Language, Script, and Advertising in India's Hindi Belt: Institutional Voices in Flux

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ABSTRACT

Certain combinations of languages and scripts have come to take on indexical properties within the world of advertising in northern India. Such properties are regimented by what is on offer—commercial items, government services and information, schooling, and coaching services. An exploration of changing conventions in advertising since the 1990s, a period of accelerated liberalization in India, reveals that there have been especially dramatic changes in education and coaching services. By considering combinations of language and script as partly constitutive of the voice of an institution, this article accounts for the changing possibilities for the articulation of institutional distinctions and the ways institutional voices commoditize aspects of personae during the last twenty-five years or so in northern India.

Advertising is ubiquitous in India. One encounters it painted on walls or on passing vehicles in the countryside, or higher above in smaller cities and larger urban areas. Advertisements are painted to walls themselves, or are painted or printed on cloth, wood, metal, plastic, or paper, and such materials are pasted to walls or displayed above the street on billboards or banners.

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This article includes arguments presented at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association and the Annual Conference on South Asia in 2016, the New York Conference on Asian Studies in 2017, and the first meetings of the Society for Linguistic Anthropology in 2018. People in institutions in India made all of the fieldwork reported on herein possible, and I have promised them anonymity. Funds for recent fieldwork were provided by Hamilton College's Christian A. Johnson Fellowship. Helping me to formulate the arguments herein were discussions with Abhishek Amar, Victoria Anibarro, Mariam Durrani, Latika Gupta, Krishna Kumar, Nita Kumar, Manabi Majumdar, Pavitra Sundar, and the contributors to this special issue. Indeed, I feel very fortunate to be able to consider each contributor a colleague and friend. Christina Davis deserves special thanks for taking the lead on the special issue at every turn. As for my contribution, the comments of an anonymous reviewer and Asif Agha made all the difference, and I am grateful for their generosity.

Signs and Society, vol. 8, no. 1 (Winter 2020). 2326-4489/2020/0801-0007$10.00

One is hardly ever out of sight of an advertisement. In the "Hindi Belt" of northern India, advertising often uses Hindi and English, and occasionally other languages such as Urdu, and Devanagari and/or Roman script, and occasionally other scripts such as nastaliq.[1] The scripts used in advertising add nothing to the referential value of what is being advertised.[2] In other words, the scripts that an advertisement uses do not inform the viewer about what is on offer, who is offering it, or where it might be located. Rather, the significance of which scripts, languages, and script and language combinations are found in an advertisement is itself "regimented" by the type of product, service, and/or institution being advertised (Silverstein 2003).[3] Considered herein are the language and script combinations differentiating advertisements for retail commerce, the government, schools, and coaching services, "coaching" referring to the preparation for exams enabling further schooling or civil service placement.

The institutional types indexed by the conventions of language and script exhibit the properties of voice employed by Bakhtin (1981) in his explorations of the semiotic material that helps to constitute the disposition of characters in literary genres. Institutional voices emerge from indexical connections between patterns exhibited within the confines of the material of advertisements themselves and the world beyond—divided up as it is between products for sale, government-generated directions and tokens of reference, educational institutions, and coaching services. Agha has explicitly addressed the fact that voices can be constituted through several channels or media: "The term *voice* is based on a corporeal metaphor of phonation—the friction of air over vocal chords—even though the phenomenon it names is not restricted to, and hence has no necessary connection to, oral speech; Bakhtin's own examples involve written texts in any case" (2005, 39). Each institutional domain is indexed by particular manifestations of language and script such that the relationships between domain and language and script combination are largely presupposed. Thus, one can say that institutional participation in one of the domains of advertising

1. The Hindi Belt is the massive area of states where the official language is Hindi. The states are Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

2. An index is the relationship between a sign and its object of representation informed by aspects of temporal and spatial contiguity (*EP* 2:5). Sometimes the indexical relationship between a sign and its object of representation can co-occur with the referential aspect of the sign such as the pronoun "I," what Jakobson called a "shifter" ([1957] 1971). Its meaning depends on who uttered the word—the indexical relationship between sign and object—and corresponds to the singular first person—the referential possibility of matching token to type. Sometimes the indexical relationship between a sign and its object of representation is not also referential (Silverstein 1976).

3. Script in India has been the subject of a number of publications (Ahmad 2008, 2011; Choksi 2014, 2015, 2017; and King 2001).

offers a position in the larger world of advertising as well as a position with respect to other institutions.

The existence of voicing contrasts among the institutional types relies on a process of enregisterment—in this case, the emergence of an identifiable set of contrasts of language and script combinations, as well as lexical items particular to the domains advertised (Silverstein 2003; Agha 2005; Gal and Irvine 2019). The notion of register also invokes those people who might recognize advertisements, the institutions that display them, and the goods and activities advertised. After all, each domain of advertising invites a particular engagement: as a consumer of retail goods, a government subject, a (certain kind of) student or parent, or someone who aspires to take an exam or acquire a civil service position.

Institutional voicing distinctions are relevant to the social worlds in which institutions exist in multiple respects. First, the institutional voices index "speaker attributes" constitutive of social personae (Irvine 1990; Agha 2003, 2005, 2007; Gal 2016, 2017). That is to say, each domain draws on and contributes to a model—via enregistered language and script combinations and lexical items—of someone who might come to consume what is on offer. While it is true that manifestations of social personae depend on particular advertisements for their realization, institutional voicing distinctions tend to draw on or orient to a discernable set of social types and attributes of their activities. While some domains—retail consumerism, for example—enable the connection of aspects of advertising to attributes of would-be consumers, others—schooling, for example—enable the connection of aspects of advertising to different personae through sets of opposing attributes. Institutions and actors across the domains thus use a common set of semiotic materials, but each institutional domain of advertising presupposes a rather specific set of metasemiotic principles for the development of the attributes of personae. And, second, registers are linked to participant structures such that the invocation of a register can imply the shift in the alignments of participants and roles (Agha 2005, 2007). In some cases explored herein, the disposition of advertising to its surroundings and its potential viewers plays a part in the differentiation of the institutional type.

By treating language and script combinations as signs of voice, this discussion seeks to consider relationships between the attributes of personae and the highly mediatized practices of advertising. Agha notes, "To speak of mediatization is to speak of institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication to processes of commoditization" (2011, 163). Indeed, the voicing contrasts considered herein are highly mediatized because they use differences

between language and script combinations to offer subjects engagements with commodification. There is no necessary connection between language and script combination, on the one hand, and commodity form, on the other. Rather, engagement with each domain's voice entails a specific set of relationships between the semiotic materials of the advertisement, attributes of relevant personae, and institutional structures.

Major entrepreneurial expansion has happened in all of the advertising domains since I began fieldwork in the mid-1990s on relationships between language and education in Varanasi, a small city in eastern Uttar Pradesh, but new forms of commodification in certain domains have coincided with shifts in personae and attributes as well as institutional structures. In order to address tourists, a specific kind of consumer, the government has left evidence that it has had to tack on advertising of another institutional entity using different combinations of language and script. In contrast, transformation has pervaded the entire domain of advertising for schools because the regimentation of language and script largely has abandoned reproducing the distinction of language-medium schooling, "medium" referring to the primary language of pedagogy. Replacing the distinction is an emphasis on English-medium schools and on schools meant to serve the poor. Thus, an old dichotomy has faded for the most part, and new distinctions of language and script have come to index new subject positions in the education sector. In the coaching service industry, there has been a proliferation of language and script combinations used in advertising. Some of them index attributes of personae as well as niches in a growingly complicated division of labor in the industry.

Tracing such changes allows for the appreciation that the possibilities of commodification have shifted in recent Indian history. These shifts necessarily resonate with the ties between institutional voice and the personae they make more or less relevant. And shifts within the institutional voices considered here show that the fates of subject positions over the years of economic liberalization in India have been rather unequal. Such are the possibilities when languages and scripts are given their semiotic due over periods of change.

Advertising Commercial Retail: Finding the Modern in Language and Script

One of the most salient properties of advertising for consumer products is the possibility of finding Hindi and/or English rendered in Devanagari and/or Roman script. Such has been true of advertising since the beginning of my fieldwork in the mid-1990s (and long before). Consider, for example, the sign

advertising the name of my landlord's shop. In 1995, *barman sṭors* was rendered as English *sṭors* (in Devanagari script) rather than the Hindi *bhanḍār* or *dukān* (as in *gāndhī khādī bhanḍār* 'Gandhi homespun shop', or *agravāl davā kī dukān* 'Agrawal pharmacy', both located near Burman Stores). The English *phon* and "*na.*," the English abbreviation for number, were in Devanagari, and all of the numerals were Hindi and Devanagari. In 1996, Mr. Burman decided to make the walkway approaching the shop more attractive by having its low wall painted. Patrons, including me, would often sit on the wall and drink the soft drinks they had just purchased from Burman Stores. Mr. Burman had Pepsi's red, white, and blue logo painted on the low wall as well. The word *PEPSI* appeared in the middle of parallel curved lines suggesting a wave. Indeed, above the circular logo appeared the word *LEHAR*. The word is Hindi and can be glossed as 'wave', and the word, like *PEPSI*, was rendered in Roman script. In some shops, I saw the same arrangement, but in others, I saw "Pepsi" rendered in Devanagari, along with *lahar*. Thus, one could find English terms like *store* and *phone* rendered in Devanagari and a Hindi term, *lahar*, rendered in Roman script, as "LEHAR."

Mr. Burman's nephew inherited the shop in 2012 and has run it with his wife since. Figure 1 shows the marquee they installed in 2013 advertising Pepsi's new

Figure 1. *Nayā bolḍ paik*, Burman Stores, 2014

slogan, *nayā bolḍ paik* 'new bold pack'. Here, *nayā* 'new' is rendered in Hindi and "bold pack" in English, and the whole phrase is rendered in Devanagari. In contrast, Pepsi's corporate logo appears in Roman script. Common to both periods of commercial advertising, whether home grown or corporate, is the appearance of Hindi and English rendered in Devanagari or Roman script.

Advertising for retail establishments and consumer goods manifests an entanglement of local mercantile establishments with multinational corporations and their brands. This invites comparison with another Indian context explored by Nakassis (2016) in his work on the performance of "style" among college students in Madurai and Chennai in the far southern state of Tamil Nadu. Nakassis reports that the students were well aware that they do not control a register of Tamil known as "pure" or of English that indicates fluency (also see Nakassis [2019, 72] for a discussion of the notion of "pure" Tamil). The embodiment of style allowed association with the potential for mobility and success of English (and an escape from being seen as able to speak Tamil only) but also risked the charge of putting on airs by elevating one's own status or revealing the lack of fluency in English of one's interlocutor. Students had to perform a "balancing act" wherein they indicate some familiarity with English without "showing off" (2016, 114–15). Nakassis notes, "In effect, one must speak English while disavowing that fact and speak Tamil while marking that one is not speaking only it" (117). Nakassis draws parallels between the citational properties of English usage in the production of style and the citational properties of brand as youth wear the results of local design and production.

There are significant differences, to be sure, between the commercial advertising presented herein and the tokens of advertising discussed by Nakassis. First, there is the question of form. While lexical items in the advertising presented herein is in English, much of it is rendered in Devanagari.[4] Lacking in mercantile advertising in Varanasi is the kind of activity Nakassis describes for the evocation of "style": "Most of the *stylish* designs worn by Tamil young men, however, materialized this aesthetics [of being like English, even if not quite] not by reflexive denotational explicitness but by stretching the limits of denotational intelligibility and morphological and orthographic coherence (cf. Tarlo 1996, 242–43). It wasn't uncommon to find nonsensical English splattered on garments from letter sequences that roughly followed rules of English morphology ('Disquerd,' 'Everinhu Canlong') to those that completely transgressed them ('asiohdngy')" (2016, 117).

4. The offer of Hindi lexical items in Roman script is far less common but is increasing in popularity.

Nevertheless, the rendering of English in Devanagari in place of items in Hindi allowed for a performative quality reminiscent of Nakassis's discussion. For example, when I asked Mr. Burman why he used *sṭor* rather than *bhanḍār* or *dukān*, he answered that the name seemed "fresh" and "modern." He quickly explained that it is *sahī* 'correct or right' to use *bhanḍār* or *dukān*, but that *sṭor* struck him as "modern." Years later, Mr. Burman's nephew described his new Pepsi marquee as "smart," "new," and *rangīn* 'colorful'. Only after looking at the picture depicted in figure 1, long after the conversation, did I realize that *smārṭ* (in English rendered in Devanagari) is part of the name of the dry cleaners next door. Mr. Burman's nephew's use of "new" parallels Mr. Burman's use of "fresh" and "modern."

All these judgments take a particular combination of language and script as indicative of a set of qualities. "Fresh" and "modern" draw on the quality informed by the temporal disposition of something as current. The sign's use of English rendered in Devanagari has as its interpretants "fresh" and "modern," a relationship that relies on the qualia of newness and contemporaneity (Chumley and Harkness 2013; Gal 2017; Harkness 2017). Mr. Burman's nephew's use of "smart" and *rangīn* both draw on qualities accessible from the sense of sight. The terms are not synonymous, and *rangīn* describes the marquee for its inclusion of bright color, whereas "smart" might be applied to anything that appears tidy or presented thoughtfully. Indeed, something "smart" might be considered to be related to the signs "fresh," "new," and "modern." All this is not to claim that advertising like this eschews Hindi in favor of English. After all, the first word of Pepsi's catchphrase on Mr. Burman's nephew's marquee is *nayā*, when it very easily could have been *nyū*. Rather, it seems that the involvement of both Hindi and English lexical items, all rendered in Devanagari script, is meant to offer a performativity unavailable through the offer of Hindi lexical items alone.

Advertising for the Government: Languages, Scripts, and Their Addressees

Advertisements in relatively official capacities present a stark contrast with advertising for commercial products and institutions. In official signage, the tendency is for Hindi and English, on the one hand, and Devanagari and Roman script, on the other hand, to be demarcated and combined, such that Hindi lexical items are rendered in Devanagari and English lexical items are rendered in Roman script. This is accomplished by virtue of there being redundancy—across examples—because the two versions typically convey very similar denotational value. Hindi is usually given prominence of place, located above and at left,

and English below and at right. Most often, a gloss of a word in one of the versions is provided in the other, but, sometimes, the very same word will be rendered in the other script—that is to say, transliterated. The provision of the same item in the other script is almost always the option when proper names are represented. What is most consistent is that a message is repeated and that the script differentiates one version from the other. What is slightly less predictable is whether a gloss of the word will be offered in the other language or whether a transliteration of the word will be offered.

Consider the signboard for the post office around the corner from Mr. Burman's shop. The sign has remained unchanged since I first visited Varanasi in 1994. *Ḍāk ghar* 'post office' is first, and rendered in Hindi and Devanagari. The next line reveals the location of the post office, *assī* (the neighborhood) in *vārāṇasī* (the city). Both are rendered in Devanagari. The Hindi/Devanagari combination is then given an English/Roman counterpart. "Post office" in Roman script is followed by "Assi, Varanasi," also in Roman script.

Figure 2 includes a sign by Uttar Pradesh Tourism, a department of the Government of Uttar Pradesh. The sign was installed over the street in the early part of the 2010s to direct traffic to tourist sites. The section of the sign on the right

Figure 2. Incredible !ndia Sign, 2014

exhibits the combinations of language and script found on the sign for the post office, and its white and green coloring indicate that it is a traffic sign offering directions to named destinations. *Ear porṭ* 'Air port' is initially offered in English in Devanagari and then in English in Roman script. *Sārnāth*, a place important in the Buddha's biography, is rendered in Devanagari and then in Roman script as "Sarnath." *Śrī kāśī viśvanāth mandir*, an especially important Hindu landmark, is rendered in Devanagari and then in Roman script as "Shri Kashi Vishvanath Temple." In the Roman script version, *mandir* has been translated as "temple." *Krīn kuṇḍ*, an important site of Aghora activity oriented to the veneration of seventeenth-century Baba Kina Ram and his subsequent reincarnations, is offered in Hindi and rendered in Devanagari, and then untranslated in Roman script as "Krin Kund." The only time English is rendered in Devanagari is for "air port," which is rendered as two words rather than one. The only instance in which Hindi is rendered in Roman script is *kund* meaning 'pool or pond', a frequently used word in place-names in Varanasi.

The section of the sign on the left, however, departs from the conventions used on the right. Most obvious are the different color scheme, the initial use of English in Roman script, the use of an adjective to name a place, the use of an apostrophe for a vowel, and the use of a stylized font. Indeed, in creating the total sign, the state of Uttar Pradesh has borrowed "Incredible !ndia" from an international advertising campaign contracted in 2002 to the advertising firm Ogilvy and Mather (also responsible for advertising campaigns for American Express and Rolls Royce).[5] A rank order of nation followed by state organizes the left section of the sign vertically wherein a highly stylized English rendered in Roman script indexes the nation and a stylized Hindi rendered in Devanagari indexes the state. *Uttar pradeś* 'Uttar Pradesh' appears in a highly stylized Devanagari below "Incredible !ndia." *Uttar pradeś paryaṭan* 'Uttar Pradesh excursion' appears further below in Hindi rendered in Devanagari. Reversed on the left is the priority of Hindi lexical items in Devanagari script that is the hallmark for signs indicating the location for government offices (as on the right side of the sign in fig. 2 and in the case of the post office). In order to turn its destinations into places meant for tourists and their practices of consumption, the state government has had to borrow from an international advertising firm and put English rendered in Roman script first.

The sign leaves ambiguous just who the addressee is meant to be, but the campaign included *atithidevo bhav* (a Sanskrit expression for the feeling that

5. I am indebted to Asif Agha for bringing this to my attention.

guests should be treated like God), the name of a televised series of messages featuring actor Amir Khan and, later, Narendra Modi, future prime minister, about the importance of being clean, polite, and responsible toward tourists. The name's derivation from Sanskrit provides a contrast to "Incredible !ndia," itself an intimation that signs such as the one shown in figure 2 do not include all Indians as (domestic) tourists. In order for the kind of commodification in figure 2 to become possible, some people must play a supportive role.

The conventions of the government whereby English is rendered in Roman script and Hindi in Devanagari are interdiscursive with a language ideological development in Indian history, debates about the official language (Silverstein 2005; Gal 2018). Disagreement in the Constituent Assembly responsible for crafting the Constitution of India (1949) was focused on the acceptability of Hindi. While Article 343 of the Constitution of India states that Hindi in the Devanagari script is the official language of the Union of India, Article 120(1) states that business can be transacted in Hindi or in English and that a member who cannot speak either one can address the House "in his mother tongue." Article 120(2) stipulates that after a period of fifteen years, Article 120(1) should be read as if it were written without the mention of English.[6] Instead, as people in the southern states agitated against the imposition of Hindi, the Official Languages Act of 1963 delayed the removal of English from Article 120(1), something made permanent in 1967. The state government's practice of offering multiple and redundant versions of place names echoes the federal government's decision to retain Hindi (in the Devanagari script) and English as official languages.

For the most part signage of the government does not resonate interdiscursively with other communicative venues in North India. The government likely forestalls uptake of its voice by the redundancy of its advertising conventions. No other domain draws the possibility of using Hindi lexical items in Devanagari and English lexical items in Roman script such that the two offer redundancy of denotational meaning. There is no chance, for example, to see the "fresh," "new," or "modern" in the use of Devanagari to depict English lexical items, as there is in advertising for commercial retail. It is fascinating, however, that the state government has borrowed a convention from an international firm to claim alignment with the "Incredible !ndia" advertising campaign, a singular rendering of English lexical items in Roman script. This

6. Government of India. 2016. *The Constitution of India*. http://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/coi-4March2016.pdf.

practice is also to be found among particular kinds of school advertising, to which we now turn.

Advertising and Schooling: From Language Medium to Prestige and Poverty

In the mid-1990s, schools largely followed the language and script conventions of government advertising in that they rendered Hindi lexical items in Devanagari script and English lexical items in Roman script, but they diverged from the government in that the indexicality of language and script combinations were regimented within an arena of their own. Schools advertising in English with Roman script were English-medium schools and schools advertising in Hindi with Devanagari were Hindi-medium schools. Schools that advertised with English lexical items in Devanagari or with Hindi lexical items in Roman script were considered less prestigious than other Hindi- and English-medium possibilities (LaDousa 2002). Language medium has long constituted a major axis of social differentiation in the Hindi Belt and elsewhere in India, and the distinction between Hindi-medium and English-medium schooling rests on other differences, such as national versus international, government subsidized versus private, and unambitious versus economically mobile.[7] There are other ways to sort schools into types besides using medium of instruction. Nevertheless, one can use the language-medium distinction to cut across all of the other differences between schools to divide all schools into one or another of only two possibilities (N. Kumar 1998; LaDousa 2014).[8] School advertisements lacked the redundancy of those of the government entirely because just which script and lexical affiliation a school displayed indexed the school as Hindi or English medium.[9]

7. See, e.g., Annamalai 1991, 2004; Nadkarni 1994; Verma 1994; Faust and Nagar 2001; Khubchandani 2003; Vaish 2008; LaDousa 2012, 2014, 2018b; Bhattacharya 2013; Proctor 2014; Sandhu 2014, 2016, 2018; Goswami 2017; and Chidsey 2018. Scholars have noted the decline in Urdu-medium schools in the city and elsewhere in northern India, and, in discursive reflection on language-medium schooling, the distinction between Hindi- and English-medium schools dominates the field of possibilities to the exclusion of Urdu (Goswami 2017). This is not to claim that Urdu-medium schools have disappeared but rather that discursive reflections on "medium" tend to ignore, and, thus, erase them (Gal and Irvine 1995, Irvine and Gal 2000).

8. People's reflections on schools that sort them into one or the other medium represent a kind of semiotic erasure (Gal and Irvine 1995, Irvine and Gal 2000) whereby the tendency of English-medium schools to take fees and for schools administered by the state government to be Hindi medium comes to account for the sum total of possibilities. The discussion herein reveals that there are schools that are private and Hindi medium and schools that are government aided and English medium. The medium distinction anchored to board affiliation serves to regiment the indexicality of script and code combinations such that English-medium schools that have received or seek to receive CBSE affiliation tend to be the ones that advertise in English rendered in Roman script.

9. The Central Advisory Board on Education in 1956 and the National Education Commission, or Kothari Commission, in 1966 advised that three languages should be studied in school in order to further the goal of

Taken for granted in India is that English can provide one with the possibility of economic advancement, spatial mobility in concert with enhanced employment opportunities, and a readily apparent attribute of educated, middle-class status.[10] What Jayadeva describes for her recent fieldwork in Banagalore has been true of English across India for decades: "Apart from indexing modernity, sophistication, a person's belonging to a particular socio-economic background, and so on (which consumer goods are also described as indexing) being proficient in English was, in addition, strongly associated with being socially skilled, well educated, intelligent, and 'professional'" (2018, 592). Some scholars have noted that economic liberalization, initiated in the 1980s, and accelerated in the wake of India's loan from the International Monetary Fund in 1991, made more salient the use of English in employment possibilities such as call centers and other service industries (Patel 2010; Mirchandani 2012; Aneesh 2015). The world of schooling, of course, plays a major role in people's access to or reproduction of the benefits of English, and the language plays a role in the nomenclature of schools themselves through the designation of language medium. Krishna Kumar has noted that "private provision [of schooling] has been growing—and much if it is commercial in nature—by leaps and bounds, in all sectors of education, including English-medium schooling. . . . The market is truly the dominant player in this story" (2018, 9; see also LaDousa 2007). English, therefore, bridges an institution and an identity.

When I began fieldwork on language and education in Varanasi in 1996, Hindi-medium schools presented a viable means of middle-class reproduction. This is not to claim that there was ever parity between Hindi- and English-medium schools. Narratives of adults and youth alike have attested to the multiple axes of difference that can position English-medium schools as economically advantaged and morally suspect (Proctor 2014; Sandhu 2016). But Hindi-medium schools in Varanasi did manage to attract students whose ambitions were to take up employment in businesses, civil services, or education. A certain language ideology underpinned by the notion of the nation made apparent that many people attending Hindi-medium schools viewed such schools approvingly as *rāṣṭrīya* 'national' versus English-medium schools as *antarrāṣṭrīya*

national integration. Scholars have noted that the implementation of the three-language formula suffered from the unavailability of teachers willing to move to distant parts of the country to teach the languages needed (Brass 1990, 143). See LaDousa and Davis (2018) for an overview of the concept of language medium and LaDousa (2005) for an analysis of why language-medium discourse subverted the three-language formula.

10. See, e.g., LaDousa 2014; Proctor 2014; Sandhu 2014, 2016, 2018; Nakassis 2016; and Jayadeva 2018, 2019.

'international'. As will be discussed further below, the field of Hindi-medium schools has become more diffuse in its advertising, and the salience of the Hindi-medium school in discourses of social class in Varanasi has shifted. And scholars have noted for other areas in India what is now true of Varanasi: a huge proliferation of English-medium schools has drawn more students into an association with English-medium education at the same time that new distinctions have emerged within English-medium education. In the past, the persona indexed by English-medium education emerged in contrast to that indexed by Hindi-medium education. There is now openly expressed uncertainty about the link between English-medium schooling and the persona attached.

Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in advertising for English-medium schools (in English in Roman script) and a decrease in advertising for Hindi-medium schools (in Hindi in Devanagari). The extreme growth in the number of English-medium schools in recent years has resulted in greater discrepancies in the fees that English-medium schools charge as well as changes in indices of prestige among such schools (Bhattacharya 2018; Jayadeva 2018, 2019). English-medium schooling has become a growth industry wherein former possibilities of what is indexed by language and script combinations have given way to new indexes of aspiration and expansion. While advertising in English in Roman script positions a school as English medium, whether a school has attained board affiliation or is still seeking it can make a difference in the school's prestige. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is the board most commonly mentioned in advertising in Varanasi, whereas the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) is the board of greatest prestige in some other areas of India.

Figure 3 includes an advertisement for S. D. M. Public School. The advertisement uses English with Roman script exclusively. A sign of the school's ambitions to achieve greater prestige is its announcement that its curriculum is based on the CBSE's "pattern." The intimation is that the school is still seeking board affiliation.

In 1996, the principal of one of the city's most prestigious English-medium schools attributed much of the status of the school to its affiliation with the CBSE, and one did indeed see the four letters on almost every advertisement for the school. By 2011, the principal explained to me that claims to CBSE affiliation were no longer needed, since people had come to assume the school's affiliation. School reputations have been circulated and established at the same time that the field of competition has widened significantly. An advertisement in English rendered in Roman script is less an index of prestige in and of itself than it once was.

Figure 3. S. D. M. Public School, 2014

The changing advertising practices of a private Hindi-medium school in which I conducted extensive fieldwork provides a partial explanation of why there is currently much less advertising for schools in Hindi in Devanagari script. The school was founded in the middle part of the twentieth century, and, in 1996, the school's signboard offered the name of the school in a register of highly Sanskritized Hindi, all rendered in Devanagari. The school is for girls, and the school used the Sanskritic *bālikā* 'child (feminine)' to denote the fact, for example. In the school's advertising around the neighborhood, however, the name of the school appeared in Devanagari script, but a list of activities the school offered was rendered in English with Roman script. Everyone saw the school as Hindi medium, and a number of people remarked that it once was more

common to find English words pertaining to school themes (register items) such as "maths" and "sports" in Hindi-medium contexts (LaDousa 2006).

Since the time of my fieldwork, the school has kept some of its name but dispensed with the Sanskritized Hindi. The shift coincided with a claim to English-medium status, but the school is still affiliated with the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Board, an administrative board run by the state government. The board is primarily associated with Hindi-medium schools. It would seem that a switch in language medium is more expedient than the rather onerous process of board affiliation. The online materials for the school, developed since the 1990s, are entirely in English. On the one page labeled "curriculum," however, the school lists all of the courses offered in keeping with the curriculum of the UP Board. The list is in Hindi and rendered entirely in Devanagari script, an index of the school's former Hindi-medium status.

While the aforementioned school's practices index the reduction in the salience of Hindi-medium schools in advertising, the Little Stars School's advertising signals that a new set of advertising conventions and attendant personae have emerged. The school was founded in 1996 to serve extremely poor students. The school was founded by a teacher and has grown from its earliest days when classes were held in the open spaces upstairs in the teacher's house. From rather humble beginnings, the school now receives funding from an overseas nongovernmental organization (NGO). In the last ten years the school has published an annual report online that states (in English and Roman script), "Little Stars offers classes in an English medium for Pre-nursery through Class 6 and a Hindi medium with English subject classes through Class 10. The core curriculum is based on the UP Board, and people take UP Board Exams to determine placement after graduation."[11] The school's annual report is likely meant for the NGO with which the school is affiliated. The school's website explains that the class background of the students it serves is low: "The children work from a very early age, picking up trash in front of stores, begging, working at road side stalls selling tea or tobacco, pushing food carts, or labor as domestic servants in wealthier homes. Every member of these families is expected to contribute to the resources, even if this is only a few rupees a day."[12]

While the school's online presence is in English and Roman script, its street advertising is in Hindi and English, but rendered entirely in Devanagari script. One of the school's advertisements on the street, for example, gives its name in

11. Little Stars School. 2014. *Little Stars School Annual Report 2013–2014*. http://littlestarsschool.org/LSS-newsletters/Annual%20Report%202013-2014.pdf

12. Little Stars School. 2019. "Little Stars School: History." http://littlestarsschool.org/history.html.

English—as well as words of a schooling register, such as *narsarī*, *boṛḍ*, and *hāī skūl*—but also includes words in Hindi, such as *kakśā* 'grade'. The school has come to address two different groups with different language and script combinations. English and Roman are meant for overseas administrators and their donors, whereas a mix of Hindi and English drawn from the register of educational institutions and practices in Devanagari is meant for people who might read advertisements on the street. Whereas Hindi-medium schools used Hindi lexical items in Devanagari script to mark an absolute distinction from English-medium schools, newer schools run by NGOs use two sets of conventions to address (and differentiate) donors and recipients. The medium affiliation of the school can be inferred from the use of Devanagari and the lack of the use of Roman script rather than from the sole use of Hindi and Devanagari as in the older convention of relatively middle-class Hindi-medium schools.

Interestingly, signboards for schools associated with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan 'Education for All Movement' illustrate a regimentation of language and script much more like that of post offices and other government street signage. The system of schools was set in place by the District Primary Education Programme in 1994, and was later associated with the goals of the Universalization of Elementary Education initiative of the Government of India. Such schools have been built to offer very poor students who had not been going to school a means to access schooling. One version uses the Hindi name of the initiative, *sarva śikśā abhiyān*, and Hindi for the initiative's slogan, *sab paṛhẽ sab baṛhẽ* 'may everyone learn and grow', and both are rendered in Devanagari script. The other version uses the Hindi name of the initiative, but English for the initiative's slogan, and both are rendered in Roman script. The slogan manifests syntactic parallelism and rhyming in Hindi, but not in English. The signs can be found in either iteration around Varanasi, and especially in the suburban areas where the distinction between city and village becomes blurred. People see such schools as government schools and readily offer that such schools are Hindi medium. What regiments the offer of two advertising options in their language and script combinations is the government's provision of signage in two languages and corresponding scripts (English and Roman, Hindi and Devanagari).[13]

The emergence of a language ideology has underpinned the massive increases in English-medium schools and students. Yet, most new English-medium schools do not have board affiliation and are not thought by many to teach

13. For discussions of language medium outside of the Hindi Belt, see, for Marathi, Benei (2008); for Bengali, Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay (2018); for Kannada, Jayadeva (2018, 2019); and, for Gujarati, Ramanathan (1999, 2004, 2005).

English effectively. Jayadeva notes of her fieldwork in Bangalore in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, "low-cost English-medium schools don't usually offer access to what my interlocutors regarded as being hi-fi or fancy English, the kind of English that students at the city's more elite English-medium schools spoke" (Jayadeva 2019, 167). Even so, she argues, "parents and teachers with whom I spoke stressed that even speaking some English—the kind you could learn at many low-cost English-medium schools in the city [Bangalore]—brought benefits" (Jayadeva 2019, 165). The language ideology holds that the association with English-medium schooling implies some ability in English as well as a forward-looking, enterprising persona.

By their convention of advertising in English in Roman script, English-medium schools provide a single index of an institutional type. Inequalities among instances of the type, however, are pervasive. Furthermore, the advertising of English-medium institutions rests on a particularly total process of commodification wherein the person and their abilities are implicated at once. I have witnessed the rather cruel lampooning of the abilities of students at less costly English-medium schools. People have used morning and evening greetings, differentiated by "ma'am" and "sir," to imply that such routines exhaust the ability and knowledge of English-medium students enrolled in low-cost schools. And yet, I have also heard people who would not consider themselves to be English speakers in any capacity argue that it is good to know a little English to avoid the embarrassment of not knowing any, especially given that advertising is not always in Devanagari. While relatively elite and very costly English-medium schools offer the ability to read, write, and speak in English, cheaper English-medium schools seem to derive some of their desirability from a more limited pedagogy: the ability to have their students associate themselves with English without the claim of mastery. Schools use English in Roman script to claim English-medium status in an educational field in which massive numbers of children are encouraged to associate themselves with the language and its ties to enterprise and mobility.

Changes in school advertising have followed shifts in the personae involved and the means of apprehending the qualities of those personae. Previously, Hindi- and English-medium schools were connected by a set of contrasting attributes. English-medium schools continue to offer an entrepreneurial persona, like before, but the student's abilities have become a sign of a vast array of institutional possibilities. In the meantime, schools have come to serve the poor, but their advertising practices, considered as a whole, are inconsistent. The government scheme uses its language and script combinations with little

interdiscursive resonance, whereas the NGO school has marked two groups with its advertising based on an unequal relationship of donor and recipient. In sum, the voice of school advertising offers increased complexity in relationships between institutions and personae and less certainty with respect to the quality of entrepreneurial dispositions.

Coaching and Advertising: From Medium to Entrepreneurialism

There is another kind of educational institution that advertises in Varanasi and across North India, namely, coaching services. Coaching services differ institutionally from schools because they can be oriented to one or more school boards and a whole host of examinations for civil service examinations or professional schools. And classes within a coaching service can be described as Hindi medium or English medium. Figure 4 includes an advertisement for M. S. S. Tutorials in 1996. The tutorial service covers both the UP Board and the CBSE, and the advertisement gives evidence that its language and script combinations are regimented by the language-medium difference that the boards index—UP/Hindi medium, CBSE/English medium. The signboard starts with Roman

Figure 4. M. S. S. Tutorials, 1996. Transliteration: *sāyankāl* [evening]; *kakśāyẽ III se VIII u. pr. borḍ CBSE* [from level III to VIII]; *māruti śikśaṇ santhān raji*. [Maruti Learning Center registered]; *B - 31/36 sankaṭmocan mandir ke pās* [near the Sankat Mochan Temple]; *bhogābīr vārāṇasī*.

letters for the institute's name which is only discovered on the third line of the sign, *māruti śikśaṇ santhān*, the word *sansthān* 'institute' being misspelled. The abbreviation for registered is English, "*raji.*," but rendered in Devanagari. The word *board* in the abbreviation *u. pra. boṛḍ* is English, rendered in Devanagari. The words *sāyankāl* 'evening' and *kakshāyẽ* 'levels' are Hindi, rendered in Devanagari. Thus, the sign is largely Hindi and rendered in Devanagari except for a few terms quite common in the register of education, such as the word *board*. The Roman items are relegated to the abbreviation used for the name and, notably, the board to which most expensive English-medium schools in Varanasi are affiliated. This is parallel to the use of English with Roman script by schools affiliated to or aspiring to be affiliated to the CBSE. The language and script combination that seems to invoke the reader of the signboard is Hindi with Devanagari.

Figure 5 depicts a 2014 advertisement for *sṭār ṭyūśan byūro* 'Star Tuition Bureau'. In contrast to M. S. S. Tutorial's signboard, and many others from the early 1990s, English terms are pervasive, including the entire name. The second line of the advertisement announces: *besṭ hom ṭyūṭar ke liye phon karẽ* 'call for the best home tutor'. The whole is rendered in Devanagari, and the syntactic whole of the utterance is Hindi. Yet, English terms pervade the advertisement. The rest of the advertisement reflects the fact that such tutorial services often hire tutors outside the center and work as a service to connect students with those tutors. The breadth of the services is indicated in the fourth and fifth lines of the advertisement, which begins with *sabhī skūlõ / klasej / viṣayõ / boṛḍs* 'all schools, classes, subjects, and boards'. The next line of the advertisement makes the liaison function of the center clear when it announces: *ṭyūśan paṛhāne ke liye ṭīcars (M/F) bhī phon karẽ* 'male and female teachers should call to teach tuition'. In a convention often seen across educational contexts, the director's name is rendered with his academic qualifications—in English and rendered in Roman script.

Tutorial service institutes have expanded in great numbers recently, and their advertising conventions have shifted too. Some tutorial services, especially those that cast a wide net and cater to an assortment of institutions differentiated by language medium, exam, and postgraduate civil service or professional exam have begun to use more English items and fewer Sanskritized Hindi items. Devanagari tends to index a tutorial service whose operations are local. But this does not exclude the use of Roman script by local tutorial services. Figure 6, for example, includes an advertisement for a coaching center run by "J. P. Sir." The advertisement makes explicit that the service offers English classes and preparation for three professional qualifying examinations. The first word

Figure 5. Star Tuition Bureau, 2014. Transliteration: *sṭār ṭyūśan byūro*; *besṭ hom ṭyūṭar ke liye phon karẽ* [call for best home tutor]; *sabhī-skūlõ/klāsej/viṣayõ/borḍs tathā sabhī* Entrance *ke* [all schools/classes/subjects/bords and all entrance]; *liye anubhavī va viṣaya viśeṣagya ṭicars upalabdha hãĩ/.* [experienced and subject specialist teachers available]; *ṭyūśan paṛhāne ke liye ṭicars (M/F) bhī phon karẽ* [teachers male or female should phone to teach].

in the advertisement is *spoken*. People in Varanasi and across North India state readily that in homes where English is not spoken—the vast majority of them—the language must be learned in school. They will readily state that schools tend not to have students speak such that "personality" develops through perceptions of matters as diverse as vowel length, hesitation, consonant production, and vocabulary. Such is indexed in J. P. Sir's advertisement. The ad "notes" that there is a "special batch" for "weak students." The postpositional phrase *ke liye* 'for' is Hindi, rendered in Devanagari. The usage is regimented by the language-medium distinction of schools. The advertisement uses English in Roman script except to index the weak students with Hindi in Devanagari. They are weak, presumably, because Hindi rendered in Devanagari is appropriate for them.

The coaching service industry has expanded even more rapidly than English-medium schools. Coaching institutes exist for civil service examinations, professional school admissions, and board examinations. Coaching centers can have

Figure 6. English Classes by J. P. Sir, 2014. Transliteration: Note—WEAK STUDENTS *ke liye* SPECIAL BATCH [special batch for weak students]; *ravidās geṭ, lankā (hindustān hoṭal ke bagal vālī galī mẽ)* [Ravidas Gate, Lanka (in the gully next to the Hindustan Hotel)].

just one employee or many, and can orient their classes to one exam, professional program, or board, or many (Majumdar 2018). There were a handful of coaching institute chains across Indian cities in the mid-1990s, whereas, today, the industry is worth tens of thousands of crores of rupees (one crore = 10 million).

Certain cities, such as Chandigarh, Delhi, Indore, Kota, Madurai, Nagpur, Patna, and Ranchi, have come to be associated with coaching. Real estate in specific neighborhoods has become very valuable and difficult to obtain because of associations with coaching. The journalist Snigdha Poonam reflects on changes in the industry in Ranchi, a small "metro" (city) in eastern India, by focusing on the Lalpur Road area. In 2001, the area was associated with coaching centers. By the 2010s, the number of coaching centers and the number of careers to which the centers catered had exploded in number. She notes:

> Today the area is a jungle of coaching centres. Every inch of real estate has been claimed by one-room establishments selling success in one or the other entrance examination: MBA/AMPT/SSC/PMT/NTSE/NEET/SLEET/MCS/JAC/BPSC. The road even has a three-storey shopping mall just for

> coaching centres, each flashing a different acronym on its glass front. The skyline is a battle of billboards, flashing blown-up mugshots of star teachers, the currency of the coaching economy—Sunil Kumar (PHY) IIT, IIM/Rakesh Sharma (CHEM) BHU/Nitin Mehra (Calculus) Roorkee, IIM. The tougher an entrance exam the teacher claims to have cracked himself, the greater his value on the market. (Poonam 2018, 37)

I would add only that most of the teachers whom I met while researching the coaching center industry in Delhi and Varanasi in 2014 and 2017 had failed the examinations for which they were coaching. This did not, however, seem to curb the enthusiasm of students.

Initialisms abound in the coaching services industry because they can stand in for widely recognized names of examinations, often derived from the post acquired through the exam or from the degree that the coaching is meant to help one acquire. In Poonam's list, for example, MBA stands for Master's in Business Management; AMPT: Advances in Materials and Processing Technologies; SSC: Staff Selection Commission; PMT: Pre-Medical Test; NTSE: National Talent Search Examination; NEET: National Eligibility cum Entrance Test; MCS: Manipur Civil Services; JAC: Jharkhand Academic Council; and BPSC: Bihar Public Service Commission. Some of these are examinations that would be recognized anywhere in India, and some are administered by states or entities near Ranchi.

Coaching services and the industry more generally receive a great deal of coverage in the press. An article written by a journalist for a prominent daily newspaper uses what is considered to be the toughest examination of all, the Union Public Service Commission Examination, to discuss whether aspirants should join a coaching service or attempt the examination on their own: "Every year the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) conducts Civil Services Exam to recruit candidates to fill various posts in departments like IAS (Indian Administrative Service), IFS (Indian Foreign Service), IPS (Indian Police Service), IRS (Indian Revenue Service) and so on." The posts mentioned are some of the most important nonelected offices in the Government of India. The journalist goes on to focus on the interview, something that reveals a growingly complicated division of labor in coaching services: "The personality test is an interview conducted to assess the candidate's personality in terms of his intelligence, abilities, traits, and values." Though not explicitly mentioned, the development of flexibility is another benefit of studying with a coaching service: "The competitive environment will keep up your motivation levels. Inputs from faculty will

help grasp more knowledge within limited period of time. Taking tests that they conduct regularly will help you improve your speed and ability to handle different types of questions" (Muralidharan 2012). The interview and the traits it invokes have become rather salient aspects of coaching that are indexed by the use of "spoken," as in figure 6.

Language-medium differences are salient for coaching centers just as they are for schools, but coaching centers engage with the issue of medium differently than do schools. Coaching centers often cover both language mediums (and make such explicit in their advertisements), just as they foreground the necessity of being able to speak in English. Such is indexical of the fact that many exams have an interview component wherein the candidate's speaking abilities are evaluated. When I asked why Hindi-medium coaching centers were still being supported—especially in the wake of protests in 2014 over the poor results of Hindi-medium applicants for the UPSC exams—several coaching teachers explained that Hindi- and English-medium students are equally intelligent. The problem, they explained, is rooted in methods of learning in Hindi-medium schools. The coaching teachers described the learning in Hindi-medium schools as "memorization" and noted that the students learn the question as well as the answer. English-medium students, they explained, are "flexible" and know that the student must "adapt" to each question (LaDousa 2018a). Needless to say, "spoken" in coaching service advertising (such as in fig. 6.) always indexes English, not Hindi. Thus, coaching services continue to cater to both language mediums at the same time that their growingly complex division of labor adds a new dimension of inequality to the notion of language medium.

Coaching advertising involves a much less constricted set of possibilities of language and script combinations than does school advertising. There are several ways in which schools and coaching services differ in their institutional arrangements that seem relevant to the broader set of possibilities in coaching service advertising. There is no board to which coaching centers are affiliated, making the prestige of a coaching center less anchored to a separate evaluative body. Indeed, coaching centers are oriented to multiple boards, whereas schools can only be affiliated with one. Sometimes the orientation to different boards is iconic with language and script combinations (as in fig. 4) and sometimes it is not (as in fig. 5). The language and script combinations of coaching center advertising can be iconic of the division of labor in the center's offerings, where the speaking necessary for interviews seems to gain an indexical link to a certain combination of language and script (as in fig. 6). All this points to the ways in which coaching has commodified different aspects of what students must master in the pursuit of a successful result.

The Situatedness of Advertisements vis-à-vis Their Readers: A Nonlinguistic Contrast

While all of the types of advertising—a store, a government building, a school, or a coaching center—might contain an address, allowing one to locate the establishment regardless of where one finds an advertisement, some advertisements help to locate their establishments by physical proximity. In the advertisement for Burman Stores and the post office, for example, the appearance of the advertisement on the building enables the viewer to locate the establishment. Often, the correspondence between location of what is advertised and the location of the advertisement is made explicit by an arrow pointing from within the advertisement to something outside.

While all four types of advertising might index the institution advertised through spatial proximity, only one type occupies a particular space to indicate the names of other places and their basic directions. Signs like the one in figure 2 are erected by Uttar Pradesh Tourism by authority of the Government of Uttar Pradesh. They sit high above the roadway and mingle with powerful streetlights and power lines. Unlike advertising that is printed on cloth banners and hung high across streets, the Uttar Pradesh Tourism road sign is built of more permanent material, is identifiable by its color scheme, and, most importantly, is not tied to any particular location such that its proximity to an institution might provide an indexical relationship. The relative permanence and prominence of government advertising indexes the capacity of the state and sets the domain apart from the other three.

The least permanent mode of advertising is engaged in exclusively by coaching services. Some coaching services paste small and cheaply printed advertisements in large numbers such that the same advertisement fills a space with its many iterations. Figure 7, for example, shows how quickly such advertisements begin to show damage, but also how such advertisements fill an area and make an impression. *Sankalp tyūṭoriyals* 'Solemn Vow Tutorials' is reminiscent of M. S. S. Tutorials (fig. 4) because its offerings include tutoring for the CBSE and the UP Board. In the case of Sankalp Tutorials, however, the aim is rather specific, entrance to the Institute of Engineering and Rural Technology in nearby Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad). During fieldwork in Delhi's Mukherjee Nagar in 2014 and 2017, I saw that handbills in the hundreds were distributed by coaching services daily. Often, a person would hand a single passerby a stack of advertisements and, should the intended recipient not grab hold of them, which was often the case, the stack would fall, disperse, and carpet the ground. Both in the case of the advertising in figure 7 and in the case of the distribution

Figure 7. Sankalp Tutorials, 2014. Transliteration: *sankalp tyūṭorials* 'solemn vow tutorials'.

of handbills in Delhi, the covering of a surface with multiple, cheaply made copies of the same image seems to be a way of capturing the attention of a would-be consumer. The practice is also iconic of the cheap printing by small-scale entrepreneurs of texts, study guides, and lecture notes for the coaching industry. Thus, the most permanent advertising uses the most singular conventions, and the least permanent manifests the widest array of possibilities.

Conclusion

In the approach offered here, signs emergent from a very limited set of languages and scripts can be appreciated as voices because they mediate what is on offer in particular ways. What is possible in one institutional voice is not necessarily possible in another. Retail consumerism, for example, offers a quality unavailable in the language and script combinations of the government. In order to appreciate the lack of commensurability between the voices, one must apprehend the ways in which advertisements involve aspects of personae and make them salient. In contrast to advertising for retail establishments, schools offer the conflation of institution and persona such that engagement with the institution might constitute the

persona. In the world of stores and soft drinks, one can appreciate a quality of advertising and perhaps consider oneself to be associated with that quality. In the case of schooling, the student can also become an instantiation of what is on offer. The quality of an English-medium school depends on the student rather than on the possibilities of language and script combination of the school's name with respect to others. And voices can draw from personae relevant to other voices, but in ways that give evidence of relatively particular commoditizations of personae. In their advertisements, some coaching centers have drawn on the unevenness of English-medium education by indexing speech as something to be cultivated with the purchase of a supplemental class and have sometimes used language and script combinations to index distinctions among aspirants. The voice of school advertising affords a rather simple index of English-medium institutional status, whereas the voice of coaching relies on differences among such schools. By considering that particular aspects of personae are made accessible in particular ways, the approach explored herein allows for the appreciation that commoditization in advertising rests on conjunctions of voice, personae, and institution.

Further adding to the importance of considering institutional engagements with personae through advertising is the fact that voices offer different possibilities for transformation of such engagements over time. Mr. Burman's nephew sees the advertising practices of a multinational corporation to exhibit qualities similar to that of his uncle's advertising, while the state of Uttar Pradesh has had to diverge from its routine of illustrating names with language and script combinations redundantly in order to accommodate a new addressee, tourists. Transformation has been germane to the very voices of schooling and coaching in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. An organizing contrast based on alignments between language and institution—medium—has given way to claims to prestige at English-medium schools, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, calls to the poor at schools with rather different sources of funding. Language-medium distinctions account for some of the indexicality of language and script conventions in advertising for coaching, but language and script conventions also index the division of labor of speech and writing in the exams to be taken.

In sum, were one to look across the institutional voices considered here, one would find forms exhibiting similarities. But, in order to appreciate what such a form accomplishes, one must take note of the voice to which it belongs. English rendered in Devanagari allows for the apprehension of the modern in commercial advertising because Hindi lexical items do not seem to offer the same possibility. English lexical items rendered in Devanagari in school advertising, in

contrast, invoke two other possibilities, the English-medium school and the NGO donor, both addressed in Roman script. Thus, each voice serves as an arena of metapragmatic possibility, and language and script combinations change in their articulation of the attributes of relevant personae in ways that are specific to each voice.

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