Article

Bringing English Back in School Education: English in Government Schools of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh

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Abstract

In the immediate aftermath of Indian Independence in 1947, there was a palpable attempt to replace English with Hindi and other Indian languages to unleash the processes of decolonisation. English was castigated as the language of the British Empire and was seen to be the basis of power and privilege for a handful of English-educated elites. A new nation-state thought it imperative to replace English with other languages which ultimately led to language-based reorganisation of Indian states. Subsequently, there was the replacement of English with Indian languages as mediums of instruction at different levels of education. Such a demand was hugely supported by a large number of Indian intelligentsia. However, six to seven decades down the line, there appears to be a reversal of earlier language politics as governments in various states of India are bringing English back as an aspirational language. This article attempts to understand the context of such

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a reversal. It also analyses ideological constructions of linguistic reality and its hold on popular perception. Ideologically constructed realities of language become a concrete, tangible force to reckon with. The article explores the renewed interest and urgency in learning English, using the frameworks of language ideology and the Bourdieusian framework of 'language as a praxis'. Following Hilary Janks, the article underlines the significance of providing critical access to English by historicising and denaturalising its prevalence as one of the major contact languages at the international level.

Keywords

English-medium education, language ideology, linguistic habitus, language education

Introduction

School education in India is facing a tricky question once again. The question is to determine the medium of instruction in government schools. Seemingly, this issue had long been resolved after the independence of India from colonial rule in favour of Indian languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. However, the issue has arisen again among a majority of Indian households who have children of school-going age and also among the policymakers.

The demand for English-medium education is almost unequivocal among parents. The question of the desirability of English-medium education is considered almost settled; the issue of feasibility has been constantly worked out based on family income and other considerations. Among the policymakers, the question is still not resolved; however, of late, a certain inclination towards providing English-medium education in government schools is apparent in several states.

Often, the demand for English-medium education is projected to be a parental choice for equitable access to education that is relevant in the labour market and civic space. Based on a preliminary analysis of discourses available in popular media, the article contends that there is very little evidence to believe that the demand for equitable access has emerged as a collective voice of citizens in a right-based framework. The demands, if any, are demands of consumer-citizens from the state to make special provisions for their children.

Often when education is provided in a medium other than a familiar language, the question of identity pops up. Identity presupposes cultural continuity over time and across the generations. The concern for maintaining and consolidating identity often motivates parents to insist on mother tongue-based education for their children. If so, how do most Indian parents desiring an English-medium education for their children deal with a sense of loss of identity? The issue has been discussed in the second part of the article after providing a brief outline of the medium of education debate in the first part. The article suggests in the third part that the discourse on identity and the production of subjectivities have been reconstituted with the advent of neoliberal politics and economics. The state in neoliberal times has also reoriented itself towards more corporate-like functioning and serving the consumer citizens. Thus, the relationship between the state and citizens has been reconfigured. In this changing context, learning and producing English became a 'move' or 'strategy' in the 'linguistic market' in the Bourdieusian sense rather than a demand for equity and social justice. The realm of linguistic exchange is a realm of power, which is often 'misrecognised' as a realm of pure linguistic and natural competence. The perception of a language is shaped by ideology, which can erase the memory of how it became the language of authority and power due to historical contingencies. The last two parts of the article discuss this aspect of language ideology and the Bourdieusian notion of 'language as a praxis'. Finally, following Janks, the article contends that not providing access to a language of power will further marginalise the section of society already marginalised. However, providing access to a powerful language like English without inculcating a critical sense of seeing the power of language as a consequence of historical contingency will perpetuate the hegemonic control of powerful language and delegitimise the lived experience of the majority of the population expressed in different languages and genres.

Education in English Medium: Setting It Aside and Bringing It Back

Although English had been a prerequisite for matriculation examination until the late 1960s, in most of the states, it has been replaced as a medium of instruction by Indian languages. Annamalai (2004) notes that the replacement of English as the medium of instruction started gradually decades before independence when the anticolonial Indian freedom movement emerged as a mass movement under the leadership of Gandhi

and other leaders. He writes: '...major Indian languages were introduced as the alternative media of education at secondary level from 1921. Textbooks and technical terms were created in Indian languages so that they could be used as the media of secondary education' (p. 182). A minuscule segment of private schools maintained their distinction by continuing with English-medium education, but the majority of Indian students learned their school subjects in Indian languages in government-run schools. Citing Nurullah and Naik (1951), Annamalai (2004) reports that in the Madras Presidency, 51% of secondary schools started offering education in Indian language medium by 1937 (p. 182). The situation in other provinces was not very different. The famous book for Algebra, written by Kalipada Basu, *Algebra Made Easy* (Matriculation Algebra), was translated into Hindi by Yatindranath Sen in 1936. In the introduction of the book, the translator Yatindranath Sen wrote exuberantly:

> 'It's a matter of great satisfaction and joy that local languages are gaining their rightful place in the Indian education system. High school students in Agra and Awadh as well as those taking the Intermediate Board exam in United Province and the Examination in Patna University can now answer their Mathematics questions in either Hindi or Urdu' (Basu, 1936. Translation mine).

This process of replacing English as the medium of instruction, which started a few decades before the independence, gained momentum after the independence. However, English continued to be a mandatory requirement for clearing the matriculation examination. A few decades later, the popular mood in some states was to remove English even as a prerequisite for matriculation examination as that was perceived as a major impediment for students from less privileged social backgrounds. When socialist leader Karpoori Thakur became the education minister in the first non-Congress coalition government in 1967, he made English an optional subject in matriculation examination. The result was marked as 'Pass without English' and candidates who passed without qualifying marks in English were derisively called passed with 'Karpoori Division' (Singh, 2015) as knowledge of English was deemed necessary to be considered an educated person. Though the number of schools providing English-medium education from the primary grade has never been impressive, the impact cannot be measured purely by the numbers. The reason was the way dissemination of education had been conceptualised

as 'downward filtration' rather than through universal access to school (Acharya, 1978; Annamalai, 2004; Basu, 1982).

Village-level primary schools teaching basic literacy and numeracy existed before colonisation. These schools continued operating in some form but were heavily monitored by colonial education departments through standardised curricula, textbooks and assessments (Acharya, 1978; Jha, 2011). By any reckoning, schools imparting education in vernacular medium were more in numbers than English-medium schools, but their status and influence were limited as English was an important qualifying subject to pass the matriculation subject. As McLaren (1986) suggests, the certification and related examination acquire a 'rite of passage' function in secular space and 'pass without English' was perceived as a ritual violation.

The opposition to English as a mandatory qualifying subject for matriculation certification and the advocacy of Hindi, which was projected as a language of common people, had significant political emotion and energy invested in it. To understand this better, we need to consider the historical setting, which has been briefly described above. The popular mood in north India was succinctly articulated through slogans such as: '*angrezi main ab kaam na hoga, phir se desh ghulam na hoga*' (Will not work in English/the country will not be enslaved again) and '*Janta ki bhasha ka aadar, loktantra ka aadar*' (Respect for the language of the people/respect for democracy) (Jha & Kumar, 2017). In West Bengal, the state adjacent to Bihar, the Left Front government brought a policy not to teach English as a compulsory language at the primary level. The move did not resonate well with Bengali middle class but the Left government, like the government in Bihar, pushed this policy under the rubric of social justice (Scrase, 2002).

In the southern part of the country, Andhra Pradesh was formed as the first state based on linguistic identity. Sri Potti Sriramulu—a prominent freedom fighter and disciple of Mahatma Gandhi—sat on an indefinite hunger strike for separate statehood for Telugu speakers and subsequently made a supreme sacrifice. Unlike northern states, the popular mood in the southern states was not strongly anti-English, rather it was anti-Hindi in some of the states. There was strong opposition to promoting Hindi as the only official language of the central government after 15 years of promulgation of the Indian constitution. Notwithstanding this difference between southern and northern states, the urge to implement regional languages as mediums of instruction in school education was unmistakable in both. It is an obvious choice for states formed on

linguistic bases to promote the use of state languages as a medium of instruction in school education.

From a general exuberance for Indian languages in the mid-1960s and 1970s, there was a sense of hopelessness set in among the students and parents of government schools by the mid-1990s and 2000s. The exodus of middle-class children from government schools and the sudden proliferation of English-medium private schools catering to high- and low-income groups through high-fee and low-fee private schools could be witnessed during the same period. As a response, different state governments started bringing English back into primary and secondary education. West Bengal Left Front government rolled back its policy and introduced English again as a subject in primary education from grade three and so did the government of Bihar led by political legatees of Karpoori Thakur. In 2000, West Bengal reintroduced English as a subject from the third grade onwards (Scrase, 2002). In 2004, the language was introduced in the first grade (*The Telegraph*, 2004). The neighbouring state, Bihar, reintroduced English from grade three in 2001 (*The Times of India*, 2001). Starting in 2006, the state introduced English as a subject in grade one (British Council, 2016). There were a few disgruntled leaders in Bihar, though, who expressed their sense of betrayal. Bhola Prasad Singh, a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) from the ruling party Rashtriya Janata Dal, retorted: 'As a minister in 1967, I used to blacken with tar signboard written in English... how can I support the introduction of English...' (*The Times of India*, 2001). But these were some of the lone discordant voices amidst the general support for the move within the party, government and public. Something has significantly changed between the 1970s and 2000s. One obvious change was the commencement of the era of economic liberalisation and globalisation, but I will come to this discussion later. For now, it would be useful to note that a decade later or so, some of these states also initiated English-medium education in a few selected schools. This initiative gained momentum by the third decade of the 21st century. On the face of it, this move appears as a pragmatic response emanating from a rational assessment of the situation contrary to the emotionally charged anti-English movement of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the emotional investment in this recent move is quite discernible. A new goddess named an 'English Goddess' appeared on the scene and a temple for same has been built in the Banka Village of Uttar Pradesh (Pandey, 2011). This particular apotheosis of English was by a campaigner for Dalit rights. However, different segments of society have periodically made passionate appeals to provide opportunities for learning English in different states.

Responding decisively to the emerging popular demand for education in English, Telangana became the first state in India that decided to provide English-medium education in all the government schools. Andhra Pradesh wanted to do the same, but due to court cases, it had to withhold the plan. While Hindi-speaking states such as Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh could not plan to change the medium of instruction in all state-run schools to English, they created a new category of school for children attending government schools to impart English-medium education. Governments of these states showcased these initiatives as their major transformative interventions and hard sold them in political campaigns (BS Web Team, 2023; ETV Bharat Chhattisgarh Team, 2023). Curiously, the category of schools is named after Mahatma Gandhi in Rajasthan and Swami Atmanand in Chhattisgarh. This naming convention looks like a desperate move to strike an uneasy negotiation between identity and aspiration.

An Indian Language Mirror and English Window Frame: An Uneasy Negotiation Between Identity and Aspiration

What does this debate on the medium of instruction tell us about the place of education in general and language education in particular in the popular imagination? For many students and parents, education is about aspiration for upward mobility and breaking free from cycles of poverty and other dependencies. For others, education is about affirming and consolidating their identities. Summoning the two metaphors often invoked to express the idea of schooling—a mirror and a window—Manabi Majumdar writes:

> 'What we saw, and what Sleeter (2009) also noted, is that schools are often a mirror for the children of the middle class and elite, who see the dominant worldview reflected in the curriculum, while it is a window frame for students of non-dominant groups who get a peep into the world of the dominant society' (Majumdar & Mooij, 2012, p. 3).

These two metaphors of a *mirror* and a *window* are relevant in the medium of instruction debate too. The mirror represents the desire of a community to see the reflection of their language and mode of being in the school curriculum, while the window represents the desire to explore the possibilities and see the world out there expressed in other languages.

Though mapping these two metaphors to the educational imaginations of two social classes—'middle class and elite' on the one hand and 'non-dominant groups' on the other—is plausible and there are certain articulations that can also be presented in support of this claim, this mapping oversimplifies an issue which is much more complex. However, before getting into complexity, let us consider some of the articulations that support this claim.

The first articulation is not directly linked to education or language education per se, but it illustrates the way a person from the oppressed class might think. When the state of Telangana was formed in response to a long-held demand for separate statehood for an underdeveloped semi-arid region of erstwhile undivided Andhra Pradesh, better educational opportunities for children were one of the expected outcomes. In the wake of the formation of Telangana state when the noted journalist P. Sainath interviewed some of the landless labourers of the state and asked them to express their hopes and expectations from the newly formed state, one of the labourers said:

> 'See my hands', says Pulemalla Janaiah, holding out heavily calloused palms and twisted fingers. The others around him smile. Their hands look the same as his. 'Our children should not have such hands', says Janaiah. He and his group of friends are landless labourers, bent with years of hard physical work. In their hearts, they believe the to-be state of Telangana will give their children a better deal (Sainath, 2013).

The landless labourer mentioned above wants his children's lives to be different from his own. He expressed his desire in much more concrete terms using his hand as a synecdoche. In this case, the focus is on change than continuity. However, identity presupposes the desire for continuity, permanence and endurance.

Beyond this incidental vignette, one also comes across articulations from a range of noted scholars speaking on behalf of disadvantaged groups in support of English-medium education and a certain disdain for standardised versions of Indian languages including Hindi. A noted scholar, Kancha Ilaiah, while underlining the alienation of standardised modern Indian languages from the lived experiences of social groups involved directly in production processes, elaborates the point with observations:

> 'Each caste is rooted in its productive process and its language is structured around that production. The Kurumaas have their own language as do the

> Lambadaas, the Erukalaas or the Koyaas. The Kurumaas not only know about the sheep, goats, trees, plants, and so on, they know the names of every instrument used in woolmaking and blanket-weaving. A Goudaa knows the names of a whole range of instruments, skills and activities that are required for toddy-tapping. The specialization that one acquires in communicating these caste occupational tasks is as much or more sophisticated than that possessed by a Brahmin who utters the several names of his Gods while reciting a mantra. What is ironical is that the recitation of several names of one God or many Gods is construed as wisdom, whereas knowing the language of production and the names of productive tools is not recognized as knowledge. The Brahmins have defined knowledge in their own image' (Ilaiah, 1996, p. 6).

The issue Ilaiah (1996) has highlighted is the way school curriculum weaved through standardised Indian languages alienates Dalit-Bahujan children. For Ilaiah and other scholars of this tradition, the process of standardising Indian languages is the process of Sanskritisation and Brahmanisation. With this, the claim of Indian languages to be the language of the Indian masses gets weakened. For Dalit-Bahujan children, the standardised Hindi or Telugu is a mirror that reflects their subjugation and, in many instances, humiliation. English is an alien language, thus becomes not at par with the standardised version of the Indian languages; rather, it becomes preferable for the reason that at least this does not bear the marks of subordination.

Having conceded the validity of mapping of two metaphors—a mirror and a window—onto two social classes, one must also emphasise that the issue is a bit more complex. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, not too long ago, a set of political actors claiming to champion the causes of socially disadvantaged groups passionately supported the removal of English as a compulsory requirement for passing school examinations. They believed that standardised modern Indian languages are more accessible to socially disadvantaged groups. Also, though these modern standardised languages might reflect the Brahmanical modes of being, they can be reoriented to express the culture and lived experience of subordinated groups. A tradition of writing Dalit and feminist autobiographies in Marathi, Hindi, Kannada and other Indian languages can be presented as such instances of breaking with the established canons of these languages. Furthermore, the desire for a sense of identity is not limited to social groups with advantages. The need to construct a unique identity and to be acknowledged for it is a universal human longing. On the other hand, aspiration is not exclusive to underprivileged groups. It is

a general yearning in the modern age. Rather middle classes opted for English-medium education much before any other social groups, so much so that English became one of the defining ingredients in the making of Indian middle classes. So, the desire to opt for education as a 'window' has been equally appealing to these classes. These classes negotiated these two aspects of education—identity and aspiration; a mirror and a window—by separating the private sphere from their public life and assigning them different roles. The private was preserved to maintain cultural continuity while the window of public life was opened to the world. One manifestation of this has been the advocacy of vernacular medium education for women and other subordinate groups while male members eagerly opt for English-medium education and thus participate in public life. This arrangement and negotiation between 'identity' and 'aspiration' has been tenuous, tentative and ambiguous, but tentativeness ambiguity and temporality are part and parcel of these negotiations. A deal the leading middle class negotiated to contain both identity and aspiration by devising ways of separating private from public survived for a considerable period and is still surviving in some forms (Chatterjee, 1993). However, in the era of economic liberalisation, this arrangement started to fall apart.

English as a Medium of Instruction: A Hegemonic Project or a Demand for Equitable Access to Quality Education

Maintaining public and private distinction became difficult with economic liberalisation and growth-led service sector. The pressure to modernise the household has always been there with universal franchises, post-independence population control programmes and other welfare measures, but post-liberalisation households became consumers of a range of goods and services provided by big multinational companies. (Chatterjee & Riley, 2001; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2009; Shani, 2017). Also, service industries demanded very different kinds of dispositions and capabilities. Communicating well with a range of stockholders from different parts of the world became one of the key capabilities. Being well-versed in English became significant in this context (Endow, 2021). In this new socioeconomic context, new identities of consumer subjects were produced. A variety of literature explores the creation of new forms of subjectivities and identities widely known as neoliberal subjectivities (Chandler et al., 2016; Gooptu, 2013; Hilgers, 2013).

As an economic and political doctrine, neoliberalism relies on private individuals taking responsibility for themselves and keeping the state or society aside as much as possible. As Varoufakis (2017) asserts, it can be viewed as a transition of a '*society with the market*' to '*market society*'. If society is a market, then there will not be any distinction between value and prices. The price realised in an open market is the most objective measure of the worth of an action. The value determined through public discourse is just an emotional and subjective predilection without any objective basis (Metcalf, 2021). So, if society is just like a market, the state entrusted with the responsibility of running a society should run it with the guiding framework of running an efficient market. This new doctrine changes the relationship between state and citizen and thus sets the ground for the emergence of neoliberal subjects. Apparently, there seems to be no difference between the liberal discourse of methodological individualism and this new form of subjectivity. However, in a close look, the classical liberal subject rests on the idea of rational autonomy. A rational autonomous subject engages with this world not only to adapt to it but also with an imagination and capacity to transform the world through coordinated collective action. There is no scope for imagination and collective actions for a neoliberal subject. A neoliberal subject is supposed to adapt to the world with all its vicissitudes and precarity. The matter of choice then becomes a matter of being strategic to choose from a given set of options, not to venture into creating new options with imagination and collective action (Hidalgo-McCabe & Fernández-González, 2020). This relationship between the concrete historical reality and the human subject is not even dialectical in the Marxian sense. It is the vicissitudes of market society in which a human subject makes a move and lives through—and even celebrates the precarity of the situation.

If we read through the discourse on opting for English-medium education, we find that this is a discourse of compulsion and desperation rather than freedom, choice and imagination. Opting for English thus comes across as a strategic move rather than a collective demand for equitable treatment.

In analysing the choice in using language as a strategic move, the Bourdieusian framework of 'economics of linguistic exchange' should be helpful to an extent (Bourdieu, 1977). I will discuss this in the subsequent section, but before that, I would like to underline that the choice of English as a medium of instruction is much more a hegemonic project than an equity demand from socially disadvantaged classes. As LaDousa (2005) suggests, the market for English language education in India is

variegated and hierarchised; children from socially advantaged social groups will always move to better-equipped high-end English-medium education to maintain their distinction. The children from socially disadvantaged groups will be stuck either in low-fee private schools or makeshift English-medium government schools. Once everyone participates in English-medium education, comparing the quality and applying the *principle of deficiency* in place of the *principle of difference* would be easier (Gupta, 1991).

Value of Language and Linguistic Exchange

Approaching the issue of the medium of instruction from the pure scientific understanding of the nature and character of human language, many linguists and educationists make a reasoned appeal for mother tongue-based multilingual education or allowing translanguaging in the classroom (Boruah & Mohanty, 2022; Jha, 2021). Unfortunately, their logical appeal does not make much headway as according to Bourdieu, understanding language as a purely logical system and abstracting it from concrete social uses is not the right way to understand people's attitudes and motivations towards language uses. Bourdieu (1977) categorically says: 'Language is a praxis...' (p. 646). He critically engages with the Saussurean concept of *langue* and the Chomskian idea of linguistic *competence*. For Bourdieu, abstracting the idea of linguistic competence by bracketing social competence in which it is embedded is a futile intellectual exercise that will not yield any insight into concrete practices. Putting this view succinctly, he says: 'Linguists are right in saying that all languages are linguistically equal; they are wrong in thinking they are socially equal' (p. 652). Possibly no linguist will disagree with Bourdieu that languages are not socially equal. However, for linguists, the question of social equality is an extraneous issue—nearly a matter of misconception among the social actors. For Bourdieu, 'misrecognition' of the differential worth of languages is not an extraneous issue that has roots in people's cognition, but rather the *misrecognition* is a part and parcel of the operation of power in society. He insists that people speak to each other not just to convey meanings, but rather to make an impact. He says:

> 'A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished. Hence the full definition of competence as the right to speech, i.e. to the legitimate language, the authorized language which is also the language of authority. Competence implies the power to impose reception' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 648).

Coming back to the medium of instruction debate, the Bourdieusian approach helps us understand why the views of people and their political representatives are often so divergent from the views of linguists and educationists. Bourdieu looks at language use not merely as conveying and receiving meanings, but rather as gaining value and profit in a particular linguistic market with accumulated symbolic capital. With this understanding, one can sense the premium parents put on their wards speaking English with fluency. The idea is not that a child should produce grammatically correct expressions. In Chhattisgarh, incidents of government school children speaking English fluently in public are often reported in newspapers. The Hindi word for fluent use of English is *farrāṭedār* (Sharma, 2023). Likewise, a group of children from government schools of Andhra Pradesh sits across the table with the chief minister of the state and converses in English which becomes news (Daily Culture, 2022; Mana Stars, 2020). What is newsworthy is the students' act of speaking, not the message they convey (Sakshi TV, 2023). The medium itself becomes the message.

While suggesting to analyse the choice of English as a medium of instruction as a strategic move and using Bourdieu's idea of 'strategy', it would be necessary to clarify that he does not perceive the idea of strategy as a cognitive move a maximising individual. In commonplace discourse, strategic action invokes the idea of conscious and well-calculated action intent on achieving a goal with optimal use of means. For Bourdieu, a strategic move is neither a pure conscious, individual move to maximise the gain nor a totally unconscious, collective action predetermined by a given objective condition. As Swartz (2002) suggests, Bourdieu's concept of habitus finds its roots in the intellectual milieu of France in the 1950s and 60s. He sought to establish a critical distance from two dominant schools of thought at the time: Claude Levi-Strauss's structuralism and Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism. In developing his ideas, he introduced the concept of habitus, which offered a fresh perspective (pp. 61S–62S). Coming from the 'social practice' perspective, Bourdieu perceives moves as habituated actions emanating from relatively stable bodily and cognitive dispositions. He termed this relatively durable disposition as habitus, and in the field of language practice, he coined the expression linguistic habitus. Although Bourdieu perceives habitus as a durable disposition, it is not entirely static and structured conditions for actions. Instead, it can generate actions in different fields. In Bourdieu's framework, the concept of a strategic move is related to the distinctive interplay between the long-lasting and improvised aspects of social actions. One of the analogies Bourdieu uses to illustrate this

interplay is the game. Players who play the game enter a realm of predetermined and durable rules. The rules of the game allow players to strategise with different degrees of skill and competence, which can lead to varying outcomes. Thus, the game analogy serves to highlight both the strategic improvisation of action and its grounding in past performance (Swartz, 2002, p. 63S).

As habitus is partly a 'corporal schema'—a form of embodied cultural capital, any gain or 'profit' acquired by moving in the market with this capital appears as natural, and not as a social gain (Hanks, 2005; Myles, 1999). The excitement and anxiety of learning English come from the intimate bodily form of its acquisition. Bourdieu (1977) writes: 'Language is a body technique and specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of the body hexis in which one's whole relation to the social world is expressed' (p. 660). We can understand the excitement and 'celebration' of speaking *farrāṭedār* English in this context.

Language Binary and the Absence of Multilingual Habitus

Indian education has been bifurcated into English and local (Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and so on) mediums since colonial times. The use of standardised Indian languages as mediums of instruction has been a significant way to express both national and sub-national identities, as well as to showcase Indian modernity. The Indian state—both at the centre and in states—promoted Indian languages as mediums of instruction as part of this compromise between continuation of cultural identities and modern aspirational changes. The three-language formula was proposed by the first National Policy on Education in 1968 (Venkataramanan, 2019). As LaDousa suggests, the three-language formula underpins a particular version of multilingual ideology. This ideology assumes each language as a distinct and definite entity while considering multilingualism as arithmetic aggregation. LaDousa's fieldwork in Banaras suggests that even this version of multilingualism did not get much acceptance in the popular perception of schooling and education. The languages like Hindi/English or Bhojpuri/Hindi have often been perceived as dichotomously placed (LaDousa, 2005). Two languages in these binaries are symbolically perceived as representing home and the world, rootedness and mobility, Indian and foreign and so on. In this conception, acquiring one language in school by students requires shooing the other language

off from the school premises. The reprimanding of students who speak Hindi and other Indian languages in an English-medium school is one example. Another is the bracketing of Urdu words when Hindi texts are corrected by Hindi teachers. The presence of other languages as school subjects becomes an unnecessary burden in this zero-sum game.

Language binary at school generates and sustains other binary distinctions, such as home language versus school language, community know-how versus school know-how, private versus public and so on. One of the parents—a father of a child from Durg, Chhattisgarh, who sends his son to one of the Swami Atmanand English-medium schools, clearly represents domesticity and schooling as binary. A school is a social place where 'discipline' is maintained, where time and space are neatly structured—time is put in rows and columns (timetable), and where spaces for various curricular activities are clearly marked. The reason he did not like the other government schools was that most activities revolved around mid-day meals in those schools. Those schools have no system, and children often leave after the midday meal or whenever they like. In comparison to school, home is much more unstructured. However, within the home, there is again a 'homologous' and analogous demarcation between the interior and exterior. The exterior is again a neatly structured space, while the interior is comparatively unstructured. In their significant work on language ideology, Gal and Irvine characterises this phenomenon as recursiveness. They write:

> 'Recursiveness involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level. For example, intragroup oppositions might be projected outward onto intergroup relations, or vice versa. Thus, the dichotomizing and partitioning process that was involved in some understood opposition (between groups or between linguistic varieties) recurs at other levels, either creating subcategories on each side of a contrast or creating supercategories that include both sides but oppose them to something else' (Gal & Irvine, 1995, p. 974).

This ideological phenomenon of 'recursiveness' might help in understanding how people make choices about schooling based on the medium of instruction in school. It is possible to interpret parental choices for schooling as rational decisions made by maximising individuals, but it would be more insightful to view it through the lens of language ideology and Bourdieu's perspective of social practice and bodily ingrained social schemas.

To Sum Up

As children from different social groups are attending elementary schools in India, the schools are becoming much more multicultural and multilingual. In everyday school context, the clear demarcation between home and school is also getting blurred. Inexhaustible and dynamic this reality might be, but the ideological lens through which this reality is perceived and the categories through which it is ordered are even more compelling. The compelling ideology of monolingualism and linguistic binaries orient people's durable disposition and constitute a linguistic reality that sustains and reproduces linguistic binaries. Bourdieusian objection to abstracting linguistic competence from social competence is important in the sense that the medium of instruction debate is neither a debate about linguistic feasibility nor purely about social efficacy. Actually, for Bourdieu, these two realities are inseparable. The issues of English as the sole medium of instruction or mother tongue-based multilingual education have to be raised in the moral and political realm. The issue cannot be resolved in the realm of efficiency and feasibility.

People would like to get access to English and other powerful languages at this historical juncture to participate in broader academic, civic and economic processes. Providing access to these languages through proper curricular planning is the responsibility of policymakers and educators. However, de-historicising and naturalising the dominance of any language and uncritically accepting the superiority of one language over another will not serve the interest of the majority of learners (Janks, 2004; Menon & Pallavi, 2022). Worshipping an 'English Goddess' will certainly not empower the marginalised groups of Indian society. Providing critical access to language, which is temporally (not eternally) in a position of power, is the one reasonable way to address the problem. As Janks (2004) succinctly puts it:

> 'The education system is a central institutional apparatus for the privileging of a particular language (or variety) and for legitimating its dominance. Bourdieu draws attention to the fact that while the education system fails to provide students from subordinated classes with *knowledge of* and *access to* the legitimate language, it succeeds in teaching them recognition of (misrecognition of) its legitimacy (1991:62, my emphasis). What is needed is classroom pedagogy that reverses this - that gives mastery of English, together with a critical view of its status as a global language' (p. 35. Italics in original).

There is an understanding that an underprepared and hastily implemented English-medium education in various states will legitimise the 'natural' superiority of English over other languages more than providing access to and knowledge of the English language. There is often a paean to the relevance of English-medium education that compensates for the lack of preparation for implementing a rigorous English language programme.

Moving forward, instead of striving to provide education in English-medium in government schools, sincere efforts should be made to teach English in a meaningful way in a thriving multilingual context. This is both desirable and feasible, provided there is political resolve and commitment. People need to be active subjects of English, not passively subjected to it. English-medium education implemented with the language of compulsion pushes people to be at the receiving end. With the colonial legacy of English education in India, which operated on the 'downward filtration theory', at this juncture, we need English in a democratic country that should work not on the *downward filtration* principle, but on the principle of *bottom-up* consolidation of knowledge and power. For this bottom-up configuration of power and knowledge, multiple ways of knowing and being conceptualised in and expressed through multiple languages need to be validated. Actively fostering multilingual space in educational institutions is as much an imperative as access to a language that has currently gained authority and power due to historical contingencies. Multilingual education with access to languages that have authority and power at this historical juncture is the way forward. Whenever we speak about the power of English or Hindi, we need to frame it in a language of contingencies rather than in a language of necessity.

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