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Debates, Practices, and Policies

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# Mind the (language-medium) gap

Chaise LaDousa

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At every halt on Delhi's Metro rail service, with the announcement of the upcoming station, comes a warning for the deboarding passengers. The announcements in Hindi such as '*doori ka dhyan rakhein*' are soon followed by 'mind the gap' in English. Sometimes, even the pronunciation of the names of stations are different in the Hindi and English messages. The second item in 'Chawri Bazar' is rendered with equal length and stress in the Hindi version, but is pronounced with a shortened initial vowel and stress on the second syllable in the English version. But while two languages coexist on the Delhi Metro, one can argue that schools across North India are doubly implicated in the language difference. Schools resemble the Delhi Metro because more than one language can be found within them, but a school is – additionally – identifiable by what language it uses as a primary language of pedagogy. The word used to refer to this phenomenon is '*madhyam*' in Hindi and 'medium' in English.<sup>1</sup> It would be like having separate metros and finding the order of the sets of messages in each kind reversed, the Hindi one with Hindi and English and the English one with English and Hindi. This chapter outlines some of the underpinnings and consequences of the language-medium divide in North India. It traces some of the ways in which the language-medium divide has undergone a change in its articulation during the past 20 years that I have been studying it in Varanasi, and, more sporadically, in Delhi. Changes in the language-medium divide have articulated the changing relationships between metros and villages in the social life of education in India, specifically through the increasing salience of provincial or small cities, like Varanasi. Such cities provide the crossroads between metros and villages and offer places where people struggle in various ways with the inequalities, tensions, and contradictions embedded in ties between language and education.

## The language-medium opposition among multiple school types

There are various ways in which the federal, state, and municipal governments play a part in differentiating schools as types, and there are additional ways, outside of official administrative and funding structures in which people recognise schools to belong to types. Furthermore, the various governmental entities have occasionally been involved with the launching of education schemes, often with the intent of providing schooling to the poor and previously excluded. In the 1960s, a system of Kendriya Vidyalayas, often called Central Schools, was established all over

the country to serve the children of government officials who faced transfer from time to time. Since the 1980s in the government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, a system of Sarvodaya Schools has been created nationwide to offer quality schooling, including instruction in English, to those children who would lack access to such schooling because of their rural residence or lower-class family origins (Vaish 2008; Viswanathan 1992). States, in turn, have the choice of whether to approve curricular materials created by the National Council for Educational Research and Training. Sometimes state governments have created their own curricular materials for use in schools (affiliated with the state's education board). Increasingly, the funding that some schools used to receive from the federal government in the form of grants-in-aid has been shifted to state educational administrative bodies (Jeffery *et al.* 2005). States are also the locus of administrative oversight of the massive network of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan schools (Programme for Universalisation of Elementary Education) that is meant to provide the schooling necessary to fulfil the guarantee of universal education set in place by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), passed by Parliament in 2009. Municipal corporations, in turn, administer schools that were already teaching children from the poorest backgrounds when the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan schools began to emerge.

Privately administered schools can receive grants-in-aid from the state or can function from the tuition, fees, and donations they receive. Schools can have religious affiliations. Convent schools have their origins in the colonial period and were often the schools for local elites desiring schooling in English for their children. Madrasas of various sectarian affiliations operate, as do schools with various Hindu reformist origins or more recent affiliations with the Hindu chauvinist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organisation). A huge number of schools in Varanasi have been founded for children who would not attend traditional institutions. Some of these have a building, but some operate from their founders' living rooms and rooftops. Some receive funding from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and some operate because of volunteer efforts. Some have begun to pay teachers and have attained school administrative board affiliation. People also talk of schools for boys as well as girls, and sometimes remark that such schools obviate the need to police tensions brought on by puberty that is necessary in coeducational institutions (N. Kumar 2007).

One of the most common ways in which people talk about schools as belonging to types in Varanasi and Delhi, as well as in locations throughout the massive Hindi belt of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, is to refer to the medium of instruction. The array of school types reviewed above only partly touches on the issue of language medium. For example, while it is true that convent schools always derived part of their identity and prestige from their teaching in English, most of the schools that people now refer to as English medium are not convent schools. Furthermore, the government of India has long had policy measures that address the intersection of language and education, but the mandated teaching of three languages in schools developed by the Kothari Commission in the 1960s for national multilingual integration remains unknown to most people in Varanasi and Delhi (see also Aggarwal 1988; Brass 1990; Gupta *et al.* 1995; Khubchandani 2003; Pattanayak 1981; Srivastava 1990). This is despite the fact that their schooling has been structured by the policy. I have argued elsewhere that the Kothari Commission's three-language formula is not reflected in – and is subverted by – reflections on schooling that are configured by language-medium distinctions (LaDousa 2014). While the three-language formula advocates for the teaching of a language outside the language region to which one belongs, configured by the salience of the divide between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, reflections on language-medium schooling focus on which of two languages, perceived to be available locally, a certain school claims.<sup>2</sup>

## Language ideology and language-medium schooling

When people talk of schools in Varanasi, Delhi, and other locations in the Hindi belt, they inevitably draw on a juxtaposition of two types, Hindi and English. One of the reasons for which the distinction gives evidence that language ideology – ideas that people have about language, including its forms, social locations, and speakers – helps to configure the ways that people reflect on the school system is that a single opposition serves to sort an enormously complex set of institutional types such that each instance belongs to one of two options, or is deemed irrelevant to the distinction (Silverstein 2000).

One of the frames for the ideological distinction between Hindi and English that informs people's ideas about Hindi- and English-medium schooling is the nation. People speak of Hindi as the *rashtrabhasha*, or national language, and English as the *antarrashtriyabhasha*, or international language.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have long noted that people in India (and elsewhere in South Asia) exhibit an immensely rich set of notions about the multiple languages they speak, describing them by area, quality, and domain of practice (Lelyveld 1993; Pattanayak 1981). For example, people in Varanasi often speak of Bhojpuri's importance to the city. Bhojpuri is a language associated with a large region in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and is spoken elsewhere in India and the world (Mesthrie 1991; Mohan 1978). People in Varanasi take pride that there is an eponymous variety of Bhojpuri, Banarsi Boli. They describe Bhojpuri generally as sweet and sometimes as rustic, and sometimes draw a contrast between it and Hindi (LaDousa 2004; Simon 1986, 1993, 2003). But the domain of schooling narrows the possibilities of metalinguistic reflection. In the domain of schooling, only Hindi stands as mother language. This is likely due to the fact that people often remark that Bhojpuri does not have a literate, standardised form, but also because Hindi, and not Bhojpuri, represents the national with respect to English in the domain of schooling. People told me that Bhojpuri is *ghar ki bhasha* (language of the house) and *gaon ki bhasha* (language of the village), but never, like Hindi, the school *ki bhasha* (language of the school), much less *desh ki bhasha* (language of the nation).<sup>4</sup> I often heard teachers lampoon the idea of offering Bhojpuri in school, much less conducting lessons in classrooms in Bhojpuri.

The fact that only standardised forms of language are used in curricular materials also serves to differentiate the language varieties thought to be appropriate for use in schools from what is called Hinglish (K. Kumar 1988). The salience of Hinglish has grown enormously, especially since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s and the subsequent rise of advertising activity and digital communication. Utterances like '*ticket liya hai*' (I got the ticket) are so common and have been for so long that they might not raise questions about the boundaries of Hindi and English (Snell and Kothari 2011; Trivedi 2011). In my own work, for example, I have noticed that classroom activity in Hindi-medium schools and in Hindi class in English-medium schools often includes such forms, and that when I ask teachers about their use of words like 'dance' and 'programme' in their lessons, they state that such words might as well be accepted as Hindi, given their commonness (LaDousa 2014). Pal and Mishra, however, note that Pepsi's Youngistaan concept used in advertising of its various products specifically invoked the label Hinglish and drew connections between it and 'youthfulness, living carefree, [and] never giving up' (2011: 173). They report:

At MICA [Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad], a group of students called itself the Youngistaan Gang! These were new-age people, up to date with everything, always setting the bar for the 'cool' quotient, and also relating closely with Hinglish.... The notable point, however, is that these young people (and others who would qualify as the Youngistaan Gang members) all came from affluent families and were comfortable with the concept of 'commodity'.

(Pal and Mishra 2011: 174)

The disjunction between salient invocations of Hinglish in advertising and in usages wherein aspects of identity are at play, on the one hand, and school invocations of Hindi as necessarily separate from English, on the other, has not been studied. Such a study is pressing, one might argue, because at least some invocations of Hinglish are associated with relatively elite youth, precisely those who are attending schools wherein language boundaries tend to be drawn particularly sharply.

With the permission of the principal and teachers, I distributed a questionnaire about language attitudes to classes at two schools in Varanasi during fieldwork in 1997. One was a private school serving grades 1 through 8 affiliated to the Uttar Pradesh State Board of Education, and the other was a school receiving funds from the state serving grades 9 through 12, also affiliated to the state's board. In each school, principals, teachers, and students describe the school to be Hindi medium. Responses to the question 'Why is Hindi important?' without exception included the notion of national language, and almost as often, included the notion that love for Hindi is tied to love for goddess Saraswati, the Hindu deity of music, poetry, and learning more generally. Sometimes, student responses explicitly contrasted the notion of Hindi as national language to English as international language. Responses to the question 'Why is English important?' consistently included a list of professions including doctor and scientist, and also consistently included the Hindi verb *ghoomna* (to roam). The use of the verb resonated with conversations I had with teachers, parents, and students at both Hindi- and English-medium schools. English, people claimed, was necessary if one was to leave the city and its environs to find work, especially if the area was located in a place where Hindi was not commonly spoken. Such reflections implicitly ignored the kind of migration that has been happening for decades, whereby people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar travel to Delhi, Kolkata, and other metros to find work in manual labour and transportation. Thus, the notion of movement attached to English-medium schooling is itself marked in terms of intersections of labour and social class.

Years later, in 2007, my student, Patrick Hodgens, and I interviewed five Class X students at a private school in Varanasi. The school is part of a chain widely described to be English medium, and the students were picked by the principal because, as she explained, they were toppers and high scorers in exams.

PATRICK: So, what do you think about the English language?

PRIYA: It's a, that's a, it's a very bold language, means you can express your feelings very freely, I feel like. So I feel like everywhere English is required. I feel like it's an administrative language and you need it everywhere. I feel it's a good way of explaining your thoughts.

AMIT: I think it's a global language and we can communicate in English everywhere. We can continue in our business everywhere, and English is always essential for us to do any global activities. So, English is very important.

RAJ: Sir, English is a language which is everywhere in the world so we will not face problems surrounding anything. We can express our views regarding anything.

RAM: It is the backbone of industrialisation and all over the world people are communicating in English. Without English, a person cannot build up his personality.

ABHISHEK: Since English is universal it can be used everywhere in the world and so it is very easy to establish friendship with any person, I feel, in any part of the world.

(LaDousa 2014: 53)

The students stressed the connection between the global nature of English and the ability to conduct business elsewhere, but they also raise another consequence of language-medium

schooling, the development of one's personality. The concept is specifically tied to English-medium schooling and is oriented to the confidence one is urged to feel on becoming an English-medium student.

When we asked the same group of students about Hindi, their answers were brief.

PATRICK: And when you think of Hindi what do you think of?

PRIYA: Hindi. Ah, Hindi has respect from me as well.

RAJ: It's our mother language.

AMIT: It's our mother language, so ... it has so much importance.

PRIYA: Yeah, it's importance cannot be mentioned in words. In words ... it is not possible.

*(LaDousa 2014: 54–55)*

Fieldwork in other schools confirmed that students at schools described as English medium use words like 'respect' to describe their mother language, but that their descriptions of Hindi are much briefer and less elaborate than those of their Hindi-medium counterparts. Furthermore, neither students at schools described as Hindi medium or English medium used Hindi as a vehicle for descriptions of personality development and confidence building.

### The language 'complex'

The language ideology underpinning students' reflections on Hindi and English, and the organisation of that ideology by language-medium distinctions, hint at inequalities in the acquisition of what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has called symbolic and cultural capital made possible by the notion of medium. The inequality in the acquisition of symbolic capital shaped by the dual-medium system becomes apparent at the university level, if not long before. This is because the university is the first place in which students from Hindi-medium schools and students from English-medium schools will necessarily meet in the classroom. Vaidehi Ramanathan explains:

If the proficiency of students educated in the Vernacular is deemed insufficient at the end of the XII grade, which by and large is the case, they are denied access to these 'prestigious disciplines'. Furthermore, in instances when VM [vernacular-medium] students are admitted to EM [English-medium] colleges, they face the uphill task of not only taking classes with their EM counterparts but of having to make the same set of state-mandated examinations in English. In many cases, this proves to be insurmountable for many low-income VM students and many of them drop out of the education system during and after college.

*(Ramanathan 2005a: 6; see also Ramanathan 1999, 2005b)*

The VM schools to which Ramanathan refers teach in Gujarati because Ramanathan conducted her fieldwork in Gujarat, but the situation that she describes applies to Hindi-medium students in the Hindi Belt as well.

Ramanathan's invocation of 'prestigious disciplines' provides further evidence of the ways in which language-medium schooling structures the uneven provision of symbolic capital to students in India. Students' progress in one of three 'lines' of study as they approach their high school and intercollege levels: arts, commerce, or science. In the 1990s, I met many parents who had decided by the time their child entered the first level that they should be able to opt for a science line later in their schooling. Since the mid-2000s, parents desiring a particularly prestigious and potentially prosperous line of study have begun to claim commerce as their child's

future possibility. The rise of digital technology industries in India and their connections to undergraduate, graduate, and professional training in courses for which the commerce line serves as preparation explains the growing predominance of the line in school ambitions. What has remained stable is that parents who desire that their children might be able to study in such a line claim without equivocation that English will be necessary. Many point to future plans to study in a prestigious line as the motive for attendance at an English-medium school. In turn, I have met many students enrolled at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) who associated their prolonged schooling with having studied in the arts line. Some students argued that if one were to come to their classes at BHU, one would see a majority of students who had attended Hindi-medium schools, but that if one were to visit the Indian Institute of Technology at BHU, the majority of students there would have attended English-medium schools.

The notion of a 'complex' was one of the primary means of identifying the result of language-medium schooling in an individual's life. Many people I knew who had studied in either Hindi- or English-medium schools talked about the growth of a complex that emerges when a person from one of the language-medium 'backgrounds' comes into contact with a person from the other. Many people also explained that the complex can emerge at different times in a person's life depending on when he/she shifts to a school of the other language medium, but that the complex is all but inevitable at the university level. There, students from Hindi- and English-medium schools will find each other in class and the former can feel inferior to the latter. Most people who mentioned the emergence of a complex noted that students from a Hindi-medium background might fall silent as a result, and students from an English-medium background might be unwilling to take criticism. The notion of the complex sees the seat of the language-medium distinction in the individual, and seems to be a response to attempts to reckon with an extremely complex interweaving of language varieties, institutional types, and sociological positions (LaDousa 2014).<sup>5</sup>

The inequalities underpinning the notion of complex take on a political geographic dimension when one considers the postgraduates studying for government placement exams and the ways in which issues of language medium configure their reflections. On a visit to Varanasi in 2014, I had the opportunity to meet a number of college graduates studying at a coaching centre in preparation for taking the Union Public Service Commission examinations. All of them were studying for the exams in Hindi medium. Asked whether they were from Varanasi, they showed surprise. One of them quipped that had they been from Varanasi, they would have attended coaching classes in a yet larger city, probably Delhi. The branch manager later explained that their Varanasi branch did not have English-medium lessons simply because students preparing for the English-medium exam usually relocated to nearby Allahabad or more distant Delhi. In sum, that coaching classes in Varanasi were conducted in Hindi – at least in a branch of a larger coaching centre headquartered in Delhi – seemed like a foregone conclusion. Furthermore, that students were studying at a coaching centre in Varanasi seemed to imply that they were from rural outlying areas. There are many students from Varanasi who do study in coaching centres for all manner of professional graduate programmes and civil service examinations, but to the rural students to whom I was speaking, the chance to move to more central nodes in a chain made good sense.

### **The voice of language-medium discourse**

When people reflect on the relationship between education and language, they enter a landscape that is bifurcated by institutional types. The relevance of medium in people's reflections on others lasts much longer than their time in school. Indeed, the language-medium distinction comes to enable people to attain what Bakhtin (1981) called a voice, a means structured by



language and institutional difference of inhabiting time and space in specific ways. Varanasi is representative of the great many emerging cities in North India that provide English- and Hindi-medium schools, helping people imagine the relevance of their as well as others' origins and aspirations. The city has long been famous as a major Hindu pilgrimage and an international tourist destination, but it is important also because it provides educational institutional types similar to those in other smaller cities such as Allahabad, Gorakhpur, and Patna, as well as many others further away.

Sometimes people imagine their children's futures and distance themselves from the city by claiming its educational offerings are inadequate. For example, during initial fieldwork in the 1990s, everyone in our lower middle-class neighbourhood called a certain paying guest 'Bankwalla'. The reference, in part, recognised the man's supervisory position in several local branches of a national bank. He had been transferred to Varanasi from Delhi, and although he was very satisfied with his pay, he was not happy to live away from his wife and daughter. I asked Bankwalla why he chose to live in our neighbourhood when much nicer options were available, and he responded that he wanted to save as much money as he could for his wife and daughter's expenses in Delhi. When I asked him why he had not brought them with him to live in Varanasi, he asked me whether I had ever heard of the tutorial sessions that my landlord's daughter was engaged in during the afternoons. He took my look of surprise as a cue to explain that my landlord's daughter was not likely to be able to speak in English without using some Hindi. I noted that there are English-medium schools in Varanasi, but Bankwalla scoffed and retorted that no school in Varanasi could teach English in the manner that his daughter was enjoying in Delhi. Proctor (2014) notes that some elites in Delhi do not value English for its international status, but rather see it as a national language, whereas students in government and non-elite private schools in Delhi reproduce the ideological underpinnings that Hindi and English education presented herein. Thus, reflections on the language-medium distinction in schooling can serve to mark distinctions between places seen as central versus those seen as peripheral, and can index the class status of the person reflecting on language.

By and large, however, people in Varanasi used the medium distinction to engage in a voice that considered the two language mediums as the sum total of educational possibility. The dispositions towards Hindi- and English-medium schools and those affiliated with them can vary, as illustrated by the cases presented herein. One's reflections on issues of caste, class, region, nation, and more or less cosmopolitan origins can be configured by the language-medium distinction. One can go so far as to claim that the distinction between Hindi- and English-medium schooling in North India has come to play an organising role in the voice by which one takes up a position in the world.

While I heard many varied perspectives on the benefits and drawbacks of one or the other medium school in Varanasi, only one person I have met managed to throw the medium distinction itself into question (LaDousa 2014). In 1997, I had the opportunity to interview a veteran government school teacher from Rewa, Madhya Pradesh who had come to visit her ailing sister, my landlady. In an interview, the teacher conveyed the voice of the present wherein Hindi- and English-medium schools are locked in a mutual opposition. But, the teacher also recalled the circumstances of her educational past wherein the boundaries of language medium were not so starkly defined. She noted that her textbooks contained a good deal of English and that the presence of English in a Hindi-medium school was hardly remarkable. A voice from her past allowed the teacher to bring to bear the possibility that language and language mediums used not to line up so neatly and present such a sharp contrast. However, her ability to problematise the notion of medium was singular in my experience, further lending weight to the argument that the voice of medium distinction has come to pervade the present.

## Cost and board affiliation

A practice germane to people's understandings of schooling throughout Varanasi is the collection of fees. A large number of schools are considered to be extremely inexpensive by virtue of the grants-in-aid made to them by the state. The schools run by municipal corporations can be included in the group of schools that are considered to cost very little. Indeed, families sending their children to such schools have reported that expenses such as pens, pencils, copies, uniform material, and uniform tailoring are the most dear (PROBE Team 1999). When asked about fees at such schools, parents hesitated to report the extremely small amount, and often accompanied the amount with a descriptor like *sasta* (cheap) or, occasionally, using the English, free. Parents at such schools used the adjective *sarkari* (government) to explain the low fees charged (Saranganpani 2003). Asked about fees at private schools, parents sending their children to government schools often guessed wildly exaggerated amounts, indicating that they did not know what such fees really are. Indeed, private school fees vary a great deal (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009; Majumdar and Mooij 2011). During the period of my initial fieldwork in 1996, fees at the most expensive schools in Varanasi were just over Rs. 300 per month. These have roughly tripled since. There were private schools in Varanasi charging Rs. 40 to Rs. 80 per month in 1996.

Parents of children at private schools continue to complain that fees constitute only part of the cost of schooling. Equally dear are the various charges for supplies, programmes, and outings that private school attendance regularly includes. Indeed, children attending expensive private schools can be identified by a large set of material items and practices that set them apart from others. Private schools often require students to buy several different uniform sets that correspond to seasons or special events. More recently, select private schools have come to advertise that their facilities are air-conditioned, and sometimes that their buses are too. Students display their awareness of popular media trends by the characters and celebrities donning their pencil cases, book covers, and the like.

When I asked principals, teachers, and parents about the relationship between the language medium of a school and the amount of fees it charges, many claimed that the two were distinct issues. People said something like, 'fees *aur* medium *alag alag baat hain*' (fees and medium are two separate issues) or, referring to one or the other topic, '*yahan to doosri baat hai*' (that's a different issue). At the same time, people treated as a foregone conclusion that the most expensive schools in Varanasi were English medium. In conversations in which I would talk about Hindi-medium schools and government schools, people would often interject that they are '*ek hi baat*' (the same thing). Indeed, there are many Hindi-medium schools in Varanasi that are private and take fees. These schools tend to be forgotten in reflections on fees because they do not belong to the extremes. They are not government schools, and yet they are not among the most expensive schools in town either. For example, people never refer to such schools using the label 'public', which denotes a private school that caters to people who want their children to be able to speak a form of English that is seen as legitimate, at least regionally. Thus, there is a polar opposition that people frequently invoke between cheap Hindi- and expensive English-medium schools by talking about the government versus the private.

Early on in my fieldwork, in 1996, I noticed that a select number of schools advertised, whether in the streets or in newspapers, that they were affiliated to the CBSE. Already in 1996, people apocryphally explained that '*ek ek gali mein angrezi medium school ban gaye hain*' (an English-medium school has been built in each and every lane). The intersection of language-medium schooling and board affiliation has become more complex since the mid-1990s. People were right that new English-medium schools were being built, but, in the mid-1990s schools made obvious their board affiliations in advertising. Since then, most elite English-medium schools

have stopped advertising their board affiliation because, as principals explained to me, people have come to assume the prestige of the school. The fact of the matter is that board affiliation with the CBSE is not so rare as it used to be. Furthermore, schools that aspire to be affiliated with the board use the word 'pattern' in their advertisements, indicating that their syllabus is in keeping with the board. A massive number of English-medium schools have now been built in Varanasi, but also in surrounding areas too, weakening the relationship somewhat between rural education and Hindi-medium schooling. What is certain is that the field of English-medium schools has grown and that indications that once were overt markers of legitimacy and prestige (such as CBSE affiliation) are only now part of a much more varied set of English-medium schools (LaDousa 2007). Bhattacharya (2013), for example, has remarked that the increasingly complex field of EM schooling likely hurts its least advantaged aspirants, the rural poor, by seeming to offer a kind of prestige particularly poorly.

### Language-medium schooling in public

Schools and, increasingly, coaching and tutorial centres, do not just offer students engagement with a syllabus, classroom instruction, and, along with board affiliation, access to a set of examinations; they also advertise vigorously (Bhatia 2007). During my initial fieldwork between 1996 and 1997, schools were among the most commonly advertised institutions, products, and services on the walls and in the streets of Varanasi. The advertisements were either painted directly onto surfaces or painted or printed on paper and cloth signs and banners. Since 1997, advertising by city schools has continued unabated, even increased now with new avenues such as Hindi or English newspapers. Advertising for coaching and tutorial services too has increased dramatically. With reduction in printing costs and cheaper availability of coloured paper, one finds entire wall and building surfaces pasted with advertisements, the same appearing many times at one spot. In tandem with this is the arrival of a new phenomenon since the mid-2000s – advertising by individual BHU students. Often handwritten, these advertisements are accompanied by a subject and a telephone number.

The ways in which the language-medium division articulates with issues of cost, board affiliation, and prestige in advertising is especially complex. This is because schools as well as coaching and tutorial services do not just use Hindi and English to advertise themselves. They also use two scripts: Devanagari and Roman.<sup>6</sup> Hindi can be represented in Devanagari and Roman script and English can be represented in Roman and Devanagari script. Thus, visual language includes a semiotic resource that complicates any direct correspondence between language and medium.

The combination of language and script combinations on signboards and advertisements for schools presents an especially obvious means for ascertaining that the prestige of schools depends on a complex interplay of cost and board affiliation (LaDousa 2002, 2014). In short, schools that advertise in English in Roman script and schools that advertise in Hindi and Devanagari script tend to represent a polar opposition of prestigious English-medium schools affiliated to the CBSE and Hindi-medium schools affiliated to the Uttar Pradesh Board (UPB). These are schools that, in turn, figure as representative instances of what people reflect on and recognise as relatively elite English-medium schools and government-affiliated Hindi-medium schools, respectively. 'Mixed' lexical and script combinations are typical of the relatively newly formed English-medium private schools or Hindi-medium schools that are often associated with a lack of legitimacy and prestige. Furthermore, a handful of schools that used to advertise their CBSE status have stopped doing so. One principal revealed that they did so because the school now had a 'reputation'. At the same time, newer schools are advertising their affiliations prominently.

In turn, some schools have begun to advertise that they are seeking UPB affiliation. Such schools often represent some English lexical items in Devanagari script.

An example of a school using English lexical items in Devanagari can be found in the signboard for a municipal corporation school depicted in Figure 5.1. The school signboard includes the elements of most schools, except for two: it is painted as if an individual were writing and the proper name of the school is left ambiguous. Its designation as a municipal corporation school is rendered in Hindi in Devanagari, but then its designation by grade level is rendered in English in Devanagari. While school is spelled correctly, ‘primary’ is not. Most school signboards identify the neighbourhood where they are located, thus making the locality a part of their name. Furthermore, the designation can be read as a clue as to why the word ‘primary’ might be misspelled. Part of the school’s identification includes reference to the sweeper colony in which it is located, a Dalit neighbourhood.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, during the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) government in Uttar Pradesh (2007–12), a statue of Ambedkar was installed right in front of the school entrance. The signboard’s representation of English in Devanagari script contrasts with signboards of English-medium schools affiliated to the CBSE (English in Roman) and Hindi-medium schools of some prestige affiliated to the UPB (Hindi in Devanagari, with a more stylised rendering).

Coaching and tutorial services exhibit somewhat lesser adherence to the polar oppositions of lexical affiliation and script rendering exhibited by schools. For example, the advertisement for the Career Point coaching service depicted in Figure 5.2 primarily uses English in (mostly



Figure 5.1 Varanasi municipal corporation school signboard.

Source: all photographs in this chapter are by the author.

*Note*

Transliteration: nagar nigam (municipal corporation) prāmaṁikī skul safāī bastī durgā kuṇḍ (sweeper colony Durga Kund) vārāṇasī.

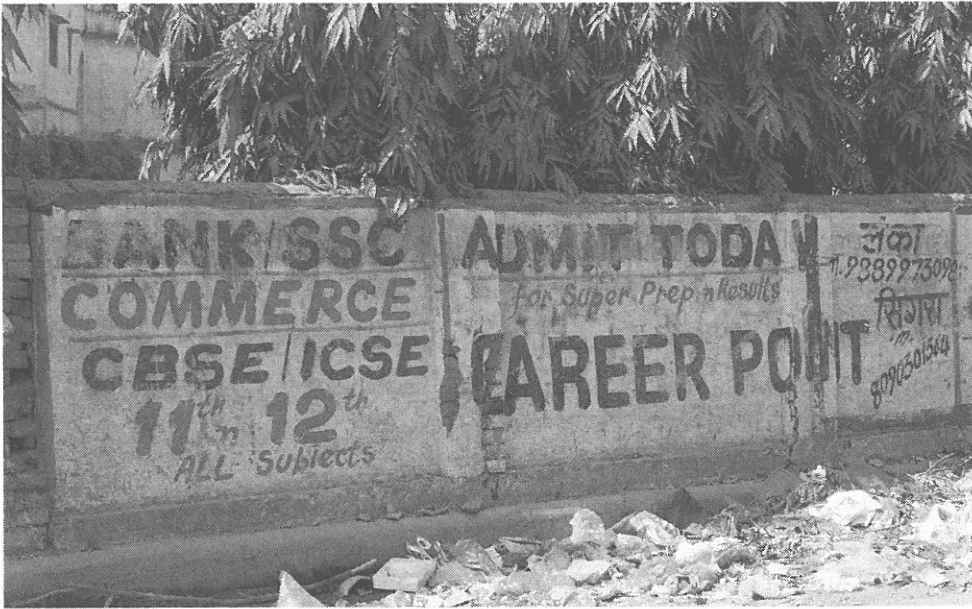


Figure 5.2 Career Point tutorial service advertisement.

capitalised) Roman script. Place names, curiously, are rendered in Hindi, suggesting – in the confines of this advertisement, at least – that references to local places are best rendered in Devanagari script. The English rendered in Roman script seems to coincide with the (CBSE and ICSE) Boards mentioned for the XI and XII intercollege levels. However, the advertisement first includes the names of more specific examinations for which the centre will prepare students. ‘Bank’ refers to a whole range of organisational bureaucracies that run examinations for posts, and ‘SSC’ refers to the Staff Selection Commission of the government of India that holds an examination for various posts. The catchy phrase between ‘ADMIT TODAY’ and ‘CAREER POINT’ includes an industry-specific register item, ‘Super Prep’, as well as the use of ‘n’ as an abbreviation for ‘and’. Such language usages contrast with the school advertisements in Varanasi, but are similar to the mid-range private English-medium school advertisements in Delhi (LaDousa 2014).

Advertisements for coaching and tutorial services have proliferated on the city walls and buildings so much so that some public spaces in Varanasi are literally covered with them. Figure 5.3 includes a depiction of three different coaching and tutorial centres. On the left are two different centres that offer preparation for the entrance examination to the same institution: Institute of Engineering and Rural Technology. The institute is located in the nearby city of Allahabad, which goes unmentioned in the advertisements, and offers a BTech in several technical fields. The two signs exhibit many parallels. Both use all lexical and script combinations, except the representation of Hindi lexical items in Roman script. Both render their titles in English, ‘[Pandey’s] Excellent Tutorials’ and ‘Career Mentors’, but do so using the Devanagari script. Indicating just how early coaching and tutorial services can become relevant in students’ lives, even for entrance examinations to a specific institution for undergraduate study, the first advertisement announces that students will be accepted after their XI year. Like the advertisement in Figure 5.2, Pandey’s Excellent Tutorials and Career Mentors give their locations using Devanagari.



Figure 5.3 Three tutorial service advertisements.

Notes

Transliterations:

(upper left)

New Batch Start

pāliṭeknik IERT

saphaltā kā dusrā nām vigat 11 varṣō se (success's second name – since 11 years)

Pandey's

Eksilēnt tyūtoriyals

dharmasāgh, durgākunḍ, vārāṇasī

(lower left)

pāliṭeknikal/IERT

kī taiyārī karē (prepare for)

kairiyar mentars

ravidās geṭ, lankā vārāṇasī

(right)

SPOKEN

GD GRAMMAR BASIC

ENGLISH – SSC, BANK, NDA, CDS

ENGLISH mē kamzor STUDENTS ke liye viśeṣ baic (weak in ... special batch for)

ENGLISH CLASSES by – JP SIR

ravidās geṭ (hindustān hoṭaḷ ke baḡal vālī galī mē) lankā

In contrast to the primary use of Devanagari in the advertisements on the left, the one on the right for English Classes by JP Sir appears predominantly in Roman script. Just what the abbreviation 'GD' stands for in the list of aspects of English to be covered at the centre is ambiguous. Otherwise, the fact that 'SPOKEN' English is mentioned first and rendered largest seems suggestive. Some of the same examinations are included as in the advertisement for Career Point, depicted in Figure 5.2. Indeed, these exams are themselves bifurcated by medium, and students can opt to take them and conduct subsequent interviews in either Hindi or English. This advertisement makes it apparent that weaker students in English should be addressed using Hindi and

English in Devanagari script, while holding out the lexical items 'ENGLISH' and 'STUDENTS' to identify what such students should aspire to be. The only words rendered in Devanagari that might be taken to be English are 'batch' and 'hotel'. The first is a commonly used word in the coaching and tutorial services industry and the second is a common reference to a hotel. Many people might claim such words to challenge the distinctions between Hindi and English.

What is certain is that when a nearby polytechnical institute is being advertised, many English lexical items will be germane to that institution. Translations of such words into Hindi would render what is being referred to unknown to most readers. The rendering in Devanagari seems to coincide with the polytechnical institute's location nearby, in a relatively non-cosmopolitan location in the Hindi Belt, but the use of English seems to render the names of the coaching and tutorial services catchy, and perhaps aligned to words like 'polytechnic' (N. Kumar 1998). When spoken English is one of the services on offer, contrastingly, Roman script comes to dominate the advertisement. Yet, English lexical items rendered in Roman script are not simply oriented to the offer of English. Those students weak in English are to be addressed in Hindi in Devanagari. The advertisement for English Classes by JP Sir renders in sharp relief the ways in which speaking in English – tied to notions about personality development introduced earlier herein – provides a coaching and tutorial niche aimed at differential histories of students who have attended Hindi- and English-medium schools – more specifically, schools that offer varieties of English seen as legitimate. Thus, although signboards and advertisements exhibit a great range of lexical and script combinations, schools continue to reproduce signs of polarity between relatively elite English-medium institutions and relatively legitimate Hindi-medium institutions, and coaching and tutorial services reproduce signs cued to a more varied set of educational services that nevertheless are calibrated to the distinction between Hindi and English and Hindi- and English-medium schooling.

## Conclusion

With the massive proliferation of English-medium schools and the provision of universal schooling through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan system, the salience of the language medium of a school continues, though now it presupposes the class and caste backgrounds of students and their parents less straightforwardly than in the past. From the peripheral position where the English they desired was provided by some in more cosmopolitan locales, Varanasi and other small cities across North India have moved to a place where they are offering coaching and tutorial services to students from their neighbouring towns and villages. Some of these private educational ventures teach in Hindi, but others rely on the inadequacy of the city and its surrounds to provide adequate spoken ability in English through the school. Advertisements reveal that the indication of students as weak in English is best conveyed in Hindi. And just as people like Bankwalla desire an English for their children that the city cannot provide, the spoken English of the coaching centre is likely to be found wanting in the eyes of certain offerings in large metros. Language-medium distinctions thus remain salient despite the fact that they articulate with an increasingly complex set of inequalities.

## Notes

- 1 When speaking in Hindi, people often pronounce 'medium' with a retroflex stop.
- 2 See Bate 2010; Cody 2013; Mitchell 2009; and Ramaswamy 1997 for overviews of the antagonism that people in South India felt as a result of the government's efforts towards Hindi serving as the national language and Hindi being taught in schools in the South.
- 3 Some of the scholarship on Hindi in India includes Dua 1994b; Fox 1990; K. Kumar 1991; Orsini

- 2002; Al. Rai 2001; Am. Rai 1984; Sonntag 1996. Some of the scholarship on English in India includes Aggarwal 1997; Agnihotri and Khanna 1997; Dasgupta 1993; Dua 1994a; Faust and Nagar 2001; Khubchandani 1983; Nadkarni 1994; Rajan 1992; Rubdy 2008; Sonntag 2000; Verma 1994.
- 4 For an example of how such medium distinctions play out in Maharashtra, see Benei (2008).
- 5 Sandhu (2014) notes the ways in which the medium divide can play an insidious role in reflections on romantic relationships and marriage.
- 6 A small number of schools use the nastaliq script to advertise their schools in their signboards, but they are largely left out of reflections on the divisions between Hindi- and English-medium schools (Ahmad 2011; King 1994).
- 7 Some schools use place names in their names, but tend to be elite. For example, Delhi Public School uses the name of the national capital in its name, along with the designation 'public'.

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