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Introduction: Language and schooling in India and Sri Lanka: Language medium matters

Abstract: This article introduces a special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* focused on the topic of language medium, pervasive in the nations comprising South Asia. This introduction provides a brief overview of sociolinguistic scholarship on education in India and Sri Lanka, a short sketch of the phenomenon of language-medium schooling, a review of the articles included in the special issue, and a summary of the theoretical contributions of the articles.

Keywords: language, education, medium of instruction, language ideology, India, Sri Lanka

> *mādhyam* [S.], adj. & m. 1. adj. middle, mid-. 2. m. a means.
> 3. specif. language of instruction or study.
> (*Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, R. S. McGregor)

1 Introduction

Educational institutions are particularly complex sites for the investigation of the sociology of language. State education systems and their curricular materials have come to serve as loci for standardized languages (Bourdieu 1991). Students' relative control over the standardized register presupposed in classroom interaction and literacy practices matters in the development of their personae in the classroom and school more generally (Heath 1983; Phillips 1983; Wortham 2006). They can come to be differentiated by their engagement with school materials and the curriculum can come to inflect perceptions of students' academic abilities (Collins 1996). Many classrooms present a rather specific

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interactional order wherein differences between students can emerge in terms of teachers' and administrators' expectations about displays of authority, respect, and knowledge (Cazden et al. 1972; Mehan 1979). Thus, schools present different hurdles to different kinds of students. Schools themselves can come to be distinguished by their ability to offer legitimate registers of language, whether in speech or writing, and sometimes examination results are used to infer whether students have acquired these registers (LaDousa 2007; Valenzuela 1999; Varenne and McDermott 1998). And schools structure times and spaces wherein non-academic registers come to serve in the reproduction of subcultural groups. Indeed, the distinction between academic and non-academic registers makes possible the intrusion of subcultural styles into academic spaces, which many scholars have interpreted as contestation or resistance (Bucholtz 2011; Luykx 1999; Rampton 2006).

Such concerns are made especially complex in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and other multilingual contexts by the notion of "medium", the primary language of pedagogy. This idea is pervasive in education and serves as a central organizing concept. While the South Asian nations have engaged in different language policies to influence which (and how many) languages should be offered in schools, across the region people differentiate schools by their medium. Language-medium divisions are not just a matter of state policy, but constitute a significant ideological framework for the production and reproduction of social differences. While locales in South Asia – however configured – are multilingual, the identification of a school presupposes a highly constricted set of standardized languages for which elaborate bureaucratic curricular and examination regimes have been developed. Furthermore, language-medium distinctions have come to serve as an especially important way through which people in South Asia recognize their own and others' identities.

The articles in *Language and schooling in India and Sri Lanka: language medium matters* selectively employ various methods including policy critique, ethnography, and discourse analysis to demonstrate some of the ways in which people make use of language-medium distinctions to reflect on their own social positions. The articles take great pains to show, however, that people do not engage in such discursive work just as they please. Language-medium distinctions implicate people in structures of inequality, most simply because people have differential access to particular languages. In addition, the complex histories of languages in postcolonial South Asia impact how they come to be associated with individuals, groups, institutions, and text artifacts. This issue brings together diverse data to demonstrate the ways ethnic, religious, gender, and class identities are articulated and challenged in relation to language-medium distinctions. We

explore how people articulate and imagine their own social location with respect to the deeply entrenched ways in which language is associated with social differences.

2 Education in the sociolinguistics of India and Sri Lanka

A large and rich body of scholarship focused on sociolinguistics in India or Sri Lanka has considered the relationship between language and education. For the most part, however, the concerns and methods of sociolinguistic investigation have not led to the kinds of insights offered in this special issue. Sociolinguistic work on education has been rightly critical of the language policies of the Government of India, especially regarding the historical disposition of Hindi and the status of minority languages. But schools have not generally been appreciated as loci of sociolinguistic interaction. This section of the special issue's introduction accounts for the ways in which education has figured in sociolinguistic literature in India and provides an explanation for the longstanding lack of interest in exploring schools as institutions worthy of sociolinguistic investigation. This section concludes with an overview of the study of education in sociolinguistic work on Sri Lanka. The way in which education figures in sociolinguistic scholarship on Sri Lanka is quite distinct from India.

Much of the sociolinguistic literature on education in India has reviewed and critiqued three policy measures in particular. First, sociolinguists have emphasized the partial and unevenly realized means of attaining a language's recognition under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Much of the work in this vein of critique used the notion of "mother tongue" to note that the standardized language (Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Oriya, etc.) included in the Eighth Schedule and authorized for use as an official language by a state government did not correspond to the language spoken at home by a large percentage of a given population (Dasgupta 1993; Pandit 1977; Pattanayak 1981; Srivastava 1990). Such problems, some scholars noted, were only exacerbated for populations speaking minority languages (Mohanty 2010; Rao 2008; Sonntag 2002).

Second, sociolinguists considered debates about the question of the young nation's official language (Annamalai 1991; Das Gupta 1970; Khubchandani 1983; Kumar 1990; Lelyveld 1993; Rajan 1992; Rubdy 2008; Sonntag 2003;

Sridhar 1987; Verma 1994).[1] Well known is that Hindi in the Devanagari script was to replace English after a period of 15 years (by 1965), but that two years before the deadline, the Official Language Bill extended the official use of English indefinitely. Many scholars have argued that the compromises made in the arrangements served to hinder the prospects of the spread of Hindi in official and unofficial capacities, and served to enhance the position of English (Dua 1994).[2]

Finally, scholars have described and critiqued the three-language formula, the policy measure set in place by the Government of India to provide a unifying framework for the promotion of a multilingual polity (Aggarwal 1988, 1997; Agnihotri and Khanna 1997; Annamalai 2001, 2003, 2004; Pattanayak 1981; Srivastava 1990). From 1964 to 1966, the Education Commission (or the Kothari Commission) developed what came to be called the three-language formula. The plan mandated that students from a region in India would have to have pedagogical exposure to a language of a different region. The plan worked on a north-south axis whereby students from Indo-Aryan language regions would receive exposure to Dravidian languages and students from Dravidian language regions would receive exposure to Indo-Aryan languages. Several scholars argued that all of the languages included in the plan were standardized languages relatively unknown to many students (Srivastava 1990). Some focused on the resistance, sometimes violent, to the introduction of Hindi in any capacity in the Dravidian language states, especially Tamil Nadu (Ramaswamy 1997). Yet others pointed out that the formula was not well supported by teacher training and relocation (Brass 1990: 143).[3]

An encompassing ideological construct in sociolinguistic work on India has underpinned the representation of education and schooling. In sum, sociolinguists contrasted the total sociolinguistic situation of India with that of the West. In the West, they explained, standardized language varieties have come to displace other varieties through institutional mechanisms like schools and mass media. In India, multilingualism has enjoyed long-term maintenance because a language variety has come to fulfill a specific functional task in a larger, complex ecology of languages oriented to discrete tasks (Pandit 1977).

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[1] See Orsini (2002) for a history of the standardization of Hindi.

[2] Dua notes generally, "the formulation and elaboration of the federal language policy and the process of implementation for its spread and development has been constrained by in-built constraints and ambiguities in the constitutional provisions and the Official Languages Acts" (1994: 119).

[3] Yet, the three-language formula continues to guide schools in exposing students to three languages. Students should start the second language in grades five through ten, and students should start the third language in grades eight through ten (Sridhar 1991: 92).

Khubchandani (1984), for example, wrote about the "bafflement" that the Indian sociolinguistic situation prompted in many social and political scientists:

> The multiplicity of Indian languages prevailing in a single federal polity has received considerable attention from many social and political scientists interested in developing nations, particularly from those for whom language identity is very much part of the identity of a nationality or a nation. Many social scientists have reacted with a sense of bafflement at the relatively fluid segmentation patters in social and language behavior and at the diversification of language use prevailing in the traditional sociopolitical order in large parts of the subcontinent. South Asia, in this context, is often compared with the proverbial "Tower of Babel", a "museum of languages", a "linguistic dinosaur", or a "sociolinguistic giant" – posing a serious challenge to the agencies concerned with language planning.
> (Khubchandani 1984: 47)

Khubchandani noted that the imagery used by social and political scientists to characterize the Indian sociolinguistic situation was overly complex and arcane.

A different sociolinguistic portrait crafted for South Asia began to emerge stressing the maintenance of multilingualism and the contribution of language varieties in a larger ecology of sociolinguistic functions:

> In this tapestry of typologically related – and unrelated – families of languages and their subvarieties that represent distinctions of caste, class, profession, religion, and region, it is, however, the network of languages of *wider communication* that cut across linguistic and geographical boundaries and facilitate communication in various pan-South Asia functions across the subcontinent.
> (Kachru 2008: 3)

Kachru mentions that language differences correspond to a number of sociological distinctions, but he stresses that such differences facilitate rather than hinder communication across the region. Agnihotri and Khanna (1997: 33–34) add the fact that non-authoritarianism characterizes the contexts in which languages are learned in South Asia: "In heterogeneous societies such as that of India, languages are learnt in non-authoritarian contexts leading to continuous sociocultural and cognitive enrichment. Variations in linguistic behavior act as facilitators rather than as barriers in communication [...]. Although there is an underlying sociolinguistic unity that characterizes Indian multilingualism, it is this unity that nurtures rather than forbids flexibility and variability."

Given the way in which the language-medium arrangement of schooling across the subcontinent pits one language against another, it is clear that schooling and its relationship to language contrasts with the model constructed by sociolinguists in India. Indeed, schools are deeply authoritarian contexts where teachers and students often struggle with engineered forms of language developed by curricular administrations and disseminated through textbooks

and exams (Kumar 1988, 1991; LaDousa 2014). A number of prominent socio-linguists including Probal Dasgupta (1993) and Debi P. Pattanayak (1981) have made these points explicitly, and have used them to argue that the school system's imposition of a standardized language on Indian schoolchildren is out of step with the sociolinguistic nature of South Asia.

A quotation from the work of Krishnamurti (1986) addresses language and education explicitly:

> There is no nation in the world which has economically and industrially advanced, based on an education system which is solely imparted through a foreign/second language. We must, therefore, decide that the quality of Indian education can be improved primarily through the use of the mother tongue, supplemented with the use of the other languages playing complementary rather than conflicting roles. Only through functional multilingu-alism, which has to be institutionalized, can we improve the quality of Indian education while promoting national integration.
> (Krishnamurti 1986: 112)

Krishnamurti's (unnamed) target of critique would seem to be the language-medium distinction itself. The situation for which he advocates flies in the face of the system that has come to predominate in India, a system organized and bifurcated by language medium.

It is clear that India's sustained multilingualism sets it apart from some other locales where monolingualism has come to be a crucial part of nation building and ideas of national belonging. In addition, it is also evident that the spirit of the three-language formula was meant to foster multilingualism (even if that of standardized language registers) as well as national integration. Our purpose, however, is to show that the notion of language medium, so perva-sive in the way people conceptualize and reflect on education, presupposes stark divisions. Indeed, in most of the contexts explored in the articles of the special issue, a school's language medium is an affiliation that precludes the school's belonging to another medium. At the same time, a language medium gains some of its qualities through its contrast with the other medium. A language medium constitutes a type to which individual institutions belong such that the individual institution can be differentiated from all those belong-ing to the other type. The very people involved with the institution can be differentiated from those involved with institutions of the other type. This situation is even more complex in the case of multilingual schools, where subsets of the school's population are associated with different language mediums (as in the case of the school Davis discusses in her article). Perhaps sociolinguists working in India avoided the exploration of people's understandings of schooling and their relationship to language because

language-medium discourse exhibits division and exclusion. Scholars building the case for complementary multilingualism in South Asia would have had little use for language-medium discourse.

Sociolinguistic work on education in Sri Lanka has been shaped by the civil war fought between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that lasted over 25 years. Historians and anthropologists have explored the role of post-independence language and educational policies in the development of ethnic tension between the majority Sinhala (Buddhist and Christian) and minority Tamil (Hindu and Christian) and Tamil-speaking Muslim populations (Devotta 2004; Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1986). A number of recent ethnographically focused studies have explored how different social groups manage and make sense of their lives amidst the conflict (Bass 2013; Thiranagama 2011). However, fewer studies have looked at the role of language and language-medium distinctions in social, economic or political life, or treated schools as sites of sociolinguistic practice.

From the mid-1940s to the 1950s, as part of the *swabasha* [vernacular] movement popular among Sinhalas and Tamils, the medium of instruction in state schools was changed from English to Sinhala and Tamil. This change was meant to alleviate inequalities between the Anglophone elites and the rest of the population. The post-independence period saw the development of a mass-education system where all Sri Lankan schoolchildren were guaranteed a free education in their first language (Little 2003; Perera et al. 2004). While students had been separated as a result of the geographical distribution of Sinhalas and Tamils, the language-medium policies made the process more systematic and pervasive. Although scholars have different views on the importance of language and education policies in the growth of the conflict in the mid-twentieth century, most agree that they increased tensions around ethnic relations (Tambiah 1986; Thiranagama 2011).

Studies have emerged exploring the role of multilingual education reforms in creating peace and interethnic integration before and after the end of the war in 2009. Secondary-level students were required to study both Sinhala and Tamil and English was reemphasized in primary and secondary education. Rather than exploring Sri Lanka in relation to other South Asian nations, these studies are framed in relation to literature on citizenship and development. While most studies focus on the structure of the national education system and the content of the recent reforms (De Silva 1999; Little 2003; Perera et al. 2004), Birgitte Sørensen (2008) examines how the reforms are implemented in practice. She provides an ethnographic account of the way school children in northeastern Sri Lanka constructed their own notions of citizenship in their interactions with their teachers and peers (2008).

Scholarship on language and education policies in Sri Lanka largely does not engage with the nation's linguistic landscape. Sinhala and Tamil are both widely described as diglossic because of the differences between colloquial and literary styles of these languages. Work on Sinhala has focused on the phonology and grammar of the language (Suseendirarajah 1999; Gair and Suseendirarajah 1998), as well as features of spoken Sinhala (Herath 2015). Studies of Tamil, however, have been concerned with describing named varieties of spoken Tamil. Scholars affiliated with Jaffna University have written on the phonology and grammar of spoken Jaffna Tamil (Gair and Suseendirarajah 1998), which is sometimes described as representing the Sri Lankan Tamil sociolinguistic situation as a whole. Other studies outline additional named Tamil varieties including Batticaloa Tamil, Up-country Tamil, and Muslim Tamil (Suseendirarajah 1999; Nuhman 2007). The curriculum for teaching Tamil-as-a-second language in state schools mirrors sociolinguistic literature on Tamil in that it included different varieties of spoken Tamil.

Scholars have compared Sri Lankan Tamil to Indian Tamil (Suseendirarajah 1999). In addition, some work was looked at the phonology and grammar of Sri Lankan Tamil in relation to Sinhala (Karunatillake and Suseendirarajah 1975; Suseendirarajah 1973). There is also a significant body of literature on lesser-known sociolinguistic varieties in Sri Lanka such as Negombo Fisherman's Tamil and Sri Lankan Malay (Bonta 2010; Slomanson 2011).

Sociolinguistic work on Sri Lanka has not directed much attention to how linguistic varieties are used in practice in multilingual settings, as well as how individuals, groups, and institutions use language as a basis for social differentiation (Errington 2000). Suresh Canagarajah (2005, 2013) contributes significantly to Sri Lankan sociolinguistics through his work on English/vernacular relations and global English. In his writing on a community in northern Sri Lanka, for example, he investigates how citizens responded to the LTTE's "Tamil-only" policy, which was motivated by a desire to bring advantages and rewards to Tamil monolinguals vs. middle-class Tamil- and English-speaking bilinguals. He argues that while citizens are in favor of the state's linguistic and ethnic policies, they negotiate the English/Tamil distinction by incorporating English into their sociolinguistic practices in innovative ways (2005). There is also additional literature on the divisive role of English in colonial and postcolonial Sri Lanka (Kandiah 2010; Gunesekera 2005; Zubair 2011). Sociolinguistic literature on this region would benefit from a focus on the ways in which youth and adults reproduce and contest sociolinguistic hierarchies and differences in educational settings.

3 Language-medium education in India and Sri Lanka: A brief overview

In its strictest sense, "medium" – in the domain of schooling – refers to the language in which most classroom instruction occurs in a school. This sense is the one offered by the *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* in its definition of the word *mādhyam* included at the beginning of this introduction. While schools in India do not follow the spirit of the three-language formula in the collection of languages they include, they do generally offer instruction in more than a single language. This is true of schools in Sri Lanka too, and in all of the nations of South Asia. Yet just which languages constitute the possibilities of a school's language medium depend on which languages are recognized by the government of the state in which the school is located. In this special issue, for example, the articles by Chidsey, LaDousa, and Sandhu are based on research in states where Hindi is recognized for official purposes such as schooling, whereas the article by Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay is based on research in the state where Bangla is so recognized. In Sri Lanka, the research location of Davis's article, Sinhala, Tamil, and, less commonly, English provide the possibilities of medium (recognized as streams in the school in which she worked).

The notion of language-medium education is not exhausted by the specification of the language in which most interaction in a particular school takes place, however. The word "medium", specified with a particular language, can be used to identify the school, its students, teachers, administrators, and parents or guardians of students. The term can also be used to identify aspects and qualities of behavior, linguistic or otherwise, exhibited by people involved with a school. One might say that schools and the people associated with them are doubly implicated in the notion of language-medium education. The idea makes explicit some quality of the school and people at the same time that it sets the school and people apart from others, often in opposition to them.

Fascinating is that, in India, the notion of language medium has little direct resonance with state language policies. Language policy in the realm of education is oriented to the three-language formula and to the guarantee of the provision of a minority language when a sufficient percentage of students speak that language as a "mother tongue". Minority languages are those not recognized by state governments for official uses. This is not to say, however, that the notion of language medium has no relationship to the organization and bureaucracy of schools. One of the ways that language-medium distinctions are organized is in relationship to the administrative school boards that authorize the curriculum of a

school and guarantee students seats in the board examinations that follow the 10th and 12th levels of schooling. Across India, state governments have school boards that oversee schools that enjoy state funding for students' tuition fees and teachers' salaries. Across states, there are several boards such as the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) that authorize their own curricula. These boards operate outside of India too. People have come to associate state boards with the provision of pedagogy in the language that the state recognizes for official use, and the pan-state boards with the provision of pedagogy in English.

Tuition fees play an even more overt role than boards in the perception that language-medium education necessitates a sharp contrasting of school types. Schools affiliated with the state government are thought to be quite cheap whereas schools affiliated with one of the private boards are thought to be comparatively expensive. A contrast has developed whereby an Indian language constitutes the medium of cheap schools affiliated with the state, and English constitutes the medium of expensive schools affiliated with private school boards. The stark contrast indicates that ideology is at play – a point elaborated on in the sections below – because there are indeed private Hindi-medium schools that take fees as well as English-medium schools that enjoy state affiliation and subsidy. Such schools are generally left out or decried as obscure exceptions when people talk about language-medium schooling.[4]

In Sri Lanka, the provision of Sinhala- and Tamil-medium education satisfied an obligation to offer a language corresponding to the "mother tongue" of students. In her article in this special issue, however, Davis is careful to review the ways in which ethnic and religious distinctions make for a more complicated conjunction of languages in education and notions of mother tongue. For Sinhalas and Tamils, mother tongue corresponds with ethnicity. Muslims, however, who define their ethnicity on the basis of religion alone, have long debated over what constitutes their mother tongue. They alternatively study in the Sinhala or Tamil mediums. In Sri Lankan schools, the presence of Muslims can thus be understood as interrupting the conflation of ethnicity, mother tongue, and language medium.

In Sri Lanka, some government and private schools offer English bilingual streams at the secondary level, where students take select subjects in the English medium. A full English-medium education, however, is only available at a type of private school called international schools. Started in the late 1970s for the children of expatriates, they have proliferated in urban centers since the 1990s.

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4 Gal and Irvine (1995) would say that such schools are "erased" or made invisible when people reflect on language-medium distinctions.

International schools are associated with high tuition fees, middle class status, and opportunity to go abroad because they prepare students for international exams that are equivalent to the UK Certification of Secondary Education (De Silva 1999). While International schools vary in quality, Sri Lankans widely equate the distinction between government and International schools with inequalities related to class and access to English.

To give a sense of how ubiquitous the language-medium distinction is, we include a number of images of advertising. All over South Asia, public space is marked by advertising. Often, single instances of advertising employ more than one language and/or more than one script (Bhatia 2000; Choksi 2014, 2015; LaDousa 2002, 2014, 2018). In Figure 1 a number of signboards advertise various types of places on a street in downtown Kandy, Sri Lanka. Furthest to the right is the English "Rich Shoe Palace". To the left of it is the Sinhala "*tāj juwalars*". "*Juwalars*" (jewelers) is rendered in the script of the rest of the shop's name, a transliteration practice ubiquitous across South Asia. Further to the left is, in Tamil, "*kathirgāma dēvālayam*" (Kataragama Temple).

Figure 2 depicts a school advertisement on a street in Varanasi, India. The sign is rather expensively produced in comparison to the more common advertisements painted directly onto surfaces (as in Figure 3). Medium affiliation is included in the name of the school itself (Project EEZ English School), as is the school's affiliation with the CBSE school board. English-medium schools with more established reputations in Varanasi no longer make explicit their English-medium status and affiliation with the CBSE because such matters are foregone conclusions. Project EEZ English School is a private English-medium school that is still striving to attract students and build a reputation.

In Figure 3, J. M. S. Coaching Centre uses Hindi and English and Devanagari and roman script to advertise. "Coaching" is a term referring to tutoring in support of the achievement of curricular requirements in school, entrance to competitive institutions, or success in examinations for administrative posts in the government. The primary offerings of J. M. S. Coaching Centre are made explicit to the left. The center offers tutoring to students engaged in the curriculum authorized by the CBSE, grades 6 through 12. The sign begins with a stylized Devanagari announcing, "*vārāṇasī kā na. 1 kocing senṭar*" [Varanasi's n. 1 coaching center]. It would seem that the exclusion of Devanagari and Hindi is not crucial to the coaching center's legitimacy, in contrast to the case of Project EEZ English School. Indeed, coaching centers often address would-be customers in Devanagari-rendered Hindi offering to improve their English. In the case of J. M. S. Coaching Centre, tutoring includes university-level help with B. Comm. (bachelor's of commerce) classes as well
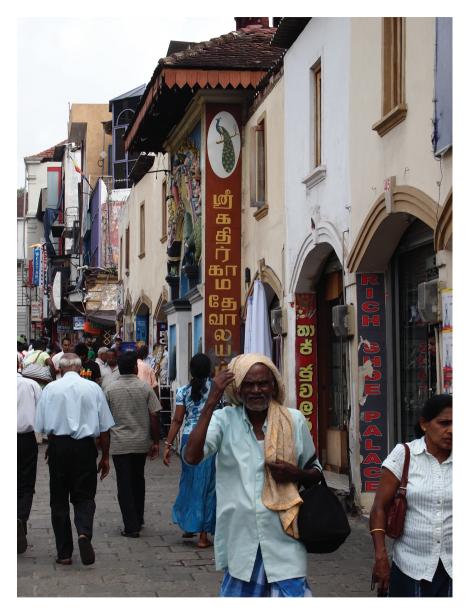
Figure 1: Signboards in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

as help with spoken English. The emphasis on spoken English is oriented to the common feeling that most students learn English in classroom settings where routines of instruction do not allow for much talk and where

Figure 2: Project EEZ English school advertisement in Varanasi, India.

Figure 3: J. M. S. Coaching centre advertisement in Varanasi, India.

engagement with literacy is paramount. The advertisement concludes with the location of the coaching center in Devanagari-rendered Hindi followed by telephone numbers. Figure 3 presents a scenario found quite commonly in coaching center advertisements: information about the services offered is in English with roman script, all bracketed by a catchy slogan and location information in Hindi rendered in Devanagari script. One might explain matters thus: the educational services offered to the viewer and the means to address the viewer are themselves offered in two different mediums.

4 The articles

In her article, "The language medium 'divide': ideologies of Hindi-English use at four all-girls' 'public schools' in North India", Chidsey explores relationships between language ideology and practice, giving special attention to gender. Public schools were opened in the British period to provide an English-medium education to upper-class Indian girls. In the decades around independence they became associated with high quality English instruction, women's emancipation, and Indian modernity. While public schools are still thought to provide young women with a strong English education, their meaning and value in Indian society are being challenged in both pedagogical practices and peer group interactions. Chidsey investigates how students differently ideologize English and Hindi in interactions with their teachers and peers. In these conversations the girls use English to depict themselves as feminine, educated, upper class and even cool. In some cases, some girls purposefully make mistakes in Hindi in order to cast themselves as elite English speakers. Chidsey demonstrates how the girls' use of English and their reflections on their language practices serve to create and sustain elite and gendered social identities.

In "English medium education, patriarchy, and emerging social structures: narratives of Indian women", Sandhu explores the centrality of the language-medium divide in Indian women's accounts of socioeconomic marginalization. She employs ethnographic interviews with four North Indian women wherein they detail the negative repercussions of their Hindi-medium education on their romantic affairs, arranged marriage negotiations, and spousal and mother-in-law relations. The narratives, which both reflect and produce the women's social realities, are situated in relation to India's rapidly changing economy, consumer-oriented middle class, and the historically patriarchal nature of Indian society. A small proportion of Indian society who has access

to English-medium private schools have access to high-paid public or private employment. Those educated in the Hindi-medium are at a clear socioeconomic disadvantage.

Sandhu shows how in their narratives the women subtly critique social inequalities related to language medium. They question the notion that women educated in the English medium have social and economic advantages, as well as the idea that marriage arrangements should be about money. However, various other aspects of their situations remain unquestioned, such as patriarchal norms and the powerless position of the daughter-in-law in relation to her mother-in-law. Common across all the narratives was a view that familial and social relationships are governed by materialism. In this context, the high status of English-medium education leads to a marginalization of Hindi-medium women. The richly detailed interviews show how these women attribute ideologies of language medium to different vectors of social distinction. Sandhu shows how the language-medium divide is not just relevant to the women's awareness of their own marginality, but is a rubric through which women see themselves and make sense of familial and social relationships.

In their article, "English immersion and Bangla flotation: rendering a collective choice private", Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay report from Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, in order to suggest an approach to education that provides a frame for understanding the social significance of languages differently than the one provided by language-medium schooling. As their article's title suggests, the emphasis on language-medium education has foregrounded English and left Bangla in a rather precarious position. The authors review some of the history of education and language policy in India to argue that there has been growing attention given to English in the education system. They also consider political stances from which arguments have been made that English affords an egalitarian, inequality-leveling possibility. They note that such arguments are made at the same time that English is now firmly associated with expensive private schooling in India.

Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay question the division between English and Bangla presupposed by the focus on language-medium schooling, and note the importance and benefit of "nurturing reciprocal relationships between Bangla and English in the school life of children". The authors provide a number of examples from contemporary schooling that demonstrate the ways in which students' proficiency in Bangla can invoke the assumption that they lack ability in English, just as instruction in English can often predominantly rely on Bangla. Such language dynamics largely affect the poor who are left to purchase English in the educational system at an extreme

disadvantage. The authors critique the privatization of the education system via English by advocating a collective commitment to the notion that the student is best served – socially and cognitively – by competence in both Bangla and English.

LaDousa offers "Language medium and a high-stakes test: language ideology and coaching centers in North India". In the article, he explores ideologies pertaining to the language-medium divide in North India in relation to controversy over the introduction of a new section of the Indian Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exam, a series of tests that are used to recruit for non-elected government positions. He draws on ethnographic research in exam coaching centers in Delhi and Varanasi in 2014 in order to show how the opposition between Hindi- and English-medium education is heavily ideologized in relation to multiple vectors of difference. The language-medium divide can be used to refer to educational institutions, language practices, textual practices, and individuals.

In Delhi in 2014, people protested the introduction of a new section of the UPSC exam. Since this portion was added in 2011, Hindi-medium students have tested poorly in relation to their English-medium peers. There were multiple reasons why these students would underperform on the exam, but people widely attributed the problem to the language-medium divide, which they associated with both speakers and locales. Coaching center teachers noted that Hindi-medium students were less adaptable and flexible than their English-medium counterparts. They spoke of students from Varanasi, a smaller and less cosmopolitan city, as being particularly strong in Hindi. However, advertising by coaching centers in Delhi claimed that language-medium differences were unimportant in the UPSC exam and that students should take the exam in the language in which they feel the most comfortable. LaDousa argues that the way teachers and students use language ideological notions to make sense of the consequences of the changes to the UPSC exam do not sufficiently account for these changes in the institution of coaching. In addition, he also contributes to the language ideological literature by demonstrating how different aspects of language ideological processes are dynamically reconfigured in relation to institutional processes.

Davis draws on long-term ethnographic research at Girls' College, a government school in Kandy, Sri Lanka in "Muslims in Sri Lankan language politics: a study of Tamil- and English-medium education". She explores the disposition of the Muslim minority among the sociolinguistic groups and language-medium distinctions of the school. While most Sri Lankan Muslims speak Tamil as a first language, the sociolinguistic identity they claim coincides neither with the ethnic label attached to the Tamil language, nor with the school's stream of

Tamil-medium instruction. This is because Sri Lankan Muslims identify neither as Tamil nor as Sinhala, Sri Lanka's major ethnic groups with associated languages (and language mediums). Davis considers the ways in which Muslim students and teachers at the school reflect on their sociolinguistic identities inside and outside of the school and finds that Muslims differentiate themselves from Tamils by foregrounding their own sociolinguistic heterogeneity.

Davis is able to relate the sociolinguistic trajectory of Muslim identity, based as it is on a rejection of straightforward affiliations with ethnic labels and an embrace of contextually specific sociolinguistic distinctions, to high rates of Muslim participation in the school's English-medium stream. Although stigmatized by some people for the variety of Tamil with which they are associated, Muslims' lack of precise fit with the ethnolinguistic affiliations presupposed by the school and its language-medium options seems to have made them particularly amenable to participation in the English-medium stream of the school offering a stance of globalization and cosmopolitanism.

In "The Right to Education Act (2009): instructional medium and dis-citizenship", Bhattacharya and Jiang consider the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), passed by the Government of India in 2009, in light of the language-medium divide in schooling. Long in the making, the RTE Act put special emphasis on a guarantee that the kind of children who did not attend school in past generations would do so in the future. Such children include those from the poorest families as well as those from rural backgrounds where schools might not exist in sufficient numbers. The authors reflect on the text of the RTE Act as well as other policy measures to interrogate the act's promise that students can enjoy instruction in their mother tongue. One of the ironies pointed out by Bhattacharya and Jiang is that children from the class background targeted by the RTE Act have come to feel the attraction of English-medium education, the medium associated with private school board administration and middle class status. The authors draw on the work of Vaidehi Ramanathan to argue that the guarantee of rights without attention to the conditions under which students might engage with institutions can very well constitute a form of "dis-citizenship", the denial of the ability to participate as a citizen. The concept is meant to bracket the realization of citizenship in policy to force the investigation of the possibilities for the attainment of citizenship in practice. Bhattacharya and Jiang conclude the special issue nicely by offering a set of recommendations about the right to education in light of the inequalities of the language-medium distinction, especially as regards the poor and marginalized.

5 Contributions of the special issue

In examining how individuals, groups, and institutions position themselves and others in relation to language medium, the articles in this special issue engage the concept of language ideologies. Although some of the articles do not invoke the concept explicitly, all of them find that the language-medium distinction exhibits features of language ideology. A central theoretical framework in the field of linguistic anthropology, language ideologies are defined as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests" (Irvine 1989: 255).[5] As places where people are evaluated on their ability to produce standardized or legitimate linguistic varieties, schools are particularly important locations for the production of language ideologies (LaDousa 2014). As Stanton Wortham (2003: 2) notes, "A society's beliefs about language—as a symbol of nationalism, a marker of difference, or a tool of assimilation—are often reproduced and challenged through educational institutions." Language-medium distinctions in education organize the ways in which linguistic varieties are ideologically associated with ethnicity, religion, gender, and class. As this issue demonstrates, language-medium distinctions take on a life of their own beyond the classroom.

A handful of studies have examined the language ideologies people use to understand and reflect on schools in South Asian contexts. An important scholar who has not contributed to this special issue is Vaidehi Ramanathan. In a monograph (2004) and a number of articles and edited volume chapters (1999, 2002, 2005, 2013), she considers the ways that Gujarati- and English-medium schooling in Ahmedabad, Gujarat have different ramifications for students with respect to their educational ambitions. Viniti Vaish (2008) has used the context of schools to argue that processes of globalization and new forms of digitally mediated labor are making access to English by the poor a potential source of employment, and Proctor (2014) has considered the language-medium divide as capable of reproduction in discursive interaction. The contributors to this special issue have published on a number of aspects of the language-medium divide. They have explored how language-medium distinctions are manifested in classroom activity, ideological reflection on classroom performance, and narratives on its relevance outside of school (Bhattacharya 2013, 2017; Davis 2012, 2015; LaDousa 2004, 2014, 2018; Majumdar and Mooij 2011; Sandhu 2014, 2015, 2016).

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5 For useful discussions of the notion of language ideologies, see Kroskrity (2000), Schieffelin et al. (1998), and Silverstein (1979).

The articles in this special issue include in their purview an expanded range of school types, social class levels, and regional and national contexts.

The articles enhance recent work on language ideologies in showing how socially occurring interactions are connected to more widely circulating discourses that are often institutionally grounded (Wortham 2012). While the notion of language medium is irrevocably tied to educational institutions, it is also a crucial rubric by which people position themselves in contexts both in and out of schools. Furthermore, the articles in this special issue illustrate how the meaning of language-medium distinctions in particular social contexts depends on the social locations of those people in its purview. On the one hand, language-medium designations can be used to identify individuals, social groups, and institutions, and by doing so, form a framework for conceiving of language in relation to social difference and inequality. On the other hand, the potential for language-medium distinctions to result in specific forms of social identification depends on institutional contexts and types of people involved, inflected by ethnicity, religion, gender, and class. Careful attention to specific moments of social positioning and the ethnographic contexts in which they take place make it possible to show that language-medium distinctions have different meanings for different people and offer different people possibilities for social identification and action in different contexts.

Chidsey, Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay, LaDousa, and Davis explore language-medium distinctions in relation to pedagogy (schools and exam coaching facilities), whereas Sandhu looks at these distinctions in relation to North Indian women's autobiographical narratives. Chidsey's and Sandhu's articles are first, and both explore the intersections of language medium, social class, and gender. The pieces demonstrate the ways in which class dispositions are reflected in the differences between Hindi- and English-medium schooling. They also show that women use the language-medium distinction in particular ways depending on the class position they inhabit. For Chidsey's elite informants, the language milieu of the school is assumed to be English, and at stake is a performance that is free of Hindi and perceived errors in English. For Sandhu's less elite informants, medium distinctions themselves are ever-present and frame the ways in which every social relation in the worlds of employment and romance is imagined. Majumdar and Mukhopadyay identify an ideology whereby Dalits, people who are associated with poverty and caste-exclusion, have come to demand access to English at the expense of the state-recognized Indian language. Thus, access to English and modes of its appreciation – which are always ideologized – vary drastically, just as the medium divide continues to benefit the institutional status of English in India. LaDousa's focus on protests

against the dominance of English in India resonates with Sandhu's focus on women's critiques of the dominance of English-medium alumnae, but he finds that the civil services exam coaching business is riddled with ideological contradiction that inevitably hinges on the weaknesses of Hindi-medium aspirants. He also finds that coaching center teachers frame the abilities of those associated with the medium divide very differently than do people involved with language-medium education at younger levels of schooling.

Some of the articles demonstrate that although schools emphasize particular models of language and social differences, they are spaces where beliefs and ideas are continually questioned and challenged. Chidsey shows us how young North Indian women challenge some aspects of the ideologizing of Hindi- and English-medium education while leaving other aspects unproblematized. Sandhu's piece is also careful to note those moments when women question and launch critiques of the assumptions about people the language-medium division engenders. LaDousa points to ways in which existing narratives of language medium insufficiently account for the sheer complexity of the relationship between language and social life. LaDousa's article shows that the very institution that has gained so much attention from protests is shifting in ways not attributable to the language-medium divide. Davis's article finds that the presence of Muslims in Sri Lankan government schools interrupts widely circulating associations between language medium divisions and sociolinguistic groups. Muslims are able to use their lack of fit to their advantage through their pursuit of English-medium education. Both LaDousa and Davis consider institutions within and outside of the focus provided by dominant language ideologies.

Finally, some of the articles launch critiques from outside the point of view of subject positions emergent from ethnographic contexts. Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay draw on ethnographic anecdotes to demonstrate the bifurcating tendencies of language-medium discourse in West Bengal, but also speak from their own more polemical point of view to argue that were students and their families to value multiple languages in the curriculum, they would avoid the pervasive privileging of English in education. Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay, like many sociolinguists working in India, note the stark division between the sociolinguistic worlds of school and life outside of school, and point to language medium's role in the division's reproduction. They bemoan the ways in which boundaries are created between Bangla and English in language-medium discourse, and call for an approach to education that takes note of and appreciates uses of language in context. In the last article of the issue, Bhattacharya and Jiang offer a sweeping critique of language policy concerning education in India, focusing their reflections on the promises of universal compulsory schooling.

They show that the role of language-medium distinctions in education has been downplayed in a recent iteration of education policy in India and offer a list of recommendations to make education more equitable.

6 Conclusion

The articles in this special issue investigate language-medium distinctions as they are produced in institutional processes and discursive interactions. They demonstrate that the medium distinction works through various scales of sociality including the nation, the region, and the family. Language-medium divisions are thus a central means of reproducing social difference and inequality in India and Sri Lanka. The contributing authors pay particular attention to the way language-medium distinctions are referred to in socially occurring interactions. Sometimes people explicitly mention the relevance of language medium to schooling, and, at other times, language medium becomes entangled with other distinctions related to nation, ethnicity, caste, class, religion, or gender. Building on the literature on language ideologies, the contributors examine micro-interactions in relation to the ways in which institutional processes resonate in widely circulating discourse about language medium. More generally, the articles in this special issue demonstrate how emergent interactional dynamics implicate people in particular ways with respect to widely circulating discourse. Such dynamics can reinforce or challenge ways of conceiving of social differences.

Language-medium distinctions in India and Sri Lanka constitute a crucial part of what it means to have an education, to speak a language, or to occupy a particular social group. Individuals, institutions, and groups must contend with the ways in which the language-medium divide resonates with different aspects of their social lives as they struggle to gain legitimacy and prestige. And language-medium distinctions loom large in the ways in which people reflect on and make sense of their past actions and future possibilities. To study language-medium distinctions in South Asia is to engage critically with how language-medium divisions—as embedded in institutional structures and everyday practices—structure inequalities in relation to language, speakers, standardized languages, and pedagogies.

audience members. Bhattacharya and Jiang, Chidsey, and Majumdar and Mukhopadhyay decided to contribute articles after the conference. Although they must remain anonymous, the external reviewers provided encouragement and insightful suggestions for revision and improvement. Their careful work is greatly appreciated.

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