

Ideological Plurality

English in Policy and Practice in India

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I. INTRODUCTION

With more than 1.3 billion people speaking in many different tongues entwined within socioculturally and politically charged hierarchies, “[l]anguage is the site where, very often, social, cultural, and political battles are fought in India” (Ramakrishnan 2017: 57). The language with the highest stakes, from a socioeconomic, educational, and cultural perspective, is one that arrived on Indian shores via the British colonizers: English. In this chapter, we use the theoretical framework of *language ideology* (Irvine and Gal 2000), or commonsense ways of constructing languages, to offer a range of perspectives about English within the scholarship on Indian language policy and practice. Specifically, we examine the relevant literature by focusing on ideological plurality, which we construct as multiplex and heterogenous beliefs that characterize notions about languages. In addition to articulating how the story of English in India is witness to contesting and varied narratives, we outline how certain types of ideologies are marginalized within these tellings.

English maintains supremacy in the Indian context because of its near-exclusive alignment with conduits to socioeconomic and educational power. Nevertheless – or perhaps this is precisely why – the spread of English remains limited. There is a wide range of estimates on the circulation of English, partly because it is not clear what it means to “speak” or “know” English. The National Knowledge Commission (2000), for example, declared that 1 percent of Indians use English as a second language. Crystal (2003) estimated the same at 20 percent. Hohenthal (2003) pegged the total number of English speakers at 4 percent of the population, while Mishra (2000) claimed it was closer to 5 percent. Mohanty (2006) approximated that less than 2 percent of Indians “knew” English. Sonalde and Vanneman (2005), meanwhile, found that 4 percent of Indians could speak English fluently, and that 16 percent could speak it a little. Ultimately, the only real consensus is that it is spoken by an elite minority: a significant proportion of the population has little or no access to it, even as it functions as the most powerful channel for wielding socioeconomic, educational, and political might in the second most populous country in the world. Despite its role within the language hierarchy, English is not an official language of India. According to Article 343(1) of the Constitution of India, “The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script.” Considering the difficulties in immediate post-independence switch over to Hindi as the sole official

language, the Constitution in Article 342(2) provided for English “to be used for all official purposes of the Union” in addition to Hindi for a period of fifteen years (i.e., until 25 January, 1965). However, later due to (primarily) South Indian resistance to Hindi, this time limitation was lifted by a Constitutional amendment and, as such, English continues by default to be used as an additional official language. English is also not included in Schedule VIII of the Constitution, which lists twenty-two languages (including Hindi) as “Official Languages” for communication between the states and the Union (Articles 344[1] and 351). In a way, therefore, the Constitution of India reflects the national ideological ambivalence in respect of English.

India is renowned for its complex, dynamic, and rich linguistic context. The 2011 Census of India obtained 19,569 mother tongue (MT) declarations which were rationalized to 1,369 MTs after linguistic scrutiny. In addition, 1,474 MT declarations each with less than 10,000 speakers were clubbed under a single “other MT” category. The 1,369 listed MTs were further grouped into 121 languages (broad categories) under each of which several MTs were listed. It must be noted that clubbing of MTs into broad categories is arbitrary, often political and contested. This leads to gross underestimation of India’s linguistic diversity. The recent People’s Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) (Devy 2014) has identified 780 languages (<http://www.peopleslinguisticsurvey.org>). A large number of languages are used in different domains of activities in Indian society – registered newspapers in 123 languages, All India Radio News service broadcasts in ninety languages and regional news units in seventy-five languages and films produced in thirty-five languages (Mohanty 2019).

In this chapter, we employ the theoretical lens of language ideology (Irvine and Gal 2000), or commonsense perceptions about languages, to explore a range of perspectives about English as they are located specifically within the scholarship and Indian linguistic policy and practice. Within this formulation, our work centers on the notion of ideological plurality, as noted previously. We begin by examining ideologies rooted in the oppressive experience and memory of British colonization. Then, we elucidate emancipatory ideologies about English reflected in its deification by the Dalit community (the “oppressed” including the lower castes, earlier known as “untouchable”; the term is also used to include disadvantaged Indigenous Tribal communities). Furthermore, we examine the powerful push for English-medium schooling across different social classes, examining how aspirational ideologies surface in language education and policy. We then turn to the *Angrezi Hatoa Andolan* (‘Remove English’ Agitations) as well as the multiple efforts to de-Anglicize place names in India. Further, we situate notions about English within the debates about its nativity or foreignness, an enduring topic of discussion in the relevant scholarly literature. Our analysis offers a selective but important glimpse into English ideologies in India from a language policy and practice perspective. We show that like the story of its linguistic landscape, the narrative of language ideologies about English in India is one of complexity and plurality. Our final contribution is to articulate how ideological resistances to English continue to be marginalized within the larger imagination of its role, leading to continued perpetuation of hegemonic voices in the discourse on English.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMING

The theoretical lens grounding our study is that of language ideology, a concept that circulates across multiple disciplines and fields (Ajsic and McGroarty 2015; Vessey 2015).

What are language ideologies? A classic definition proposed by Silverstein (1979: 193) was that these are “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” Language ideologies have also variously been constructed as “orientations” (e.g., Soler and Vihman 2018), “positionings” (e.g., Wortham 2001), or “attitudes” (e.g., Garrett 2007) toward language (see also Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), among others. Piller (2015: 4) lays out some key ideas regarding language ideologies:

[these] are . . . best understood as beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language that are socially shared and relate language and society in a dialectical fashion: Language ideologies undergird language use, which in turn shapes language ideologies; and, together, they serve social ends, in other words the purpose of language ideologies is not really linguistic but social. Like anything social, language ideologies are interested, multiple, and contested.

Language ideologies are thus fundamentally socially situated (Woolard 1994), helping “mediate social identity” (Wortham 2001: 8). Importantly, they are heavily influenced by and respond to dominant social forces, and thus beholden to specific groups over others (Piller 2015). According to Vessey (2015), they stabilize over time, eventually appearing as *common sense*, circulating in explicit or implicit ways (Woolard 1998). They thus become discursively *naturalized* in everyday contexts. They are critical in multiple ways as they “enact links of language to group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 56). Therefore, they correspond to core social and cultural values. Over time, languages and their speakers become positioned in distinct ways, leading to the circulation of particular kinds of identities, becoming strongly affiliated with them (Wortham 2001). This is not, of course, to characterize them as monolithic; they are fluid and dynamic (Piller 2015). Language ideologies are thus implicated in different languages, institutions, policies, and actors in society, impacting issues of significance such as policy and educational practice (Delarue and De Caluwe 2015; Soler and Vihman 2018).

Importantly, *ideology* as a concept keys into issues of power, authority, and control as they are implicated in social space (Eagleton 2007; Woolard 1998). Scholars using the language ideological framework therefore attend closely to the implication of power within language beliefs (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). The lens of language ideology, in fact, offers critical insight into how power is processed via “ideological reflection and refraction” (Mertz 1998: 151). Since language ideologies “participate in the semiotic processes through which ideas become naturalized, essentialized, universalized, or commonsensical, ideas about language are implicated in the process by which any cultural ideas gain the discursive authority to become dominant” (Gal 1998: 322). Taken together, these aspects make language ideologies an important site for social and cultural analysis. However, Costa (2019) has pointed out that researching language ideologies is complicated by the fact that the narrow analysis of beliefs or ideas invites structuralist bias. A related critique is offered by Ajsic and McGroarty (2015), who highlight that most analyses in the area tend to concentrate on institutional forces. Our work embraces Costa’s (2019) and Ajsic and McGroarty’s (2015) critiques: we thus focus on underlying events as well as ideas and offer room to noninstitutional voices in our review.

The examination of English language ideologies in the Indian context has been of enduring interest to scholars (e.g., Bhattacharya 2017a, b; Dasgupta 1993; Mohanty 2017, 2019; Ramanathan 2005b; Rao 2016; Roy 2015), and we aim to weave different

strands together through a review of the literature, in order to show how language ideologies about English in India not only respond to local, historical, and political forces, but are also simultaneously influenced by larger neoliberal flows of discourse around Global English (Piller 2015). As Bhattacharya (2017b: 350) has previously noted, the mapping of the ideological backdrop on English has been, “by and large, homogenous and riveted on how it functions as a socioeconomic and educational imperative for power and success.” The linguistic landscape of India is so profoundly complex, and the sociopolitical context so diverse, that broader institutional discourses offer but one perspective. We try to capture this complexity as language ideological plurality, referring to the multiplex and heterogeneous beliefs and their manifestations characterizing conflicting notions about English in India. It is, of course, impossible to capture the full range of ideological positions that may be relevant; we can but offer a focused glimpse.

III. OPPRESSIVE EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY OF COLONIZATION

Given the fact that English is an imperial legacy, we begin by looking at ideologies that relate to India’s colonial past based on Bhattacharya’s (2017a) study, which pits two contesting narratives about English and colonization that elucidate the circulation of conflicting ideologies regarding English at macro- and micro-levels within India. She began by highlighting the perspective of a critical policy piece, one of the government’s *Position Papers*, “The Teaching of English” (NCERT 2006: 1). This document articulated key English language policies and teaching practices within the educational context in the country. The opening paragraph of the document offers a clear window into its ideological perspective:

English is in India today a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and a fuller participation in national and international life. Its colonial origins now forgotten or irrelevant, its initial role in independent India, tailored to higher education (as a “library language”, a “window on the world”), now felt to be insufficiently inclusive socially and linguistically, the current status of English stems from its overwhelming presence on the world stage and the reflection of this in the national arena . . . The visible impact of this presence of English is that it is today being demanded by *everyone* at the very *initial* stage of schooling. (Emphases in original)

The extract elucidates several significant ideological positionings regarding the circulation of English in India. English is seen to imbibe an aspirational quality when it comes to enabling social, economic, and educational opportunities on a local as well as a global scale. Note how as a national policy document, the *Position Paper* constructs a collective “Indian”, creating one ideological positioning that purports to glorify English within the country. The *Position Paper*’s pronouncement is in line with Vaish (2005: 187), who postulated that English was “an agent of decolonization.” It is worth noting, however, that within this larger imaginary, resistances to English are marginalized or rendered invisible. Importantly, Bhattacharya (2017a: 2) discussed the “quick and easy dismissal of the colonial inheritance of English,” contesting the policy pronouncement with ethnographic data at her long-term field site.

Providing a strong counterfoil to the *Position Paper*’s dismissive narrative about people’s ideologies about the colonial connection to English, Bhattacharya (2017a) drew

on her research with young multilingual boys at an orphanage in suburban New Delhi. The close analysis of data collected therein highlighted the ways in which ideologies about English continue to remain deeply intertwined with India's colonial past. For example, one young participant, Girish, asked if Bhattacharya (the researcher) was in fact an "English" person because she used to be a teacher of the language. When she clarified that she was not, in fact, "English," Girish stated that if she were indeed "English," the boys would have to kill her, "Because we are at war with the English" (Bhattacharya 2017a: 12). The teaching of English was thus strongly connected to the state of being a British colonizer, and the use of present tense ("we *are* at war") clearly marked that while India may have gained independence, it remained in a state of war against the British as far as Girish was concerned.

Another young boy, Sudheer, claimed during an interview in the same study that "everyone hates the English, all of India" (Bhattacharya 2017a: 13). Here, the English were specifically contrasted against Americans, who were spared the same level of ire – likely because while they are English speakers, they are not viewed as colonizers. Sudheer noted that Indians traveled to America, because "if someone wanted to be a soldier, he or she could learn English in America, and return to India and inform Indians that the English were going to attack again" (Bhattacharya 2017a: 13). Thus, India would be forewarned because the English-speaking soldier would be able to understand current England's war s. The processes of globalization, enabling travel to America, thus offer the possibility of acquiring English outside of a colonial frame, in order to defend against the enduring colonial agenda. As Bhattacharya (2017a) highlighted through an analysis of a different boy's statements, the colonial past still casts a dark shadow, and its link to the English language today remains very much alive, functioning as one of many "forms of resistance or contestation to symbolic domination" by English (De los Heros 2009: 173). What Bhattacharya's (2017a) study also brought to light was how language policy documents struggle to create one voice in the face of a pluralistic many – a process she categorized under *ideological erasure*. She argued that "the categorical assertion of . . . homogeneity and the dismissal of alternate and differing perspectives, regrettably, leaves little or no room for the representation of difference" (Bhattacharya 2017a: 16), a difference that is the defining characteristic of India. In the next section, we continue the discussion on English policy, highlighting some of the struggles that remain in unifying a highly pluralistic society.

IV. EMANCIPATORY PROMISE OF ENGLISH: REFRAMING COLONIZATION

One fascinating example of local ideologies around English surfaces in the consecration of a temple to the "Goddess of English," the foundation stone for which was set down in 2010. The BBC ran this news story, featuring Chandra Bhan Prasad, an author from the Dalit – formerly known as the "untouchable" – community. The creator of the Goddess of English, he was determined to institute a temple in the Goddess' honor in the village of Banka in Uttar Pradesh, a North Indian state. The Dalit community has struggled for many generations as a result of oppression from castes that are socially ranked higher within a problematic caste system, and restrictions on their ability to access meaningful education has been a key factor in the reproduction of their socioeconomic suppression. Because English is a critical factor in facilitating socioeconomic mobility, for Prasad it held the key to a "Dalit renaissance" (Pandey 2011).

Worshippers, led by Prasad, congregated annually in celebration of “English Day” (Lord Macaulay’s birthday), praying to the Goddess: “Oh Devi Ma (Oh Goddess Mother), please let us learn English! Even the dogs understand English” (Masani 2012). The association with Macaulay surfaces in a description of this ritual offered by Thomas (2012: 13): “Beside the goddess hangs a portrait of her unlikely messiah, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the British Whig historian and statesman who brought English education to India way back in the 1830s.” Notably, Macaulay is often criticized for his infamous comment that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (Macaulay 1835: n.p.).

According to Rege (2010), Prasad aimed to symbolize the power of English through the Goddess, and by doing so sought to unsettle dominant narratives demonizing Macaulay. He underscored Macaulay’s exasperation “about the British having to give scholarships to children to study in Sanskrit and Arabic even when they were ready to pay for English education” (Macaulay 1835: 91–2). It is important to keep in mind that Prasad’s resistance is embedded within a history that has denied – through “scriptural injunctions” (Anand 1999: 2053) – access to Sanskrit, a Hindu “High Language,” for Dalits. In the past, thus, Sanskrit was never culturally or socially framed as “being a democratic language that was accessible to the masses” (Anand 1999: 2053) – there were powerful forces that constrained its movement across Indian social strata. Caste was a key force that enforced the restrictions. As a point of resistance, then, Prasad reframed English as a democratic language in contrast. English today thus has become a pivotal ally to access to education and socioeconomic mobility. It is thus possible to argue that Prasad’s “rereading [of English] disrupts the ongoing processes of collective remembrance of language and education in colonial India” (Anand 1999: 92). This connects nicely with Mahapatra and Mishra’s (2019: 352) argument about the complexity of ideological positioning within the Indian context:

If English was the chief means of constructing colonial modernity and structuring a nationalist identity among the elite, rejecting it in favor of the vernaculars and identifying with common masses was a means of expressing anti-colonial sentiment and structuring an alternative identity. With the growing importance of English globally, and the opening up of India to the global economy, English education is also seen as a means of acquiring a new identity, an identity of resistance to the traditional upper-class, upper-caste hegemony in India and also a Bourdieusian desire.

Thus, English is now increasingly constructed among the lower social classes as a way to circumvent older, oppressive hierarchies – even as English renews, reproduces, and participates in a very particular kind of hegemony. In Andhra Pradesh and other states in India, many elected representatives from the indigenous communities (officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes in India) demand English-medium (EM) schools for indigenous tribal children. As we see here, thus, language ideologies can show how access to particular forms of power can help reframe understandings of colonization, particularly in contexts of hierarchized oppression. Some of the highest stakes where these ideologies come into play is education, where we turn to next.

V. ENGLISH IN LANGUAGE POLICY AND AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

As we have seen earlier, Constitutional recognition in India is restricted to twenty-two languages (Schedule VIII) and English has a special role as an “additional official language.”

Effectively, this amounts to nonrecognition and neglect of minority languages; this helps further cement linguistic hierarchies (Mohanty 2019). Within the educational context, only thirty-three languages (including the twenty-two official or scheduled languages) function as an instructional medium in schools and the number of languages taught as language subjects in schools stands at forty-one (Panda and Mohanty 2014). Panda and Mohanty also show that the number of languages used in schools has declined over the years. Education of Indian children occurs at the intersection, then, of languages socially, culturally, and economically stratified within a complex space. These kinds of hierarchies naturally impact national and regional language educational policymaking.

Articulated in 1956, the most significant policy to shape the national language-in-education context is the *Three Language Formula* (TLF). It recommended three languages to be taught in schools in both Hindi-speaking and non-Hindi-speaking areas. The three languages included the MT, or regional language (RL), as the first language, Hindi (or any other Indian language in non-Hindi-speaking areas), and English. In attempting to bring in some uniformity in the regional choices of the three languages, the TLF continued to be revised from time to time (see Mohanty 2019, Chapter 7, for an elaborate discussion of TLF). Through various interpretations and applications of TLF, the regional majority languages (and not necessarily the MTs) became the first language and the medium of instruction in the state-sponsored public schools where English became the second language pushing Hindi (or Sanskrit in many cases) to the status of the third language. As Mohanty (2019: 152) noted, “the confusion created by the TLF contributed in many ways to the growing prominence of English in Indian school curricula.” The hegemony of English, in particular, and Hindi within national language educational policy has served to exacerbate local tensions as a result of a complex matrix of regional language ideological politics (Langer and Brown 2008). Moreover, English, because of its association with cultural, economic, and social capital, has been at the center of much scrutiny in these discussions (Chakraborty and Kapur 2016).

A key national policy adopted more recently is the Indian government’s *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education* (RTE) Act (2009). Promulgated a decade ago, it mandated, for the very first time, free and compulsory education for *all* Indian children between the ages of six and fourteen (Ministry of Human Resource Development 2009). The *Act* stipulated that the “medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in child’s mother tongue,” but it offered little direction for implementation. Nor did it offer any real insight on how to manage the issue of conflicted language ideologies resulting in charged debates about MOI, which often pits English and vernacular languages on opposing sides (Bhattacharya and Jiang 2018), with parents heavily invested in the former.

It is estimated that ninety million children in India are currently being formally schooled in English (Kalia 2007). In fact, over 40 percent of school children in India are in EM schools (mostly private schools), and the number of children in these schools increases by over 10 percent annually (Mohanty 2019). Paradoxically, the rate of growth of students in EM schools is particularly high in Hindi-speaking areas; during the period of five years from 2009, for example, the number of students in EM schools increased by 1000 percent and 4700 percent, respectively, in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the two most populated states in the so-called Hindi belt (Mohanty 2019). English skills are highly coveted, as we previously outlined, because it is believed to be a crucial tool for socioeconomic mobility. Lower-income groups, as Nambissan (2016: 86) argued, draw clear “linkages . . . between the knowledge of English, middle-class jobs, social distinction, and elite status.” In particular, they recognize its role as a gatekeeper to higher education

and higher paying jobs (Hornberger and Vaish 2009; Kam et. al. 2009; Ramanathan 2005a). There are powerful numbers driving these ideologies, as Azam, Chin, and Prakash (2013: 365) found:

There are large, statistically significant returns to English-language skills in India. Hourly wages are on average 34% higher for men who speak fluent English and 13% higher for men who speak a little English relative to men who speak no English. For women, the average returns are 22% for fluent English and 10% for a little English.

Unfortunately for the poorer sections of Indian society, government-run primary (elementary) schools, a free option for Indian children, are criticized for the poor English-language instruction they offer (Thiyagarajan 2008). In such schools, English pedagogy is centered on transmitting ‘scholastic’ English (emphasizing reading and writing) (Gupta 1997), with the acquisition of communicative skills being secondary goals (Vaish 2005). Moreover, English acquisition is almost “entirely dependent on classroom experience” (Gupta 1997: 9) for poorer children, because they have little or no access to the language outside of it (also see Mohanty, Panda and Pal 2010, for a discussion of strategies in teaching English to such children). Poor teacher training, inadequate teacher language skills, emphasis on rote memorization, and minimal allocation of time to language teaching also contribute to form an inferior English language learning experience for a majority of children (Vaish 2005). Thus, disillusioned by English teaching at government schools, many parents enroll their children in private English-medium schools, notwithstanding high costs (Probe 1999).

This has contributed to the exponential rise in the number of un- or semi-regulated, private English-medium schools, a large majority of which target the poor in particular (Aggarwal 2000; Annamalai 2005; De et al. 2002; Jhingran 2009; Mohanty 2019; Nambissan 2003). Mohanty (2019: 196–8) drew a direct link between the quality of schooling, English, and social class in India and discussed the range of what he called “from Doon Schools to Doom Schools.” He showed the hierarchy from the very high-cost elite EM private schools (such as the Doon School) exclusively for the extreme rich class down to almost no-cost poor-quality vernacular-medium public schools for the poor class. According to Mohanty (2019: 197):

With varied layers of school quality and quality of English teaching, some learn English and other school subjects with proficiency whereas others do not . . . Thus, there are now sub-categories of ‘English-knowing’ people. The EM schools and the role of English in public and private schools have led to a new *caste* and *sub-caste* system in India, differentiated on the basis of quality of English proficiency.

A key concern is that many such ‘Doom’ schools are what Lin (2005: 48) has referred to in the Hong Kong context as English medium “in name if not in reality.” Mohanty, Panda, and Pal (2010: 214) have criticized the proliferation of such schools based on the “myth of English-medium superiority.” They further noted that such schools aim for *cosmetic Anglicization*, where, despite the *nominal* importance of English, vernacular linguistic practices dominate. As Annamalai (2005: 26) has previously noted, the English being acquired at such schools is not “critical, creative and applicable to the problems of real life and the needs of the society.” Students learn ‘bookish’, noncommunicative language skills in English; and what they learn, he noted, is to imitate, not interpret, texts. Crucially, as Rao (2016: 205) has noted, “For the vast majority of Indian students . . . English promises much but delivers little.” In this manner, English as a language of instruction helps reflect,

maintain, and perpetuate socioeconomic divides (Mohanty 2017). Specifically, “English-medium education widens social fractures in Indian society by creating and reinforcing a social, cultural, economic, and discursive divide between the English-educated and the majority” (Faust and Nagar 2001: 2878). Social ideologies in India have thus begun to intervene along linguistic caste lines (Mohanty 2017, 2019).

VI. ANGREZI HATAO AND ANTI-HINDI MOVEMENTS

The politics of languages in India have continued to keep alive a love-hate relationship with English for over seven decades after independence. English is powerfully “contested in political fora, given its visible association with elitism” (Roy 2015: 524). In 1967, Ram Manohar Lohia, a socialist leader opposed to the post-independence dominance by the Congress Party and Nehruvian legacy, started the *Agrezi Hatao* (remove English) movement, which sought to de-anglicize Indian education and social life and to have public display of English road signs and billboards removed. The move to eradicate English from public spaces was intertwined with his goals for socioeconomic equality and progress for those on the margins in particular (Kumar 2010). However, while the move received attention, ultimately it failed to shape the desired policy goals. This perspective was not a singular one within the Indian political context; there were other similar moves.

Communist policies in the early 1980s, for example, led to the removal of English as a mandatory subject from elementary classrooms in West Bengal, an Eastern Indian state. There was fierce resistance to this, and the political move was framed as being in the same vein as the former colonizers (i.e., the British) who also wanted to restrict access to an English education. Those who resisted the move argued that it was motivated by the Communist Party’s fear that English “would spread liberal ideas . . . [because] the Communist Party of India (Marxist) wants to keep the masses uneducated so that they can be manipulated and prevented from questioning the system” (Banerji 1985). Ultimately, the measures were uneven in their impact and met with limited success. The policy was abandoned in 1999. In today’s West Bengal, the medium of education remains a critical discursive focus, and at the center of conflicting ideologies. Chakraborty and Kapur (2016: 21), for example, found in their study that while Bengali-medium instruction “might generate cultural benefits . . . it is generally at the cost of attaining higher economic benefits from liberalization.” The demand for English is greater than ever now at the elementary levels, fueled by aspirations of socioeconomic mobility and greater educational opportunities (Sau, Samanta, and Ghosh 2016). The Communist Party’s attempts to eradicate English ultimately went nowhere.

While the movement of “removing English” has remained limited in its impact, it persists today, continuing in a variety of forms in different regions of India. For example, Hindi nationalists seek to promote Hindi dominance over Indian languages leading to the myth of Hindi as a national language¹ (the popular reference to Hindi as a *rāshtrabhāshā* or a “language of the country” has also led to the perpetuation of the myth). Further, attempts to minimize the role of English and promote Hindi through governmental initiatives have met with political resistance to Hindi dominance and anti-Hindi agitations in South India, especially in Tamil Nadu and other states where Indo-Dravidian languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam) are in the majority. In September 2019, for example, on the occasion of *Hindi Diwas* (Hindi Day), the government’s Union Home Minister Amit Shah noted: “Today, if one language can do the work of uniting the country, then it is the

most spoken language, Hindi. There is so much influence of English on us that we cannot talk in Hindi without its help” (Dechamma 2019: n.p.). This led to widespread uproar, leading Shah to issue a quick face-saving clarification that his words had been wrongly *politicized*. Thus, Hindi, a uniting force during India’s freedom struggles, has become a dividing force after independence, leading to the de facto dominance of English in India. It should also be noted that while the resistance to English is often manifested across divergent political movements, individual responses to questions of language choice in education and other domains of social activities are much more pragmatically driven. As parents, for example, people see the benefits of English in education for the future of their children and also the benefits associated with Hindi as a socioeconomic capital because of its majoritarian dominance at a national level. This explains why English as a language of education – as a medium of teaching and learning and as a language subject – is most favored all over the country. In the Hindi-speaking areas of the country, the advantage of Hindi as a language that children know and use is taken as a given and so English is sought after as an added advantage for children’s future. Similarly, in the non-Hindi-speaking areas, education in English is sought after for its benefits while parents are not averse to their children learning Hindi because of its potential significance at a national level. Thus, despite divergent political beliefs in respect of English and Hindi, at the grass-roots level the motivations may be practical rather than purely ideological.

One final note: we do not postulate that anti-Hindi sentiment is localized to the South or all-pervasive; as a dominant national-level language, it is wise to note that Hindi also carries significant socioeconomic capital. Importantly, the politically charged discourses and debates around Bengali, Hindi, and English serve to highlight how language ideologies may be *as* conflicted about what are perceived as “local” languages as opposed to what is often constructed as a “foreign” one (i.e., English).

VII. NOTIONS OF NATIVITY OR FOREIGNNESS

Is English a ‘foreign’ language or a native language in India and in other postcolonial societies? The question of ownership of English in postcolonial societies is significant since it is related to teaching and learning of English as a second or a foreign language in these societies. The positioning and the role of English in the multilingual ecologies of these societies are highly contested. Mohanty (2017, 2019) pointed out that promotion of the notion of “World Englishes” has facilitated the elitist characterization of English as a ‘native language’ in postcolonial societies and the claim to its ownership. Such a claim implies treating English as a second language for the native users of Indian languages and application of second language teaching methodology in teaching English to Indian learners. However, as Phillipson (2009: 89) noted, any declaration by the ‘experts’ that English “now ‘belongs’ to all its users and has become detached from its Anglo-American roots” is misleading since the global use of English continues to be guided by ‘Anglo English’ (Wierzbicka 2006). In his discussion of ‘Indian English,’ Dasgupta (1993: 216) pointed out that the usages and variations in Indian English are always judged with reference to the norms or standards set by the “Anglo-American mint.” The claim of *Indianness* of English is based on the observation that speakers of many Indian languages and local varieties often use words and expressions which are borrowed from English. This is interpreted by the proponents of Indianness of English as language learners’ familiarity with English. However, such borrowings across contact languages are common to all the languages of the world, including English. The presence or use of a few English words

and expressions in native Indian languages cannot be taken as ‘evidence’ of knowledge of English since the borrowed expressions are treated by the language users in India not as English, but as a part of the Indian languages (Mohanty 2017). The claim that the ownership of a local or national variety of World Englishes resides with the users of that variety is misleading since, as Dasgupta (1993) has pointed out, the norms are exogenous.

Because of prolonged and extensive contact with English, Indian languages have borrowed and adopted many words and expressions from English. This in itself does not make English an Indian language or a language rooted in Indian culture. The foreignness of a language is not just a question of its origin or use: it is dependent on the extent to which the language is rooted in the daily life cultural experiences of the users of that language. In this sense, English as a language is quite alien to Indian life and culture, especially rural and tribal India. (Mohanty 2019: 192–3)

Thus, while the position that Indian English can be treated as a “native” language (Agnihotri and Singh 2013) circulates in scholarship, there are conflicting ideological beliefs on that account.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As we outlined it, the story of English in India is one of ideological plurality, that is, without a single, coherent ideological narrative. Of course, our perspective offers but a glimpse of the complexity that characterizes it. The ideological plurality in respect of English in India can be linked to the politics of linguistic identity and dominance reflected in three centrifugal forces in Indian society and polity: (i) surface level extolment of MTs, (ii) glorification of Indianness and Indian cultural traditions leading to rejection of English/anglicization and, generally, “foreign” ideologies,² and (iii) rejection of Hindi-dominance by some non-Hindi language users along with subaltern endorsement of English by the disadvantaged Dalit groups,³ and Indigenous/Tribal Minority and Minoritized Linguistic communities. These forces have led to anomalous positions in respect of English in India – widening influence and following of English and yet apparent rejection of and hatred for the language. The 2011 Census of India shows English as a first language for about 256,000 speakers (i.e., only 0.02 percent of the population)⁴ And, at the same time, as noted earlier, over 40 percent of the school students in India are in English-medium (EM) schools and the annual growth rate of students in the EM schools is 10 percent (Mohanty 2019). The ambivalence in respect of English is evident from the fact that the growth rate of EM students is particularly high in Hindi-speaking states. It bears noting here that not all EM schools are created equal, and many in the Indian context are EM in name alone (see Bhattacharya 2013). Ultimately, the plurality of English ideologies can be traced to the popular ambivalence embedded in the rejection of colonial subjugation, on the one hand, and perception of English as the language of power, opportunity, and mobility, on the other. Similarly, at a political level, the plurality of English ideologies is clearly linked to simultaneous and unreconciled promotion of both MT and English as political imperatives. This results in the gap between the declared and de facto policies; as Panda and Mohanty (2014: 111) pointed out, “while the policy rhetoric is guided by the political compulsions to assert national and indigenous identities, the ground-level decisions in respect of languages in education are influenced by the market forces in favor of English.”

NOTES

1. The Constitution of India does not recognize any language as the national language. Article 341(1) of the Constitution recognizes Hindi as “the Official language of the Union.” Article 343(2) provides for English “to be used for all official purposes of the Union” in addition to Hindi. English, therefore, is not an ‘official’ language of India; it is usually referred to as an additional or associate official language.
2. These forces are reflected in rightist politics and promotion of *Hindutva*.
3. This is exemplified by promotion of the *English Goddess* and English as a language of emancipation for the Dalits or downtrodden communities (see Mohanty, 2019: Chapter 9, for discussion).
4. Census of 2011 also shows that English is used as a second language by eighty-three million and as a third language by forty-six million people in India.

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