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Postcolonial Language Ideologies: Indian Students Reflect on Mother Tongue and English

The 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) proposes a revision to the Indian education system. The document foregrounds "mother tongue," a concept that has been highly salient in India since the mid-nineteenth century, by specifying that students should learn in it. But it makes little mention of English, despite its importance, and the desire for it, at every level of education. The construction of nation and language in the NEP begs a question: how do the constructions, foci, and relative silences of policy resonate with people's understandings and uses of languages? This article incorporates interviews at an engineering university in western India, the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar, to examine graduate students' reflections on mother tongue in relation to their multilingual practices on campus and at home. The students exhibited a range of ideological perspectives on mother tongue and English that are not addressed in policy measures. Using the heuristic of postcolonial semiotics, we show that the students were unable to simultaneously identify with the nation (via mother tongue) and English. We contribute to linguistic anthropology and South Asian studies by foregrounding people's metadiscourse in how they make sense of, and ultimately problematize, constructions of colonial and postcolonial policy. [mother tongue, postcolonial semiotics, language ideologies, education, English, India]

The National Democratic Alliance government, which is led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, released the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP), a document that proposes a revision to many aspects of the structure of the Indian education system. The NEP foregrounds "mother tongue," a concept that has been salient in India since the British colonial period, by specifying that students should learn in it whenever possible (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2020). However, the document makes very little mention of English, despite its importance, and the desire for it, at every level of education. Thus, the NEP applies several decades of legislative measures that have urged nationalist identification with Indian languages through the notion of mother tongue but leaves ambiguous how one should engage with the apparent importance of English.

The construction of nation and language in the NEP begs a question: how do the constructions, foci, and relative silences of policy resonate with people's understandings and uses of languages? This article incorporates interviews at an

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engineering university in western India, the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar (IITGN), to examine students' reflections on mother tongue in relation to their multilingual practices on campus and at home. IITGN is in the state of Gujarat, where Gujarati is the state language, but it draws students from all states and regions of India because it is an elite university. Lectures and coursework are in English, but Hindi functions as a common language along with English. Students also converse in many other Indian languages and linguistic varieties (see below for a discussion of mixing practices). In interviews conducted in 2020, Chaise LaDousa, a white American male, and two graduate student research assistants asked graduate students questions about their mother tongue, such as if they have one and how they define it, before moving to more general questions about their language use. While the majority of the students quickly and easily named a mother tongue, subsequent discussion revealed their variable understandings of it. In some cases, the students' senses of mother tongue were unable to capture the complexity of their descriptions of the different regional varieties they spoke at home and their various relationships to each other, as well as the national sphere. Their discussions invoked ethnic and religious differences, processes of standardization, and various imaginings of English in relation to Indian languages. Although English was pervasive in their discussions of their education experiences and everyday lives, only a single student claimed English as a first or primary language. Tellingly, he was the only student to emphatically claim that he had no mother tongue.

Scholars of language and social life in India, across the nations of South Asia, and in societies where colonial languages are realities of contemporary life, have demonstrated the continuing relevance of colonial constructions of language categories and social distinctions. Some have focused on genres like hip-hop to foreground the ways youth use languages in transgressions of policy measures and language boundaries legitimized by the state (Pennycook 2007). Yet, scholars of language in India have pointed to the colonial origins of mother tongue and its contemporary use in the census (Khubchandani 1997; Mitchell 2009; Pattanayak 1981), and attested to the concept's continuing salience in institutional life and elsewhere in a vast array of nation states including Bangladesh (Sultana 2021), Sri Lanka (Davis 2022), Nepal (Hoffmann-Dilloway 2010), and Malaysia (Albury 2017). English has received a great deal of attention across the postcolonial world in locales like India (Annamalai 2018; Auddy 2019; Kachru 1997), Sri Lanka (Kandiah 2010; Parakrama 1995), Bangladesh (Hamid and Hasan 2020), East Africa (Higgins 2009), Singapore (Babcock 2022), Hong Kong (Bolton 2002), and Malaysia (Pennycook 2013). Scholars have shown that the way people order different national, regional, and/or local languages in relation to one another is complex and tied to national histories but is especially focused on institutional contexts like schools where the relationships between these languages and English are sharply unequal and where power-laden distinctions between Englishes can emerge (Canagarajah 2005, 2013; Das 2016; Davis 2020; Ganti 2021; Jahan and Hamid 2022; Ramanathan 2005; Sandhu 2016). Scholars have also taken special pains—sometimes with reference to the notion of "translanguaging" (García 2009)—to show that language practices often confound demarcations between varieties identifiable as mother tongues and English (Kothari and Snell 2011; LaDousa 2014; Nakassis 2016; Proctor 2014; Sultana 2014).

This article offers something new to scholarship on language and social life in postcolonial societies: an account of people grappling with the contradictions illustrated by language policy in interactions. This requires attention not just to discourse, but also metadiscourse (discourse about discourse) (Lucy 1993). Much of the literature on language in postcolonial societies, even work that invokes the postcolonial, uses terms like "native," "vernacular," and "indigenous" to represent languages other than English. None of the students at IITGN used such terms. Furthermore, the students we interviewed complicated any easy rendering of themselves and their practices through the concept of mother tongue, just as some reported a high degree of proficiency in English. In order to appreciate the

complexity of what the students struggle with, this article uses the heuristic of what Angela Reyes has termed a "postcolonial semiotics," defined as "processes through which linguistic and other signs are linked to the colonial and its ongoing relevance in the construction of value" (2021, 291). While the NEP recreates an indexical relationship between student and mother tongue within the contextual grounding of the nation, Reyes notes that "postcolonial semiotics does not construct unitary formations as much as produce multiplicity, ambivalence, and uncertainty around the questions of colonialism's endurance" (293). The questioning of unitary formations is consistent with Judith T. Irvine's (2022) recent discussion of the need to focus on multiplicity, boundaries, and contrasts in studies of language ideologies (see Irvine and Gal 2000).[1] Whereas Reyes charts the emergence of postcolonial tensions in the Philippines in the form of the *conyo*, "a figure [that] is often understood as participating too enthusiastically in colonial models of behavior that are seen as overly modern and a national betrayal" (2017b, 105; see Reyes 2017a), this article seeks to understand how students struggle with a colonial term of widespread salience, mother tongue, that is woefully inadequate for describing their sociolinguistic lives, which include English.

By investigating IITGN students' metadiscourse through the heuristic of postcolonial semiotics, we show that simultaneous identification with the nation (via mother tongue) and English is ultimately impossible. Postcolonial semiosis is embodied in moments of reflection in which the students grappled with rather than answer questions about what might constitute mother tongues and English. The discussions at the center of this article reveal that the notions of mother tongue and English are in productive tension, but this tension cannot predict particular constructions of mother tongue, or alignments with the notion of mother tongue. This article adds to scholarship on language in postcolonial societies by showing how students negotiate the incompatibility of simultaneous identification with the mother tongue and English and reveal a range of ideological perspectives. Some of these perspectives presuppose a degree of belonging to a language or region while others demonstrate relative exclusion and singularity. It is this variability offered in moments of reflection that policy measures in postcolonial societies and uses of terms like mother tongue cannot address.

Mother Tongue and English in Postcolonial India

The notion of mother tongue has been resilient in India from the colonial to postcolonial periods. While its ultimate origin in Europe is murky (Mitchell 2009), it gained prominence in South Asia in the mid-nineteenth century and has been pervasive ever since (Ramaswamy 1997; see Bénéï 2008). A number of institutional uses of the term have gained legitimacy such that mother tongue has entered the lexicon of legislation. The Indian census has used mother tongue since its inception in 1872 but its meaning has shifted over time (Pattanayak 1981; see Agnihotri and Khanna 1997; Dasgupta 1993). The census is widely used by the government and scholars to ascertain which portions of the population speak which languages (Mitchell 2009), but it has been criticized for not providing an accurate picture of the Indian sociolinguistic situation (Seetharaman 2019; see Khubchandani 1997). Even though many Indians speak multiple languages at home with family members, when they answer the census they must select one as their mother tongue. In the 2011 Indian census, mother tongue is defined in the following manner:

> Mother tongue is the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. If the mother died in [the child's] infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person's home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded. (Government of India 2011)

The definition makes explicit that the language identified with the respondent must be singular.

Further complicating the representativeness of the census by way of its use of mother tongue is that people's responses are influenced by their different, and sometimes contradictory, senses of the term. E. Annamalai (2018) discusses how mother tongue may be conceptualized in policy and practice as a language spoken by one's mother (the current census definition), a language of primary socialization, a language of communicative competency, or a language of identity (related to region, ethnicity, religion, or caste).[2] For instance, from 2001 to 2011 there was a seventy-six percent increase in the number of people who listed the classical language Sanskrit as a mother tongue on the census even though very few use it as a spoken language (Seetharaman 2019).[3] Here, the notion of mother tongue as a language of religious identity conflicts with the idea of it as a language of spoken communication. As Mitchell (2009) observes, when a person chooses a language as a mother tongue on the census, they are not simply claiming a language, but positioning themselves in relation to a sociolinguistic situation in a way that reflects their political, religious, or class aspirations. Such nuance is not manifested in the way the census represents people in terms of language.

Education is another domain where mother tongue has gained institutional legitimacy and use. When the national language policy was first established in 1947, policy makers agreed that "English would be replaced by Indian languages at the federal level and the state level" (Annamalai 2004, 184). However, the government showed little commitment to this resolution, likely motivated by the desire to avoid conflict between groups with different agendas with regard to English and local and regional languages (2004). India's planned replacement of English with Hindi as the official language was thwarted by the Official Languages Act in 1963, which allowed for the continued use of English for official purposes (Das Gupta 1970). In 1956 India was linguistically organized into fourteen states, most with one Indian language as the official state language. To facilitate communication between different regions of the country, the government passed the "three-language formula" in 1968 (National Policy on Education 1968; see Venkataraman 2019). It prescribed that two of the three languages taught in schools be native to India. While English was not named in the policy, schools throughout the nation selected English as the third language (Aggarwal 1988). Over the past half century, debate over which languages should be offered in different states and regions has continued. For example, few schools in the north offer any of the Dravidian languages spoken in the south and there has been antipathy in Tamil Nadu to instruction in Hindi (Brass 1990; Ramaswamy 1997).

India's Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009, which mandates free and compulsory education for all Indian children between the ages of six and fourteen, was praised widely for increasing access to education for the nation's poorest groups, many of whom are linguistic minorities (e.g., speakers of indigenous languages). Section 29(2)(f) recommends that the "medium of instruction shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue," but there is no further elaboration (Parliament of India 2009, 11; see Bhattacharya and Jiang 2022). Both the RTE Act and the NEP recommend that students study in their mother tongue. While the RTE Act does not define it, the NEP notes that mother tongue usually corresponds to a home or local language but that in a multilingual family a home language may be different from a mother tongue or local language (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2020).[4] Although English has tended to be under planned in postcolonial nations in that it has not received the same policy attentions as other languages (Kachru 1991; see Canagarajah 2005), it is striking that the RTE Act does not mention English. The NEP refers to English only in the context of its offering as a subject along with other languages and the need for bilingual textbooks and instruction in mathematics, science, and law education (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2020). Annamalai (2021), in his comments on the 2019 draft NEP (see Ministry of Human Resource Development,

Government of India 2019), notes that technological skills coupled with English are clearly important in helping India reach its stated goal of becoming a world leader in terms of economic growth and scientific advancement.[5] By leaving the role of English in the nation's development goals largely implicit, the current government is extending a "nativist" ideological position taken by several previous governments to promote Indian languages and avoid associations between English and foreignness (LaDousa and Davis 2022b).

In summary, neither the NEP nor the RTE Act address two dimensions of inequality structured by language throughout the Indian education system. First, linguistic minorities are often at a disadvantage because their home languages are rarely offered as mediums of instruction in schools (Bhattacharya and Jiang 2022; Mohanty 2018; Sridhar 1996). And second, the mention of mother tongue education invokes one of the starkest and most pervasive divisions in the education system: the distinction between Indian language-medium and English-medium schools.[6] Medium of instruction, which refers to the primary language of instruction at a school (LaDousa and Davis 2022a), has profoundly colonial origins: British colonizers provided a small elite with access to English-medium schools to attain civil service jobs (Viswanathan 1989), and Indian language-medium schooling provided access to a lower tier of employment (Kumar 2005; Seth 2007). These dynamics have been replicated in the post-independence period where alignments between private education and English-medium instruction, on the one hand, and government aided education and Indian language-medium instruction, on the other, have grown in strength (Annamalai 2004; LaDousa 2014; Sandhu 2016). Throughout India, proficiency in written and spoken English is widely understood to be a prerequisite for higher education, which is almost entirely in English, and for access to lucrative government and private sector employment (Faust and Nagar 2001; Jayaram 1993; Proctor 2014; Ramanathan 1997; Rubdy 2008; Verma 1994). In the last few decades, processes of globalization and neoliberalism have led to an increased demand for English-medium education among people of all ethnic, caste, and class backgrounds, further fueling the rise in numbers of private schools (Bhattacharya and Jiang 2022; Highet and Del Percio 2021).

Several scholars have noted the ways that people take up subject positions in discursive interaction by using the notion of Indian language education and its relationship to English. In Lavanya Murali Proctor's work on Hindi- and English-medium schools in Delhi, schoolchildren invoked the person with the "good job" in contrast to the "hick" (*gavaar*) to imagine who had proficiency in English and who did not (2014). Vaidehi Ramanathan, in her account of a Gujarati-medium women's college in Gujarat, writes, "I found myself hating some of the middle-class totings of my person—my short, westernized haircut, my leather handbag and shoes (despite my Indian garb)," all features she associates with her upbringing in English-medium schools (2005, 120). Priti Sandhu demonstrates that women in a number of cities in North India use the fact that they have studied in Hindi-medium schools, and not English-medium ones, to account for troubles in employment and romance (2016). LaDousa writes about the "complex" that people at various class positions imagine develops as a result of Hindi-medium education. The state is made evident by the anger or embarrassment felt at one's lack of familiarity with English or lack of an English-medium upbringing (2014). In his fieldwork in a college setting in Tamil Nadu, Constantine V. Nakassis notes that students were aware that they did not fully control a register of Tamil that was known as "pure" or one of English that would indicate fluency. The use of some English allowed an association with its potential for mobility and an escape from accusations of speaking Tamil only, but also risked the charge of being arrogant or pretentious (2016).

The language ideological constructs in the work discussed above reiterate the ideological underpinnings of policy measures: education draws associations between mother tongues and Indian language mediums, and does so, in part, because neither is English. In contrast to these works, the IITGN students did not take on subject

positions using stark contrasts between Indian languages and English. (The one student who identified with English did not do so in contrast to an Indian language and described himself as highly multilingual.) There are number of likely reasons. All of the above mentioned studies conducted on medium were in college and school settings with lower or lower-middle class students and in areas where a particular Indian language was at issue, whether it was a national or state language. Depending on the area of the country in which the study was located—Gujarat to the west, the "Hindi Belt" to the north, or Tamil Nadu to the south—most students invoked a single language as an emblem of self, region, and/or nation, in contrast to English. Because IITGN students were from places all over the nation, the mother tongues they named as their own did not provide a common language in contrast to English. Furthermore, many of the students grew up in pervasively multilingual households, which was often the result of their families' complex migration history and their parents' mixed linguistic heritage. And although the students manifested different dispositions to languages and linguistic varieties depending on their ethnic, religious, caste, and class identities, they found English to be generally highly important to university study and social life. Thus, we found that for the IITGN students, there was no one organizing ideological field between Indian languages and English. In the following section, we outline our research methods before turning to a discussion of students' reflections on mother tongue and their experiences with English.

IITGN and Methods

India is home to over 50,000 institutes of higher education, but only a very small percentage of youth pursue tertiary education (Kumar 2018). Higher education institutions, whether public or private, include colleges and universities. Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are autonomous public technical universities that receive a large share of the central government's funds for higher education and have a highly competitive exam-based admissions system. They are considered to be the best in the nation for engineering. The first IIT was established in Kharagpur, West Bengal, in 1951 with the goal of producing an "adequate supply of technologists and engineers for the development of post war India" (Government of India 1948). Four more IITs were later founded in the west (Mumbai), north (Kanpur), south (Chennai), and the national capital (New Delhi). In the last three decades, IITs have been one of the main conduits for an expanding information technology workforce to places like Silicon Valley, California (Subramanian 2019). In 2008, the number of IITs grew from eight to fifteen, and Gandhinagar, capital of the state of Gujarat, became home to one of them. IITGN distinguishes itself from the other IITs through its special programing, including a five-week orientation program, and its focus on the humanities and social sciences.

IITGN students vary with respect to region, ethnicity, religion, gender, caste, class, and sociolinguistic competency. Students who come from English-medium schools have an academic advantage over those who studied in Indian languages. While the institution cannot undo the complex inequalities between students, IITGN addresses the students' unequal experiences with English by requiring all incoming bachelors and masters students to take an English writing course. Several students interviewed said that the faculty provided them with ample English writing and speaking support. There is a significant sociolinguistic division between North Indian students, who are usually proficient in Hindi, and South Indian students, who may have studied Hindi in school, but rarely speak it well. They often communicate in English with classmates who speak different first languages.

In the interviews, the students explicitly differentiated each other in terms of language and region. Some discussed their own religious affiliations in relation to languages they learned in school (e.g., Urdu or Sanskrit) or their speech, but they did not refer to their classmates by religion. IITGN, like all IITs, requires that 15, 7.5, and 27 percent of available seats be reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and

Other Backward Classes (castes), respectively, but students from upper-caste backgrounds are still overrepresented (Subramanian 2019). Caste hierarchies are recognized on campus and inform interactions, but caste was not mentioned in the interviews. In her recent book, Ajantha Subramanian (2019) provides an in-depth historical account of relationships among caste hierarchies, reservation policies, and ideologies of meritocracy at IIT Madras. Her study reveals the complicated ways in which an upper-caste—especially Brahmin—identity is imbricated with the nationalist development goals of IIT in alumni reflections. She situates these reflections in a "war of manoeuvre" with recent lower caste political movements (2019, 26). The students interviewed in this project were relatively silent about the subject of caste, likely because of its entanglements with discourses of meritocracy and justice. In addition, unlike the people interviewed by Subramanian, the students interviewed in groups were likely in the presence of classmates from different caste backgrounds.

From January to February 2020, LaDousa spent four weeks on the IITGN campus doing participant observation of campus life. Conversations between students and faculty in the canteen and other public venues were multilingual in that multiple Indian languages were used simultaneously, and English terms and phrases were ubiquitous. Public signboards and other handouts and notes the students showed LaDousa from their coursework often involved English and at least one Indian language, and when equivalent expressions were offered in different scripts (Devanagari and Roman for campus landmarks), terms were sometimes translated and sometimes transliterated. Interviews were pursued as a research method to encourage students to name and describe the language varieties that the term "mother tongue" might include and to reflect on their multilingual practices on campus and at home. The fifteen interviews were conducted by LaDousa; Praji, a female doctoral student in cognitive science from Maharashtra; and Yogesh, a male doctoral student in the humanities and social sciences from Kerala.[7] They interviewed students in the Master of Arts in Society and Culture (MASC) program, the Master of Technology (MTech) program, and the Master of Science in Cognitive Science program (LaDousa also interviewed Praji). The interviews ranged in length from sixty to eighty-five minutes and included one to four students at a time. Group interviews were encouraged to prompt discussion of names used for language varieties. Though they were not prompted to do so, students also discussed the ways that they aligned with different varieties in relation to particular family members, migration histories, or educational experiences. Some of the transcript excerpts included below make evident that the group scenario of interviews encouraged students to collaborate in offering explanations and performative demonstrations of typical linguistic interactions. Students also sometimes questioned each other on their claims.

While the interviewers used the same set of general questions, LaDousa's interviews were conducted in English while Praji translated parts of the questions into Hindi to accommodate MTech students who were having comprehension difficulties. (Both faculty and students noted that MTech students tended to be weaker in English than students in humanities and social science programs.) The MTech students answered in English, Hindi, or in a combination of the two. Due to LaDousa's identity as a foreigner, many of the students initially assumed he knew very little, but they opened up once they realized that he had an extensive knowledge of Indian education. For instance, he referred to specific exams they took and had been to some of their secondary schools. The interviews were friendly and light in tone and students showed respect for each other's diverse backgrounds and experiences.

While the concept of mother tongue was foregrounded at the start of the interviews, other questions about language were more open ended. For example, LaDousa asked about the students' experiences with language but did not specify a language. Consistent with Irvine's (2022) methodological suggestion for the study of language ideology in social life, we focused on the contrasts that the students made,

as well as what they mentioned and what they left out, especially if it was something others brought up.[8] The interviews were transcribed and translated by all three authors, who all have experience in South Asian sociolinguistic contexts, including northern, southern, eastern, and western India. The three authors analyzed the data jointly in several in person and Zoom sessions.

Conceptualizing and Problematizing Mother Tongue

Many students not only indicated that they had a mother tongue when asked, but many acted like it was a foregone conclusion, as evident from the following excerpt from LaDousa's interview with two MASC students, Aarya, a female from West Bengal and Balaji, a male from Kerala:

1. Chaise: Do you have a mother tongue?
2. Aarya: Yes.
3. Balaji: Of course.
4. Chaise: What is it?
5. Balaji: Mine is Malayalam.
6. Aarya: Bengali.

The interviewers and the students used the English term for mother tongue, but some students used the Hindi term, *mātribhāṣa*, in Hindi sentences.[9] When asked to define mother tongue, the students revealed that they had varying conceptions of it. A female MTech student from Rajasthan, in an interview with Yogesh, invoked the current census definition in identifying mother tongue with the speech of a mother to her child (she used a single Hindi word). In her explanation, she voices a mother-baby interaction:

> Whatever we speak we, initially, that word, we listen so, when we got born—at the same time we used to hear those words from our ma. . . . mother and that's why we speak them and that's why we get the feeling of. . . . [it] means when we drink water mummy, mother used to say that mum mum *pīlī* (drank), so we got the feeling like this is mum mum mum, the baby initially says I need mum, that is for water, so uh like whatever we listen, that we speak. . .

Most students, however, described mother tongue as a language of primary socialization, a language in which they have communicative fluency, or both (Annamalai 2018). For example, Aarya from West Bengal said, "Yeah, I mean, it's as, I mean, it's just very obvious it's the language we speak and it's the only language we have known while communicating, while growing up." A female MTech student from Andhra Pradesh defined it the following way: "According to me, [it is] the language in which they are fluent in, the language they use daily for a conversation." When asked what words they associate with mother tongue, students mentioned identity, home, comfort, confidence, fluency, and comprehension. A female Malayali Hindu student from Mumbai named Deepa said it makes her think of jalebi, a spiral-shaped Indian sweet:

Deepa: [Malayalam] is very graceful. The thing is, we have a script, and that script is very curvy. Like, you know jalebi.[10]

Students had different views about whether everyone has a mother tongue. Balaji from Kerala said, "Um, probably, most probably, most of living human beings possess a mother tongue, they do have a mother tongue, I believe." But Aarya corrected him. She argued that because it is ascribed and not achieved, some people may not have one, such as in the case of orphans who do not know their birth parents. In contrast to the census definition, she relates mother tongue to both parents rather than just to the mother.

When asked, many students said that mother tongue has some connection to region, but their explanations of the connections made obvious that not all mother tongues are equivalent, whether to each other or to the idea of national belonging. A female MTech student named Ruhani noted that her mother tongue, Telugu, neatly corresponds to her region because it is the language of her state, Andhra Pradesh. Indeed, we found that South Indian students who spoke the language of their state as a first or home language made unproblematic claims to it as a mother tongue. In a point resonating with the discussion in the NEP about the complexity of mother tongue in multilingual families, Ruhani added that the relationship between mother tongue and region is complicated by migration, as in the case of people from Andhra Pradesh who live in Delhi but speak Hindi as a mother tongue because they do not know Telugu. Even though it is not a standardized state language, a male MTech student from Rajasthan discussed how his mother tongue, Marwari, a regional variety spoken in the Hindi Belt, indicates his region. He response also shows the bond he feels with other students from Rajasthan: "*jaise mãĩ rājasthān se hũ̃ to mãĩ yahã̃ āyā to jaise koī bhī jaise* mother tongue *mẽ bāt karāo to koī bhī bandā merī* mother tongue *sunke ki yaha samajh saktā hai ki yaha rājasthān kā hai to bhaicārā bāt jātā hai* (Like I am from Rajasthan so I came here so like any. . .talk in whatever *mother tongue* and if any guy hears my *mother tongue* he can tell this guy is from Rajasthan and it is a brotherly thing)." The connection between mother tongue and regional identity here is an example of social indexicality, the process by which languages or features of speech point to an aspect of a person's social identity, as mediated by ideology (Irvine 2001; see Gal and Irvine 2019). Yet, the languages invoked as mother tongues have very different statuses when considered from the viewpoint of the state's recognition.

One interview excerpt provides an extended consideration of the ways that mother tongues are not equivalent with respect to regional constructions. Praji, the research assistant from Maharashtra, interviewed three Hindu MTech students, Ruhani from Andhra Pradesh (see above), Arvind, a male from Rajasthan, and Geetha, a female from Uttar Pradesh. Upon hearing that Arvind is from Rajasthan (line 5), Ruhani immediately called him out on his earlier statement that Hindi is his mother tongue:

1. Praji: So where are you guys from?
2. Geetha: I'm from UP.
3. Praji: Okay. Where in UP?
4. Geetha: Aligarh.
5. Arvind: I'm from Rajasthan.
6. Ruhani: Rajasthan means?
7. Arvind: Yeah.
8. Ruhani: Your mother tongue is different, no?
9. Arvind: My mother tongue is Hindi. Most usually, most of the people in my area, they speak Marwari. But actually, I am born and brought up in, uh, *yaha* (this), Jaipur, so *vahã̃ pe* (there) Hindi. . . I am not fluent in my dialect, Marwari.
10. Praji: So your mother tongue you did not speak?
11. Arvind: *mārwāṛī nahĩ̃ hotā hai hamāre pāpā thoṛā bolte hãĩ̃ māmā nahĩ̃.* (I do not speak Marwari, dad speaks a little, mom does not.)
12. Praji: Okay, then you speak Hindi.
13. Ruhani: Then you should learn, no? You should learn your mother tongue.
14. Arvind: It's about mother tongue, not father tongue. My father speaks Marwari.

As evident from lines 6–14, Ruhani and Praji both initially assumed that Arvind was claiming Hindi as his mother tongue when it was actually Marwari, but his sociolinguistic situation is more complicated. He grew up speaking some Marwari with his father, but his mother speaks another regional variety, which he did not name. There has long been debate in the Hindi Belt about whether regional varieties spoken there should be considered dialects of Hindi or languages in their own right (LaDousa 2014). When Ruhani questioned whether Hindi is his mother tongue in line 8, Arvind responded by explaining in English mixed with some Hindi that many people in Rajasthan speak Marwari, but he grew up in Jaipur, where a standardized variety of Hindi is widely spoken. He added that he is not fluent in Marwari, which he pointedly referred to as his dialect. After his explanation, Praji discounted his claim that Marwari is not his mother tongue by asking in line 10, "So your mother tongue, you don't speak?" Praji also grew up in a highly multilingual environment: in her one-on-one interview with LaDousa she claimed that everyone has a mother tongue, but when asked to identify her own, she discussed how she grew up speaking both Marathi and Hindi (her father, who is from Madhya Pradesh, mainly speaks Hindi). In line 11, Arvind, using Hindi in a move that substantiated his connection to the language, explained that he does not speak Marwari and that his father speaks a little and his mother none. While Praji acknowledged that Arvind mainly speaks Hindi in line 12, Ruhani, still focused on Marwari as his mother tongue, instructed him on how he needs to learn it. Switching back to English in line 14, Arvind invoked the literal definition of mother tongue from the census to reiterate that Marwari is not his mother tongue. In this exchange, Praji and Ruhani expected that Arvind would have a regional variety as a mother tongue, likely because Rajasthan is associated with several different regional varieties. Geetha, who had also claimed Hindi as a mother tongue in the interview, was never called out on a regional variety, possibly because her hometown, Aligarh, is close to Delhi, in an area where the regional variety, Khari Boli, is often identified with standardized Hindi. This example shows how some students from the Hindi Belt were able to claim Hindi more successfully as a mother tongue than others because of existing associations between regions and regional varieties.

Many students described how the varieties they grew up speaking were negatively evaluated in relation to state legitimated standardized varieties. But while some students identified themselves as speaking regional varieties, other students associated themselves with religious or ethnic varieties. Their discussions also speak to the lack of equivalence between the different varieties discussed as mother tongues. LaDousa interviewed three MASC students: a Muslim female from Kerala (Aaisha); a Muslim female from West Bengal; and a Hindu female from Jharkhand. When the West Bengali student mentioned that comfort comes to mind when she thinks of her mother tongue, Aaisha immediately noted her lack of comfort in her Muslim variety of Malayalam because, at home in Kerala, it points to her religious identity, another example of social indexicality:

> Aaisha: When I think about my mother tongue I feel like I am not comfortable even though I am speaking Malayalam because my Malayalam is revealing my identity. In Kerala itself. Because when I am speaking Malayalam, all these people say, "Oh is this Malayalam?" because my Malayalam, my slang, is revealing my identity because I am a Muslim. Every word in Kerala. Every word in Kerala. My Malayalam is entirely different than them.

Although Aaisha initially named Malayalam as her mother tongue, in the above excerpt she discussed her variety of Muslim Malayalam, which she referred to as "my slang," as her mother tongue. Muslim varieties of Malayalam are inflected with Arabic words and phrases and have other distinct dialect features (Mohammed 2007). She went on to discuss how her Malayalam is mocked in a popular radio show in Kerala, and that the character who speaks it is a woman

played by a man. She then specified that it is not actually the Muslim variety of Malayalam spoken by her family members that is her mother tongue, but the particular variety of it that she speaks, which, in turn, is a product of her life history:

Aaisha: But even my Malayalam is different from my sister's Malayalam, my mother's Malayalam, and my father's Malayalam. My mother tongue is my mother tongue. I got some English words, some standard Malayalam words from my friends and all. That has made my mother tongue.

She then explained that her friends in junior college used to laugh when she spoke Malayalam, but that it happens with English as well:

Aaisha: They just take my words and everything and when I am talking English also they take. . . They laugh easily, I do not know.

She discussed how because she is from an uneducated family and English was not emphasized in her schooling in Kerala, the first time she ever spoke English was at her IITGN admissions interview. It is particularly notable that she spoke of being negatively evaluated in every language she speaks.

In this interview, Aaisha revealed a nuanced sense of mother tongue that is specific to her and her life experiences, some of which include prejudice about her religious identity, as well as the fact that her family is relatively uneducated. It is significant that when she began to talk about her position within her family, English suddenly became relevant to the explanation of her experience. Aaisha's comments thus show that mother tongue can be a source of prejudice when it stands in contrast to a state legitimated variety, is associated with a minority religious or ethnic identity, or both; and it can invoke the notion of English. We now turn to English.

Conceptualizing and Problematizing English

In the second part of the interviews, some students continued to refer to their mother tongues when discussing their sociolinguistic practices, but others instead used terms such as dialect, variety, slang, "my language" and "paternal grandmother's language" (Aaisha used both mother tongue and "my slang" in the above excerpts). As previously discussed, only one student, a male South Indian Hindu student in the Master of Cognitive Science program named Vikram, explicitly claimed not to have a mother tongue. He was also the only student for whom reflection on mother tongue prompted identification with English as a first or primary language. Vikram's exceptionalism reiterates the ideological incompatibility between the notion of mother tongue and English found in policy documents like the RTE Act and the NEP. He shows that identification with English presents an incongruity from the indexical relationship that mother tongue has to the nation. While he is not the only student to describe his family as an especially complex multilingual group, it is his identification with English that sets him apart from many of his classmates. In the following, we discuss how Vikram positioned himself with respect to English, Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam. We then look at students' discussions of English as well as their accounts of their uses of it.

When LaDousa asked Vikram in their one-on-one interview if he thinks he has a mother tongue, he responded, "That's an interesting question because I personally *don't* (Vikram's emphasis)." He was raised in Delhi by a father from Kerala and a mother from Delhi whose father had come from Tamil Nadu. He identified his "primary language at home" and first language just as he might if he were describing a mother tongue, but he never named English as his mother tongue. His parents probably did not speak Hindi as much because his father is not fluent in it:

1. Vikram: For me English was the primary language at home because everybody spoke English. Everybody. . . I mean, and it was like Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, English. So I grew up with several languages and my

father... and my father. He was a polyglot himself. He could speak like around five languages fluently.

2. Chaise: Ah, I see. My goodness.

3. Vikram: He spoke English, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and, um, Hindi. And so I grew up with that. And so when people ask me, "Oh, is English your second language?" [I say,] "Do you know? I grew up speaking English."

Throughout the interview, Vikram positioned himself as strong in English. He mentioned he had tutored students in the orientation program for the Bachelor of Technology program and said that while those from Rajasthan and other northern regions initially could not speak English well, they improved over time. But he added that many students are hesitant to ask for help because they feel ashamed that they are not stronger in English. He elaborated:

Vikram: And there's a judgement: "Oh, you don't know much." And there's the idea that English is only known to the people who are studying or the upper class, which I think then has translated into this mutated form where you are like judged of your intelligence by the amount of English that you will speak.

In another example of social indexicality, he associated English competency with being educated, upper class, and intelligent. And yet, it became clear that his use of English in peer interactions was not always received positively. This is consistent with Nakassis's (2016) observation about English interactions in Tamil Nadu, India where the use of too much English can come off as pretentious. He said that students on campus say, "Speak in Hindi. And don't think you are better than us just because you can speak in English." This attitude reinforces the view that "English is something that's not for you." Pivoting to describe his own experience, he said:

Vikram: People have once or twice said that to me. They'd be like, "You're such a nice guy when you talk in Hindi. You are such a genuine guy. But then you switch to English." And it might seem for them, because they have the idea that English is a second language, that the person like who always spoke in English, it's just not needed.

Vikram related his experiences to language politics and expressed disdain for the dominant Hindi nationalist view that all Indians should speak Hindi when it is only widely spoken in some states and there are many varieties of the language (see Brass 1990; Dua 1994; Rai 2000; Sridhar 1987):

Vikram: Because the northerners do not really consider that there's this whole other culture issue where the northerners are like, "Everybody should speak Hindi." This is a complete bullshit idea, one nation, one language. I'm like, Hindi is spoken in four states [sic]. And there's not even one Hindi.

Referencing his heritage on his father's side, he mentioned that Tamilians are "very chauvinistic" about language, but then, correcting himself, explained, "They are not chauvinists. They are very proud of their language."[11] His recounting of his visits to Tamil Nadu shows how the use of English instead of Tamil was negatively perceived by his relatives:

Vikram: Whenever I would go to Tamil Nadu, not very frequently, but say once in three years or something like that. And I talk to my auntie in Hindi and English. Because that's what we speak, how we speak, in English. Talking to my mother they say. They are very direct: "Oh, talk in Tamil, talk in Tamil if you can." They are very vehement about it.

Returning to national language politics, he added that he recently attended an academic panel in which a woman said that English is dominant in India, not because it is a common language but because of the history of colonization. But he noted that

English is a universal language, and thus, a "tool of bonding." He said that lower classes increasingly desire to learn English and predicted that eventually all Indian schools will be English medium.

Vikram considers speaking English as a primary or first language to be something that distinguishes him from his classmates and some of his family members. Similar to Aaisha, he points to the uniqueness of his speech and his sociolinguistic experiences. His conflicted stance toward the idea of mother tongue is not just rooted in his use of English but in his rather fragmented relationship to Indian languages (Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam), which is a result of his parents' mixed linguistic heritage and his family's multigenerational migration history. But claiming English as a mother tongue was not possible for Vikram, although he did not explain why. As consistent with Irvine's (2022) methodological observation, what he did not say in the interview is particularly notable. Vikram's stance that he does not have a mother tongue demonstrates a lack of fit with widely accepted sociolinguistic models and the views conveyed by the other students interviewed.

Vikram used the ideological point that there is a distinction between Hindi as national language and English as colonial language not to take a subject position himself, but to disparage the idea of a single national language. He gave evidence that many languages can embody a sense of belonging to regions, which can shift as one travels from north to south. What remains problematic for Vikram is the attitude that others have about his speaking English, for its class markedness and for its replacement of what is imagined as offering a more friendly persona or an identification with a regional or national identity.

Like Vikram, other students widely discussed English in the context of their socialization to IITGN academic life and their everyday experiences on campus. When LaDousa asked Deepa, the Malayali MASC student from Mumbai (see above), if students struggle with language, she tellingly began talking about English:

1. Chaise: And, uh, does anyone come [to IITGN] and struggle with language a bit? Have you heard of such cases?

2. Deepa: Ah. I have heard of such cases. I have heard that those who did not predominantly undergo their education in, uh, English medium have a little tougher time to come here. We have a mandatory writing course with us, with faculty.

In discussions of academics, the students mentioned their English writing more than their speaking, which is consistent with the emphasis on performance on exams in Indian education (Kumar 1988). Some explained how students in the social sciences and humanities were expected to have a higher level of English proficiency than MTech students, whose success is primarily measured by technical expertise. In fact, some MTech students said that professors are often lenient about their English grammar on exams if they demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the material.

In her interview with LaDousa, Praji, who said she spoke both Marathi and Hindi at home but did not explicitly name either as a mother tongue (see above), described her journey to improving her English, focusing on her speech. She had learned some English growing up from reading books and watching DVDs, but she had little experience speaking it "because nobody around me spoke in English." Even though she attended an English-medium school, her teachers did not speak English outside of lessons. She recounted an incident at her junior college (grades 11 and 12) in Pune, a large city in Maharashtra, in which her teacher humiliated her for not speaking properly when she was called on (LaDousa initially thought she had interrupted the class):

1. Praji: A teacher started asking, "Where are you from? Why are you disturbing the class?"

2. Chaise: Because you were talking in English?

3. Praji: No. I wasn't talking properly. There were 200 people. She could not hear me.I tried to respond, but I could not speak properly. She said "You can't speak properly. How did you get in?"

4. Chaise: Wow. Did it make you feel bad?

5. Praji: It felt horrible. All of my classmates were staring at me, right?

Praji improved her spoken English proficiency by chatting with people at the British Council Library, which was near her home. Learning to write was also difficult because initially she had to write sentences in Marathi and then translate them into English (see Chidsey 2018 on such practices in Hindi-speaking North India). She added that even though she has been using English for seven or eight years, her speech is still flawed:

Praji: When I speak, it's not flawless. I stumble at times. I can speak well. I'm not saying I cannot speak.

But after pointing out that students from Indian language-medium backgrounds and small towns struggle with English the most, she noted:

Praji: And overall I would say that all Indian students struggle with English. Because we never use it apart from here [at IITGN]. It's not our language.

Praji's invocation of English as foreign underscores the fact that Indians do not develop full fluency in the language because they do not get enough practice speaking it.

Later in the interview, Praji shifted to discuss English in relation to the national sphere:

Praji: I also think it's necessary in India to learn English because we do not have a language like German and Japanese that unites the whole country. We have to rely on a language which was adopted from our colonizers so that's okay. But at the same time it's okay to speak in our languages as well.

While she began to take up the position that Vikram decried, that a single language would unite the country, she proceeded to make the case that English can coexist with Indian languages even though one in wrapped up in colonial structures of power. A male MTech student from the northern state of Haryana named Ashish, in an interview with Praji, also stressed the usefulness of English. He noted in Hindi that many people think that English is being imposed on Indians, but then questioned the advantage of his language (Hindi) when he cannot even use it to order a glass of water in Tamil Nadu. But while Praji brought up the utility of English as a common language she also stressed the importance of speaking "our languages." Semiotically, this term assumes that one can possess an index of belonging from a suite of possibilities that are what they are because, in part, they are not English. Earlier in the interview she had, in fact, described her language as a "slang" variety of Hindi that she presumably speaks with her father and paternal grandmother. This is similar to Aaisha, who described her Muslim variety of Malayalam as "my slang." But, as relevant to Irvine's (2022) point, it is telling that Praji did not explicitly name either Marathi or Hindi as a mother tongue. She may simply have found it more useful to describe her multilingual practices than to try to reconcile them with notions of mother tongue (e.g., she discussed how her father would speak to her in Hindi and she would sometimes answer in Marathi).

While Praji appeared critical of her English at various points in the interview, she is clearly a competent English speaker, as she made clear to LaDousa when she said "I'm not saying I can't speak" (see above). A high achieving student, she mentioned at the end of the interview that she had recently published a blog article in a major

science journal. As is the case with many IITGN students, her self-criticism speaks to her considerable achievement in English, which is the result of hard work and resourcefulness.

Although they do not identify with the difference in taking up a subject position, several students, in the context of their upbringing and schooling, spoke about their English as if it were in competition with Indian languages. A female MASC student from Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, for instance, expressed regret that she never learned her paternal grandmother's Bhojpuri (a regional variety spoken in the Hindi Belt) because her mother had pushed her to use English and she preferred to speak Hindi with her friends (see Hardy 2015 on Bhojpuri regional nationalism). Other students discussed how their switch to the English medium in secondary school meant that they did not develop written proficiency in their first languages. The female MASC student from West Bengal, Aarya, said she had wanted to study literature in what she described as her mother tongue of Bengali, but her mother had dissuaded her from it because it would not benefit her future job prospects. But she felt strongly that it was necessary to get exposure to Bengali nationalism to counter Hindi nationalism (see Chakrabarty 2000 on Bengali nationalism).

Although mixing Indian languages and English in speech is ubiquitous at IITGN, as discussed above, students rarely discussed sociolinguistic uses of such across contexts. Aaisha, in fact, was the only student to mention that English is a part of her speech in her mother tongue. In an interview Praji conducted with four male Mtech students, one from Haryana (Ashish, see above) and three from Rajasthan, they, in a mix of Hindi and English, stated their preference to express emotions in their mother tongue (several other students made similar comments):

1. Ashish: emotions *jab nikaltī hai* mother tongue *mẽ hī nikaltī hai*. (When emotions are expressed, then they are expressed in the mother tongue.)

2. Rajesh: emotions *kabhī, kabhī aise nikaltā ki jaise merī* language *hai to usmẽ, to aise* English *mẽ nikaltā*, "oh god, what happened?" *lekin hindī mẽ agar kuch lag jāyegī to "bīz, kyā ho gayā yār, lagtī rahatī hai yār*." (*Emotions*, sometimes. . .they are expressed sometimes in my *language*, sometimes in *English*, like "*oh god, what happened*," but in Hindi if I get hurt then it is like "beez, what happened friend, this is hurting friend.")[12]

3. Gopal: expressions emotions *sab hī* represent *karne ke liye* mother tongue *hī* best *hai jaise* cricket *khelnā to kuch* wicket *le liyā*. (*Mother tongue* is the *best* to *represent* all types of *expressions* and *emotions*, like when one is playing *cricket*, and somebody takes a *wicket*.)

When Ashish brought up the idea of emotions in line 1, Rajesh, in pointing out that sometimes emotions are expressed in his own language and sometimes in English, voiced himself reacting to being hurt in English and Hindi. In the Hindi version, he replaced the vocative "god" with "*yār*" (friend). Gopal, in line 3, using a cricket scenario to reinforce his friends' points, drew on the rhyme of the English "cricket" and "wicket" in a Hindi sentence. Taking a wicket is an especially dramatic event within the game. Rather than explaining how they mix Hindi and English, these young men exemplified their practices through direct statements and voicing their own utterances. They thus performed rather than described their mixing and switching practices.

The students' switching of Indian languages and English also came up in discussions of text messaging.[13] Some said that they type in Bengali, Malayalam, or Hindi script, but others noted that they write these in Roman even though scripts for these Indian languages are readily available on their phones. A female Hindu MTech student from Andhra Pradesh explained that she texts in different languages depending on the context. She texts in a minority Dravidian language for religious festivals and in English with her classmates because her Hindi texting is lacking:

"Whenever I type something in Hindi, they just tell me, 'What is this?' They always make fun of me." Students' adjustments to academic and social life at IITGN were invariably tied up with improving their English, and consistent with this, they often referred to English as a skill to be acquired. While reflections on mother tongue kept Indian linguistic varieties and English apart, in subsequent discussion about practices, students made obvious that English and Indian languages are co-present in everyday communication. They provided specific examples or performed recognition of this fact rather than describing it, as in the above example. This was likely because the invocation of English in matters of identity often raises its association with colonialism and its contrast with Indian languages, or sometimes, simply, "our languages."

Conclusion

While India's NEP makes limited mention of English, it uses the notion of mother tongue to identify students and imagine their relationship to the national sphere. By examining how IITGN graduate students from across the nation reflected on their lives and practices, this article identifies as central two interrelated dimensions of postcolonial semiotics (Reyes 2021). First, the students reproduced the notion that to claim English is to forego a mother tongue and that to claim a mother tongue is to eschew identification with English. Thus, the state poses a necessary arrangement to its students, reproducing a colonial distinction between mother tongue and English, and students cannot avoid, it seems, its logic of identification. Identification with the nation requires that one thinks of oneself in terms of mother tongue. But in their talk about mother tongues, students revealed a second dimension of postcolonial semiotic. They demonstrated that mother tongues are sometimes problematic in their uptake, resemble English when English is used for identification, and often intermingle with English in practice. Thus, students reproduced the identificatory logic of national education policy at the same time that they demonstrated that it reinforces a dualism that their lives complicate.

The fact that postcolonial semiotics pervaded the interviews is most apparent in the distinction between Vikram and everyone else. Vikram's identification brings to the fore the incompatibility between English and national belonging mediated by the notion of mother tongue. Because he identifies strongly with English, Vikram could not claim a mother tongue. What is so striking about Vikram's disavowal of possessing a mother tongue is that his description of what made his identification with English so strong mimicked many of the ways that students described their mother tongues (he even referred to it as his primary and first language). English was spoken in his childhood home, his father and everyone else spoke it, and Vikram possessed obvious proficiency in it. In summary, despite the fact that he offered descriptions that precisely mirrored descriptions of mother tongues, he denied having a mother tongue. The emphasis of his denial stands in contrast to the obviousness with which the mother tongue question was met by everyone else.

But even though most of the students readily identified with a mother tongue, as soon as they began to talk about their lives, they demonstrated the limitations of the concept of mother tongue as an adequate descriptor. Most described home as a place where many languages were spoken. The consequences of multilingualism for one's identification—in the sense that a particular language might become especially important—became salient when students discussed travel to see relatives (e.g., Vikram) or talked about parents or grandparents having migrated and resettled in their hometown (e.g., Vikram, Praji, and Arvind). On campus, students talked about their regional language affiliations and their possibilities for bonding (the MTech student from Rajasthan), the common use of Hindi (and the fact that students who could not speak Hindi could not participate in such interactions), as well as the ways that texting made apparent options for scripts and associated dimensions of language use. English was one of the most pervasive themes the students discussed. They

reported vastly different experiences with English in keeping with its entanglements in the pre-university education system and its reproduction of social inequality. Ideological reflections on English were not organized by the regional logic that often underpinned candidates for mother tongues. And students could not make sense of English in relation to Indian languages in a single organizing ideological field.

When students did try to make sense of the relationship between candidates for mother tongues and English, they most often invoked the association of English with colonialism. Mother tongues and English are semiotically incompatible when considered to be indexical of national belonging and, in overt reflection, English came forth with colonial associations. As mentioned above, perhaps this is precisely why it was in moments of performance—where the iterability of interaction rather than description was at work—that the intermingling of mother tongues and English was possible (and obvious). Indeed, it was when Ashish, Rajesh, and Gopal discussed whether the mother tongue is best for expressing emotions that they used English, both to make the case itself and to offer emotionally charged expressions. English became relevant when the particular virtues of the mother tongue were being elaborated. This irony is characteristic of the postcolonial semiotics that Reyes (2021) identifies. It is precisely when that which is associated with belonging to the nation that the element not available for national cathexis emerges—not in an antithetical position, but, rather, as part of everyday practice.

This article follows much scholarly work in postcolonial societies that argue that to describe the complexity of everyday language practices and ideologies requires attention to the complex, uneven, fraught, and shifting position of English with respect to differently imaged local, state, and regional languages and linguistic varieties. But what the IITGN students revealed with their discursive reflections is a postcolonial semiotics that the state's education policies are yet to address. Perhaps policy cannot address the fact that mother tongues are not equal vehicles of national belonging and that the identification with English shares semiotic dimensions with the identification with mother tongues because to do so would pull policy measures into the same contradictions that students face and would likely produce critique. Given that the students in this study are at an elite university, it would be fascinating to explore the resonation of policy among students studying in less prestigious venues, as well as among people at other institutions such as banks, call centers, and corporations. And given that mother tongue is a salient issue in other postcolonial nations, how do the people there problematize the postcolonial semiotics presented by policy measures?

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Notes

1. Language ideologies have been defined as "conceptualizations about languages, speakers, and discursive practices," which, like other kinds of ideologies, are "pervaded with political and moral interests, and are shaped in a cultural setting" (Irvine 2012, para. 1). For

literature on language ideologies, see Kroskrity (2000); Gal and Irvine (2019); Silverstein (1979); Woolard (1998); and Woolard and Schieffelin (1994).

2. For more discussion on the multiple meanings of mother tongue, see Khubchandani (2003); LaDousa (2010); Nadkarni (1994) and Pattanayak (1981).

3. See Hastings (2008) and Ramaswamy (1999) on ideologies of Sanskrit as a mother tongue.

4. The NEP states: "Home language is usually the same language as the mother tongue or that which is spoken by local communities. However, at times in multi-lingual families, there can be a home language spoken by other family members which may sometimes be different from mother tongue or local language" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2020, 13).

5. The NEP states, "Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage in terms of economic growth, social justice and equality, scientific advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation" (Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2020, 3).

6. In using the phrase "Indian language-medium education" we are referring to the designation of school types rather than the larger field of language difference.

7. We use pseudonyms for all IITGN students.

8. Irvine writes, "To see the ideological work that people do in talk, one should pay attention to the contrasts they draw, and notice not only what they say but what they leave out —what people do not mention, especially if somebody else does" (2022, 11).

9. Scholarship attests to the fact that names for languages in circulation in colonial and contemporary India include "*bhāṣā*" or "language" in Hindi (Khubchandani 1997; LaDousa 2004; Lelyveld 1993; Majeed 2019). Such names did not emerge in the interviews conducted at IITGN. A likely reason is the highly educated backgrounds of the students.

10. A reviewer suggested that Deepa might be utilizing a North Indian stereotype of South Indian scripts.

11. See Ramaswamy (1997) on the history of Tamil devotion and the Dravidian nationalist movement, which gained momentum in the Madras Presidency from the 1930s to the 1950s.

12. "Beez" seems to be akin to "ow" or "ouch." The authors are unfamiliar with the expression.

13. A rapidly growing literature addresses digital practices in India and elsewhere in South Asia (see Davis and LaDousa 2020; LaDousa and Davis 2022b; and Punathambekar and Mohan 2019 for overviews).

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