

Preface

This intermixture of the Indian languages and English...is not a mirage: by now, after nearly two centuries of continuous aesthetic refinement, the highly crafted 'English' of Indian-English literature is full of the long shadows of Indian languages. The indigenous languages are some among the social, political, and aesthetic elements that have penetrated the English language in its alien environment on the subcontinent, and like other precolonial and noncolonial presences, they have leaked continuously into this literature through the aperture that opened inside two hundred years ago....this shadowy interspersation constitutes a pervasive, internal 'decolonization' of English at the level of language itself. And, in the logic of intercultural contestation and 'post'-colonialism, that – perhaps – is exactly as it should be. (Dharwadkar, 2003: 262)

As scholars in World Englishes have long been testifying (e.g. Kachru, 1997; Smith & Forman, 1997), English in postcolonial communities is a splintered, hybrid English, being appropriated, nativized and adapted by local environments (Canagarajah, 1999a). Within this already fractured scene, though, exist splits and it is particular English-related divides as they occur in one particular postcolonial context (namely India) that is at the heart of this book. English, as the ensuing pages demonstrate, is entrenched in the heart of a class-based divide (with ancillary ones of gender and caste as well) and issues of inequality, subordination and unequal value seem to revolve directly around its general positioning with Vernacular languages. This issue of English – access to it, being fluent in it, 'moving up' in the world because of it – playing a divisive role on the post-colonial ground has generally remained unarticulated. The English that I speak of in this book is Indian/South-Asian English: I am proceeding from the assumption that it is its own variety and has to be understood as such with subtle shadings and nuances of its own and not as a variety that should be compared to 'native-speaking varieties of English'. As the quote from Dharwadkar (2003: 262) points out, English has cast 'long shadows' for more than a couple of centuries on the subcontinent constituting a 'decolonizing' at the 'level of language itself'. Postcolonial hybridity – of the sort on which the book is based – by its nature implies nativizing; i.e.

appropriating the colonizer's language (in this case, English) to fit and reflect local ways of thinking, knowing, behaving, acting and reasoning in the world. In some instances, the contexts of appropriation are fraught with tension, producing instances of outright rejection or mockery. In other contexts, the appropriation 'seems' relatively 'seamless'. Regardless, though, appropriation and nativization are the default in such contexts, occupying different points on several co-existing biliteracy continua that makes room for both gradual development and occasional back-tracking (Hornberger, 2003), and it is on this hybrid *continuous* ground that the present searching is to be understood. Indeed, as some of the chapters will point out (specifically Chapters 3 and 6), 'localizing' and 'nativizing' occupy different points of several intersecting literacy continua, being more or less obvious in the relatively divergent 'Vernacular-medium' and 'English-medium' settings.

The issue of how language policies at all levels – nation-wide, state-wide, institutional – impact schooling-related domains on such hybrid continuous grounds is central to the book as well. While the book is not about issues in language policy and planning *per se*, it is about the ways in which students, teachers and institutions interpret and engage with particular language policies to build bridges across perceived chasms, while respecting tensions in contact zones. Much of the scholarship in language policy and planning (e.g. Baker, 2000; Bauldauf & Luke, 1990; Cummins, 1988, 2000; Hornberger, 2003; Spolsky, 1986; Tollefson, 1995; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000; May, 2001) has already paved the way for the 'situated' understanding of language policies undertaken here. Indeed, along with research in other bi/multilingual realms (Baker [2003] in the context of Wales; Bloch and Alexander [2003] in the context of South African schools and Mercado [2003] in the context of Latino youths in New York), the present exploration offers glimpses into some of the complex ways in which language policies around bi/multilingualism get connected to 'local' facets on the ground; i.e. how language policies become social practices; how they are interpreted and resisted by teachers and institutions; how they connect to larger political ideologies; and how they reinforce existing social stratifications. In other words, the book views *language policies as hybrid entities* in themselves, drawing their force and movement from the lives of real peoples and their motivations.

While this notion of hybridity is the general default of this book, certain dichotomies do exist and while that might seem contradictory at first glance (how can one ascribe to the fluid/hybrid nature of all beings, while also adopting a more generalized view?), it is, in fact, not that incongruous at all. Postmodern views of cultures and peoples as being fluid and

dynamic and of all identities being hybrid are most valuable, most especially because they give us a way of talking about individuals in contexts. But social stratifications of class, caste, ethnicity and gender in societies still exist and when languages – especially English and the Vernaculars in postcolonial contexts – seem to fall along those lines, then a critically and ethnographically oriented researcher has little choice but to address the chasms as well. In this sense, then, the book contributes to the larger globalization and English narrative by singling out instances of divides lying latent beneath contexts of appropriation. Synthetic as the yoking of hybridity and stratification may seem, it is a yoking that I have deliberately chosen to construct, since it is the only one that to me (right now) seems comprehensive and honest. So, over and above the contact zones in which the learners, teachers, institutions and I find ourselves, this book carves out yet another one, namely one in ‘research’ orientation and methods: I situate this book squarely in the centre of both hybridism and chasms, fluidity and fixed points. Paradoxical as it may seem, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Yet another tension in the ‘researching’ aspect of this exploration deserves mention, namely conflicts between capturing the dynamic fluid aspects of reality, including numerous voices and my own vacillating role as insider and outsider, in the mummified, frozen genres of writing. Because I am writing about fellow human beings – indeed, fellow Indians – questioning, thinking and participating in their everyday teaching and learning domains, I have felt, time and again, that the genres oriented to ‘empirically-oriented’ explorations fall short: they do not, by any means, even begin to capture the myriad, contradictory ways in which gulfs and bridges get noticed and overcome. Yet, I am drawing on these genres because they are the venues through which my writing is most likely to reach readers. As I explain in some detail in the Introduction, these and other clashing strains inform most aspects of this piece of work.

As will be apparent, I write here of several chasms in the complex socio-educational landscape that raised and schooled me, including the crucial one of ‘English-medium’ (EM) and ‘Vernacular-medium’ (VM) (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). Partially constituted by colonial legacy and post-colonial practice, this gulf pits students educated in the VM in unequal opposition to those educated in the EM in India. As one schooled in the EM, I, in this exploration, partially understand how college-going VM students get positioned in the English–Vernacular divide and the ways in which they and their teachers negotiate the relative importance accorded to English in their lives. While I intuitively and intellectually sensed that their journeys were quite different from mine and others like me, it was

not until I actually began my forays into the VM worlds that I realized the extent and depth of certain chasms. The metaphor of gulfs and bridges that I use throughout the book, then, needs to be understood against an overall backdrop of an amalgam of sustained splintering and unceasing contact.

The explorations offered in this book represent several conflicting sentiments that have stayed with me through the researching process. The discursive act of writing, where, for the sake of coherence and argument, I have selectively held up some facets for scrutiny, seems to belie the plurality of the context. I realize that this is a troubling issue that is going to continue to plague researchers that do this kind of research. Another difficult issue has to do with my speaking for students and teachers in the VM. As one raised in and bred in the EM track of the Indian educational system, I ask myself constantly if I can speak for a group of learners and teachers whose experiences were, in many ways, quite different from my own. While these questions have pestered me all along, the key issue that has kept me focused on the project has been the overwhelming support I have received from all (EM and VM) people engaged in teaching VM students and from the VM students themselves. Unequivocally, these people have maintained that the wide gap between the two mediums – set in place – from the kindergarten to the 12th grade level – is one that is seldom seriously and critically addressed at the tertiary level. Change, slow and gradual as it is in all educational systems, starts with an analytic consciousness of problems in the first place and, for me, the present endeavor represents early steps toward addressing some realities regarding the divisive role of English on the Indian postcolonial ground. So it is with mixed emotions that I present this to the Applied Linguistics/TESOL worlds. I have tried, as much as possible, to walk the fine line between being a ‘researcher’ and ‘native’ and I cannot really tell if I have succeeded. And I suppose, in the end, it does not really matter, except to the (VM) students, teachers and administrators since it is they who gave unstintingly of their time and energy.

Very many people have helped me over these seven years with this endeavor – students, faculty, administrators, former deans and supervisors. Several went out of their way to call my attention to finer points in the educational machinery. I especially thank Father Francis Parmar, S.J., Father Vincent Saldana, S.J., Father Vincent Braganza, S.J., Arati Kumar, Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Rita Kothari, Sarvar Sherry Chand and Suguna Ramanathan at the Jesuit institution for their unwavering support about all issues Vernacular. At the business college, Havovi Trivedi helped me to see how English, the Vernaculars, disciplines and class simultaneously

inform aspects of language teaching and learning, while Chirag Trivedi, himself schooled in the Vernacular, works to build bridges for VM students in this (EM) setting. Mr D.B. Pandya, Tarlaben Desai, Mr T.J. Purani and Kinjal Desai at the women's college spent long hours with me in empty classrooms in the women's college explaining to me their local struggles against the English–Vernacular gulf, both in and out of the classroom. The EM and VM students at all three colleges sacrificed many of their free periods talking to me and showing me their notes. Dinkar Trivedi and Vijay Sherry Chand – neither of whom are affiliated with the institutions described here but who have worked for years in Vernacular-related educational realms – helped enormously by helping me piece together the political background of English and the Vernaculars in Gujarat. Suguna Ramanathan and Sarvar Sherry Chand, who have spent years in the English–Vernacular trenches in Ahmedabad, have given me nuanced feedback each time I have sought it.

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Writing (2003, 12(2): 130–132, 145–147) and are reprinted here by permission from Elsevier.

My greatest debt I owe to my family – my husband, Jody, and daughter, Aasha – for not only providing the lighter moments during the entire process but for serving as sounding boards for my ideas and observations. My parents, to whom this book is dedicated, represent to me the intermingling of English and the Vernaculars, as nothing else can. Direct products of colonial times while rooted in home-grown Vernacular traditions, they at once let me see how relations between English and Vernaculars in postcolonial contexts are simultaneously overlapping and dichotomous, divisive and not. They live out the dominant metaphor of gulfs and bridges used in this book by showing me, often in unspoken, quiet ways, that if all gulfs need bridges, then the first step is to look for and understand gulfs. Bridges (and resistance), then, are not far behind, if not already there. This book remains a tribute to them.

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