned.

Hypothesis

I considered some possible explanations for why Duolingo does not offer courses in Indian languages. The first is one of intention: perhaps linguistic diversity simply isn't one of Duolingo's concerns when designing content. The second has to do with spread: perhaps Indian languages are not spoken as widely as others. The third has to do with ease: perhaps Indian languages are too difficult to teach. The fourth has to do with expertise and employment: perhaps there aren't as many human resources for the Indian language. The fifth has to do with timelines: perhaps Indian language courses are currently being developed but are not ready yet. The sixth has to do with interest: perhaps there is less demand for Indian languages. In the following sections, I will briefly outline my findings for each of these possible explanations.

Perhaps Linguistic diversity is not one of Duolingo's concerns when designing content

One explanation might be that Duolingo has no interest in representing a diversity of languages and is content with offering courses in languages in Anglo-European languages like English, French, Spanish, etc. However, this doesn't hold water as Duolingo offers courses on East Asian languages like Chinese and Vietnamese, one indigenous language (Navajo) and, as per their website, is in the process of developing a course on Xhosa. The official Duolingo blog even has posts celebrating the diversity of Asian languages (Blanco 2021) and boasting of the internal diversity of the organisation:

> To develop a product that meets the diverse needs of our learners, the teams within Duolingo must reflect the diversity of those learners.
>
> Of the 175 or so people who work at Duolingo, our employees represent 25 different countries and speak over 15 languages fluently. But we know we need to continue to press forward to increase the types of diversity represented at the company.
>
> (Mitlo 2019)

To what extent this internal diversity includes individuals from the subcontinent is something that I will touch on later.

Perhaps Indian languages are not spoken as widely as others

Another possibility is that Duolingo decides what language courses to include based on how useful their users might find them. In other words, the more widely spoken a language is, the more likely it is that a user might benefit from learning the language. Once again, it is unlikely that this is a major reason why Indian languages are underrepresented. To cite just one example, Tamil is spoken by 86,430,500 people worldwide as of 2011 (Eberhard et al. 2022). Welsh has 573,050. Duolingo offers a Welsh course, but not a Tamil course. While there aren't as many Malayalam speakers as there are Tamil speakers, their number is not insignificant. As per the 2011 Census, Malayalam is spoken by 34,838,819 Indians. While it is unclear what percentage of the Malayali diaspora speaks Malayalam, the number of non-resident Keralites is as high as 1.6 million in 2013 ("Survey finds" 2013).

Perhaps Indian languages are too difficult to teach

It's possible that some languages aren't suited to being taught via language learning apps. Language difficulty is highly variable depending on which languages are being compared and hence this can be difficult to evaluate. However, we do know that the US State Department classifies languages according to how long it would take for a learner to reach general professional proficiency ("Foreign Language Training," n.d.). Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Tamil, Telugu

and Urdu are all Category III languages considered "hard languages" and require approximately 44 weeks on average. Five languages are considered "super-hard" Category IV languages that require twice as much time: Arabic, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean and Mandarin. While Duolingo does not have separate Cantone and Mandarin courses, it does have a Chinese course as well as courses for every other Category IV language. The fact that it has a Japanese course which, with its three scripts and variable context-specific kanji readings and tonal pronunciations, is by no means an easy language to learn, suggests that we cannot identify difficulty with non-Latin scripts as being an issue either.

Duolingo has also shared the challenges they faced in designing and promoting their English course for Hindi speakers (Rungta 2020) but were not only able to publish that course, they also published a Hindi course for English learners, overcoming the linguistic pedagogical challenges that involved (Chawla 2018). Oddly enough, they also have an English course for Bengali speakers, but not a Bengali course for English speakers. Whatever the reason for that may be, it can be safely assumed that it isn't because of any fundamental pedagogical incompatibility between the two languages.

Perhaps there aren't as many human resources for Indian languages

While at one time Duolingo crowdsourced the development of their courses via their Incubator programme, this was discontinued once they started making money and wished to standardise their approach to designing courses (Awodey and Tsai 2021). The Incubator was instrumental in creating the Hawaiian and Irish courses among others, so it's possible that once it was ended, the process of publishing courses was slowed down by the lack of people capable of designing Indian language courses. While Duolingo has expressed its commitment to diversity, as mentioned earlier, it is always possible that the specific composition of their team lacks subcontinental representation. As of 2019, Duolingo not only doubled the size of its team but also hired 70% people of colour (Mitlo 2019). One might assume that this would include people of Indian descent, but I haven't found any specifics here.

Perhaps Indian language courses are being developed but are not ready yet

In 2018, when Duolingo released its Hindi for English speakers course, it was reported that English courses for Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu learners were in the works (Chawla 2018). However, as of 2023, only the courses for Hindi and Bengali speakers have materialised. This might be because of delays created by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the closure of the Incubator programme which was linked to the development of these courses. However, there is no readily available information regarding the status of these courses or Indian language courses for English speakers. The Incubator page used to show the progress level of the various courses being developed but now, in its absence, we only know from the Duolingo website that their Xhosa course is 6% complete. No other language courses are listed as being in development.

Perhaps there is less demand for Indian languages

It is possible that there is not as much demand to learn Indian languages. From an economic perspective, this would seem unlikely. Let us only consider the question of migrant labour. Even if we were to only consider migration occurring within the country, it is clear that enough Indians are travelling for work to states with languages unfamiliar to them for there to be a significant demand for assistance in learning these languages. Simply taking Malayalam as an example, migrant labour is crucial enough to Kerala's economy that accessible Malayalam learning resources could realistically be assumed to meet a consumer need. Lakhs of migrant labourers, many of them from distant and linguistically alien states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Assam and West Bengal work in Kerala, offsetting the significant outmigration of native Malayalis from the state (Vijapurkar 2017). Duolingo is cognisant of the mobile data revolution in India as a result of which 500 million Indians came online for the first time between 2017 and 2022 (Rungta 2020). Hindi is the tenth most popular course on Duolingo as of 2022, yet India is the only country in which it is the second most popular course (Blanco 2022). All of this together suggests that there is potentially huge demand in the subcontinent alone. It is unclear if Duolingo is factoring this in at all. In a blog post regarding Duolingo's activities for Indian users, only their English for Hindi speakers course was touched upon (Rungta 2020). This is, no doubt, a consequence of India's colonial hangover and the troubling equation of English proficiency with intelligence and employability that exists in the country.

While the demand for Indian language courses may be high in terms of raw numbers, the most convincing explanation for their absence has to do more with the popularity and visibility of particular languages on a global stage as a result of political and cultural events and trends. The massive popularity of the HBO series *Game of Thrones* is no doubt the reason why Duolingo has a High Valyrian course. The Ukraine war led to a spike in the popularity of the Ukrainian course in 2022, especially in countries taking in Ukrainian refugees (Blanco 2022). The popularity of Duolingo's Korean course is strongly linked to the rising popularity of Korean culture internationally, thanks to K-Pop and the series *Squid Game*, among other factors (Blanco 2021, 2022; Zabell 2021; Ramirez 2017). The increasing popularity of Korean culture has also resulted in more people travelling to South Korea for tourism, which Duolingo predicts will increase in 2023 (Blanco 2022).

Other language apps

In my search for apps that could teach me Malayalam, I was able to get a sense of the underrepresentation of Indian languages on the language app market. In this, Duolingo is typical of the larger ecosystem of language learning apps where I find a similar underrepresentation. For this research, I sought out more specific data. Based on data collected by AppMagic regarding the

number of downloads worldwide across Google Play and the Apple App Store, Statista developed a list of the top 10 language learning apps in 2024 ordered by the number of monthly downloads.

By downloading these apps, referring to their Google Play Store descriptions, or looking up their official websites, I was able to tabulate the presence or absence of Indian language offerings on these apps (Figure 10.1).

App Name	*Indian Languages Offered*
Duolingo - Language Lessons	Hindi
Lingokids - Play and Learn	None
Buddy.ai: Fun Learning Games	None
Learn 33 Languages - Mondly	Bengali, Hindi, Urdu
Babbel - Language Learning	None
ELSA Speak: English Learning (formerly ELSA: AI Learn & Speak English)	None
HelloTalk - Language Learning	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Meitei, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu
Learn & Speak English Praktika	None
Falou - Fast language learning	None
Busuu: Learn Languages	None

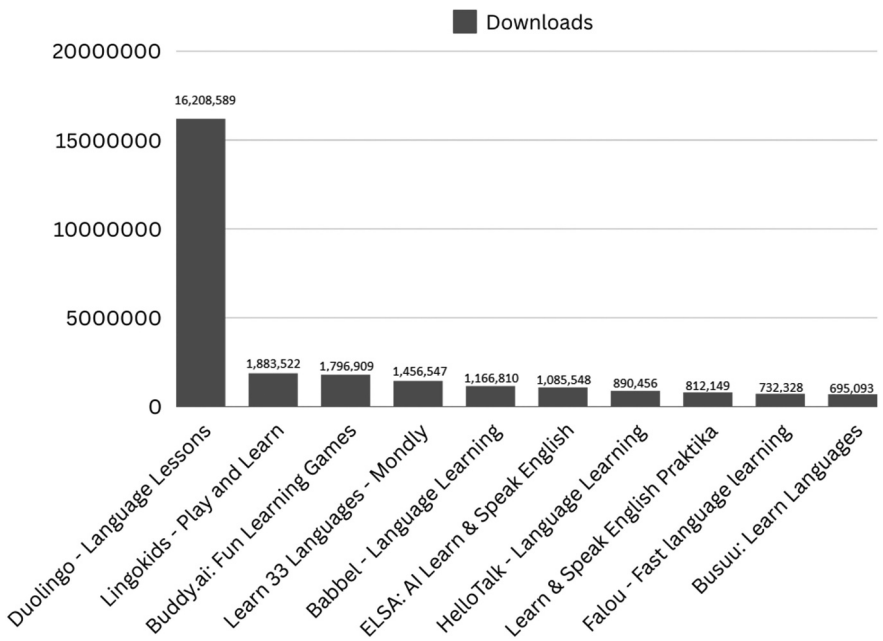


Figure 10.1 Leading Language Apps Worldwide by Downloads in January 2024.
Source: Statista.

Some Observations

Even a cursory look at the data reveals some rather telling trends. Only three of the top ten apps offer Indian languages (Duolingo, Mondly and HelloTalk). Hindi is offered by all three apps offering Indian languages and is the sole Indian language offered by Duolingo. Four of the apps are exclusively for learning English (Lingokids, Buddy.ai, ELSA Speak and Praktika), indicating that the language app market reflects global language imperialism and not just Indian language hierarchies.

HelloTalk immediately stands out as supposedly offering a wide range of Indian languages. In fact, it appears to offer learning options for every language listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Upon closer examination, however, HelloTalk is designed to connect app users such that learners can learn from native speakers who do not seem to have any qualifications other than being self-declared native speakers. It does have a gamified learning module akin to Duolingo referred to as HelloWords. However, this tool only offers 29 languages including only one Indian language: Hindi. Thus, rather than offering a gamified learning tool, the app is more oriented towards creating and sustaining a language learning community with some additional support such as translation and grammatical correction functions. And where it does resemble Duolingo, it replicates its lack of Indian language options.

O Malayalam, Where Art Thou?

The most popular language learning apps having proved to be dead ends in my search for apps to teach me Malayalam, I began searching the Google Play Store for less popular options. Flashcards for learning languages like Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam are available on apps like Duocards (not related to Duolingo) and Tinycards (developed by Duolingo but discontinued in 2020 to redirect funds to the Duolingo app) but are nowhere near as popular or quality-controlled as apps like Duolingo. Finally, I was able to find and download three apps that showed promise.

The first of these apps, Ling, was everything I was looking for. Like Duolingo, it offered reading, listening and speaking exercises. While the variety of these exercises was more limited, they were satisfactory. Ling has a gamified structure with lessons and levels of progressive difficulty. It has a daily counter that lets you build up a streak and gives you reminders regarding the same. It has an in-app currency, leaderboards, a chatbot, practice exercises and even a friendly animal mascot like Duolingo does: a mouthless and possibly nameless monkey wearing a cap. Not quite as charismatic as Duo, but it's something! There is, however, a catch. While the first few levels are free, I soon hit a paywall. Unlike Duolingo, the number of lessons available in the free version is extremely limited. In order to access the full offerings of the app, I would have to pay steep subscription fees. At the time of writing this, they are

as follows: ₹7,800 for 12 months, ₹3,800 for 6 months, ₹1,450 for 1 month and a lifetime subscription for a one-time payment of ₹5,679. For comparison, an annual subscription to Super Duolingo costs ₹950.

The other two apps—Speak Malayalam 360, and Learn Malayalam via English—were free but proved to be little more than digital phrasebooks with lists of common words and sentences and audio recordings of the same. The former has a slight edge as it includes a Skill Test option consisting of 25 questions. Taking the test gives you a score which tells you how many questions you got wrong but offers no explanations or even the correct answers. There is also a Jumble game that plays a short recording in Malayalam and then asks you to transcribe the recording by appropriately rearranging a short set of words in the Malayalam script. Once again, the appeal and utility of this game is miniscule. Finally, Speak Malayalam 360 allows you to draw characters in a white space which it will then interpret as being a character in the Malayalam abugida. Upon tapping the character, you get a picture of an object starting with that letter and the word in Malayalam. Once again, I found myself confronted with the near-useless picture books of my childhood except now in app form. To its credit, this one at least had audio recordings of the word for me to listen to and sound out.

Conclusions and Further Research

While there might be a number of explanations for the absence of Indian languages on Duolingo, the most plausible one has to do with international demand as shaped by cultural popularity. Perhaps the international success of the Telugu film *RRR* will inspire Duolingo to prioritise creating and publishing a Telugu course. Of course, given that Duolingo is an American company, it is possible that their decisions will be guided primarily by the perception of India and its languages as it exists in the US. If so, it might be a while before non-Hindi languages get the recognition they need. A 2020 YouTube video in which 50 Americans are asked to name any Indian language has 27 people being able to name Hindi ("We Asked 50 Americans" 2020). For comparison, four said Punjabi, two said Gujarati, three said Farsi, one said Nepali, one said Arabic and seven said Hindu. One said English, so that's good news for me. Thus, despite the fact that the dominance of Hindi is a specifically Indian problem, it seems to have projected itself onto the rest of the world as well possibly as a result of disproportionate attempts by Indian political and cultural institutions to promote and popularise the official language. While this remains to be seen, it's worth noting that Duolingo is not alone in its lack of attention to Indian languages and that a similar trend can be observed in the other major language-learning apps.

Writing this chapter helped me identify a number of related avenues that might warrant further research. Recently, Duolingo has been terminating around 10 percent of its contract writers and translators as what is speculated to be part of a push to transition to a learning model in which AI plays a much

bigger role (De Vynck 2024). If the limitations to including Indian languages are primarily the result of insufficient human resources, AI might accelerate this process though as with any attempt to replace humans with AI, quality control and bias will be a major cause for concern. Although I have focused on Malayalam to some extent, there is scope for similar and more comprehensive analysis and critique while centring other Indian languages, especially those that even the Constitution does not accord the recognition that they perhaps deserve. To better understand the question of international demand, there is a need for a larger examination of the recognition of non-Hindi Indian languages in other spheres and forums in which international communication is essential such as in the case of interpreters available for international bodies and training resources for the same. Within the digital realm, the language politics of subtitling and dubbing options for streaming platforms could also be worth looking into. A much larger and perhaps more urgent project would have to do with the international recognition of sign languages from the Global South. To be clear, while all of these projects have their own value in the fields of translation studies, media studies and cultural studies, my interest in them here is in terms of the insight they might bring into the effect of international public recognition and visibility of Indian languages on the availability of digital pedagogical tools.

As for action responses, I hope people who read this are similarly inspired to hunt for, demand or develop more free or freemium gamified language learning apps for Malayalam so that, if for no other reason, Malayali black sheep like me are able to find the resources we need. Our phones won't teach us Malayalam but they will teach us Hindi. If we want technology to service our needs, ensuring greater equity between Hindi and the hundreds of Indian mother tongues that it currently overshadows is a crucial and long-overdue step in the right direction.

Note

1 I am very grateful to the editors and their suggestions for directing me to pay closer attention to the question of mother tongues.

References

Agnihotri, Rama Kant. 2015. "Constituent Assembly Debates on Language." *Economic and Political Weekly* 50(8): 47–56. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24481425

Agnihotri, Rama Kant. 2022. "Language in education: There's power in multilingualism." *Frontline*, 16 May.

Awodey, Myra, and Karin Tsai. 2021. "Ending & honoring our volunteer Contributor program." *Duolingo Blog*, 10 March. https://blog.duolingo.com/ending-honoring-our-volunteer-contributor-program-2/

Blake, Robert J., et al. 2020. "Which Digital Tools Work for L2 Learning?" Chap. 4 in *Brave New Digital Classroom: Technology and Foreign Language Learning*. 3rd ed. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nc6rkf.9

Blanco, Cindy. 2021. "Special report: Asian and Pacific language trends on Duolingo." *Duolingo Blog*, 13 May. https://blog.duolingo.com/special-report-asian-and-pacific-language-trends-on-duolingo/

Blanco, Cindy. 2022. "2022 Duolingo Language Report." *Duolingo Blog*, 6 December. https://blog.duolingo.com/2022-duolingo-language-report/

Chawla, Ankit. 2018. "Duolingo Launches Hindi Learning Course, Other Indian Languages Coming Soon." *Gadgets 360*, 19 July. https://www.gadgets360.com/apps/features/duolingo-hindi-course-india-languages-kanan-gupta-1885292

"Congress to oppose Hindi 'imposition' on non-Hindi speaking states." 2022. *Telangana Today*. 16 April. https://telanganatoday.com/congress-to-oppose-hindi-imposition-on-non-hindi-speaking-states

De Vynck, Gerrit. 2024. "Duolingo cuts workers as it relies more on AI." *The Washington Post*, 10 January. https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/01/10/duolingo-ai-layoffs/

Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. 2022. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 25thed. Dallas, Texas: SIL International.

"Foreign Language Training." n.d. *U.S. Department of State Website*. https://www.state.gov/foreign-language-training/

Government of India. 2011. Census of India 2011.

"'Hindi is Our National Language…': Nitish Kumar Loses Cool in INDIA Bloc Meet Over Translation Request." 2023. *News18.com*. 20 December. https://www.news18.com/politics/nitish-kumar-loses-cool-india-bloc-meet-translation-request-hindi-is-our-national-language-dmk-8711135.html

"Hindi not getting enough prominence, says Rajnath." 2015. *The Times of India*. 15 September. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/hindi-not-getting-enough-prominence-says-rajnath/articleshow/48964330.cms

"Hindi unites the country's diverse languages, says Shah." 2023. *Hindustan Times*. 15 September.

Huynh, D., L. Zuo, and H. Iida. 2016. "Analyzing Gamification of 'Duolingo' with Focus on Its Course Structure". In *Games and Learning Alliance: 5th International Conference, GALA 2016, Utrecht, The Netherlands, December 5–7, 2016, Proceedings*, edited by R. Bottino, J. Jeuring, R. Veltkamp, 268–277. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50182-6_24

Jolad, Shivakumar, and Aayush Agarwal. 2021. "India's Linguistic Diversity: How the Census obscures it." *The India Forum*, 5 August. https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/what-census-obscures#:~:text=The%20Census'%20process%20of%20enumeration,(Census%20of%20India%202018)

LaDousa, Chaise, Christina Davis, and Nishaant Choksi. 2022. "Postcolonial Language Ideologies: Indian Students Reflect on Mother Tongue and English." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 32(2): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12378

Mitlo, Brittany. 2019. "Diversity at Duolingo: Why it's important to us and the progress we've made." *Duolingo Blog*, 31 July. https://blog.duolingo.com/diversity-at-duolingo-why-its-important-to-us-and-the-progress-weve-made/

Ramirez, Elaine. 2017. "Duolingo Is Launching A Korean Course To Cash In On Asia's Booming Language Market." *Forbes*, 7 September. https://www.forbes.com/sites/elaineramirez/2017/09/07/duolingo-korean-language-course-launch/?sh=37d4b9316c70

Rungta, Abhishek. 2020. "Language learning for the next billion: Duolingo in India." *Duolingo Blog*, 24 September. https://blog.duolingo.com/language-learning-for-the-next-billion-duolingo-in-india/

"Survey finds only 16.25 lakh NoRKs." 2013. *The Hindu*. 31 October. https://web.archive.org/web/20240528180934/https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/survey-finds-only-1625-lakh-norks/article5299108.ece

Tabibian, Behzad, et al. 2019. "Enhancing Human Learning via Spaced Repetition Optimization." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116(10): 3988–3993. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26683053

Vijapurkar, Mahesh. 2017. "Kerala's emigration, locals' disinclination to work is a boon for interstate migrant labourers." *Firstpost*, 14 June. https://www.firstpost.com/india/keralas-emigration-locals-disinclination-to-work-is-a-boon-for-interstate-migrant-labourers-3612913.html

"We Asked 50 Americans if They Could name ONE Indian Language….." 2020. "Our Stupid Reactions." *YouTube*. 4 October.

Zabell, Sam. 2021. "'Squid Game' could inspire a new wave of Korean language learners." *Duolingo Blog*, 4 October. https://blog.duolingo.com/squid-game-could-inspire-a-new-wave-of-korean-language-learners/

11 Remembering Nepal Bhasa through Artificial Intelligence (AI) Translations

Language, Technology and Indigenous Memory

Uma Pradhan

Introduction

"This is the time to dream, imagine, build… so that we can achieve what we cannot even conceive today!" said the President of the World Newa Organisation (WNO) as he invited the Newar diasporic community to contribute to the Nepal Bhasa Google Translate project. This initiative aims to create a database to add Nepal Bhasa to the Google Translate platform. Nepal Bhasa, one of the 123 languages spoken in Nepal, has been classified by UNESCO as a "definitely endangered language" due to declining fluency among the younger generation. His call to action was therefore grounded in the possibility of envisioning a future different from the current reality, where Indigenous and minoritised languages[1] are "dying" at an alarming rate. More importantly, it is also built upon and extended the long-standing language activism of the Newar community.

Focusing on the Newar community, both within and outside Nepal, and their successful collaborative project to add Nepal Bhasa to the Google Translate platform, this chapter highlights two dimensions of language preservation through technology. Firstly, in the absence of sufficient written records and a substantial language corpus, the community is bringing together the broader diasporic community and companies such as Google to create language corpora. Secondly, they are using technology to "remember" and preserve the "memory" of these languages, ensuring their transmission to younger generations. In doing so, the community is employing language-based artificial intelligence (AI) to envision new futures for minoritised languages and attempting to preserve their language in the face of its predicted "language death."

The chapter explores how human–technology interactions have created opportunities to (re)think Indigenous language futures. Moving beyond the perspective that views AI-linked futures as merely new tools to perform old tasks (Broussard 2018, Yudkowsky 2008), this project seeks to investigate how new educational tools can foster innovative actions and meanings (Facer and Selwyn 2021). Self-learning predictive models, automated data processing,

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-15

and the world-making logic embedded in AI are expected to create conditions for actively "making" Indigenous futures by subverting past power relations and imagining more inclusive possibilities (Ranathunga et al. 2023, Nemorin et al. 2022). While these imagined futures have the potential to challenge linguistic hierarchies, bridge learning gaps, promote diversity, and decolonise AI through engagement with Indigenous knowledge, this exciting field remains largely unexplored. In recent years, there has been increased focus on developing interventions that harness the transformative potential of technologies. However, perceiving AI solely as an algorithm undermines its social and political potential and overlooks the opportunity to translate diverse ways of understanding and experiencing the world. By comprehending these new interactions between humans and technology, we can reimagine learning and the dynamics among students, teachers and knowledge and envision a new collective future in our ever-evolving world.

This chapter argues that developing technology for minoritised languages is not merely a technical endeavour but a contested process of "technological imagination" that subverts linguistic hierarchies by actively creating space for "remembering" minority languages. These efforts to develop new technology challenge simplistic ideas about how minoritised languages and technology interact, disrupting the long-standing history of language-technology interaction that has often led to the erasure of spaces for minoritised languages. By engaging with technology and fostering community collaboration, Newar language communities are creating new possibilities within these predominantly Western technological spaces. This shift has also transformed the perception and association of minoritised languages concerning both the past and the future. Overall, this chapter demonstrates how interactions between diverse knowledge systems can inspire new epistemic imaginations and innovative ways of engaging with the world.

Language Death, Technology and Education

The stark reality of language death remains a significant concern for minoritised language communities worldwide. Data on language death indicates that many Indigenous, minoritised and tribal languages are gradually dying out. The 'death' of a language is generally defined as the point at which "nobody speaks it anymore"; in other words, language loss can be seen as an ongoing disembodiment (Crystal 2002). For a language to survive, it must be actively spoken by its community. When no new speakers are taught or no new learners emerge, the language is considered to be dying. According to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 230 languages went extinct between 1950 and 2010 (UNESCO 2010). It is predicted that every two weeks, a language dies with its last speaker (National Geographic 2012). Estimates suggest that a third of the world's languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers remaining, and almost half of the languages spoken today are predicted to disappear by the next century (Eberhard et al. 2024).

Within this context of predicted language loss and death, what possibilities exist today for Indigenous, minoritised and tribal languages worldwide? Increasingly, language communities are turning to new technologies as potential spaces where these languages can thrive. Emerging studies on new technologies illustrate how changes in "technological imaginations" shape the envisioning of new educational futures, where technology is not "simply involved in the creation of unique consumer goods, digital applications, gadgets, and gizmos but also in the process of designing the techno-cultures of the future" (Balsamo 2011:5). Balsamo describes the technological imagination as follows:

> mindset that enables people to think with technology, to transform what is known into what is possible. This imagination is performative: it improvises within constraints to create something new.
>
> (Balsamo 2011:6)

This idea of technological imagination shows that technology is not just a thing or an artefact but also brings together different materials, people, practices and affordances. Positioned within feminist approaches to media theory, this perspective on new technologies draws attention to the technological relations and conditions in which they were forged (Bassett, 2007). However, the technological imaginations of minoritised language communities are often constrained by language hierarchies, manifested in inadequate language data, contested or absent standardisation, and incompatibility with existing foundational models of machine learning. Within this context, these communities strive to develop technological solutions to counter the predicted future of "language death" and explore technology's role in preserving the embodied knowledge of their languages. Through such imaginations, these communities envision a future where their languages remain alive. Here, technological spaces are shaped by an ongoing and iterative process of negotiation and, therefore, hold possibilities for new imaginations and creativities. She explains:

> It is through the exercise of their technological imaginations that people engage the materiality of the world, creating the conditions for future world-making. In the active engagement between human beings and technological elements, culture too is reworked through the development of new narratives, new myths, new rituals, new modes of expressions, and new knowledges that make the innovations meaningful.
>
> (Balsamo 2011:7)

Developing technology for minoritised languages is a complex and contested process. It involves not only the inclusion of these languages in technological spaces but also the undoing of obstacles created by language hierarchies and the creation of opportunities to "remember" minority languages in diverse

ways. By approaching the concept of "remembering" beyond the "biological metaphor of language life" (Perley 2013: 245), new technological opportunities allow us to expand our understanding of language embodiment within the speaking community, incorporating a range of technological artefacts (Van Dijck 2011).

> This shift in ontological conceptualisation permits the inclusion of non-living items such as lexicons, grammar, DVDs, etc. to be afforded "energy" for sustaining language life. These material artefacts of language analysis and documentation are important life-giving sources for language revitalisation and awakening…More critically, the interaction between these material artefacts of language and speakers/learners increases the vitality of language through their intersubjective relations. This is crucial for indigenous language revitalisation and especially true for "dead" or "extinct" languages… This active process of *remembering* (emphasis in original) and re-embodiment is necessary for proposing "emergent vitalities" as a perceptual stand for revitalising indigenous voices.
>
> (Perley 2013: 245-6)

Technological innovation for minoritised languages, therefore, offers intriguing insights into how new technology–language interactions can go beyond the mainstream view of technology as a hegemonic, surveillant and controlling force, as well as the historical use of technology for the subjugation and erasure of Indigenous languages. By exploring how technology under development shapes "ways of knowing … and the meanings that circulate about particular types of technology" (Balsamo 2011:37), the following sections will explore how language communities envision technology as a space for imagining a new future for their languages in the face of "language death."

Nepal Bhasa and Google Translate Project

This chapter draws on the Nepal Bhasa Google Translate project, coordinated by the Newar Community in the diaspora. In the context where UNESCO has declared Nepal Bhasa as a "definitely endangered language," the community members have been working together to generate a Nepal Bhasa language database in collaboration with Google to add the language to the Google Translate platform (Setopati 2024). For this research, I have utilised "digital ethnography," where I have closely followed the progress of the project since 2022, closely studied the recording of the translation and validation discussions posted on Facebook, analysed the public statements and press reports posted on WNO website, and attended public press conferences organised by WNO[2]. The analysis presented in this chapter is based on the public discourse presented by WNO as a part of their language activism and efforts to revitalise Nepal Bhasa.

Nepal Bhasa is spoken by the Newar community, primarily concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley but also worldwide within the Nepali diaspora. Although Nepal Bhasa literally means the language of Nepal, it is distinct from Nepali, which is the official language of Nepal. The term Nepal Bhasa was deliberately chosen by Newar ethnic activists, who argue that it more accurately reflects the historical nature of the language. This term is now widely accepted in all formal settings. In this chapter, I have used Nepal Bhasa to reflect the term chosen self-consciously by Newar ethnic activists and used by the Nepali state as a census category.

The Google Translate project is built upon a rich history of efforts to revive and revitalise Nepal Bhasa. Minoritised languages such as Nepal Bhasa have endured a violent history, with many of their language activists imprisoned for publishing poetry and other literature. Prior to the Constitution of Nepal in 1990, the use of languages other than the national language, Nepali, in public spaces and for official purposes was deemed communal and, therefore, against the law. As a result, the transmission of this language to younger generations has encountered numerous obstacles. In recent years, the issue of minority language education has emerged as an overtly public and politically charged subject. Many ethnic organisations have put forward demands for mother tongue education and the use of minority languages in official contexts (Gellner 1986; Bhattachan 1995; Sonntag 1995). The 1994 election manifestos of the three main political parties—Nepali Congress Party (NC), Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist-Leninist, UML) and Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)—included a commitment in general terms to the promotion of mother tongue education (Whelpton, 1997: 64), and many parties subsequently continued to keep the topic on the political agenda. Among the 40-point demands put forward by the Maoists before the start of the People's War (1996–2006) was a call for the right to use all Nepali languages and dialects. Also, during the People's War, the Maoists attacked school buildings, not only as symbols of state institutions but also as icons of ethnic subjugation and discrimination (Pherali 2011).

One of the key features of the language movement in Nepal has been its effort to normalise language in public arenas such as education, media and state institutions. This resulted in many substantive changes in the public use of language within Nepal. In 2014, Radio Nepal, the state-run radio station, broadcasted a five-minute news in a number of national languages and a weekly page in *Gorakhapatra*, the state-run newspaper, in a number of languages other than Nepali. The Nepal Academy has included research on ethnic languages in its programmes since the 1990s. Similarly, the Nepal National Plan of Action (GoN 2003:47) has prioritised reorienting the existing policies that focus on the inclusion of ethnic, minority, Dalit and women and girls in the development and use of local languages. Recently, there have been many other initiatives that have focused on digital space. For example, the digital resource on Nepal Bhasa: https://www.nepalbhasa.org/; Indigenising the Himalaya project: https://www.criticalhimalayancollective.com/indigenising-the-himalayas-project;

Digitising Nepal Bhasa manuscripts in the UK: www.nepalbhasamanuscript.org etc. While such actions may not have been enough to bring about revolutionary changes, it has nonetheless opened up significant spaces for more minority language education. It is within this specific social and historical context that the community's desire and determination to work on this project have emerged.

The Nepal Bhasa Google Translate project is a collaboration between Google and the World Newa Organisation, a membership-based organisation of diasporic Newar communities around the world, which has been mobilising people in and outside of Nepal to contribute translated sentences to the Google Translate project. As a result, it has led to extensive and ongoing collaborative efforts both within and outside of Nepal. Volunteers from the Newar communities gathered daily on Zoom to construct the linguistic data by either translating sentences or validating the translated sentences. This continued for 3 years, totalling over a thousand daily episodes live streamed on Facebook as a part of the "WNO Daily Broadcast" series. During these sessions, the volunteers completed approximately 50 translations per day and numerous validations of already-translated sentences in the app's beta version. After almost four years of continuous work, Nepal Bhasa was successfully listed on Google Translate in June 2024.

The project developed with the following timeline:

Project idea initiated—2019
WNO and Google signed an agreement—19 January 2021
10,000 first translations to start the project—June 2021
Community contribution started—April 2021
Digitisation of documents completed—January 2021
500,000 contributions completed—February 2024
Contribution ended—April 2024
Nepal Bhasa listed on Google Translate—June 2024

Remembering the Language to Build "Big Enough" Data

The technological imagination guiding the Nepal Bhasa Google Translate project was straightforward: to build a language repository easily accessible to new speakers of Nepal Bhasa, thereby actively shaping a future for the language that resists the predicted "language death." However, given the social and political contexts, which do not necessarily support minoritised languages, the development of technology was faced with challenges including limited resources, biases in existing technology and entrenched linguistic hierarchies. Unlike mainstream and high-resource languages, minoritised languages require more foundational tasks, such as creating datasets and incorporating these datasets into the Google Translate platform.

Given the unequal foundations of technological development and the dominance of "big data" in constructing technology, WNO sought to influence this

space not through "big data," but through "big enough data"—just sufficient to develop these new technologies. Even before the actual translation project began, the community needed to gain recognition from Google as a separate language. The initial phase of the project, therefore, involved collecting various published materials. For this purpose, WNO enlisted the help of various individuals and institutions. Publishing houses such as Eloh Prakashan and Swaniga Dainik, along with academic institutions like the Nepal Bhasa Department of Tribhuvan University, supported the scanning and digitising of published books. This long and arduous process ultimately led to the recognition of Nepal Bhasa by Google. In the second phase, they collected Nepal Bhasa material that had been translated into other languages. They mainly focused on Nepal Bhasa to English translation so that it can use the large English corpus that Google Translate already holds. For this, WNO submitted all their Press Releases and other publications, which had already been translated into English. In these submissions, comprising both digitised Nepal Bhasa language corpus and English translations, the community was able to create "big enough data" which enabled Google to recognise Nepal Bhasa as a language.

Following this recognition, WNO signed an agreement with Google to formally start this project on 19 January 2021. According to the agreement, WNO would provide Google with 1200 Nepal Bhasa sentences that had been translated into English. These sentences could include a range of different topics: sentences on general conversations, technical topics, or scientific issues. However, gathering these sentences and their translation was not an easy task—the repository had to be constructed with sentences and their translations that were as accurate as possible. To address these constraints, the Nepal Bhasa Google Translate project adopted two approaches. Firstly, in the absence of sufficient written records and a substantial language corpus, community members relied heavily on discussion, deliberation and their embodied knowledge to produce translations and train the Google Translate software. The task of envisioning technological futures for these languages required significant translation efforts to bridge diverse logic and knowledge systems, making them accessible to one another. Secondly, the need to overcome technical challenges, sparse language data, insufficient resources and inadequate institutional support—meant that the language technologies could not be built only by technical teams—and needed a diverse range of expertise.

The Nepal Bhasa Google Translate project was primarily supported by the pro-bono contributions of a community of volunteers, both from Nepal and around the world. The volunteers met every day in Zoom and divided themselves into different Zoom rooms. Each of these rooms was composed of 3–6 individuals with diverse interests, coming together with loosely articulated goals for reviving this language. Many of them were in their 50s or above, and were joined by many younger volunteers as well. The members of these Zoom rooms engaged in discussions about the most effective way to translate these sentences. They often translated the sentences aloud and experimented

with multiple versions. Here, community members heavily rely on memory and deliberations in order to teach Google Translate these languages. Nobody dictated in detail how the work was to be done, so each group worked quite differently. Consequently, this led to discussions and debates on determining the optimal translation. When completing the translations, the members often prioritised meaning over word-for-word accuracy, teaching the machine to understand word analysis, grammar analysis, meaning analysis and style analysis.

Since there could be multiple meanings of one word, the exact translation required discussion in most instances. Most members agreed that one should not translate alone, and this needed to be done in a group. Take this translation as an example, one of the sentences that was listed in Google Translate was the sentence: "She works as a dinner lady." Dinner is called "Beli" in Nepal Bhasa. So, one of the group members suggested that the word "dinner lady" could be translated as "Beli yaki ma maiju." However, the group discussed whether the word "Beli" could be used if the meal was in the morning. After some deliberation, the group decided to translate the word "dinner lady" as "dinner misa." The final translation that was added to Google Translate was "Wa dinner misaya katha jyaa yana chwana."[3] When the group was faced with difficult sentences, they chose to skip the sentences so that they could prioritise adding more data to the platform.

This process of developing an optimal translation was also quite educational for the younger generation. As the group collectively discussed the translations, many discovered that they were learning various aspects of Nepal Bhasa vocabulary, grammar and dialects. One of the volunteers shared the following experience:

> …we used to brainstorm the alternatives or what could be more accurate forms. Throughout the Google translation project, I not only contributed to Google, but I also felt like I learned more about my own culture and language…Not just from the Kathmandu Valley but various other forms and dialects of the language that are spoken outside the valley…[4]

In order to provide technical support to the volunteer, the core team members also prepared various videos, including videos on technical support[5] and online translation contribution guide[6]. These videos answered questions such as: Which script to use? Whether to translate or validate? Where to find a keyboard? How to contribute? How to validate? etc. These technical support, in the period between 2000 and 2024, Nepal Bhasa community members worldwide have actively participated via Zoom, volunteering their time and contributing approximately 50 translations per day, along with numerous validations. Thus, by establishing this extensive corpus and coding, language technology was perceived as a means to unite both people and machines, potentially opening up a future where this language would not be lost.

Remembering the Language through AI

This technological imagination for remembering Nepal Bhasa through AI has emerged within a specific socio-political context where the younger generation may need to learn their "mother tongue" or "native" language as a second language. This project is, therefore, shaped by the vision of a new future, where minoritised language communities, such as the Newar community, can transfer their embodied knowledge of the language to new technological platforms, making it possible to remember the language even when teaching and passing down knowledge to the younger generation has proven challenging.

Even though the "death" of a language is generally seen as an ongoing disembodiment, or the point at which "nobody speaks it anymore," this transfer of embodied linguistic knowledge allows for the possibility of embedding the memory of the language into technology—thereby giving it a new lease on life. The members often spoke of its purpose as "preserving a way of life," and how it will allow the new generation to continue using this language: "My child will be able to use Google Translate to write a Father's Day card in Nepal Bhasa." According to one of the volunteers who shared their experience,

> …I grew up in New York City, and it was very difficult for me to stay connected to my roots. My parents did try very hard - they were juggling between teaching us English, and teaching us the culture. And so my Nepal Bhasa, as time went on, got weaker and weaker because I didn't really have anyone to practise… and then later we found out that WNO was working on Google Translate and we were like wow that's amazing 'cause now you have the world on your fingertips you will literally have your native language in your fingertips, the tool is right there you can look at it anytime and you can practise in your own time![7]

As the Newar community continues to add more translated sentences, Google Translate is drawing on this corpus to build a language model that is able to generate more complex sentence translations. According to the member of the project, who is also a Google Translate representative and working very actively with WNO to develop this model, the "big enough data" that the Nepal Bhasa community is building will allow further development in language learning, as he mentions below:

> …when I started this, my goal was to see if there's a better way to sort of move past …very static translation capabilities like dictionaries books where you have to go through and read and understand. It captures at a moment in time what translation could be… But with Google Translate, what you're actually building is a natural language model. It is more it's less translation and more communication - ensure that it's easy to communicate between languages…

The task of remembering the language through AI, however, has not been straightforward. While Google Translate is now able to process complex Nepal Bhasa sentences, it is not yet able to capture the history and lifeworld in which the language is deeply embedded. The community is still working towards teaching the software the specificities of the language. For example, the community has submitted an online petition[8] to change the name from Nepalbhasa (Newari) to Nepalbhasa (Newar).[9] The following excerpt from the petition shows the difficulties faced by the minoritised language communities in receiving accurate representation in public spaces.

> ATTN: ISO 639-3 Registrar
> RE: Proposed name change for Nepalbhasa (Newari)
> This document outlines a proposal to change the reference name for the ISO code new from Nepalbhasa (Newari) to Nepalbhasa (Newar). i)The Newar community has unanimously accepted Nepalbhasa as the name of their language For the last four decades, the Newar community has consistently voiced the name of their language as 'Nepalbhasa'. It has been an integral part of their linguistic rights and cultural identity which took the form of a political movement changing the future of the entire country. The Newar community has continuously voiced to correct the unacceptable name 'Newari' as it continues to remind them of the loss of their linguistic rights. They have urged ISO to consider this fact through an online petition.'…ii) (ii) The Government of Nepal has officially replaced the word Newari with Nepal Bhasa. On Sep 8, 1995, following decades of protest from the Newar community, the then Prime Minister of Nepal Mr Manmohan Adhikari declared that the name of the language of the Newars be changed from 'Newari' to 'Nepal Bhasa'.[10]

There is definitely a broad recognition that the data needs to be constantly updated and that the language translation will continue to become more accurate. As the Deputy Mayor of the Kathmandu District mentioned in her congratulatory message to the community, "there might still be a lot of mistakes in the platform. But we need to clean it up, and improve it further slowly. The important thing is that we have made a good start. Nothing is 100% perfect when it starts."[11] This development is, therefore, still a work in progress. According to one of the volunteers, this work needs to be seen as a slow process where the changes will be visible gradually.

> …everyone is translating different sentences, and they were really happy about it. I have also been getting lots of feedback and people letting me know that some sentences are not translated correctly. But with my own experience in this field, I tell them that it is OK. This is a very slow process, and it will happen gradually, not in one day. I believe there will be a good improvement in language translations in the near future.[12]

Remembering as An Imagination of a New Future

What conceptualisation of language education may emerge as we attempt to include new technologies, such as AI, in education, and when these things are afforded the possibility of sustaining the life of a language? The development of the Google Translate app for Nepal Bhasa illustrates that, given the unequal foundations between different languages and the gradual loss of language among the new generation, envisioning the future of minoritised languages fundamentally involves reimagining and reshaping the power dynamics between languages. These new spaces created by technology reveal that such projects should be viewed not merely as technological applications but as complex processes that both replicate and reconfigure our understanding of language and education.

Especially given the uncomfortable history where technology has been mainly used for the subjugation and erasure of different knowledge, and the further mainstreaming of dominant languages, imagining new futures through digital technology poses both conceptual and practical challenges. By bringing together these seemingly disparate worlds, one representing Indigenous and minoritised languages, which is often relegated to the past, and the other representing artificial intelligence, which is regarded as a hyperspace of the future, this work highlights the contours of possibility offered by artificial intelligence to advance education for minoritised languages. With the development of the language corpus for Nepal Bhasa, the community is also gradually attempting to shift what is possible in those languages and how we may be able to think about education when bringing these apparently different knowledge systems together.

The discussion in this chapter also shows how future making is fundamentally a task to envision the rearrangement of power relations. In the field of technological development, language hierarchies show up in the form of a lack of "big data" that shape the foundational development of technologies. Here, digital technologies are not fixed points but rather practical, experiential and relational processes, and where future making is a continuous and iterative process of ongoing action (Bryant and Knight 2019). Such creative and political reimagining of the future is distinct from more popular "predictive" and "anticipatory" engagements, which are increasingly overtaking educational discourse (Facer, 2011; Gulson et al., 2022).

Thus, this technical space provided an avenue for constructing the form, content and functionality of this repository. It was envisioned to serve as an interface between the collective act of remembering through AI memory—to use and reclaim the language. According to the Google Representative from the Nepal Bhasa community:

> …this is the first step. We kind of have the most fundamental models in place, and then we can start building on top of it through audio translation models you know we can do speech to text, text to speech models, so there are a lot of things that we can do to make this even better and richer for everybody to use… with large language model it's not just

simply translation anymore but it also understands the whole makeup of the language right and so now you can use something like this interactive to you know build like a like learning services for language models that you can teach those who don't know the language.[13]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how technological initiatives leveraging artificial intelligence offer transformative possibilities for minoritised languages through innovative human–technology interactions. The collaboration between South Asian language communities, activists and companies like Google exemplifies a concerted effort to create robust language corpora that enrich the AI understanding of these languages. This digital activism not only challenges the bleak forecasts of language endangerment but also underscores a proactive and constructive approach to preserving and revitalising Indigenous, tribal and minority languages. The impact of these efforts highlights a dynamic shift from predictions of extinction to the proactive creation of vibrant, people-centred educational technologies that foster the survival and flourishing of linguistic diversity.

By embracing new technological innovations enabled by emerging technologies, the Nepal Bhasa language community is striving to go beyond the predicted future of language endangerment and death. The discussion in this chapter reveals that language communities strive to preserve and revitalise their languages even when they become disembodied, giving "life" to them by integrating them into digital platforms. This future differs from the prediction by UNESCO's language endangerment list, which forecasts the death of many such languages. These new technological innovations also present significant opportunities for South Asian language communities, not only by reinforcing but also by constructing the social realities experienced by their learners.

Here, technological spaces are viewed not as fixed points but as practical, experiential and relational processes, where future-making is a continuous, iterative process realised through interventions in the present, reframing of the past, and the formulation of future visions. By viewing technology as a potential life-giving force and engaging in everyday practices of "remembering" language, projects like the Nepal Bhasa Google Translate initiative illustrate the technological imagination of diverse possibilities for language and education futures. This chapter thus contributes to the expanding interest in using technological innovation for creative and interdisciplinary approaches to language education, underscoring its interaction with broader social and political dynamics.

Notes

1 The terms "minority" and "minoritised" have been used to refer to social groups that have suffered subordination by the dominant group in terms political, financial or social power. In Nepal, the terms such as "indigenous groups" and "nationalities" have been used to recognise these groups. Much of the demands of these

social groups have revolved around the issues of power relations rather than the numerical size of the groups; as well as the demands on ethno-linguistic right coalescing around the question of mother tongue.

2 The recording of press conference to celebrate the inclusion of Nepal Bhasa on Google Translate is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4Da8TcihuQ; accessed on 28 July 2024.

3 This excerpt is based on the discussion held in Zoom room WDB_484: Nepal Bhasa Google Translation and Validation (Recording of the programme available at: https://fb.watch/tMEfQSBhkr/; accessed on 20 July 2023).

4 Excerpt of presentation by a volunteer during Nepalbhasa Google Translate Project Special Programme on 7 July 2024 (Recording of the programme available at: https://fb.watch/tMAsxJ8HLs/; accessed on 7 July 2024).

5 Recording on technical support available at: https://fb.watch/tMBMCN4zcO/ accessed on 20 July 2023.

6 Recording on translation support available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NipO3Tb7IaA; accessed on 20 July 2023.

7 Excerpt of presentation by the co-founder of Newar Youth in New York City and Newa youth leader, during Nepalbhasa Google Translate Project Special Programme. Recording of the programme available at: https://fb.watch/tMAsxJ8HLs/; accessed on 7 July 2024.

8 Online petition is available at https://www.change.org/p/nepalbhasa-newar-as-the-language-name-in-iso; with 482 signatures on 8 August 2024.

9 The World Newah Organization has compiled the following news materials published in various Nepalese leading daily newspapers which reported the cabinet decision of the Nepal government to officially replace the word "Newari" with "Nepal Bhasa" (Available at https://www.worldnewah.org/content/2367.html; accessed on 20 July 2023).

10 A copy of this statement is available at https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=889112486591045&set=a.558971822938448; accessed on 28 July 2024.

11 The celebratory programme on Facebook Live (Recording of the programme available at: https://fb.watch/tGAOswPfIT/).

12 Excerpt of experience shared by a volunteer presentation by co-founder of Newar Youth in New York City, during Nepalbhasa Google Translate Project Special Programme. Recording of the programme available at: https://fb.watch/tGAQNKwc_A/; accessed on 20 July 2023.

13 Excerpt of presentation by Google Translate core team member during Nepalbhasa Google Translate Project Special Programme. Recording of the programme available at: https://fb.watch/tMAsxJ8HLs/; accessed on 7 July 2024.

References

Balsamo, Anne. 2011. *Designing Culture: The Technological Imagination at Work*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bassett, Caroline. 2007. *The Arc and The Machine*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Bhattachan, K.B. 1995. Ethnopolitics and ethnodevelopment: An emerging paradigm, In Dhruba Kumar (Ed.), *State, leadership and politics in Nepal*, Kathmandu: CNAS:

Broussard, M. 2018. *Artificial unintelligence: How computers misunderstand the world*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press.

Bryant, Rebecca and Daniel M. Knight. 2019. *Anthropology of the Future*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. 2002. *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (Eds.). 2024. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 27th edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International (available at https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/how-many-languages/; accessed on 8 August 2024).

Facer, K. 2011. *Learning futures: Education, technology and social change*. London: Routledge.

Facer, K., and N. Selwyn. 2021. *Digital technology and the futures of education: Towards 'Non-Stupid' Optimism*. Background Paper of Future of Education Initiative. Paris: UNESCO.

Gellner, D. 1986. Newar: Caste and identity, *Areh. Europ. Social.*, 27: 102–148.

Gulson, Kalervo N., Sam Sellar, and P. Taylor Webb. 2022. *Algorithms of education: How datafication and artificial intelligence shape policy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ministry of Education (MoE). 2003. *National plan of action (NPoA)*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Government of Nepal.

National Geographic. 2012. (Available at https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/issue/july-2012; accessed on 28 July 2024).

Nemorin, S., A. Vlachidis, H.M. Ayerakwa, and P. Andriotis. 2022. AI hyped? A horizon scan of discourse on artificial intelligence in education (AIED) and development. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 1–14.

Perley, Bernard. 2013. Remembering ancestral voices: Emergent vitalities and the future of Indigenous languages. In Elena Mihas, Bernard Perley, Gabriel Rei-Doval, Kathleen Wheatley (Eds.) *Responses to language endangerment: In honor of Mickey Noonan. New directions in language documentation and language revitalization*, pp. 243–270.

Pherali, T.J. 2011. Education and conflict in Nepal: Possibilities for reconstruction, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 9 (1): 135–154.

Ranathunga, S., E.S.A. Lee, M. Prifti Skenduli, R. Shekhar, M. Alam, and R. Kaur. 2023. Neural machine translation for low-resource languages: A survey, *ACM Computing Surveys*, 55 (11): 1–37.

Setopati. 2024. Bibhinna Deshma basne Newarharu le hazaar din ma phatte gareko kaam (available at https://www.setopati.com/exclusive/333551; accessed on 28 July 2024).

Sonntag, S.K. 1995. Ethnolinguistic identity and language policy in Nepal, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 1 (4): 108–112.

UNESCO, 2010. *Atlas of World Languages in Danger*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing (available at https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187026; accessed on 1 August 2024).

Van Dijck, J. 2011. Flickr and the Culture of Connectivity: Sharing views, experiences, memories, *Memory Studies*, 4 (4): 401–415.

Whelpton, J. 1997. Political identity in Nepal: State, nation and community. In David N. Gellner, Jonna Pfaff-Czarnecka, John Whelpton (Eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Yudkowsky, Eliezer. 2008. Artificial Intelligence as a Positive and Negative Factor in Global Risk. In Nick Bostrom, Milan M. Ćirković (Eds.), *Global Catastrophic Risks*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 308–345.

12 Unveiling the Barriers

Exploring EdTech Integration Challenges and Solutions for ESL Instruction in Bangladesh

Andrianna Bashar

Introduction

The integration of digital technology into global educational systems has caused a paradigm shift in teaching and learning methodologies, presenting new opportunities across various dimensions of education. Within the context of Bangladesh, there has been an evident policy emphasis on incorporating technology into the educational framework with the overarching goal of enhancing learning outcomes (Vivek, 2020). However, the effectiveness of technology integration within specific educational settings faces a set of challenges. These challenges extend beyond mere technical difficulties (i.e. internet access and equipment) and are more sociocultural in nature. This study aims to observe the barriers to integrating educational technology (EdTech) into English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, distinct from conventional technical issues typically underscored in discussions regarding technological integration within developing nations. Instead, it seeks to provide an in-depth comprehension of the reasons underlying the resistance to technology implementation from teachers' perspectives in ESL centres.

The chapter is based on qualitative research conducted in five ESL Centres located within universities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Despite possessing the financial means to be adequately equipped with the necessary technology, these centres face nuanced challenges in embracing technological interventions. This chapter presents insights from interviews with ESL teachers from these centres to understand the pedagogical implications of EdTech use in higher education. It provides a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the Bangladeshi ESL landscape. These ESL Centres function as language improvement spaces, offering academic remedial guidance and language support to students with less proficient English communication skills. The aim of this study is to investigate whether there are challenges in implementing EdTech in these centres.

The chapter argues that contrary to popular belief, it is not infrastructure, lack of connectivity or access to mobile phones/computers that hinders the integration of EdTech. The barriers are more sociocultural in nature, involving aspects such as perceptions of what constitutes "proper studying" and how

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-16

learning should take place. This study explores how these sociocultural aspects manifest in practice and whether they hinder the process of EdTech integration. Understanding these barriers is crucial for recognising factors beyond technical issues or financial burdens, including sociocultural influences. Additionally, the study aims to explore possible solutions for overcoming these challenges. It may also serve as a starting point for a deeper exploration of the sociocultural aspects that hinder EdTech implementation, as the focus is often on infrastructure and connectivity issues. By uncovering these complexities and potential solutions, this research aspires to contribute to developing effective strategies for optimising EdTech use and ultimately enhancing ESL learning outcomes in Bangladesh. The study advocates for a pedagogically informed approach to digital education in Bangladesh that considers the country's unique challenges and opportunities.

Educational Technologies (EdTech) and English Language Pedagogies

The role of EdTech in language learning has sparked various debates within the academic community. Selwyn and Facer (2014) discuss the significance of digital technology in education, highlighting the importance of understanding the past, present and future implications of technology in educational settings. Chun, Kern and Smith (2016) delve into the use of technology in language teaching and learning, emphasising its impact on language use and acquisition. In 2018, Ahmadi provided one of the most thorough literature reviews on the relationship between technology and Language Learning. In the paper, he discusses the various arguments on technology integration into language learning since the early 2000s up until 2018 and finds that there are several studies (Lam & Lawrence, 2002; Solanki and Shyamlee, 2012; Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2017 in Ahmadi, 2018) that admit that technology brought about significant changes in language learning, therefore concluding that learning to incorporate it is becoming inevitable. Despite a rather noteworthy difference in the years during which the research was conducted, they all pointed out several similar elements. The primary advantage identified in these studies was that technology allows learners to gain some autonomy in their learning process (Lam and Lawrence, 2002 and Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2017 in Ahmadi, 2018). This demonstrates that since as early as 2002, there has been an academic discourse about the integration of technology and the importance of teachers adapting to the changes.

Today, proponents such as Sugata Mitra (2005) and Chris Dede (2009) to name a few, stress EdTech's potential to address longstanding educational challenges. For instance, EdTech offers individuals with disabilities, those in remote areas, and economically disadvantaged populations access to high-quality learning resources (Sabatini et al., 2022). It also empowers educators to personalise learning and bridge the gap between different educational philosophies (Sabatini et al., 2022). EdTech can be effective for students with

reading or language-based disabilities, but further rigorous studies are needed to fully establish its value (Hurwitz & Vanacore, 2022).

However, a crucial concern emerges: Who is in control? As technology increasingly permeates classrooms, the issue of student agency in EdTech environments becomes a concern (Brod et al., 2023). Debates on EdTech also touch on historical perspectives, with underlying metaphors enduring over time to support the automation of teaching, potentially altering traditional educational schemes (Ferreira et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the multifaceted nature of EdTech. In low-income countries, it presented both opportunities and constraints. While EdTech helped bridge the gap in teacher capacity, it also underscored the need for resources in local languages (David et al., 2021). Striking a balance between self-directed and collaborative learning in online environments remains a persistent debate, emphasising the importance of fostering student learning strategies (Peters et al., 2022).

In the realm of language learning specifically, the debate surrounding technology's role has been ongoing since the early days of ICT introduction (Marcinkonienė & Zdanytė, 2016). Digital tools undoubtedly play a significant role in fostering collaborative creativity in language education, enriching student experiences and preparing them for the challenges of a globalised world (Sastre et al., 2022). However, there is a gap in research regarding teachers' trust in AI-based EdTech, highlighting the need for further exploration in this area (Nazaretsky et al., 2022). These discussions surrounding EdTech in language learning encompass issues of effectiveness, student agency, historical perspectives, the opportunities and challenges it presents, and the need for further research to understand its full impact on educational practices (Kerssens, et al. 2022).

The theoretical framework chosen for this chapter is the sociocultural theory (SCT) by Lev Vygotsky (1978), which emphasises social interaction and the use of cultural tools in learning. This explores how ESL instructors can leverage collaborative learning, scaffolding and culturally relevant resources within EdTech platforms. The first research question delves into the influence of sociocultural factors. SCT emphasises the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning thrives through social interaction and cultural tools. The study will explore how cultural norms regarding authority, learning styles, and technology use might impact teacher–student dynamics and EdTech acceptance. Additionally, SCT sheds light on potential socioeconomic disparities in access to technology and digital literacy skills, highlighting potential inequalities requiring attention. The second research question focuses on the pedagogical implementation of EdTech. SCT encourages students to critically evaluate whether these tools align with established ESL teaching principles. Analysing how technology fosters or hinders collaborative learning, scaffolding opportunities and the individual needs of diverse learners within the ZPD will be crucial. Examining whether teachers receive adequate training and support to leverage EdTech effectively while adhering to sound pedagogical practices will help understand this aspect better.

Finally, the third research question will identify effective solutions. Using the SCT framework, the chapter shall explore how EdTech can be adapted to specific sociocultural contexts. This might involve developing culturally relevant content, fostering peer interaction through technology and building digital literacy skills among teachers and students. While addressing infrastructural limitations may also be part of the concept, it is not relevant to the study; hence, the focus will lie on designing solutions that can be implemented immediately without having to wait for funding. By employing SCT as a guiding framework, this research can delve beyond mere technological adoption rates and uncover the nuanced sociocultural complexities shaping EdTech integration in Bangladeshi ESL classrooms. Through careful analysis and culturally sensitive solutions, we can unlock the transformative potential of technology to enhance language learning experiences for all.

Several studies illustrate the potential pitfalls of neglecting pedagogy in EdTech implementation. For instance, Warschauer (2004) argues that technology alone cannot overcome fundamental inequalities in access and skills, echoing concerns about digital divides hindering inclusive learning experiences. Furthermore, Cuban (2001) warns against "technological determinism," where technology dictates teaching practices instead of vice versa. This can lead to the superficial use of technology, failing to capitalise on its true potential for engaging students and promoting deeper learning.

Therefore, prioritising pedagogy when implementing EdTech is crucial. This involves providing teachers with sufficient support and training to understand how technology aligns with specific learning objectives and adapt traditional practices to leverage the unique affordances of digital tools. As Zhao and Frank (2003) suggest, technology should be seen as a "catalyst" for change, supporting and enhancing existing pedagogical approaches rather than replacing them entirely. Only by prioritising sound pedagogical foundations can we unlock the true potential of EdTech to create enriching and transformative learning experiences for all.

ESL Education in Bangladesh and Technology

Bangladesh's 2012 Master Plan for ICT in Education aimed to bridge the digital divide and improve education quality through wider technology access, teacher training and engaging content. By 2019, successes included equipped schools and digital libraries, but challenges like unreliable internet and limited training remained. The plan concluded in 2021, paving the way for further advancements. While the 2018 National Digital Education Policy emphasised technology in education, Teach the World Foundation (n.d.) highlights the critical issue of quality standards. Overcrowded classrooms and underqualified teachers lead to high dropout rates, especially in rural areas where socioeconomic factors further limit access to education.

Bangladesh's growing focus on integrating EdTech in education is seen as a positive development. Studies suggest that EdTech improves learning, and

technology can be a powerful tool for inclusion and adaptability. While still new, Bangladesh utilises EdTech through online platforms, digital books, virtual classrooms and educational apps. These offer benefits like improved student achievement, motivation, personalised learning and communication. However, challenges remain, including cost, teacher training and ensuring equitable access. Despite these hurdles, EdTech holds immense potential to elevate education standards in Bangladesh, especially as technology becomes more affordable and accessible.

Lam et al. (2021) inquire about the practical application of eLearning technology to enhance pedagogical progress within the classroom setting. They ask, "How can eLearning technology facilitate pedagogical advancement practically in the classroom?," a question that appears to be particularly relevant in the context of Bangladesh's Digital goals. Since its implication, there was no clear pedagogical pathway, nor was there a solid implementation plan for training educators to incorporate EdTech in classrooms. All these studies prove the importance of establishing a solid pedagogical approach and providing comprehensive training to educators. These findings emphasise that even the most advanced technologies can prove ineffective if educators do not utilise them effectively in their teaching practices. While the excitement surrounding EdTech integration is undeniable, a crucial aspect often gets overlooked: pedagogy. Simply throwing technology into classrooms without considering how it can support effective teaching and learning practices can hinder, rather than enhance, educational outcomes.

Research by Mishra and Koehler (2006) emphasises this point, highlighting the need for a "Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK)" framework. This framework underscores the intricate relationship between technology, pedagogy, and content, requiring teachers to not only understand specific technologies but also how to integrate them meaningfully into their teaching strategies. Existing literature reveals that while digital technology has the potential to increase access to and improve the quality of education in Bangladesh (Kozma, 2008), there are significant barriers that limit its effectiveness. These include inadequate infrastructure, lack of teacher professional development, and limited digital literacy skills (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Additionally, contextual factors such as culture and language can impact how technology is integrated into teaching and learning in different environments. The influx of educational technology and AI tools into classrooms has ushered in a complex wave of challenges for educators. While many successfully navigated the shift from physical classrooms to virtual spaces during the pandemic, the transition's unevenness highlights deeper issues which are often highlighted in recent literature. Unequal access to technology, disparate teacher preparedness, and lingering questions about effective pedagogical approaches on digital platforms remain critical areas of concern. Addressing these challenges requires careful consideration of various factors when designing for digital education.

In one of the most recent studies on edtech and ESL, Hossain and Al Hasan (2023) offered an optimistic overview of EdTech integration. The

study focused on student perspectives, and it was found that students are eager to use EdTech tools if they are provided with proper tools. The key findings of the study shed light on various aspects of EdTech integration. Firstly, the high familiarity (95%) of students with educational technology is a noteworthy observation, emphasising the pervasiveness of technology in their lives. However, a critical analysis reveals a multitude of challenges faced by both teachers and students, underscoring the complexities of EdTech adoption. The lack of proper training for teachers to utilise devices, difficulties in operating technologies, expensive data packages, limited access to platforms, and health issues arising from the prolonged use of EdTech highlight systemic issues that need urgent attention. This aligns with existing literature emphasising the importance of teacher training in successful EdTech integration (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013). Many teachers in Bangladesh are not adequately trained in how to use digital technology in the classroom. This can make it difficult for them to effectively use EdTech resources and can also lead to students not getting the most out of their learning. A 2018 study by the World Bank found that only 17% of teachers in Bangladesh have received any training on how to use ICT in the classroom. The study, therefore, seeks to assess the present state of ESL education in Bangladesh, identifying key opportunities and challenges associated with the incorporation of technology for educational purposes within this specific context.

Discussion of Methodological Approach

The targeted population for this research comprised instructors of English Language Centres within private tertiary educational institutions in Bangladesh. Five private universities were chosen in capital, Dhaka City, and a total of 10 instructors and administrators were interviewed. Demographic factors such as age and gender were excluded from consideration as they did not contribute to addressing the research questions. The choice of this specific population was driven by their capacity to offer valuable insights into ESL learners and their teaching experience. Additionally, these instructors and administrators provided essential data for the secondary analysis, specifically regarding the statistics of the student population attending ESL centres, which was the foundation for the secondary analysis part of the research. Furthermore, tutors and administrators served as crucial intermediaries between students and university administration. This positioned them to provide insights into whether the universities were inclined to promote the use of educational technology (EdTech) and to share any feedback from the students.

The goal of the study is to understand if there are barriers that exist to the integration of Edtech into ESL classrooms within tertiary-level institutions in Bangladesh, which is why it is important to use qualitative research methods. The data for the study was collected using the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews followed up by surveys as well as general participant

observation for context. This is the preferred method for collecting in-depth information which cannot be presented in a quantitative way (Choosing & using sources, n.d.).

The study's limitations, such as issues related to sampling, coverage of universities, inclusion of teachers' perspectives and time constraints, must be considered when interpreting the findings. This reflects the need for further research to address these limitations and provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with EdTech in EFL contexts in Bangladesh. The multifaceted challenges reported by participants underscore the intricate nature of integrating EdTech in educational settings in Bangladesh, emphasising the urgency of addressing these issues to unlock the full potential of technology-enhanced learning.

Subject Background and Intrinsic Motivation

There appears to be a difference between some universities regarding university initiatives in integrating EdTech. Universities with larger departments integrating technology, with some universities even having Technology in the name, were more proactive in investing in the integration of EdTech than universities that specialised in business, for example. An examination of student utilisation of ESL services across five universities (University A–E) revealed variations in service use by major. At University A, students in Life Sciences exhibited the highest utilisation of ESL services (4.3%), followed by Medicine (5%), Engineering (3%) and English (0.8%). A similar trend was observed at Universities B, C and D, with Life Sciences consistently demonstrating the highest demand for ESL support (ranging from 3.5% to 5%). Engineering followed closely at all three universities (ranging from 3% to 4%). Notably, the English majors at Universities C and D displayed no reported use of ESL services (0%). University E presented a slight deviation, with Engineering majors utilising ESL services the most (5%), followed by Life Sciences (2.5%), Medicine (4%) and English (1%).

These findings suggest a potential correlation between the language demands of specific majors and the need for ESL support. Students in fields like Life Sciences and Medicine, which often rely heavily on English-language scientific literature and communication, may require more targeted language assistance than those in Engineering or English majors, where coursework may be more language-specific. However, further investigation is necessary to explore the underlying reasons behind these disparities and account for potentially confounding variables such as programme structure, student demographics and the availability of ESL services within each university. This information was essential to understand if there are any special links within these categories and the readiness to learn individually using EdTech tools. The findings show that most students are from STEM subjects, and nearly none are from English-related majors.

The most common factor that ESL tutors mentioned was the students' lack of intrinsic motivation. There was a high emphasis on tutoring taking place face to face and no intention to learn on an individual basis. Some of the findings from the interviews and the observations combined echo the findings in the literature. As Hossain and Hasan (2023) have outlined, the lack of proper training for teachers to use devices remains one of the key issues even within these relatively technologically "advanced" settings. It must be noted that in most universities, the administrator and tutor role was often shared or carried out by one individual. Furthermore, the hired tutors were often third or fourth year ELT students from the University. While undergraduate ELT education provides students with the basics of teaching approaches and theories, the problem that occurs is more dependent on technical factors and experience. Going back to the data presented above, it has been evident that subject background plays a role in English proficiency as well as willingness to put in more independent work. This reflects how willing students are to do self-work. As one tutor in University C noted:

> There is lots to suggest these variables are quite accurate even in predicting future students. For example, if I base the argument that medical and engineering students are almost always more than say… English and social sciences, although social sciences also depend on which…. then you can easily draw a line. Something like… Medical and Engineering are considered more 'traditional' major choices, which means more students coming from either suburban or rural areas will be pursuing those or students coming from Bengali medium curricula. Either way, these things almost always add up. Ask other teachers you will hear the same.

While tutors believe their observations predict future university success, research suggests caution. Socioeconomic background, geographical location and school type might correlate with academic choices. However, attributing academic ability solely to these factors risks perpetuating inequalities and overlooking individual potential (Archer et al., 2012). Categorising disciplines like medicine and engineering as "traditional" majors also carries cultural biases. Research shows these fields often attract students from privileged backgrounds due to historical and gendered expectations (Carlone & Sanders, 2018), and labelling them "traditional" risks further marginalising alternative choices. With this said, there might be truth to the statements as the teachers have a better understanding of the cultural norms and the patterns that reoccur culturally. However, it is essential to stay reflexive in research and practice. While a tutor at University D pointed out:

> … those students that come for help from day one are usually those who expect University to be like school and this centre like coaching centre. They do not like to do independent work neither can they be trusted to do it on their terms because TikTok is always there, you know. They want face-to-face instruction, preferably spoon-fed.

The expectation of "spoon-feeding": Some students might initially seek structured learning similar to pre-university experiences. This doesn't necessarily imply an inability for independent work. Research suggests a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning can be challenging for some students, requiring adaptation and support (Biggs, 2012). Focus on learning styles: Instead of assuming certain groups need "spoon-feeding," considering diverse learning styles (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) can ensure inclusive teaching approaches cater to individual needs (Coffield et al., 2004).

Drawing insights from interviews with administrators and tutors, an interesting finding emerged—even seemingly proactive educators might not always adhere to a robust pedagogical approach. What does this signify? The shared experiences suggest that these individuals, often with good intentions, might be unwittingly drawn into a transactional paradigm of support, mirroring the actions of a young tutor by simply completing tasks alongside students instead of nurturing independent learning. However, to truly unlock the potential of these supportive efforts, a shift towards a professional pedagogical approach is essential.

Gamification and Interactive Lessons

Four out of ten tutors across Universities A, B, D and E have noted that there is undoubtedly a willingness from the tutors' side to add an element of gamification and interactive lessons. The finding that 40% of tutors see potential in gamification aligns with Shuash et al. (2020), who found teachers positively perceived gamification's potential to enhance engagement and motivation. Moreover, if they were to sit down and monitor the students on EdTech apps, it would probably be more willingly received, and then the integration process would happen. This would be a step to get them going. The suggestion of tutors monitoring students on EdTech apps raises ethical concerns around surveillance and potential intrusion of privacy. It's crucial to involve tutors in designing monitoring approaches that prioritise learning outcomes and ethical considerations.

Furthermore, many of them are paid by the hour and have said that this would be much more time-consuming than simply explaining to them within homework exercises. These concerns about time constraints remain a major barrier, echoing Dicheva and Dichev (2017), who identified workload as a significant challenge for teachers implementing technology and are pretty common. Concerns about increased time commitments are valid. Studies like Khokhar et.al (2017) suggest providing teachers with training and support can mitigate this, including efficient tool integration and time-saving strategies. All the participants noted that there is little initiative or availability for professional development at work or anywhere else. ELT and TESOL qualifications come in the form of university degrees, and there are no programmes offering courses and professional skills upgrades, especially regarding EdTech. It needs to be noted that tutors mentioned that students from more rural

backgrounds or coming from secondary curricula taught in Bengali often struggled with even basic tasks that relied heavily on ICT use, such as text-based comprehension and language proficiency, particularly in subjects like grammar and comprehension.

Finally, there is another barrier in using good quality EdTech applications and software which is often paid, which is the inability of Bangladeshi students to purchase foreign products online. The tutors certainly cannot encourage looking into torrent alternatives, so there is a barrier to access. This specific issue is also not as easily solved as it requires authorisation and finding requests from the university funding bodies, which becomes a prolonged process. These specific aspects were mentioned by tutors in Universities A and E. The financial barrier posed by paid EdTech software for students and the ethical dilemma of suggesting non-authorised alternatives are crucial considerations. This aligns with Warschauer (2004), who highlights the "digital divide" and the importance of equitable access to educational technology. Universities could explore open-source or freemium EdTech options, negotiate bulk discounts, or seek funding to address affordability concerns.

Despite all the initiatives and rapid interest in incorporating technology and EdTech tools into education, there was very little evidence that significant pedagogical programmes were established. There was a rapid growth of EdTech companies and initiatives across the country in recent years but very few core pedagogical underpinnings to support the initiatives being effectively implemented within ESL/EFL settings.

Effective Pedagogical Training for Effective Integration of EdTech

As indicated in the researcher observations part of the findings section, while both formal education and informal tutoring aim to enhance student learning, the impact of each can vary considerably based on the underlying approach. Untrained tutoring, often driven by good intentions but lacking rigorous pedagogical grounding, can provide surface-level support or even hinder progress. On the contrary, a professional pedagogical approach, informed by evidence-based practices and a deep understanding of learning, fosters deeper understanding and empowers students to become independent learners. One participant from University E, who was a fourth-year English Learning and Teaching (ELT) student, noted:

> I sometimes feel like I am causing complications by relying on my theories because other non-ELT tutors are not using any of the approaches. I understand that it is the right way, but I sometimes get comments from students like, "that miss doesn't tell us to do these, she just shows us." Because of this I get anxious that I might get fired if a student complains. If you ask my honest opinion, this wouldn't happen if everyone had some basic pedagogical training at first.

This example clearly shows that the key difference lies in the intention behind the interaction. Untrained tutors, despite their knowledge of the subject matter, may rely heavily on rote memorisation, drills and passive information transfer (Hattie, 2009). As Snowman and Biehler (2020) rightly note, this "chalk and talk" approach, while seemingly efficient, fails to address individual learning styles, diagnose misconceptions, or cultivate critical thinking skills. Students may memorise facts for short-term gains but lack the ability to apply knowledge meaningfully, leading to frustration and potential negative impacts on self-esteem and overall motivation.

On the other hand, a professional pedagogical approach actively engages students in meaningful learning experiences (Hattie, 2009). Tutors with expertise in pedagogy employ varied instructional strategies, cater to individual needs and assess understanding formatively. They utilise questioning techniques to promote critical thinking, encourage self-reflection, and guide students towards independent problem-solving. This fosters a deeper understanding of concepts, promotes critical thinking and instils a lifelong love of learning, ultimately leading to improved academic performance, increased confidence and empowered learners. An example from a tutor in University B supports this argument:

> I had special feedback from 5 students this year after I used some method I learnt in my ELT course. I remember this one day, one student came and said that they really benefited from the extrinsic motivation of award system I created. They said this, and my constant telling them that I know they can do it, really boosted their confidence and will to improve. I try to use more theoretical approach since then.

The research is clear: students benefit significantly from evidence-based pedagogical practices (Shuell, 2010). Studies have shown that trained tutors who utilise strategies like scaffolding, differentiation and metacognitive prompts create positive learning environments that significantly outperform drill-based, untrained approaches. These benefits extend beyond immediate grade improvement, leading to enhanced critical thinking skills, stronger self-regulated learning and increased intrinsic motivation, all of which contribute to long-term academic success.

While both untrained tutoring and a professional pedagogical approach aim to support student learning, their impact differs vastly. Untrained tutoring, though well-intentioned, can offer limited benefits and even hinder progress. In contrast, a professional pedagogical approach, grounded in evidence-based practices and understanding of learning, empowers students to become independent learners, fosters critical thinking, and ultimately leads to significantly improved academic performance and lifelong intellectual growth. Therefore, investing in qualified tutors with sound pedagogical expertise is not just an investment in grades but an investment in nurturing empowered, lifelong learners.

Implications for Education in Bangladesh and South Asia

A significant challenge within South Asian education systems is the presence of a poorly-skilled and inadequately motivated teaching workforce (UNICEF, 2019). For over a decade, numerous reports and initiatives have emphasized the critical need for qualified teachers capable of seamlessly integrating educational technologies into their classrooms (Parvin and Salam, 2015). However, despite these calls to action and the accelerating pace of technological advancement, a substantial gap persists between the rapid evolution of technology and the rate at which educators can effectively adapt. This disparity underscores the necessity for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to address this critical issue. As the UNICEF report concludes that these changes are not about finances but action, '.....developing curricula well-aligned with these standards, regularly assessing student mastery of these standards, and designing quality teacher training that attracts a talented pool of students who are motivated to teach the demanding curriculum effectively' (2019), is the goal that must be put forward. The same applies for integration of tools into ESL learning spaces.

This study shows that Bangladesh is facing a dilemma caused by sociocultural friction. This friction is based on the belief that instruction that happens online, or not face-to-face directly from a tutor to a student, is not very reliable. This is what many would refer to as a "non-modern" way of thinking and is evidently quite traditional in nature. This mindset is firmly held by many parents in Bangladesh as afterschool coaching centres have become popular and are only growing in number. However, it is important to understand that these places do not offer space for developing independent and critical thinking but rather nurturing the very "spoon-feeding" tactics that seem to hinder student performance in universities, as shown in the findings.

A great starting point would be to roll out the necessity to upgrade teaching to integrate various EdTech tools and then experiment with which works best in different settings. EdTech tools do not only have to be limited to online apps and digital platforms, but they can also be offline resources such as downloadable mp3 recordings and videos. EdTech Hub is a good place to start as it offers insights into research and projects carried out in different countries. There are courses such as one on "Tech-Support Structured Pedagogy" and others for professional development (Adam et al., 2021). While this does not merely apply to ESL classrooms only, the point is to offer an immediate and relatively frictionless solution to ensure there is a movement towards the goals outlined for the future of digital education in Bangladesh.

The initial step would be to ensure that concrete steps are taken in regulating the implementation of digital technologies in education in Bangladesh. Other South Asian countries take this as an example to investigate similarities in these problems among their educational institutions. Moreover, instructors must have relevant, up-to-date training. It is important to acknowledge that the change happening in the EdTech sector is relatively rapid. So, the policies

must keep up with the pace and ensure that proper measures and regulations are implemented. Additionally, the study suggests that a pedagogically informed approach must be taken to digital education in Bangladesh and all South Asian countries. This involves designing and implementing programmes that are culturally and linguistically suitable to the country's unique context.

Finally, as an educator, I must emphasise the importance of integrating a culturally responsive pedagogical approach. This means making instructional approaches such as Universal Design Learning (UDL) and Diversified Approach a necessity in ESL teaching as the one method-fits-all approach simply does not work, as the findings have clearly suggested. In this way, each student will be presented with the EdTech tools and learning styles they are comfortable with, which will improve the effectiveness of the system. There is an important quote by Hemphill and Blakely that I want to share:

> The persistent view of English Language Learners (ELLs) as "at-risk" exemplifies the colonial logic behind many educational institutions and their presumed role in supporting "deprived" populations. "The objective of colonial discourse," Bhabha (1994) writes, "is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types . . . in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (p. 70). Tracked or remedial English Language Development (ELD) classes, tutoring, counselling, and parent education programs designed to "close the achievement gap" act as parts of this colonizing project.
>
> (Hemphill and Blakely, 2015)

This quote is essential in understanding that English Language Teaching should be viewed as a learning process reflecting the cultural aspects rather than attempting to erase the cultural elements in favour of the language being learnt. This approach will reorient the students not to think of the language as "superior" but rather assume it as a tool to help them read or communicate with people of other nationalities. It is important to access and integrate this into the teaching methodology when designing such lessons.

This study is limited by time constraints, and further research must be conducted with a larger-scale survey with more tutors to capture a wider range of perspectives. It might be useful to address the specific concerns and needs of tutors who are less receptive to gamification. It would also be helpful to attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of different gamification approaches and EdTech tools in the Bangladeshi context, but only in spaces where they are already implemented on a wider scale. I believe this is an example that Bangladesh and other South Asian countries could follow to build a strong pedagogical base for EdTech implementation (Ferrell et al., 2018). This requires policymakers, educators and researchers to work collaboratively to address the challenges of limited access to technology, inadequate teacher training, and infrastructure. By doing so, digital education has the potential to promote lifelong learning, bridge the gender gap and promote critical thinking.

Conclusion

This study provided perspectives from ESL tutors in tertiary education institutions on what hinders the seamless integration of EdTech tools into ESL instruction. The findings show that the barriers are not limited to internet access or availability but also include cultural factors such as background, traditional mindset and lack of intrinsic motivation. Another key factor identified is the crucial need for widely available professional skill development programmes for educators at all levels, especially those needing to integrate EdTech. This chapter demonstrates that through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT), the complexities of EdTech integration in Bangladeshi ESL instruction come into sharper focus. SCT posits that learning occurs within the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), where learners, supported by more knowledgeable peers or instructors, can grasp concepts beyond their independent reach (Vygotsky, 1978). EdTech tools, when strategically implemented, can become powerful mediators within this zone. Collaborative platforms can facilitate peer interaction and knowledge sharing, fostering the social construction of understanding central to SCT. Interactive language apps can provide scaffolded learning experiences, gradually increasing the difficulty to match individual learner needs (Gu, 2019). However, challenges arise when these tools fail to consider the sociocultural context of Bangladeshi classrooms. Limited access to technology, uneven infrastructure, and varying digital literacy levels among students and teachers can exacerbate existing inequalities and hinder effective use within the ZPD. Moreover, cultural norms and expectations around learning styles and teacher–student dynamics might require adaptations to EdTech implementation for optimal impact.

Overall, this study highlights the need to address broader challenges related to understanding the sociocultural makeup of students and developing diversified learning approaches based on their backgrounds to harness the potential benefits of digital technology for ESL in Bangladesh. Following the example of the neighbouring country, India, which has been a leader in the EdTech sector, Bangladesh can create an ecosystem that fosters innovation by developing policies that facilitate the integration of technology in education. Additionally, teacher training programmes must be developed to provide sufficient pedagogical knowledge and skills required for effective digital education. This means introducing more university programmes offering education degrees and PGCE-type training programmes emphasising EdTech tools and AI incorporation. Furthermore, digital education can be used to promote 21st-century skills such as collaboration and creativity, which are essential for preparing learners for the future workforce. By addressing these challenges and adopting a pedagogically informed approach to digital education, Bangladesh can pave the way for a brighter and more equitable future for its citizens. By investing in technology and training teachers on how to use it effectively, the government of Bangladesh will ensure that all students have access to an inclusive, diverse and quality education.

References

Adam, Tom, Rong Chuang, and Björn Haßler. 2021. *Structured Pedagogy and EdTech.* EdTech Hub. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4460344

Ahmadi, Mohammad Reza. 2018. *International Journal of Research in English Education*.

Archer, Louise, Jennifer DeWitt, and Susie Willis. 2012. *Aspirations and Attainment in Higher Education: An Exploration of Class, 'Race' and Gender*. Routledge.

Bhabha, H.K. 1994. The Location of Culture. Routledge.

Biggs, John. 2012. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (4thed.). Open University Press.

Brod, Garvin, Natalia Kucirkova, Joshua Shepherd, Dietsje Jolles, and Inge Molenaar, 2023. "Agency in educational technology: interdisciplinary perspectives and implications for learning design", *Educational Psychology Review*, (1): 35. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09749-x

Carlone, Heidi B., and William L. Sanders. 2018. "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Teacher Education: A Critical Examination of the Research Base", *Review of Educational Research*, 88 (1): 88–120.

Chun, D., R. Kern, and B. Smith. 2016. "Technology in language use, language teaching, and language learning", *The Modern Language Journal*, 100 (S1): 64–80.

Coffield, Frank, David Moseley, Elaine Hall, Kathryn Ecclestone, and David Johnston. 2004. *Learning Styles and Pedagogy in Post-16 Education* (Vol. 4). Routledge.

Cuban, Larry. 2001. *Oversold & Underused: Rethinking Educational Technology.* Teachers College Press.

David, Raluca, Toby Phillips, and Arnaldo Pellini, 2021. "Education during the covid-19: crisis opportunities and constraints of using EdTech in low-income countries", *Revista De Educación a Distancia (Red)*, (65): 21. https://doi.org/10.6018/red.453621

Dede, C. 2009. Immersive Interfaces for Engagement and Learning. *Science*, *323*, 66–69.

Dicheva, D., Dichev, C. 2017. Gamifying education: what is known, what is believed and what remains uncertain: a critical review. *Int J Educ Technol High Educ* 14, 9 https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-017-0042-5

Ertmer, Peggy A., and Anne T. Ottenbreit-Leftwich. 2013. "Removing Obstacles to the Pedagogical Changes Required by Jonassen's Vision of Authentic Technology-Enabled Learning", *Computers & Education*, 64: 175–182.

Ferreira, Giselle, Márcio Silveira Lem Gruber, and Thiago Cabrera. 2023. "From didachography to ai: metaphors teaching is automated by", *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* (1): 2023. https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.798

Ferrell, G., R. Smith, and S. Knight. 2018. *Designing Learning and Assessment in a Digital Age*. JISC, Head of Learning and Teaching Transformation, Higher Education. https://www.jisc.ac.uk/full-guide/designing-learning-and-assessment-in-a-digital-age#

Gu, A.Y. 2019. "Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning". In *Educational Technology in EFL/ESL: A Sociocultural Perspective*, edited by J. Herrington, A. Ke, and J.Y. Chan, 7–22. Springer.

Hattie, John. 2009. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement.* London: Routledge.

Hemphill, D., and E. Blakely. 2015. *Language, Nation, and Identity in the Classroom: Legacies of Modernity and Colonialism in Schooling* (1sted.). New York: Peter Lang.

Hossain, M., and R. Al Hasan. 2023. "Educational Technology (EdTech) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Bangladesh: Necessities, Innovations, and Implications", *Studies in Linguistics, Culture, and FLT* 11: 102–129. https://doi.org/10.46687/NREO6623

Hurwitz, Lisa B. and Kirk Vanacore. 2022. "Educational technology in support of elementary students with reading or language-based disabilities: a cluster randomized control trial", *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 56 (6): 453–466. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194221141093

Kerssens, Niels, José Van Dijck, et al. 2022. "Governed by Edtech? Valuing Pedagogical Autonomy in a Platform Society", *Harvard Educational Review*, 92 (2): 284–303.

Khokhar, A., Gulab, F. & Javaid, S. 2017. Information Communication Technology Integration: Trained Secondary School Teachers' Dilemma. *Journal of Research in Social Sciences -JRSS.* 5, 94–102.

Kozma, Robert. 2008. "Comparative Analysis of Policies for ICT in Education". In *International Handbook of Information Technology in Primary and Secondary Education*, edited by J. Voogt, and G. Knezek, 1083–1096. Springer.

Lam, P.L., H.K. Ng, and A.H. Tse. 2021. "eLearning Technology and the Advancement of Practical Constructivist Pedagogies: Illustrations from Classroom Observations", *Educational Information Technology*, 26: 89–101. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10245-w

Lam, Y., & Lawrence, G. 2002. Teacher-student role redefinition during a computer-based second language project: Are computers catalysts for empowering change? Computer Assisted Language Learning, 15 (3), 295–315. https://doi.org/10.1076/call.15.3.295.8185

Marcinkonienė, Romualda, and Jūratė Zdanytė. 2016. "Screen vs paper in foreign language learning", *Studies About Languages*, (27): 0. https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.27.13748

Mishra, Punya, and Matthew J. Koehler. 2006. "Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A Framework for Teacher Knowledge", *Teachers College Record*, 108 (6): 1017–1054.

Mitra, S. 2005, "Self organising systems for mass computer literacy: Findings from the 'hole in the wall' experiments", *International Journal of Development Issues*, 4 (1), 71–81. https://doi.org/10.1108/eb045849

Nazaretsky, Tanya, Mutlu Cukurova, and Giora Alexandron, 2022. "An instrument for measuring teachers' trust in ai-based educational technology", https://doi.org/10.1145/3506860.3506866

Parvin, R.H., and S.F. Salam. 2015. "The Effectiveness of Using Technology in English Language Classrooms in Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh", *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, 2 (1). http://preserve.lehigh.edu/fire/vol2/iss1/5

Peters, Mitchell, Montse Guitert Catasús, and Marc Romero Carbonell, 2022. "Finding balance through connected learning designs: disentangling self-regulated and co-regulated learning in online postgraduate education", *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, (1): 2022. https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.752

Pourhossein Gilakjani, A. 2017. A review of the literature on the integration of technology into the learning and teaching of English language skills. International Journal of English Linguistics, 7 (5), 95–106. doi:10.5539/ijel.v7n5p95

Sabatini, John, Jae Park, Anya Chakraborty, Arthur C. Graesser, Macintyre Thomas, C. Manoj, and Moses Oladele Ogunniran. 2022. "Education technology", https://doi.org/10.56383/sdro8173

Sastre, Moisés Selfa i, Manoli Pifarré, Andreea Cujba, Laia Cutillas, and Enric Falguera. 2022. "The role of digital technologies to promote collaborative creativity in language education", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.828981

Selwyn, N., and K. Facer. 2014. "The sociology of education and digital technology: Past, present and future", *Oxford Review of Education*, 40 (4): 482–496.

Shuash, Rgwan, Seriaznita Mat Said, Jameela Hanoon Umarlebbe, Al-Fartoosi Rana, Ali Mhoodar, and Asma Alasbali. 2020. "Gamification and Education: An Overview", *Test Engineering and Management*, 9128–9137.

Shuell, T.J. 2010. *Scaffolding Student Learning: Instructional Approaches and Practices That Work*. Wiley. https://ctl.wiley.com/scaffolding-learning-in-the-online-classroom/

Snowman, Jack, and Robert Biehler. 2020. *Psychology for Effective Teaching: Integrating Theory and Practice* (14thed.). Wadsworth/Cengage Learning.

Solanki, D., & Shyamlee, M. P. 2012. Use of technology in English language teaching and learning: An analysis. *2012 International Conference on Language, Medias and Culture IPEDR* vol. 33(2012)©(2012)IACSIT Press, Singapore. 150–156.

UNICEF (2019) Improving Education Quality in South Asia (I) : A review of UNICEF's Efforts. https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/6991/file/Improving%20Education%20Quality%20in%20South%20Asia%20(I)_30Aug_019_Web.pdf.pdf

Vivek, G. 2020. "Digital Education Transformation: A Pedagogical Revolution", *i-manager's Journal of Educational Technology*, 17 (2): 66–82. https://doi.org/10.26634/jet.17.2.17136.

Vygotsky, L. S. 1978. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Warschauer, Mark. 2004. "Technology as Scaffolding for Second Language Learning: Epistemological and Pedagogical Considerations", *TESOL Quarterly*, 38 (1): 5–27.

"What is the Education Challenge in Bangladesh?" n.d. Teach the World Foundation. https://www.teachtheworldfoundation.com/whom-we-impact/bangladesh?

Zhao, Yong, and Kenneth A. Frank. 2003. "Technology in Teacher Education: Deciding What Goes into the Black Box", *Educational Researcher*, 32 (4): 27–32.

13 Virtual teacher communities in Sri Lanka

Difficulties and possibilities

Sandapa Dissanayake, Mihiri Jansz and Brooke Schreiber

Introduction

In Sri Lanka, as in many other contexts, the COVID-19 pandemic created profound disruptions to higher education. With the closure of educational institutions and physical distancing maintained worldwide, there was an unprecedented immediate move to remote and digital learning. Teachers had to adapt to a paradigm shift in pedagogy with or without prior experience, technical skills and knowledge in educational technology, creating an immediate demand for professional development which also needed to be delivered online. This situation was both an extreme challenge and an opportunity to pilot new, innovative ways of doing professional development.

Given the remoteness of many schools and universities in Sri Lanka, the lack of existing professional development, and the financial and practical difficulty for teachers in travelling to urban centres (e.g., Asian Development Bank), virtual teacher professional development (TPD) could be a viable option. Professional development around educational technology is a growing need in Global South countries like Sri Lanka, as teachers need to prepare for online teaching. Professional development is also especially crucial for novice English language teachers at the tertiary level, given the complex role of English in Sri Lankan culture and the multiple varieties of and beliefs about English, that Sri Lankan language teachers must contend with (Schreiber and Jansz, 2020).

This chapter describes a TPD initiative that underwent a transformation to accommodate that new digital landscape and provide support, resources and a sense of connection among a selected group of English teachers: specifically, novice English teachers in a state university in Sri Lanka. The chapter reports on an action research (AR) project involving eight English teachers who were teaching a six-week Intensive English Language Course for incoming students in business and finance and who participated in an online community which was conducted using both synchronous and asynchronous technologies. The chapter reports on the issues teachers reported facing during the teacher professional development sessions.

We first outline the linguistic context of Sri Lanka and the educational system in which the teachers were working, then review relevant literature on

DOI: 10.4324/9781003491347-17

TPD online. We then describe the project itself and the data collection, before turning to an analysis of the teachers' experiences in the programme, in particular how the teachers' lack of resources and cultural determinants impacted the effectiveness of the professional development activities. The chapter sheds light on the challenges the teachers experienced within the virtual teacher community, and we argue that the perception of online teacher education as effective in the Global North and the global use of it as a solution during a pandemic sharply contrasts with the practical challenges faced in the Global South given the disparities in technological infrastructure, cultural context and socioeconomic factors. We conclude with a discussion of initiatives that could better support teachers' participation in a fully online professional development community, both practically in terms of infrastructure and connectivity, and ideologically, offering more training on the nature and purpose of these communities, and new, more specific platforms.

Language ecology and education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a deeply multilingual country with two national languages, Sinhala and Tamil, one official link language, English, and minority languages such as indigenous Adhivasi language and Sri Lanka Portuguese (Rasool 2020). The rich linguistic diversity in Sri Lanka, in other words, is shaped by its colonial past and indigenous languages. The Sri Lankan societal discourse around English is complicated. Generally, English is perceived as a sure path to economic prosperity and upward social mobility (e.g. Fonseka, 2001); in fact, it is seen as "the panacea for all problems pertaining to higher education and employment" (Raheem and Ratwatte 2004, 29). In the years since Sri Lankan independence, there have been various moves to eradicate or de-hegemonise English (Parakrama 2012), including the switch to Sinhala as the official language in 1956. Yet, globalisation intertwined with technological advancements that are dominated by English have upheld and strengthened the importance of English in postcolonial Sri Lanka (Canagarajah 2005).

In modern-day Sri Lanka, English is widely taught as a second language. With the lasting colonial legacy, English is entrenched in the Sri Lankan education system, continuing to promote a Eurocentric worldview and epistemology (Mignolo 2000). Privileging English at the expense of indigenous languages like Sinhala and Tamil reflects a form of linguistic imperialism (Pennycook 2017) and can downgrade the official languages to a secondary status. Providing equal access to English to ensure that everyone has the same opportunities for employment and social mobility appears democratic. However, in the process, there is a re-enforcement of a colonial language as the one with the most capital, and Navaz (2021) has argued that the use of English as a medium of instruction may actually compromise the quality of education a student acquires because quality English medium education may be limited to institutions where anglophone or well English educated educators teach, primarily in wealthier, urban areas.

Currently, tertiary education provided by the state is delivered in Sinhala, Tamil and English media while certain disciplines such as medicine, science and engineering are delivered exclusively in English (Navaz 2021), reinforcing English's privileged postcolonial status. General English has been included as a subject that all students should take as part of their Advanced Level examination at the end of high school, which serves as an entrance requirement for state universities, further highlighting the tension between English and indigenous languages in postcolonial Sri Lanka. However, passing English is not required for entrance, and so its inclusion is largely symbolic of the importance of English in Sri Lankan higher education. The reluctance to make English a strict requirement could be attributed to concerns regarding education equity and potential backlash. Overall, the complex status of English in Sri Lankan education reflects attempts to balance global trends with the preservation of local/indigenous languages and ways of knowing.

Since 1982, intensive courses in English for incoming undergraduates in state universities have been offered (Gunawardene 2009). The great emphasis on English at the tertiary level has also resulted in dedicated departments of English language teaching in all state universities whose role is to bridge students' proficiency gaps in English supporting them to complete their degrees in the English medium and become more employable. The current study focuses on fresh graduates from these English language teaching programmes, who were then recruited to teach intensive language courses.

Use of technology in ESL education in Sri Lanka

Within Sri Lanka, access to technology is far from uniform in educational contexts, including primary and secondary school contexts as well as state university contexts (de Silva and Amaradasa 2022). There was a rapid and unprecedented adoption of technologies such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and WhatsApp in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic to support higher education in Sri Lanka. However, differing access to the internet, devices and digital skills associated with socio-economic background caused differential impacts on the learning of students from economically privileged and underprivileged backgrounds (Hayashi et al. 2020). Although there are some policy introductions to make a digitally inclusive Sri Lanka, lapses still remain in tertiary education.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

Effective delivery of TPD is a constant concern in the field of education because of its deep importance to educational quality. According to Helleve (2010), "to be a professional teacher or teacher educator means to participate in an ongoing learning process" (p. 1), and The World Bank's World Development Report (2018) emphasises that "equipped and motivated

teachers are the most fundamental ingredient of learning" (p. 131). Effective teacher education is particularly indispensable in Sri Lanka because it can help to address the lack of quality of delivery, lack of preparedness for technology integration, lack of professional standards, and improve the currency of knowledge, and motivation. TPD not only gives teachers access to the latest pedagogical strategies, evaluation methods, and educational technology tools, but can also enhance teachers' proficiency in English and thus their confidence. In addition, TPD will enable teachers to address the needs and challenges of the highly diverse student populations in Sri Lanka. TPD in Sri Lanka has mostly been overlooked, and a long-term investment on it is absent in Sri Lanka, as short-term needs are often prioritised.

Gaible and Burns (2005) have argued that effective TPD must include inquiry-oriented, adaptive, collaborative and reflective methods such as communities, peer observations, action research, group discussions and projects integrated into the teachers' regular teaching practice. TPD must be carefully planned to account for the needs of teachers and the environment they work in, as well as the time and resources teachers can devote to TPD (World Bank's World Development Report 2018).

One way to provide this much-needed TPD is to create professional learning communities, which "have been held up as powerful structures for teachers' continuing professional development" in the literature (Servage 2008 74). The advancement of technology has allowed these communities to become more accessible and dynamic support systems, enabling teachers to share best practices, teaching strategies, and resources. Within professional learning communities, teachers can engage in critical reflections on their teaching practices and refine them through collaborative inquiry, and this can support teachers' development of critical pedagogies (Freire, 1970). Through collective dialogue, teachers can support each other in challenging digital inequities, contesting linguistic imperialism, and creating inclusive learning environments for students. In particular, TPD for online teaching is crucial to help teachers adapt to the ever-evolving digital landscape, stay updated on the latest educational technologies, troubleshoot the use of those technologies, develop their own digital literacy, and ultimately provide more effective learning experiences for their students.

Within Sri Lanka, a small number of studies on TPD have shown that asynchronous discussion forums provide useful opportunities for teachers interactions and inquiry-based learning (Schreiber and Jansz 2020; Gunawardena et al. 2012). Schreiber and Jansz (2020) suggest that synchronous discussions can reduce transactional distance, but time differences, students' lack of free time, and bandwidth limitations may make that difficult. As Abeywickrama's (2021) study identified, university teachers sought the support of digital internet-assisted tools and applications and social media platforms to improve the quality of their teaching practice. Abeywickrama (2021) emphasises the importance of promoting Sri Lanka teachers' interest to pursue professional development through opportunities that cater to their real needs.

Overall, it's clear that the Sri Lankan education system is in need of good opportunities for TPD to prepare teachers for the twenty-first-century skills such as using technology collaboration, critical thinking and decision-making (Sethunga et al. 2016). This demand exists in the higher education sector because the teachers are short of pedagogical content knowledge (Abeywickrama 2019, 2021) to manage the constantly changing education landscape

Online TPD

Online TPD is a steadily growing area of teacher education research (Dille and Rokenes 2021, Lantz-Andersson et al. 2018, Macia and Garcia, 2016). Much of the literature has explored the advantages and importance of online teacher communities that are carried out as formal and informal networks (Dille and Rokenes 2021; Lantz-Andersson et al. 2018; Macia and Garcia 2016; Fasso 2010; Reading 2010; Vavasseur and MacGregor 2008). Teacher reflections (Sarmad 2017; Hawkes and Romiszowski 2001), sustainability of teacher learning (Pierre 2016), accessibility from different geographical locations, flexibility for the teachers to engage in self-paced learning, guidance on technology incorporation (Ferdig et al. 2020), collegial support, and collaborative opportunities such as discussion forums and live conferencing, are such regularly identified benefits.

Research has also explored the use of synchronous or asynchronous communication tools and blended approaches as viable methods for teacher education (Sumer 2021, Kong 2018). Asynchronous virtual teacher communities are often characterised in the literature as providing affordances for deep learning and development (Ajani 2021; Cansoy 2017; Pierre 2016; Sarmad 2017). However, Sumer (2021) recommends the use of synchronous communication tools for teacher reflections in TPD, and Kong (2018) supports a blended approach. This range of findings may reflect teachers' cultural context, needs, attitudes, access to technology, time and convenience as well as the design of TPD activities.

Despite the general findings suggesting that asynchronous online teacher communities can support deep learning and development, studies have also noted that asynchronous TPD can result in less immediate and less interactive reflection on teachers' personal teaching experiences, superficial sharing practices, and lack of critical exchangement among teachers (Ciampa and Gallagher 2015; Prestridge 2009; Lin, Lin and Huang 2008). For example, the tendency towards seeking information rather than collaborating, lack of experience, insecurity and discomfort in sharing ideas publicly and lack of face-to-face communication can be barriers to teachers' active participation in an online community (Brass and Mecoli 2011). "Free riding" (Lin, Lin and Huang 2008) in such contexts may result in discouraging those who are already participating in a community, leading to a participant dropout.

It's important to consider that the vast majority of studies on online TPD have been conducted in the Global North and tend to prioritise the views, experiences and resources of economically developed countries with

better-equipped educational institutes and better access to technology, usually supported by funding. They have national standards and educational policies to guide educators with virtual professional support such as ISTE standards for educators in the USA, Education and Training Foundation in the UK, Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) and Digital literacy framework by the Ontario Ministry of Education in Canada. There is a coherence in their educational systems to support more structured, standardised and accessible online TPD mechanisms. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the Global North has recognised the strengths of online TPD, which may not transfer to the Global South.

In particular, for virtual TPD in Sri Lanka, a country belonging to the Global South, examining the cultural relevance of online TPD is important. There may be several issues with implementation. First, there is a lack of understanding regarding the cultural nuances and associated factors, the historical impact of coloniality on educational practices and the linguistic diversity of the country that may influence the designing of online TPD. A further lack of research on best practices for implementation in this context may limit the quality of the limited existing online teacher education programmes in the Global South. Since online TPD communities are not a familiar concept in these countries, they are not as prevalent as in the Global North where they hold the promise for developing teachers professionally. Thus, there is a call for more empirical scholarly investigations into rigorous methods and designs of online TPD that could examine the complex nature of teacher development in virtual space (Dede and Ketelhut 2008). As claimed by Hartshorne et al. (2020), the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of TPD communities in technology-mediated settings. Accordingly, this study addressed a gap in the existing literature on online TPD in the Global South.

The current study

In 2021, during the peak of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka, the Department of English Language Teaching (DELT) of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka (WUSL) offered an Online Intensive English Language Course for the new entrants of the Faculty of Business Studies and Finance (FBSF) within a relatively short period of six weeks. The intensive course was intended to provide a convenient and accessible way for the incoming students to achieve English language proficiency and skills to meet the demands of English-medium instruction. Five English instructors were newly hired to teach virtually using the LEARN Zoom platform and the university Learning Management System (LMS) namely MOODLE. ZOOM sessions were held on weekdays for four hours per day. The LMS was used for purposes such as sharing study materials, lecture recordings and announcements, embedding online exercises as well as administering quizzes and assessments.

Because the English teachers hired to teach the six groups of the course were novices, with limited or no teaching experience in both in-person and

online tertiary contexts, it was essential to provide professional development during the teaching period. Novice teachers are likely to encounter "practice shock" because the reality of instruction is contrary to the ideal view of teaching that they expect (Helleve 2010). In order to support the novice and less-experienced English teachers who were physically isolated during the pandemic to be prepared for the prospective challenges they might face in the virtual classroom and develop their pedagogical practices, a virtual teacher community was implemented.

Both synchronous and asynchronous platforms were incorporated in designing the online teacher community. During the six-week intensive course, the researchers led two cycles of the intervention based on the cyclical AR model of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) where the four stages of plan, action, observe and reflect were iteratively followed. A Zoom discussion and an LMS forum facilitated the community in Intervention 1. Two Zoom discussions and an ongoing WhatsApp group were used in Intervention 2. The goal of the activities was solving and helping with the issues faced by the teachers, sharing and discussing teaching ideas, and planning the overall teaching of the course that together could develop a sense of collegiality (Table 13.1).

Table 13.1 Sequence of events undertaken in the current study

Step	*Time*	*Event*	*Purpose*
1	Before the intervention	A focus group discussion with novice instructors	To identify the teachers' needs, determine the inquiry focus & intended improvements
2	Before the intervention	An orientation to Zoom and LMS	To provide training on the platforms as they were not familiar with them
The online teacher community—Intervention 1			
3	During Cycle 1	Weekly reflective journals maintained by the teachers and facilitator	To record observations & reflect on the community on a regular basis
4	After Cycle 1	Interviews with teachers	To gather further insights on the effect of the intervention
Redesigned online teacher community—Intervention 2			
5	During Cycle 2	Weekly reflective journals maintained by the teachers and facilitator	To record observations & reflect on the community on a regular basis
6	After Cycle 2	Interviews with teachers	To gather data on the effect of the reconstructed community

The focus group discussion conducted before the intervention had questions to elicit the participants' educational and teaching background, teaching philosophy, access and use of technology, and knowledge and experience in online teacher education. In the discussion, it emerged that novice teachers were not familiar with the Learning Management System (LMS) and Zoom, so an online orientation to the platforms was added.

The online teacher community consisted of five novice English instructors and three early career lecturers. Lecturers were considered more experienced than the new instructors, but not veterans. Experienced teachers were a source of rich input who were at the same age level as well as tech-savvy. The participants were selected based on convenience sampling along with informed consent. Four novice instructors' and three lecturers' first language was Sinhala whereas one instructor's first language was Tamil. All participants were female, young adults between the ages of 25–30 who lived in several remote areas in the country. All of them were graduates in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or English from state universities except one instructor holding a higher diploma in English.

TPD activities were scheduled according to the participant teachers' preferences and availability. There was flexibility in deciding how much time to allocate in them; therefore, the community followed protocols. In Cycle 1, the Zoom structured discussion protocol facilitated weekly one-hour sessions during weekends, where each novice teacher was expected to share e-teaching issues and others were encouraged to provide feedback. Similarly, the structured LMS discussion forum, also held weekly on weekends, and the teachers were encouraged to propose innovative online activities for upcoming lessons, with all members expected to actively participate by replying to others' ideas, and commenting at least to one reply. The protocols for Cycle 2 involved structured Zoom discussions twice a week for sharing teaching issues followed by comments from other members similar to Cycle 1 and collaborative lesson planning in Zoom break-out rooms. In addition, a WhatsApp group for discussion, feedback, and sharing of innovative teaching activities and resources was initiated.

The facilitator and participants maintained reflective journals as self-assessment tools to reflect on the online community, and the Gibbs (1988) Reflective Cycle was adopted to think systematically about the experience from an educational perspective. Maintaining a reflective diary demanded commitment and interest from the participants to frequently record detailed accounts of their inner thoughts about the ODCTPD. Nevertheless, the participants were encouraged to record what they experienced, as it was crucial for their professional development, especially for the novice teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants individually to explore their views on the impact of the ODCTPD in an open, supportive environment. They were conducted at the end of each cycle and each interview took about 15–20 minutes. The interview protocol investigated online class difficulties, preparation of lesson materials, attitudinal changes, sense of community,

comfort in sharing ideas, peer involvement, preference for discussion types and technology, encountered barriers, and opinions on the effectiveness and potential improvements of the programme. Data analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive approach of thematic analysis.

Teachers' responses to the online TPD community

The online TPD intervention experienced several profound challenges, necessitating changes to the protocol, which are described below. Ultimately, the data suggests that these novice instructors were not yet ready to benefit from a fully online TPD community, and demonstrates that remote English teacher development is nuanced and very context-dependent.

Resistance to asynchronous communication

The participant teachers resisted using the asynchronous forums, demonstrating disengagement from them. This was evident when towards the end of Cycle 1, the LMS forum was just a platform to share resources, and most posts received zero replies from other instructors. In fact, by the end of Cycle 1, only two novice teachers were still posting in the forum.

When asked about this disengagement, the teachers cited concerns about the time lag in terms of responses and consequent disengagement and a general disinclination to engage in sustained asynchronous dialogue. They also stated that the forum did not actually support them in finding solutions to problems.

The most commonly referenced reason for resistance to the forum was the lack of immediacy of responses, the need to wait for a reply, and in some cases, a lack of any reply. As one participant wrote in her journal:

> Lack of interactive nature of the LMS discussion forum was evident; I often felt frustrated due to the passive nature…; I think text-based chats are not productive…they lack encouragement for contributing; It will be useful if an alternative to forums can be used like social media. That will be convenient and interactive.
>
> Another participant explained, "In the forum, I upload and wait. I get feedback after a while. Then, honestly I get fed up. It's better to have live discussions". For instance, as frequently observed on the forum, there were replies to posts delayed by four to five days."
>
> A third participant reiterated a preference for real-time communication, which she thought would provide a sense of presence and immediate responses: "I missed on the spot talks … chats that I wanted to happen". A fourth participant echoed that sentiment saying "We are not actually used to this forum thing."

Accordingly, the instructors seemed to be alienated in the asynchronous platform. This alienation could stem from a preference for oral interactions inherent

in a rich oral tradition that is a part of Sri Lanka's heritage. For instance, elders share stories with communities that gather around to listen to them as a means of knowledge construction with collective understanding (Dawoodbhoy 2021).

Another possible interpretation is that the teachers were isolated and felt unsupported due to the high transactional distance (Moore 1997) created by the forum. In previous studies, asynchronous discussion forums have been shown to have the capacity to increase dialogue, in part because they allow participants additional time to prepare responses (Ikhsanudin 2021; Andresen 2009). Thus, the discussion forums were imagined as a way to support quality feedback and meaningful discussions in the remote teacher community. However, this was not what transpired.

Although the novice teachers identified the need for and importance of remedial feedback, which they were used to in face-to-face discussions, they rarely provided each other immediate constructive feedback in the asynchronous forum. This might, again, be due to the unfamiliarity with the asynchronous mode, or reluctance in providing written feedback that did not align with an oral culture. Furthermore, this study corroborates the conclusions drawn by Brass and Mecoli (2011) that limited experience and the absence of direct communication become barriers to active participation in an online TPD community.

Another concern was the general user-friendliness of the LMS interface. One participant reported the following:

> I don't like the appearance of forums. I feel it's somewhat old.. or outdated.. It's not very instant to get the options to a message. Even the basic options like attaching files and links are complicated. So, I actually found it challenging…

A disinclination to use the forum especially for collaborative dialogue contributed to limited engagement and surface-level interaction. Superficial engagement was detrimental to the TPD experience of teachers as Figure 13.1 illustrates, resulting in limited, late and shallow responses In fact, the participants preferred making posts rather than commenting on others' replies. The maximum number of replies to any post in the forum was 4. Encouraging teachers to generate "discussions characterized by openness, debate, and constructive criticism" was a challenge (Al-Jarf, 2021). They did not engage in critical analysis of social dimensions such as digital divide and did not build a sense of community within the online teaching context when utilising the shared resources. This sense of community, created by deep engagement, is a necessary building block in supporting the development of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) through TPD.

In addition, the community was facilitated in English, as is the norm for academic settings focused on English language teaching, and as a result, the language the participants mainly used in the TPD community was English since the community was facilitated in English which was the norm for academic settings. However, English was not their first language, and they were new to

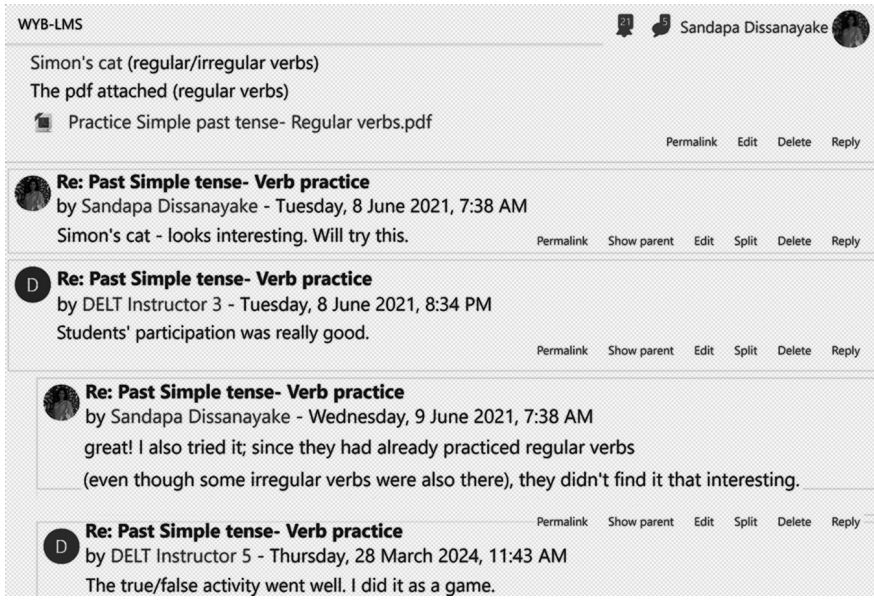


Figure 13.1 A sample forum in MOODLE.

collaborative and reflective discussions particularly in English, making them less comfortable expressing themselves, fully recognising these language dynamics, and inviting the use of the local languages in addition to or instead of English, could be one way to decolonise the practices in an online TPD community and make the community more pedagogically effective and more critical.

It can be surmised that the teachers preferred expressing themselves orally and that they felt limited and disjoined in the asynchronous forum. As one participant stated

> …. the discussion was not mm… like there was no flow to the discussion most of the time. When it is written and people do not respond quickly, adjusting the conversation is difficult I think. This is a communication lag we faced actually.

This can be framed by Kern's (2011, 203) process-product continuum of modes in digital written communication. There are two orientations of digital writing that are the two ends of the spectrum: "product"-oriented forms resembling paper-based writing (e.g. Websites, most email) and "process"'-oriented interactive discourse (e.g. instant messaging, chat) that shares many features of speech. Written communication in forums is biased towards product-oriented communication by merely "releasing" messages to the readers. They are posted for other participants to respond to and it focuses on the end result, not the process.

Given that the formal education system introduced to Sri Lanka by the colonisers, i.e., Portuguese, Dutch and British, including structured, written methods of learning, Sri Lanka has experienced a transition from the traditional oral culture to a Westernised written culture during and after the colonial period. Those traditions were devalued by the colonial powers because "within the logic of modernity/coloniality, other people's ways of being and knowing are considered inferior" (López-Gopar et al. 2021, 152). The resistance we observed to communication through asynchronous forums among our participants, leads us to question whether decolonising education should begin by confronting unmarked discourses that normalise the privileging of written rather than spoken ways of knowing.

Multiple platforms and mobile accessibility

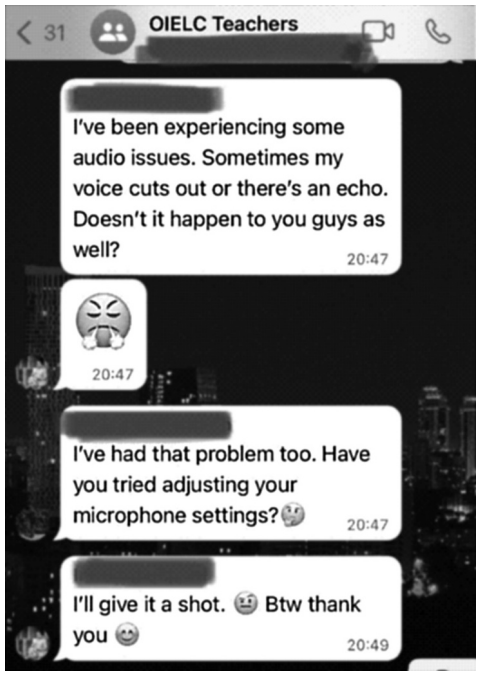
At the end of Cycle 1, based on observations of the LMS forum, and the participants' comments, the facilitator saw a need for an alternative platform. WhatsApp was chosen as a more user-friendly and readily accessible tool, to be used in Cycle 2, although it was "not truly synchronous" (Kern 2011, 203). This suggestion was made by the novice teachers as they were already using WhatsApp and had WhatsApp groups with their students too.

WhatsApp is a tool of written electronically mediated communication that can be placed on the interactive process-oriented end of the continuum on account of its spontaneity that resembles speech (Kern 2011). As an instant messaging app, especially popular among contemporary Sri Lankans, it is compatible with oral culture and was already familiar to the participants. Real-time communication allowed teachers to quickly share texts and voice messages as well as multimedia.

Participants preferred WhatsApp because it was, as one participant noted, "more efficient than the LMS" and "gave immediate feedback from others."

The WhatsApp chats were lengthy and interactive compared to forums. There were several types of messages in WhatsApp chats related to sharing, questioning, requesting ideas of online teaching strategies/materials, providing feedback on shared resources/teaching experiences, collaborative planning of quizzes/assessments, collaborative efforts in solving technical issues, and caring and supporting each other during that challenging pandemic period. Evidence for such engagement is given in Figures 13.2 and 13.3. There was a diversity of content shared in instant messaging, that was focused on novice English teachers' development.

It seemed that this modality helped to reduce transactional distance by increasing social presence and contact. Studies highlight that instant messaging helps teachers to develop as a community and WhatsApp specifically is identified as facilitating the sharing of pedagogical content knowledge and emotional support (Ajani 2021; Cansoy 2017). This supportive environment for teachers was clearly identified in this study's WhatsApp chats.



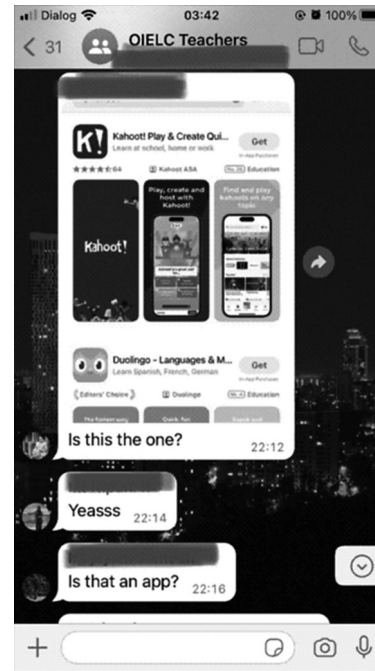
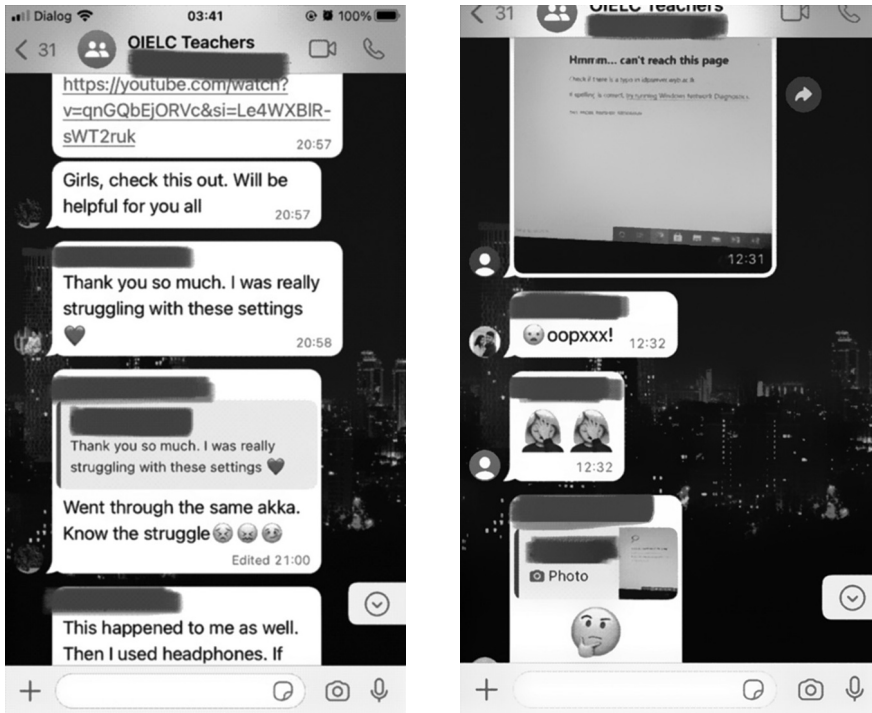


Figure 13.2 & 13.3 WhatsApp chats for collaborative troubleshooting and questioning.

Mobile accessibility was an advantage for the remote teachers to stay connected in the community. As one participant expressed, "We didn't want to be at the computer because we could use WhatsApp on the phone. Earlier we had to check the LMS from time to time. So using WhatsApp was very easy for us." Instant notifications ensured the teachers were informed about others' messages and resources immediately leading to time-sensitive discussions. Using WhatsApp for sharing resources was also productive as there were multiple materials and sources shared in comparison with the LMS forum. In contrast to the asynchronous forum, when participants shared any pedagogical or technological resource, teaching experience, or article, there was an immediate response within the chat. Participants also appreciated being able to communicate multimodally using emojis, stickers, voice messaging, and video conferencing.

The forums had not provided such features to capture the attention of the participants and create communicative motivation. The participants reported that in MOODLE text-based interactions, they missed the sort of emotional expression usually conveyed and shared in face-to-face conversations. WhatsApp allowed a richer exchange of information and empathy that aligned well with oral traditions.



Figures 13.4 & 13.5 WhatsApp chats with emoji-based emotional expressions.

Digital divide and inequalities

Digital divide can be defined as the dichotomy between people with and without access to information and communication technology (Soomro et al., 2020). It also refers to the division between urban and rural areas as well as between different countries worldwide. Many places in Sri Lanka are affected by poor telecommunication infrastructure leading to low capacity for remote work, and this can pose barriers to online TPD.

The digital divide substantially impacted the participants in this study. Low-speed internet connections at home regularly interrupted video conferencing activities in Zoom, so that in every session, there was at least one teacher who was struggling to join Zoom or to stay online. The teachers from remote and isolated areas simply did not have adequate digital infrastructure to have strong connections. In their words: "I often faced connection issues. I tried my best to manage," "Because the connection was not stable, I was unable to turn on [my] camera." The teachers further faced difficulties in buying data cards during the lockdown.

The technology usage was also impeded by certain environmental conditions such as heavy rain and strong winds. Nonetheless, the teachers tried to engage in the online community by using affordable high-end data packages

and moving to better network coverage areas. Financial constraints also limited them from access to assured technology and effective online professional development opportunities. These disadvantaged conditions may have demotivated the participation in the online community. Stable and reliable technology is a crucial requirement for a remote online teacher community, something that is often overlooked in research in the Global North. The adoption of Western technological norms, without understanding the compatibility with the practical realities and cultural background of teachers in other contexts, can foster hegemonic tendencies (Selwyn, 2013). Decolonisation of TPD and of education more broadly requires us to recognise how technological inequalities can privilege the voices and experiences of teachers who have resources while marginalising those who do not.

The digital divide, during the pandemic especially, further exacerbated the unequal access to education which is partly a legacy of colonialism that is still observed in Sri Lanka. Divisions in class, socio-economic divisions, access to technology, and resources mirror the inequality that was worsened during the colonial era. We have not sufficiently invested in education and infrastructure to meet the global trends. Yet, ironically, technology is portrayed as a way to reach the poor and provide better education in political rhetoric (López-Gopar et al., 2021). The same agendas can be seen in our system where the remote virtual teacher community took place. An issue that was discussed but not addressed was that continuing education online during the pandemic would benefit those with access to both devices and the internet while compounding access to quality education for those without ICT access.

Conclusion

This initiative shed light on several challenges faced when implementing online TPD in the Global South. The original TPD model of asynchronous forums aligned with Global North's educational paradigms was unsatisfactory to the community participants. Although most of the literature portrays asynchronous virtual teacher communities as offering a conducive environment for deep learning, reflections, quality feedback, and sustainable development (Ajani 2021; Cansoy 2017; Pierre 2016, Sarmad 2016), the current study demonstrates how context-dependent those findings are. Being remote participants without adequate access to technological infrastructure, and drawing on a primarily oral culture, teachers missed out on real-time interactions and immediacy with their peers. Consequently, the asynchronous forums provided only limited opportunities for critical examinations of teaching practices and integration of technology. Critical reflection and collaborative learning which could lead to professional development expected from the forums were not in evidence. The current study, therefore, corresponds instead to some of the studies that underscore the less immediate and less interactive nature of asynchronous communities (Ciampa and Gallagher 2015; Prestridge 2009; Lin, Lin and Huang 2008).

Overall, it is important to note that the online teacher community did have some social benefits, such as filling the social gap to a certain extent, so that teachers felt less completely isolated, encouraging technology initiatives to incorporate technology into teaching. Our teachers still prefer in-person interactions, and report that they have not achieved a high level of technology use for professional education. Accordingly, they believe that online exchanges fail to entirely replace face-to-face discourse, though they accept that it was the best option under the circumstances. As one participant said, "I know that Zoom is not perfect. But at this time, we have no other choice. We can discuss and share everything via Zoom, but still I miss face-to-face discussions."

Once the online TPD switched to a more synchronous mode, participants perceived the instant messaging mode of WhatsApp groups as user-friendly and convenient, with the immediate and dynamic responses, personal and emotional support that were essential to make an online collaboration genuine and successful. WhatsApp played a supportive role in guiding teachers to utilise technology for virtual teaching through a collective exchange of ideas and strategies, mirroring the findings outlined by Ferdig et al. (2020).

This study highlights the influence of colonial legacies in adopting educational technologies. In addition, favouring WhatsApp demonstrates the adoption of a decolonial perspective in TPD that encourages teacher educators to question if the recommended educational technologies are truly suited to the context. Preference for instant messaging over asynchronous forums can be interpreted as an instance of challenging the Western ways of knowing and embracing culturally sensitive technologies.

We also found that aspects of inadequate and unreliable technological infrastructure including access to internet connections and devices, financial constraints and certain environmental conditions such as heavy rain and strong winds were frequent technological issues that disadvantaged the virtual community. These technological disparities exacerbated the other challenges encountered.

The issue of digital divide in Sri Lanka directs us towards digital equity: ensuring equal and fair opportunities for all teachers to access and benefit from technologies for educational advancements. These technological issues are rooted in historically perpetuated colonial inequalities and injustices. This study highlights the need for crucial fundamentals such as developing proper digital infrastructure, providing broadband connectivity for educators, initiating Wi-Fi partnerships, and allocating funds to cover teachers' internet expenses. In fact, a decolonised technology policy in education should also be implemented in Sri Lanka. More emphasis has to be placed on underserved communities to provide such communities with flexible and adaptable technologies. This often involves collaboration between the government and stakeholders to create policies, invest in infrastructure, and promote educational technology as a holistic decolonisation effort. Existing disparities in access to technology or unequal distribution of resources should be addressed as a fundamental need of social justice in order to create an inclusive digital ecosystem that can assist education in the country.

The impact of the remote virtual teacher community was not as strong as expected due to the challenges it faced during the implementation. If the teachers were part of a physical, face-to-face community that allowed potential involvement with fewer technological barriers, it could have led to different results. For example, an online TPD might be paired with in-person sessions, either before or after, to increase engagement and work with teachers' preferences. This could be an effort to decolonise the teacher's educational space and practices to empower their voices and engagement towards the goal of professional development. The findings of the study suggest that for effective TPD, teacher educators and institutions should apply technologies with careful attention to the synchronicity of the modes, honouring the needs, attitudes, languages and background of the participants through a decolonial approach.

References

Abeywickrama, K.R.W.K. 2019. Teacher engagement and professional development initiatives: A case study of university ESL teachers in Sri Lanka. Unpublished PhD thesis., Deakin University, Australia.

Abeywickrama, K.R.W.K. 2021. Professional development and ESL teacher quality: An empirical study. *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1 (2): 51–58.

Ajani, O.A. 2021. Teachers' use of Whatsapp platforms as online communities of practice for professional development. *Journal of African Films, Diaspora Studies*, 4 (1): 103–129.

Al-Jarf, R. 2021. ESL teachers' professional development on Facebook during the Covid-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 2 (6): 75–81.

Andresen, M.A. 2009. Asynchronous discussion forums: Success factors, outcomes, assessments, and limitations. *Educational Technology & Society*, *12* (1): 249–257.

Brass, J., and Mecoli, S. 2011. The (failed) case of the Winston society wikispace: Challenges and opportunities of web 2.0 and teacher education. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 11 (2): 149–166.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2): 77–101.

Canagarajah, A.S. 2005. Dilemmas in planning English/vernacular relations in post-colonial communities. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9 (3): 418–447.

Cansoy, R. 2017. Teachers' professional development: The case of WhatsApp. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6 (4): 285–293.

Ciampa, K., and Gallagher, T.L. 2015. Blogging to enhance in-service teachers' professional learning and development during collaborative inquiry. *Education Tech Research*, 63: 883–913.

Dawoodbhoy, Z. 2021. *Our Stories: Lessons from the Lives of Our Elders.* https://asiafoundation.org/2021/09/01/our-stories-lessons-from-the-lives-of-our-elders/

De Silva, D.G.N.T., and Amaradasa, R. 2022. Technology mediated education in Sri Lanka: Expectations, challenges and strategies. *Journal of Economics and Management Research*, 3 (3): 1–7.

Dede, C., and Ketelhut, D.J. 2008. A research agenda for online teacher professional development.

Dille, K.B., and Rokenes, F.M. 2021. Teachers' professional development in formal online communities: A scoping review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *105* (2): 1–17.

Fasso, W. 2010. Facilitated networking and group formation in an online community of practice. *Australian Educational Computing*, 25 (1): 25–33.

Ferdig, R.E., Baumgartner, E., Hartshorne, R., Kaplan-Rakowski, R., and Mouza, C. 2020. *Teaching, technology, and teacher education during the COVID-19 pandemic: Stories from the field*. Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). https://www.learntechlib.org/p/216903/

Fonseka, E.A.G. 2001. English language teaching in post-colonial Sri Lanka. *Silhouette. Journal of The General Sir John Kotelawala Defence Academy*, 126–131.

Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gaible, E., and Burns, M. 2005. *Using technology to train teachers: Appropriate uses of ICT for teacher professional development in developing countries*. Washington, DC: infoDev. Retrieved from http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.13.html

Gibbs, G. 1988. *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Oxford: Oxford Further Education Unit.

Gunawardena, C.N., Jayatilleke, B.G., Fernando, S., Kulasekere, C., and Lamontagne, M. 2012. *Developing online tutors and mentors Sri Lanka through a community building model: Predictors of satisfaction*. Proceedings of the International Conference on Advances in ICT for Emerging Regions (ICTer2012), Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Gunawardene, M. 2009. *An enduring friendship: The Asia Foundation celebrates five decades in Sri Lanka*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ace Printing and Packages (Pvt) Ltd.

Hartshorne, R., Baumgartner, E., Kaplan-Rakowski, R., Mouza, C., and Ferdig, R.E. 2020. Special issue editorial: Preservice and inservice professional development during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 28: 137–147.

Hawkes, M., and Romiszowski, A. 2001. Examining the reflective outcomes of asynchronous computer-mediated communication on in-service teacher development. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 9 (2): 283–306.

Hayashi, O., Garcia, M., Maddawin, A., and Hewagamage, K.P. 2020. Online learning in Sri Lanka's higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Asian Development Bank Briefs*. doi: http://doi.org/10.22617/BRF200260-2

Helleve, I. 2010. Theoretical foundations of teachers' professional development: Methods for improved education delivery. In *Online learning communities and teacher professional development: Methods for improved education delivery*, edited by J.O. Lindberg and A.D. Olofsson, 1–19. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Ikhsanudin, I. 2021. Online discussion forums for rural teacher professional development. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 11 (1): 61–84. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v11i1.2087

Kemmis. S., and McTaggart, R. (Eds.) 1988. *The action research planner*, 3rded. Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Kern, R. 2011. Technology and language learning. In *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, edited by J. Simpson, 200–214. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kong, S. 2018. Community of Practice: An effective way to ESL teacher professional development in vocational colleges. *English Language Teaching*, 11 (7): 158–162. doi:10.5539/elt.v11n7p158

Lantz-Andersson, A., Lundin, M., and Selwyn, N. 2018. Twenty years of online teacher communities: A systematic review of formally-organized and informally-developed professional learning groups. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 75: 302–315. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.07.008

López-Gopar, M.E., Cordova, V.H., Sughrua, W.M., and Jimenez, E.N.L. 2021. Developing decolonizing pedagogies with Mexican pre-service 'English' teachers. In *Transmodal Communications: Transpositioning Semiotics and Relations*, edited by M.R. Hawkins, 152–175. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Lin, F.R., Lin, S.C., and Huang, T.P. 2008. Knowledge sharing and creation in a teachers' professional virtual community. *Computers and Education*, 50 (3): 742–756. Elsevier Ltd. Retrieved January 30, 2024 from https://www.learntechlib.org/p/66837/.

Macia, M., and Garcia, I. 2016. Informal online communities and networks as a source of teacher professional development: A review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55: 291–307.

Mignolo, W.D. 2000. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Moore, M.G. 1997. Theory of transactional distance. In *Theoretical principles of distance education*, edited by D. Keegan, 22–38. New York: Routledge.

Navaz, A.M.M. 2021. Challenges faced by students in English medium undergraduate classes: An experience of a young university in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Arts, Science & Commerce*, *7* (4): 158–166.

Pennycook, A. 2017. *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. New York: Routledge.

Pierre, L. 2016. *Creating and sustaining communities of practice through online discussion forums- going beyond the professional development workshops*. Unpublished master's thesis, School of Education, Manchester.

Prestridge, S. 2009. Teachers' talk in professional development activity that supports change in their ICT pedagogical beliefs and practices. https://www.academia.edu/5419665/Teachers_talk_in_professional_development_activity_that_supports_change_in_their_ICT_pedagogical_beliefs_and_practices

Raheem, R., and Ratwatte, H. 2004. Invisible strategies, visible results: Investigating language policy in Sri Lanka. In *Language Policy, Planning, and Practice*, edited by S. Mansoor, S. Meraj, and A. Tahir, 91–105. Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press.

Rasool, R. 2020. Preserving the lesser known languages: The case of Sri Lanka. In *Linguistic Diversity in South and Southeast Asia*, edited by A. Abbi, and K. Vatsyayan, 73–86. Delhi: Primus Books.

Reading, C. 2010. Using ICT to increase professional connectedness for teachers in remote Australia. *Australian Educational Computing*, 25 (2): 3–6.

Parakrama, A. 2012. The malchemy of English in Sri Lanka: Reinforcing inequality through imposing extra-linguistic value. *English language as Hydra: Its impacts on non-English language cultures*, 9: 107–132.

Sarmad, Z. 2016. Effectiveness of online discussion forums as a useful strategy for teachers' development in teaching English as a second language. https://www.academia.edu/34263462/EFFECTIVENESS_OF_ONLINE_DISCUSS_FORUMS_AS_A_USEFUL_STRATEGY_F_TEACHERS_DEVELOPMENT_IN_TEACH_ENGLISH_AS_A_SECOND_LANGUA_Document_sub

Sarmad, Z. 2017. *Effectiveness of online discussion forums as a useful strategy for teachers' development in teaching English as a second language*. https://www.academia.edu/34263462/EFFECTIVENESS_OF_ONLINE_DISCUSS%09%09%20FORUMS_AS_A_USEFUL_STRATEGY_F_TEACHERS_DEVELOPMENT_IN_%09%09%20TEACH_ENGLISH_AS_A_SECOND_LANGUA_Document_sub

Schreiber, B.R., and Jansz, M. 2020. Reducing distance through online international collaboration. *ELT Journal*, 74 (1): 63–72. doi:10.1093/elt/ccz045

Selwyn, N. 2013. *Distrusting Educational Technology: Critical Questions for Changing Times*. New York: Routledge.

Servage, L. 2008. Critical and transformative practices in professional learning communities. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35: 63–77.

Sethunga, P., Wijesundera, S., Kalamany, T., & Karunanayake, S. 2016. *Study on the professional development of teachers and teacher educators in Sri Lanka*. http://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2-Final-.pdf

Soomro, K.A., Kale, U., Curtis, R., Akcaoglu, M., and Bernstein, M. 2020. Digital divide among higher education faculty. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17: 1–16.

Sumer, M. 2021. Online learning communities in teachers' professional development: A systematic review. *Anadolu Journal of Educational Science International*, 11 (2): 572–587. doi:10.18039/ajesi.853801

Vavasseur, C.B., and MacGregor, S.K. 2008. Extending content-focused professional development through online communities of practice. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 40 (4): 517–536. doi:10.1080/15391523.2008.10782519

World Bank's World Development Report. 2018. *Learning to realize education's promise*. https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018

Index

Pages in *italics* refer to figures and pages in **bold** refer to tables.