

# 16

## Multilingualism, education, English and development: Whose development?

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### Introduction

This chapter seeks to interrogate the role of English in multilingual societies, including India, and to show that the much talked about relationship between English and development may be true for some but is questionable for many. We will begin with an analysis of the notion of development as a broad framework to examine the relationship and then look critically at the commonly held views about the divergent roles of English as a global language in different parts of the world. Based on our work on English in Indian society and education, we will analyse the processes through which English in India advantages some but disadvantages most.

### The human face of development

While reduction of poverty and inequality remains a core aspect of development, in recent years, economists (e.g., Amartya Sen, Angus Deaton) have sought to project a human face of development, emphasising the need to move away from simple economic indicators of income and consumption. Development is viewed as related to human freedom, dignity, choice and participation and, more importantly, to reduction of inequality and discrimination. Welfare economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen views poverty as ‘capability deprivation’ (Sen 1985, 2001; Dreze and Sen 2002). An individual’s capability is related to effective opportunities to be who he or she wants to be or to engage in chosen activities. Poverty is characterised as relative absence of capability for functioning or for engaging in pursuit of some desired outcomes (e.g., working, having some leisure, leading a life of health or being literate) and capability as ‘the ultimate combinations of functioning from which a person can choose’ (Dreze and Sen 2002, 35). Thus, the essence of capability is freedom to choose. Freedom is ‘the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead’ (Dreze and Sen 2002, 35-36). Poverty is not just absence of income, but ‘unfreedom’ (Sen 1985) or curtailment of capabilities. Dreze and Sen point out that any form of social discrimination leads to lack of social opportunities ‘to expand the realm of human agency and freedom, both as an end in itself and as a means of further expansion of freedom’ (Dreze and Sen 2002, 6). The capability approach is a powerful interdisciplinary tool to deal with issues related to poverty and well-being of marginalised communities for whom poverty is lack of agency or control over the

factors that determine their life chances (Robeyns 2010). Robeyns emphasises the need for analysis of the capability inputs and obstacles to realisation of capability in order to understand the problems of discrimination and marginalisation of communities. It is necessary, therefore, to ask: 'What is the most critical (and cost-effective) input to change the conditions of poverty, or rather to expand human capabilities?' (Mohanty and Mishra 2000, 265). According to Sen (1985; Dreze and Sen 2002) education and health are significant capability inputs for development. Education is an enabling factor for economic development and illiteracy is 'unfreedom' – an obstacle to realisation of capability for economic development. In the modern world, formal education<sup>1</sup> provides access to employment, income and economic opportunities and empowers the individual adding to social and cultural freedom and capacity for democratic participation. More recently, the works of economist and Nobel Laureate Angus Deaton (2013; Deaton and Dreze 2002) have also drawn our attention to the role of social discrimination and inequalities in economic development. Societal hierarchy, discrimination and subordination on the basis of caste, class, culture, religion and language lead to disadvantages and 'voicelessness' (Dreze and Sen 2002), which are associated with illiteracy<sup>2</sup> and educational failure. Dreze and Sen (2002) speak of a host of 'discouragement effects' responsible for educational backwardness of the disadvantaged communities. Such discouragement factors are associated with devaluation of languages and cultures of the indigenous, tribal, minority (ITM) communities and include alienating curricula, classroom inactivity, social discrimination in the classroom, poor teacher quality and other conditions of linguistic and cultural discrimination. Neglect of ITM children's home language in education is one of the major discouragements triggering educational failure and illiteracy, contributing to loss of freedom, capability deprivation and poverty. 'While formal education is the enabling factor for economic development, language is the enabling factor for access to quality education, and often to any school education' (Mohanty and Skutnabb-Kangas 2013, 162).

Language as a cultural capital is a critical link to education and access to social resources. In multilingual societies, languages are associated with power and hierarchy; some languages enable greater access to privileges and social opportunities and others lead to deprivation and discrimination. Under such conditions, use of languages becomes the basis for freedom, opportunities and capability development or for discrimination, denial of opportunities and constraints in realisation of capability. Examining the relationship between language, capability deprivation and poverty among the tribal language communities in India, Mohanty concludes:

*When language becomes the basis of power, control and discrimination, socioeconomic inequality is perpetuated; the language(s) that people speak or do not speak determines their access to resources. Education is a critical factor in this relationship between language and power. The exclusion and nonaccommodation of languages in education denies equality of opportunity to learn, violates linguistic human rights, leads to the loss of linguistic diversity and triggers a vicious cycle of disadvantage perpetuating inequality, capacity deprivation and poverty. (Mohanty 2009, 121)*

The role of English in development can be analysed within this broad framework of development in terms of the relationship between languages in multilingual societies, inequality, discrimination and capability deprivation. This chapter seeks to critically engage with the most talked about relationship between English and development from this perspective.

## The rhetoric of English and development

The growing craze for English all over the world is associated with the rhetoric of English and development permeating into popular perception of its significance (e.g. Focho 2011), often without any critical scrutiny. Broadly, English is projected as a global language (Graddol 2000) or a language needed for maintaining a competitive edge in a globalised world. Yet, as Coleman notes:

*Globalisation and competitiveness are associated with a need for English and then with a need to use English as a medium of instruction, although the logical relationships between these concepts remain unclear.* (Coleman 2011, 104)

More specifically, English has been held as a tool for global economy, commerce, science and technology (Graddol 2000; Seidlhofer 2003), media, entertainment, tourism, diplomacy (Negash 2011) and international migration (Capstick 2011), particularly to UK, USA and other English-speaking countries. In the context of post-colonial multilingual societies, English (as well as other colonial languages) has been seen as a unifying language, a language of reconciliation, a link language or *lingua franca*. Kennett, team leader of a special internationally funded Performance Improvement Project in Sri Lanka with a programme of fostering 'English as a link language and a tool for conflict transformation and development' (Kennett 2011, 320), underscores the peace-keeping role of English 'for conflict-prone societies where national languages have traditionally become social and ethnic dividers' (Kennett 2011, 321). Williams (2011, 45) quotes John Mwanakatwe, Minister of Education in post-independence Zambia, on the 'inevitable' role of English:

*Even the most ardent nationalists of our time have accepted the inevitable fact that English – ironically a foreign language and also the language of our former colonial master – has definitely a unifying role in Zambia.*

Such views are quite typical of the linguistically diverse post-colonial societies in Asia (Mohanty and Panda 2015; Panda and Mohanty 2015) and Africa (Arkorful and Adger 2015; Kamwangamalu 2015) where linguistic diversity and post-colonial tension over relative dominance of languages has led to a wide acceptance of English (and other colonial languages) as a 'neutral' language of unity amid the apparent chaos of the multilingual world.

Without going into the multiple bases of claims regarding the relationship between English and development (which seem to have moved from assertions of English as a 'global' language facilitating cross-border communication to one that actually causes or triggers development out of poverty), one can broadly discern three patterns in the academic and popular discourse in this area of study:

1. A set of beliefs and values about the potentials of English for economic transformation and development;
2. Ideological and evidence-based propositions about the nature and factors of dominance of English and its role in development; and
3. Study and analysis of any relationship between English and economic, political, educational and social development.

The repeated rhetoric of links between English and developmental opportunities gets reified in popular images, beliefs and values regarding the emancipatory power of English and facilitates transformation of the ideology of English into linguistic hegemony. There are many examples of such reification from the non-English speaking multilingual world. I will cite only two examples from India. First is the *Goddess English* in Banka village in Uttar Pradesh, sought to be worshipped for better English for emancipation of the *dalit* or downtrodden people. A bronze idol of the goddess, vaguely modelled after the Statue of Liberty, holding a pen high in her right hand and a book in the left and donning an English hat and a gown, was unveiled and worshipped in Banka village on April 30, 2010, and, following some controversies over the proposed temple site, the 'goddess' now waits for a temple to come up. Then, there are temples in India which are popular as shrines for *Visa Gods* (or *Visa Bhagwans*, as they are popularly called), worshipped for grant of entry permits for international migration mostly to USA, UK, Australia and other developed countries. There are, in fact, destination-specific specialised temples for visa to different countries. One such temple is Balaji Temple in Chilkur, Andhra Pradesh. The requirement of demonstrated proficiency in English as a criterion to obtain an entry permit to the UK and other countries reinforces the belief that English is a gatekeeper to a better world.

The belief in the emancipatory power of global English is a part of the popular myth rarely subjected to critical scrutiny. That the values associated with English are prejudicial and, often, lead to violation of human rights, does not seem to inform the growing craze for the language. For example, use of proficiency in English as an entry requirement prevents non-English knowing family members of immigrants from joining them in the host country and, thus, disunites families and violates human rights. But, the popular beliefs about the value of English seem to remain undeterred by such issues and unaffected by negative evidences; that in most societies there are examples of some who benefit from the privileged positioning of English weighs heavily in perpetuating the pro-English bias. The complex dynamics of the socio-political processes in multilingual societies transform these beliefs and values about the developmental role of English into 'a political imperative' (Williams 2011, 52), propelling political processes to promote English and, often, effectively subverting pro-nationalistic forces. English-for-unity is one such contrived 'political imperative' growing out of a multiplicity of linguistic identities. As social identity theorists (Reicher and Hopkins 2001) show, entrepreneurs of identity manipulate social identities to create social categories and conflicts. In multilingual contexts, identity entrepreneurship analysis suggests that entrepreneurs of linguistic identities divide a multilingual society and then promote English for unity as a political imperative. That

social cohesion is promoted by recognition of linguistic human rights and emphasis on indigenous mother tongues and not by discriminatory language policies and imposed dominance of English or any other 'global' language is often ignored. (See Coleman 2015 for several chapters subscribing to and elaborating on this view.)

The second strand in the English-and-development discourse is in respect of the dynamics of the beliefs and values regarding English, its role in development and the agency in the spread of English. Phillipson's (1992, 2009) influential work *Linguistic Imperialism* provides an exhaustive theoretical framework for analysis of the dynamics of the imperialistic spread of English and Anglo-American complicity in the same. While the linguistic imperialism theory has had a wide following, there are others who accept the spread of English as a hegemony involving 'free choice' of World Englishes without any active agent promoting the language (to serve Anglo-American interests). In what seems to be a parochial reading of colonial history, Brutt-Griffler goes to the extent of suggesting that English was not imposed on the colonies but was '*wrested from an unwilling imperial authority as part of the struggle by them [the colonial subjects] against colonialism*' (Brutt-Griffler 2002, 31). Reflecting the debate on agency in the global spread of English, Spolsky (2004) asked 'Was or did English spread?', raising a dichotomy between what he labelled as a theory of 'conspiracy' to actively impose English (through the processes of linguistic imperialism) and a mere hegemonic spread. It is revealing to note that in elaborating the theoretical foundations of linguistic imperialism, Phillipson seems to have favoured a position of hegemony seeking to examine its dynamics through analysis of British and American promotion of English while concluding that English (ELT) has '*not been promoted globally as a result of a master-minded plan*' (Phillipson 1992, 307; emphasis added). He perhaps anticipated this dichotomy to offer pre-emptive clarification, stating that 'hegemony does not imply a conspiracy theory, but a competing and complementary set of values and practices, with those in power better able to legitimate themselves and to convert their ideas into material power' (Phillipson 1992, 74). I will return to this question of agency in the growing influence of English in the multilingual world. But, two points need to be underscored in respect of the dichotomy between active agency and natural spread of dominant languages including English. First, the hegemony of a language like English implies that dominant ideas are usually taken for granted and, hence, search for an active agent is not needed. For example, all over the non-English speaking world, it is taken for granted that education in English is good education and wide uncritical acceptance of this proposition influences a set of practices in society and education. Further, while the dominance of English over the national and local languages in multilingual contexts is undeniable, it is also true that active imposition of English through external forces, such as the British and American promotion of English, which Phillipson (1992) documented in support of linguistic imperialism, has become more implicit and subtle, making the growing influence of English appear to be internally driven. Hegemonic ideas tend to be internalised by the dominated even if objective analysis often shows that these may not be in their best interest.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that the findings of studies of the relationship between English and development are not unequivocal. Demonstrations of a relationship between English and development are correlational not causal and are

context specific. In fact, at another level, as has been shown in different post-colonial societies, English can be linked to social stratification, elite formation and exclusion of masses (e.g. Kayambazinthu 1999; Heugh 1999), all of which divide more than they unite. As Williams suggests, 'Far from being a source of unity, the use of English in education in Africa has become a factor in national division, while the distribution of English proficiency in society is an indicator of the extent of this division' (2011, 44). Referring to the role of 'the superimposed international languages' in the African context, Kathleen Heugh also points out that 'these languages serve only the interests of the elites' (1999, 306). Thus, any claim of a positive role of English in development cannot be taken to be a universal phenomenon. English is not a culturally neutral medium that puts everyone on the same footing; it empowers some and disempowers many. The role of English as a lingua franca varies across class, caste, gender, geographical location, language communities, identities and other sociolinguistic contexts in multilingual societies. In India, multiple varieties are used as lingua francas by people belonging to rural-urban localities, different socio-economic and caste groups; these include regional languages, Hindi, *Hinglish* and English with underlying continuities between them. Thus, there is a need to examine the role of English in different societies, cultures and sub-cultures and qualify the observations in respect of its role in development.

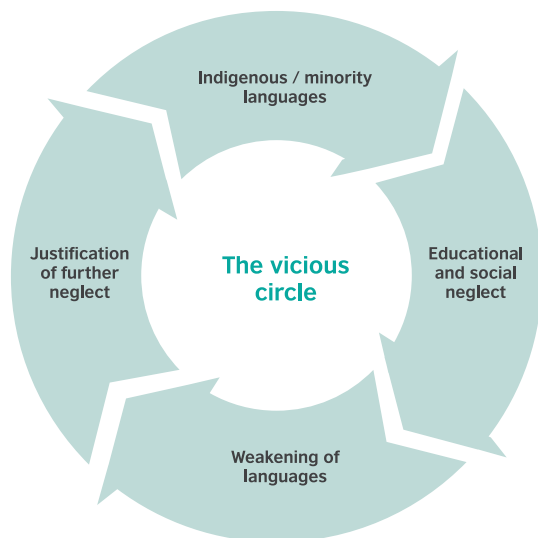
In the following sections, drawing on our work in respect of English in Indian society and education, I will discuss the processes through which English in India gets situated in a position of dominance, disadvantaging the other language communities, and analyse the role of English in Indian education in perpetuating social discrimination. It will be shown that while some groups benefit from English, most do not.

### **English and the dynamics of hierarchy and discrimination**

The hierarchy of power relations in respect of languages in multilingual societies effectively leads to deprivation of many languages in favour of the dominant ones. Two aspects of the dynamics of dominance of English are of significance in multilingual contexts and will be briefly discussed here. One is the process through which social and educational exclusion of languages leads to their cumulative impoverishment and the other relates to the emergence of social class differences in respect of the role of English as a cultural capital through early multilingual socialisation.

Prolonged socio-economic and educational neglect pushes languages out of significant domains of use, leading to their progressive impoverishment and weakness, which is used to justify further neglect. Dominant languages like English perpetuate a vicious cycle of disadvantage for the dominated languages in multilingual societies (Mohanty 2010, 2013a; Mohanty, Mishra, Reddy and Ramesh 2009), as shown in Figure 1.

The dominance of English in multilingual contexts leads to gross socio-economic and educational neglect of the indigenous or national languages which, in turn, triggers loss of their instrumental vitality and cumulative weakness. When instrumental vitality of a language is critically affected, there is a dissociation between perceived



**Figure 1: The vicious circle of language disadvantage**

instrumental and integrative functions of the language. In hierarchical multilingualism, English tends to take over the instrumental functions, whereas the dominated local language may continue to be viewed as necessary for integrative functions only. The indigenous tribal minority (ITM) languages, in particular, are subjected to large scale social neglect and are systematically impoverished. Continued exclusion of these languages from education and other domains is often justified by policy makers and the State on grounds of such weakness. This perpetuates the disadvantage of dominated languages in a vicious circle which, in effect, widens the gap between the dominant and the dominated languages in the power hierarchy.

Attitudes towards languages, perceptions of their vitality and relative social status and dominance are transmitted through early multilingual socialisation. Our studies in India show that children in a variety of multilingual contexts, regardless of their own multilingual proficiency, develop an awareness of multiple languages in their milieu and the social functions of these languages by about age nine, progressing through a sequence of stages (Mohanty, Panda and Mishra 1999). Children acquire a progressive awareness of the hierarchy of languages and, between seven and nine years of age, most children in India show an understanding that English is more prestigious than other languages. Processes of multilingual socialisation vary across different socio-economic classes, particularly in respect of the role of English in early socialisation (Bujorbarua 2006). Without going into the details of these studies, it can be pointed out that English is almost absent in the family level language socialisation of children from the lower socio-economic strata. The upper and middle class parents, on the other hand, employ specific socialisation strategies to orient their children to use English, mostly for scholastic achievement and individualistic self-development and tend to devalue mother tongues as languages limited only to family and limited interpersonal domains of use. To sum up, the following are some salient features of multilingual socialisation in India relevant to the present discussion:

1. Hybrid linguistic practices by upper and middle class parents (and adults) to scaffold learning of English;
2. Use of different languages for priming different orientations and identities;
3. Socialisation practices, mostly among the English-knowing upper and middle class parents, for use of English for scholastic achievement, disciplining functions and use of mother tongue (MT) for expression of nurturance, caring and personal support;
4. Use of languages for priming different orientations in self-construal (greater use of English for construction of autonomous/individualistic self and mother tongue for relational, interpersonal or collective self).

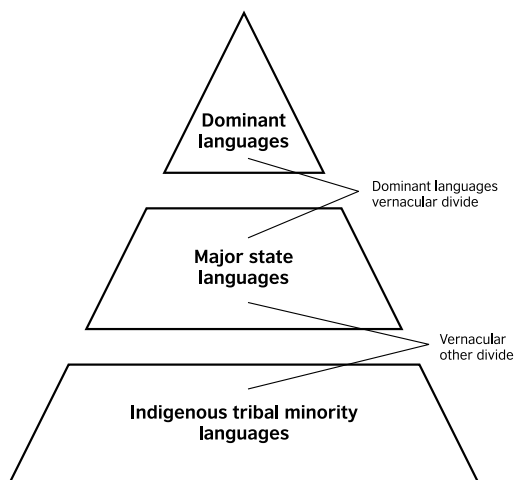
The dynamics of the vicious circle of language disadvantage and multilingual socialisation show how English is differentiated in the social macro-structure as well as in the micro-level emergence of understanding of the role and status of languages in a hierarchical sociolinguistic structure. At both the levels, English is socially placed in a manner that triggers a hierarchical order of languages. English occupies a higher status in the hierarchy compared to other dominant regional/national languages and the ITM languages. The gap between the languages located in higher and lower levels widens over time, due to cumulative disadvantage to languages with lesser power and vitality. The complex dynamics of hierarchical relations between English and other languages in multilingual societies is reflected in a double divide between English, the major national/regional languages and the ITM languages.

### **English and the double divide**

The hierarchy of power and privileges associated with languages affects the dominated language users, their chances of upward social mobility and development of capabilities. Analysis of the language policy and practices in India and the post-colonial countries including South Asia (Mohanty 2010; Mohanty and Panda 2015; Panda and Mohanty 2015) shows two major power cleavages: one, between the dominant colonial language, English, at the top of the hierarchy and the major national/regional languages (the English-Vernacular Divide), and the second, between these national/regional languages and the ITM languages (the Vernacular-Other Divide). The double divide in hierarchical multilingualism is shown in Figure 2.

With such a double divide, the languages in the middle rung are under pressure from the language at the top of the hierarchy and are gradually pushed out of significant domains of use such as education. At the same time, these dominant national/regional languages of the middle level also exert shift pressure on the ITM languages, displacing them from the public domains of use and marginalising them in a vicious circle of disadvantage. Given the low vitality of ITM languages and the disadvantaged conditions of their speakers, the rate of domain shrinkage, marginalisation and language shift/loss is much higher for these languages compared to the languages higher up in the hierarchy. The economic value of languages, their access to privileges and instrumental benefits in multilingual societies are linked to the power of these languages which are hierarchically distributed. Ironically, in multilingual





**Figure 2: The double divide in multilingual societies**

societies, the most powerful language usually has a relatively smaller number of users. In India, less than 0.02 per cent have English as their first language or MT and only about ten per cent know English through formal education.<sup>3</sup> All major regional languages of India or the languages mentioned as official languages in the VIII<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution of India have a larger share of the population but they are less powerful than English. Over 40 per cent of school children in India are in English medium schools and the number of children in such schools is growing by over ten per cent every year.<sup>4</sup> One would expect the children learning in English medium schools to have an advantage over those in the vernacular medium schools, but Indian studies do not show such advantage, as we will see below. Further, there is a wide range of English medium schools varying in quality and cost. This has resulted in clear social-class differences among children in English medium schools and across all schools in India. Learning outcomes in English and vernacular medium schools are quite divergent (see 'The myth of English medium superiority' below).

### **From Doon schools to Doom schools: English medium schooling and the new caste system**

After independence, the Indian constitution could not enforce a common system of schooling. Private, mostly English medium (EM), schools continued along with government or public schools. As a result, there is a range of private schools catering to different socio-economic levels. These schools vary in their cost and quality. Some schools, like the famous Doon School and some International Schools, are very prestigious high cost EM schools for children from super-rich elitist families. There are also good quality costly EM schools in urban centres for the upper classes. These high cost EM schools employ qualified, high salaried and competent teachers and provide a quality teaching-learning environment for the pupils. However, the lower and working class parents cannot afford the cost of these private schools. With the growing demand among the aspirational lower class parents for EM schools, there is now a large number of low cost and low quality EM schools in semi-urban, urban slum and rural areas. The quality of teaching-learning practices in these schools

is extremely poor; teachers are low-paid, lack required qualifications and teaching competence and have very low proficiency in English. Unlike the parents of the pupils in the high cost EM schools, the parents of the low cost EM schools do not have any proficiency in English and cannot afford private tuition or other support for their children's academic development; generally, in the low cost EM schools children neither learn English nor the subject matters and are doomed to failure. The EM schools in India have been labelled as ranging from 'Doon schools to *Doom* schools' (Mohanty 2012).

The lower class families who cannot afford the fee-paying EM schools send their children to free public schools. These schools are in very large numbers and are generally poorly managed with minimal facilities and quality. The level of classroom achievement is quite low. These schools are vernacular or major state language medium schools which, in effect, offer mother tongue (vernacular) medium education to majority language children but impose submersion education in a non-MT language on ITM children (who are further disadvantaged due to the discrepancy between their home and school languages). These schools teach English as a school subject from early primary grades (mostly from Grade 1). The range of private and public schools in India, grossly categorised on the basis of the estimated quality and cost (Mohanty 2010 and subsequent analyses), is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Range of private and public schools in India: From Doon schools to Doom schools**

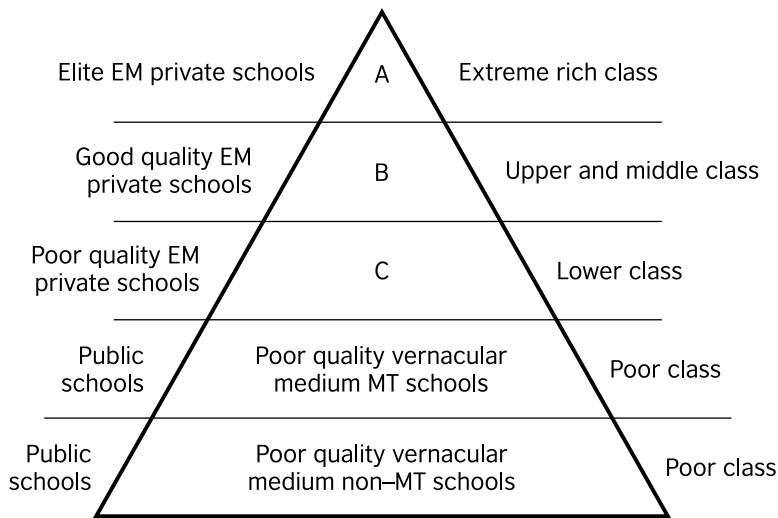
Type of school	Approximate cost
1. Exclusive elitist EM residential schools (e.g. Doon School)	US\$ 20,000 per annum
2. High-cost EM schools for the privileged class	US\$ 2,000–6,000 per annum
3. Low-cost EM schools for the less privileged class	US\$ 100–400 per annum
4. No-cost VM government schools for the poor	Free (with midday meal in primary grades)
4.a) MT medium for regional majority language groups	
4.b) Non-MT for ITM language groups	

Key: EM = English medium                      ITM = indigenous tribal majority  
 MT = mother-tongue                          VM = vernacular medium

It should be pointed out that these broad categories of schools are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive; within each category there are variations and there are also schools which fall in between the major categories.

English medium schools and the role of English in public and private schools have led to a new caste system in India. Examples of the working of this new 'caste' system can be found in the matrimonial columns in newspapers. There are solicitations of caste-

based marriage proposals and also many which solicit a bride educated in 'English medium' schools. Further, with English medium schools of various kinds, we have school divides corresponding to social divides as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: English, schooling and social class in India**

As noted earlier, the private schools are fee paying schools varying in their quality and cost and catering to different social strata. In Figure 3, the three broad types of private schools are labelled A, B and C corresponding to different socio-economic levels. The poor who cannot afford even the cheapest of the English medium schools send their children to public or government schools which are major regional mother tongue language schools for most children and non-mother tongue schools for ITM children.

It should be pointed out that English is a school language and not a home language for school children in India (except for a negligible minority from English MT homes). However, the parents who send their children to good quality EM schools belong to upper and middle classes and, as pointed out, language socialisation practices in their homes usually provide a considerable degree of early attitudinal and proficiency development support to children both before and after they join school. The children who join low-cost EM schools and public schools are from lower and poor classes. Their parents have little proficiency in English; socialisation practices in their homes do not provide any support for English literacy. Thus, the nature and implications of the language barrier for development of English literacy is quite divergent across the social classes. All children have the task of negotiating the home language and school English barrier. But the upper class children with their home-based support have an early advantage in respect of English, whereas the poor and lower class ones do not have any such support. Teachers and children in private EM and public vernacular medium (VM) schools need to negotiate the language divides in the teaching-learning

of English in schools (as a medium of teaching-learning in EM schools and as a school subject in VM schools) with or without home-based support for English. While the majority language children and their teachers need to negotiate the English-Vernacular divide in the classrooms, for ITM children both English-Vernacular and Vernacular-Other divides have to be negotiated. The contexts of English literacy development are quite complex and the nature of school practices divergent.

## **Negotiating the language barrier: School practices in teaching English**

As indicated, almost all the private schools in India are English medium schools whereas the Government schools teach English only as a language subject. We have undertaken studies (Mohanty, Panda and Pal 2010; Pal Kapoor and Panda 2016 and ongoing studies) of school and classroom practices in respect of English and negotiation of the language barriers that children face in the schools. High cost EM schools have distinct westernised/Anglicised culture (material and non-material), values and school practices. All classroom transactions are in English and children are not allowed to use their mother tongues in schools and are encouraged to use English even outside the school. Parental support for teaching of English as well as school subjects in English is expected and obtained. Parents support teaching of and in English through their own efforts, private tuition, coaching and other devices, including the availability of additional books and reading materials. In contrast, poor quality English medium schools only appear to be English medium in a formal/declared sense; most of the classroom transactions and children's mutual conversations are in their MT. There are deliberate attempts by the schools to introduce cosmetic Anglicisation: English prayers in chorus, a welcoming 'Good Morning' routine in chorus (often even when one visits late in the afternoon) and western school uniforms (usually including a tie and shoes) modelled after more prestigious EM schools. The text books are in English, which the teachers read in the class, usually one sentence at a time, and translate into the children's MT. The key English words in the text are spoken aloud and drilled in question-answer format. Classroom transactions are nativised and hybridised and there is unrestricted use of non-English languages or MTs even in teaching English (see Mohanty, Panda and Pal 2010 for details of classroom practices). Class examinations avoid questions which would require pupils to write sentences or long answers; usually a multiple choice format is preferred. Parents do not know English and cannot afford private tuition. Teachers are also poor in English.

Teaching English is very different in schools with large proportions of tribal children. Our observations (reported in Mohanty, Panda and Pal 2010) in public/government vernacular (Odia) medium primary schools with Kond (Kui MT) and Saora (Saora MT) tribal children in Odisha (India) revealed a considerable dilution of emphasis in teaching English as a school subject (from Grade 3 onwards) and also very poor English proficiency among the teachers. In these classrooms, teachers read from the English textbook a single word or a sentence at a time and immediately translate or elaborate the same in simple Odia. The teachers occasionally use Kui or Saora, the home language of the tribal children, if they happen to know the language (but, not many teachers know tribal languages). The classroom transactions are characterised

by choral practices and drilling to have children memorise the English letters of the alphabet and numbers in sequence, some textbook words and conversational routines ('What is your name?', 'What is your father's name?' etc) in English<sup>5</sup>. Learning to write English mostly involves copying letters of the alphabet, with each child tracing each letter repeatedly on his or her writing board while the names of the letters are spoken aloud; later, the children copy some words from those written on the blackboard. Evidently, the teachers in these schools make symbolic efforts to meet the curricular requirement for English without any serious attempt at teaching and learning of a foreign language. Lack of substantive learning targets is reflected in their casual assessment of pupils' learning of English. One of the teachers for Kui-speaking Kond children told us (in Odia, translated here):

*Sir, these children do not even understand Odia. What English will they understand? We somehow manage by using sometimes Kui and sometimes Odia. Luckily they are not failed if they fail in English.*

It seems that the teachers prioritise negotiating the Vernacular-Other divide, deferring negotiation of English.

The processes of teaching-learning of English are quite divergent across the different types of private EM schools and public VM schools which differ in respect of how English is placed in the school programme, the quality and competence in teaching, the nature of classroom practices and pupils' readiness for learning English with different patterns of socialisation and support for English in their homes. As expected, the outcomes of school learning of English are also very different. The poor parents who send their children to government VM schools (mostly because they cannot afford the cost of EM schools) seem to be reconciled to the prospects of poor English achievement by their children in these schools. Besides, most of the children in these schools show some basic classroom learning achievement particularly in different subject areas taught in a language with which they are familiar. The fee-paying pupils in the poor quality EM schools are subjected to poor quality teaching in a language for which they get minimal school support and almost no home based support. Thus, EM schools teach some and fail others.

Consideration of the quality of EM schooling and the educational cost to the parents raises a pertinent question: 'Whom do English medium schools teach and whom do they cheat?'. The above analysis of how English is transacted in different types of schools – the Doon schools and the Doom Schools (the majority language schools for tribal children) – suggests the obvious. The poor quality, low cost English medium schools do not and cannot teach English, or, for that matter, other subject matters. Parents in India spend approximately five to ten per cent of their income<sup>6</sup> to meet the cost of private English medium schools. The expenditure of parents from lower strata in terms of percentage of income is indeed higher than their high strata counterparts who also spend a lot more on home based support. But, the burden of expenditure is huge for the lower strata parents sending their children to EM schools where they do not get the returns they expect and are cheated. It is not uncommon for children from lower income families to struggle through ten years of EM schooling with internal assessment in the school showing adequate achievement and, then,

fail the common high school examination; their parents feel cheated but it is too late for them and their children. The poor parents sending their children to low cost EM schools do spend a substantial portion of their family income for education in English. However, their children do not get the expected quality of education. The upper class parents pay high school costs for the good quality EM education which their children seem to receive from the schools (with a lot of home-based support from the parents). The commercial private EM schools, which cater to the upper class offering high cost and quality education, teach the upper class children, whereas those offering low cost education cheat the poor with low quality ineffective education. The interaction between parental socio-economic status, quality of EM schooling and children's academic achievement brings the popular perception of the superiority of EM schooling into question.

### **The myth of English medium superiority**

English medium schools are in great demand because of the popular belief that they are better schools. However, studies comparing children from EM schools with those from MT medium schools in different parts of India (Mohanty 1990, 2003; Nayak 2007; Sema 2008; Srivastava 1990; etc) show that, when the quality of schooling and the socio-economic status of the parents are controlled, mother tongue medium children perform better than their EM counterparts in measures of academic achievement, understanding of the science and maths concepts and skills in language use. Studies among the Bodo children in Assam (Panda and Mohanty 2011; Saikia and Mohanty 2004) also show that Bodo children in Bodo medium schools perform better than their Bodo counterparts in Assamese or English medium schools. In a study by Patra (2000), Grade 6 and 8 Odia medium children with late (Grade 4) entry into learning English as a school subject were compared with the corresponding grade EM children who had studied in English from Grade 1. MT medium children showed poorer English reading, writing and comprehension skills compared to their English medium counterparts at Grade 6 level. But, in Grade 8, the two groups did not differ in the measures of proficiency in English (except verbal fluency). The MT medium children who learnt English only from Grade 4 took four years to catch up with their English medium counterparts who learnt English from Grade 1. It seems, then, that when children learn through their MT and then learn English later, they learn English at a faster rate and, in about four years, achieve the same level of competence in English as the English medium children. Early development of mother tongue proficiency in schools comes at no cost to effective learning of English and other languages at a later point in schools, as Cummins (1984, 2009, etc) has suggested in his Linguistic Interdependence Theory. Indian studies as well as many from Africa (including the major Ethiopian study) and other parts of the world (see Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010) show that education in the MT is more effective than education in English or other unfamiliar languages. The belief in the superiority of English medium education is a myth perpetuated due to the confounding effects of quality of schooling and socio-economic status differences in how education in English is supported in the home environment of the pupils; while children from upper classes get the advantage in EM schools, those from the lower classes are clearly disadvantaged. The belief in the significance of English in education and development is socially constructed (Ryan 2009).

## Whose development does English promote?

We return to the main concern of this discussion: 'Whom does English education benefit?'. The upper and middle class parents and their children, who already have a lot of material, attitudinal and socialisation support for English, get more and the poorer ones, who do not have such support, get less of the benefits. In his analysis of the Matthew effect in English language education in Indonesia, Lamb (2011) discusses some processes through which learners' socio-economic background influences learning of English. According to Lamb, socio-economic conditions and cultural capital nurtured through early education and home environment ensure that some learners benefit more from English language education than others with the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged increasing over time spent on education for English. The social class and rural-urban differences in school learning are also found to increase over the number of years of schooling, showing what some Indian researchers call the 'broom-stick' phenomenon (see Mohanty and Misra 2000), i.e. the widening gap between the poor and the rich, rural and urban children in terms of English competence. The evidence presented in this analysis as well as the Matthew effect studies elsewhere show that English benefits the already English-rich (through early socialisation practices and home support) more than the English-poor and the gap between them increases progressively.

A large number of disadvantaged children, whose parents aspire for a better future for their children through the emancipatory effects of education in English, end up with poor English and low academic competence. They do not get the promised benefits and continue to have limited opportunities despite their education in 'English medium' schools. Soon after independence, India's first Prime Minister Nehru was concerned about discrimination between the 'English knowing caste' in India and the masses. Now there are English knowing sub-castes in India, differentiated on the basis of the level of competence in English: those with excellent English, average English and poor English distributed over different English knowing sub-castes. Whose development does English promote?

English has been called a 'killer language', a tag which it earns on two counts: first, learning of English early in schools has subtractive effects on children's MT and, second, expansion of English has adversely affected linguistic diversity. But it does not have to be so. English can contribute to being a part of the multilingual mosaic of the postcolonial societies. English has been accepted as a part of the multilingual world view and openness in many societies; it must grow along with societal multilingualism and not at its cost. Multilingual societies need an egalitarian language policy perspective which can effectively prevent assignment of greater priorities to some languages over others. It needs to be recognised that, in multilingual societies like India, the learning of English must necessarily be based on a strong foundation of well-developed mother tongue for additive multilingual proficiency. In other words, English language teaching-learning needs to be relocated in the framework of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (Mohanty 2013b). Elaborate discussion on this framework is beyond the scope of the present discussion, but, it needs to be pointed out that experimental programmes of MT based multilingual education (MLE) in two states (Odisha and Andhra Pradesh) in India and our 'MLE Plus' programme

(Mohanty and Panda 2007; Panda and Mohanty 2009) have shown some initial success in fostering better classroom participation and achievement and learning of English (see Mohanty 2010; Mohanty and Panda 2015; and Panda and Mohanty 2014, for details; see also Manocha and Panda 2017 and Nag 2017 in this volume).

## Conclusion

Questions about the choice of English and its role in development in multilingual societies are complex. On the basis of our work on English, education and multilingualism in India, I have sought to highlight the divergent practices, outcomes and concerns in respect of the choice of English and its role in education for capability development in different social groups. Analysis of the underlying processes in the spread of English raises several issues regarding external imposition of English on post-colonial and multilingual societies and internal choice from within these societies. Attributing external agency in the growing role and significance of English in multilingual societies and education in these societies has been seen as undermining the freedom of language users to choose. Progressively the process of expansion of English seems to have become implicit, appearing to be almost autonomous or agent-less. The movement from explicit forces of linguistic imperialism and English ideology to implicit and autonomous choice of English in post-colonial multilingual societies reinforces the hegemony of English. It seems the hegemonic and dominant positioning of English in these societies is a result of progressive internalisation of the role and significance of English by the dominated people and their languages even if most do not benefit from English in education and society. The Goddess of English is a symbol of such internalisation and uncritical acceptance of the dominance of English.

Whatever may be the nature of agency, the choice of English as a dominant language of development is perhaps an imposed but internalised imperative that benefits some and disadvantages many. There is a need to look critically at the role of English in different societies, cultures and sub-cultures, particularly since the effects of English are quite divergent across different layers of the society. The common users of languages do have freedom to choose between the indigenous mother tongues, dominant regional/national languages and English; but for a free choice to exist and to be exercised there have to be viable alternatives and full information, knowledge and understanding of the implications of such a choice. Otherwise, the choice of English is like that of a visually handicapped person who 'chooses' to walk right through a red light. Is such a choice informed? Is it free and is it desirable? That is the question which each one of us in multilingual societies must ask and answer for our own and for the common good.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Often only formal education is seen as 'education' whereas most of our effective life skills are developed through informal education, mostly in the family and the community. Any assumption that formal education is a superior process and has greater legitimacy is uncalled for and biased (see Mohanty and Skutnabb-Kangas 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Depiction of people in oral cultures without formal education as 'illiterate' is biased; it raises an undue comparison between what some people have (e.g. literacy of the 'literate') and



some others do not have 'illiteracy' as absence of literacy among people from oral cultures). In our view (see Mohanty and Skutnabb-Kangas 2013), it is more appropriate to speak of people as *orate* and *literate* in terms of their dominant patterns of proficiency in language and communication.

<sup>3</sup> The 2011 Census of India ([www.censusindia.gov.in](http://www.censusindia.gov.in)) shows that out of the total population of 1,210,569,573, the number of persons declaring English as their mother tongue is 226,449. The most common estimate of English knowing people in India (including those who can speak it as their first language) is ten per cent of the population. However, there is a wide variation in the level of proficiency among these people; the number of people who use English to communicate is much lower.

<sup>4</sup> The figure of 40 per cent is a projected figure for 2016-2017. In 2013-2014, 34.30 per cent of elementary level children and 37.01 per cent of high school students were in private schools (almost all of which are English medium), as reported in Ministry of Human Resource Development figures placed in Parliament (*Indian Express*, Delhi, 21 December 2015). The estimate of ten per cent annual growth in the number of students in English medium schools is based on the fact that numbers nearly doubled from 15 million in 2008-2009 to over 29 million in 2013-2014 (*Times of India*, Delhi, 28 September 2015). The growth rate of students in English medium schools during this period was particularly high in Hindi-speaking states; for example, in Uttar Pradesh it increased by 1,000 per cent and in Bihar by 4,700 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> In one of the classrooms that I visited all the children responded to the question 'What is your father's name?' saying in chorus, 'My father's name is Dhani.' Apparently the teacher had given them a model answer (with *Dhani* as a name) which all the children memorised through repeated drilling without any understanding.

<sup>6</sup> In 2012 the author conducted an informal survey of 40 parents from Delhi and Odisha belonging to different social strata and sending their children to different types of EM schools to find out the proportion of income spent as school costs for each child. The actual amount that is paid as acknowledged school fees is relatively low, but parents have to pay much more for a variety of other funds related to 'developmental activities' in the school.

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