

Citizens of the English Language: Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Indian Subjectivity

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Abstract

This paper presents what I call extralingual citizenship which theorizes an expansion of translingualism to include the ethnoracial logic of the nation-state and demonstrate the entanglement of language, governance, and education in the policing of knowledge infrastructures and discursive practices. I build on the work of Kachru on World Englishes, Tupas on unequal Englishes and extralinguistic value, Rosa and Flores on raciolinguistic ideologies, and translingual scholars such as Trimbur, Cannagararah, and Gilyard to frame extralingualism as a kind of citizenship, attempting to shift the focus of English pedagogy and practice away from the syntactical and etymological concerns of language use to the agentive potential of the language user. I center this study in India, framing the English language as an archive of the memory and afterlife of colonialism, exploring the idea of extralingualism through (i) Gauri Vishwanathan's Gramscian exploration of English literary study in colonial India, (ii) autobiographical fictions written by Ahmed Ali, Ramabai Ranade, and Shevantibai M. Nikambe, (iii) a juxtaposition of the formative language debates of the Constituent Assembly of India with the recently updated National Education Policy of 2020, and lastly (iv) a comparison of the Spoken English coaching industry in India with Writing Centers in India's emerging private liberal arts schools to speak to the English-markets reified by extralingually differentiated Englishes. My aim, across the full scope of this project, is to reframe English as a contested linguistic field where multiple Englishes become analogous to the respective forms of capitalism, sociality, and subjectivity constructed through them.

Keywords: Extralingual Citizenship, World Englishes, Translingualism, Extralinguistic Value, linguistic Imperialism, Decolonial Language Pedagogy, Nation-State/Colonial Governmentality

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Introduction: Whose English Is It Anyway?

It begins with a closeup. We see the skewed shadow of a man against a glossy white wall, its volumetric silence broken only by his energetic voice. He says:

Hey, bro, let me tell you what had went down. I was two bands away from getting, bro, whole barber shop, bro. Come on, mama. Bro. Peanut gonna call my phone talking about. I just got paid. I looked at the phone. You just got paid? What?! Man, where the dice at? I'm ready to shoot. We can roll. Last time I shot with it, 1300 in my pocket. Easy. Off top.

The shot widens as he speaks, revealing a Black man leaning against the railing of a balcony. To his left sits another Black man—the multiple Grammy and Pulitzer Prize-winning rapper Kendrick Lamar—who asks, “What happened?”:

What happened? Man? Peanut is what happened. Had me hot on my mama. Hot. Seven, seven, seven. Back to back to back to back. Bro, I was mad. He was all in my bag, in my pockets and my whole Duffy. I was ready to get out.

The camera continues to zoom out. We now see an elderly white man sitting to the left of Lamar—the billionaire Ray Dalio. Three men sitting on a black wrought iron balcony, framed against the pristine white walls of an apartment building. Lamar turns to Dalio and says:

Actually, what he’s saying is, he saved up money to get a local barber shop. He then made a friendly business wager with Peanut and hoped to secure more money for his business, eventually losing it all with one roll of the dice. Ray, what do you think?

“I think his problem is volatility,” Ray replies, using a slew of high-handed financial jargon to encourage the man to diversify his investments. Lamar promptly translates. “Basically, bro, what he's saying is, slow money wins the race.”

In reviewing this exchange, consider: what compels Lamar to interpret on both men’s behalf? One would assume they are speaking the same language. Yet, Kendrick chooses to translate the Black man’s African American vernacular (AAVE) to a version of English that his white companion can understand. There’s relative ease in the way he conducts this translation: this role is clearly not new to him. In fact, one could argue that his translation isn’t even linguistic: it’s sociocultural and heteroglossic, telling of the epistemic imaginations that both men inhabit. One man’s “wager” becomes another’s “dice,” meaning transferred across signs even as its *extra-linguistic value*¹ is not, demonstrating a hybridity and internalized hierarchy within the English language and an unequal demand for translation amongst its variegated users. Put simply, all Englishes are not made equal; their social implications are marked by distinct ethn racial histories, haunted by vestiges of colonialism, feudal stratification, and slavery, which pervade the contemporary moment to inform a divergent constellation of subjectivities and material realities. Referencing Kachru, this “colonial present” informs the

¹Ruanni Tupas frames *‘extra-linguistic value’* as being “[...] attached to [White] English (and other contextually dominant languages/varieties) as a means of explaining the hegemony it enjoys, as well as to understand as (hidden) resistance the plethora of persistent ‘errors’ and ‘deviations’ that characterize non-elite use.” (2015: xi)

appropriation and pluricentrication² of the English language into multiple World Englishes (WE), fractured across an unequal exchange of linguistic centers and peripheries. Despite its seminality, Kachru's framing has been criticized for assuming a center-periphery binary in the evolution of English, overlooking the transcultural flows that contribute to the co-development of hybrid forms of local Englishes across geographic boundaries. While subsequent scholarly attention³ has attempted to address these critiques, the same cannot be said for public consciousness which attempts to resolve this using one of two strategies. First, in the disproportionate celebration of English as a global language: the multiplicity of Englishes is reframed as one single English expressed multiply. Secondly, by framing WE as deviating from a so-called Standard English (SE), resulting in the differentiation and hierarchization of colloquial sociolects and postcolonial English variants as peripheral. This is enacted through the institutional demand for English proficiency (IELTS, TOEFL, et. al.) and the formulation of TESOL as a distinct pedagogical code. While there are ongoing efforts to include WE within TESOL programs⁴, these attempts remain mostly peripheral with their biggest achievements limited to North America. Consequently, Lu & Horner have advocated for a translingual approach that situates language practices within a "temporal-spatial frame" where they are always "emergent, in process (a state of becoming), and their relations as mutually constitutive" (p. 587). However, Gilyard points out a "tendency to flatten language differences" in translingual theorizing, neglecting the fact that—while we all differ as language users—not everyone differs in the same way (2016, p. 287). This flattening of differences within intersecting reifications of WEs overlooks sociocultural variance, creating a "linguistic everyone."

Framing Extralingual Citizenship

My work emerges from this peculiar juncture: in an attempt to untangle the "everyone" into multiple "linguistic someone"s, I introduce the notion of *extralingual citizenship*. By virtue of its inherent social value, language functions as a sort of passport that reflexively informs societal access and individual subjectivity. This value is mediated by ideologies of the nation-state, the native speaker, racial and casteist supremacy, the ethnocentric myth of the monolithic nature of English, its hegemonic status over other languages, and the commodification of language—attitudes that were manufactured during the colonial era and remain largely undisputed in public consciousness, policy, and technology (Tupas, 2015, p. 6). Performed language has material force, as Gilyard (2016, p. 287) puts it, as demonstrated in the advertisement that opens this paper. Developed for CashApp in 2022, the advertisement raises Kendrick's translation of AAVE into a performance of the inequality of WEs. The implication of these imbalanced extralingual citizenships is obvious: consider Ebonics where the use of AAVE is institutionally penalized despite its commercial exploitation. In effect, while WEs as cultural commodities are grossly fetishized for capitalist consumption, their users continue to be delegitimized. In effect, by framing extralingualism as a form of citizenship, I aim to shift the focus of English pedagogy/practice from the syntactical concerns of language *use* to the agency of the language *user*, while highlighting

²Writing in *Other Tongues: English across cultures*, Kachru orders this pluricentrication in his "Three Circles of World Englishes" – the "Inner Circle", consisting of the sites of origin of the English language and its subsequent spread through the first diaspora, namely the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland & anglophone Canada; the "Outer Circle", sites created through British imperial expansion i.e. India, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, Philippines, and its other erstwhile colonies; and lastly, the "Expanded Circle", that includes sites where English plays no historical or governmental role but is still used for international communication, namely China, Russia, Japan, non-Anglophone Europe, South Korea, and Egypt.

³See B. B. Kachru, E. Schneider, C. Mair, et. al.

⁴See Young, Greenfield, Flores, Rosa, et. al.

the interconnections between language, education, subjectivity, and governance in shaping knowledge economies and discursive practices. Rather than flattening, I attempt to address “the erasure of historical and unresolved struggles that are involved in meaning-making practices and knowledge production” (García and Baca, 2019, p. 29).

The interaction of these processes is not linear: they occur as a living entanglement—a melting pot I call the *churn*. Language is perhaps most surreptitious in its regulation of social contact where the centrality of misunderstanding masks the very cause of this communicational distance. Misunderstanding is the first element of intercultural encounter, with the process of translation becoming the paradoxical site of both misinterpretation and language production. This is, however, a threat to centralized state machinery especially in nationalist societies where desires for monolingual identity deny the asymmetry of language use through institutional codification, further regulating the churn. The radical vitality of language use is thus characterized as language *misuse*, discreetly converting its essence into the evidence of its guilt. By extension, this language misuse creates a language *misuser*, dictating their value as both subject and commodity within neoliberal society, a regulatory spillage that manifests as a linguistic caste system, governing access to education, work, and social opportunity. Extralingual citizenship is, thus, an umbrella term that hopes to articulate these limitations, encompassing the various aspects of citizenship (social, racial, sexual, etc.), supplemented by language (*extralingual*, as in ‘over and above’) as well as those that are deeply linguistic (*extralingual*, as in ‘especially’), and can be understood as the unstable entanglement of both these readings and their resulting asymmetry. To illustrate, the following sections evaluate India as a site of continued extralingualism.

These English Masks, Those Colonial Roots

English, often referred to as the “global language of miscommunication” by Pennycook (2006, p. 5), exemplifies the asymmetries discussed thus far. Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* uncovers the co-development of British political and commercial interests and English literary education in India. The propagation of English among the natives served to uphold British authority and create a stable state conducive to British mercantile and military interests (p. 20). The institutionalization of English literary education, in this context, becomes one of many imperial strategies, gaining synonymy with notions of morality, virtue, and—most prominently—truth.

Between 1817 and 1835, the growing debate on the value of native languages and literary practices “was not simply over language or literature, but the *status of knowledge* itself” (p. 101, emphasis mine). Lord Babington Macaulay famously stated that a single shelf of a good European library was worth more than the entire native literature of India and Arabia. In response, Orientalist John Tyler argued for the preservation of Indigenous knowledge, emphasizing its value in understanding the history of scientific and philosophical systems and the steps taken to arrive at truth. Here, theories of curricular policy are raised into binary evaluations of the truth claim of knowledge, with nativity constructed akin to error, falsity, and dogma, and English—with its Biblical associations and post-Enlightenment brand of intellectuality—bearing the ultimate claim to truth. By a simple leap of imagination, this logic is extended to its respective language (mis)users, mirroring the xenophobic discourse on purity, whose traces now inform the “appropriateness” of WEs and the slow cognitive rupture of their speakers.

The conclusion of the debate I outline above saw the adoption of Lord Bentinck's 1835 English Education Act decreeing that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone" (p. 41). English, in this instance, becomes a proxy for European knowledge; in turn, "Englishness" becomes a metonym for Europeanness, transferring its imposed superiority over indigeneity onto the language itself. It reads as a simple formula: to know English is to gain access to Europe, to civilized intellectuality and high morality. Colonial subjectivity is haunted by the vestiges of this hegemony, forcing heteroglossic language users to tear their psyche on linguistic lines, assigning asymmetric values to the language-of-home (say, one's mother tongue) and the language-of-society (here, English). Quoting Nandy:

Such disjunctions between politics and culture became possible because it is only partly true that a colonial situation produces a theory of imperialism to justify itself. Colonialism is also a psychological state rooted in earlier forms of social consciousness in both the colonizers and the colonized. It represents a certain cultural continuity and carries a certain cultural baggage. (p. 2)

How do we make sense of the cultural baggage that comes with the English language? English has since taken on many forms in its postcolonial life, and yet the conflation of 'truth' with English continues, only now it is reserved for a specific kind of 'proper' metropolitan English, as Kachru et. al. have articulated in earlier scholarship. What that English is specifically? Nobody knows. In practice, it isn't simply *what* English is performed but *who* it is performed by that ultimately validates its claim to legitimacy.

One needn't look further than the synthetic construction of Babu English in colonial India as a separate "illegitimate" variety spoken by India's English-educated bureaucracy to understand the mapping of racial identity onto language use and vice versa. This is similar to how AAVE, Spanglish, and other BIPOC English registers are delegitimized today, astutely illustrated in Rosa and Flores' concept of raciolinguistic ideologies or "the process through which language and race are co-constructed to frame the language practices of racialized communities as inferior" (2015, p. 149-152). Here, V Sreeja on Babu English:

Dubbed as the mimic men, they [Babus] were the favourite objects of lampoon of many Indian and English fiction writers and ironically they were ridiculed for the same facts they were admired for – their knowledge/a little knowledge of English, their (almost successful) aping of other symbols of Englishness and the apparent, relative proximity to the colonial master. The evolution (or counter evolution) of the term Babu is in itself testimony to the process of denigration that the class suffered in the wake of colonisation. Although it ["Babu"] is used as a courteous term of address in many Indian languages, the raj period bestowed it with a contemptuous sense. [...] In an attempt to elevate themselves to the levels of their masters, they end up being laughing stocks. (2019, p. 13)

In her analysis of English language letters written by Bengali civil servants in late 19th century India, Sreeja defines the Babu English style as being marked by "excessive stylistic ornamentation, politeness and indirectness," "the discourse organization [...] of a South Asian language", and an inordinate "use of subservient address forms." For instance: "With deep regret and unfeigned sorrowfulness your poor slave approaches his poor tale at the footsteps of your honours throne... he may meet with forgiveness of his sins" (Arnold, 1891, p. 6).

These were, she continues, “part of linguistic forms prescribed for [English] subordinates to use in addressing their superiors during the early days of the British rule in India” (2020, p. 144). And yet, when mimicked by brown ‘Babus,’ these linguistic forms become a recipe for ridicule. Evidently, language skins meaning, even as the color of one’s skin informs what value is afforded to them.

Authored Subjectivity: An Extralingual Reading Ahmed Ali’s ‘Twilight in Delhi’

It was the eve of Indian independence. After fourteen years as a scholar, teacher, and novelist, the Urdu literary icon Ahmed Ali found himself at Nanjing University in China. He had just been appointed Visiting Professor and would spend two years teaching English at the behest of the British Council. Ending his tenure in 1948, Ali sought to return to his native Delhi. However, the India he had left behind no longer existed. In the time since his departure, his country had endured an unstable mitosis, splintering the subcontinent into two conjoined twins in a violent partition of land, livelihood, and language. One colony became two free nations, and yet, Ali became a new kind of prisoner. Having never stated his preference, the Ambassador of India in China K.P.S. Menon denied his return to India, arguing that as a Muslim he would have to go to Pakistan—which is where he would live until the day he died, never again returning to the streets he called home.

Eight years prior, at the height of the Progressive Writers’ Movement (PWM), Ali had written *Twilight in Delhi*, a prescient novel set in the wake of English colonialism. Taking place between 1911 and 1919 in newly-colonized New Delhi, the book explores the complex forces shaping the city—parallels that Ali would personally experience not even a decade later—through the perspectives of two protagonists: Mir Nihal, the father who longs for lost Mughal glory, and Asghar, the son who embraces English modernity. Albeit not stated explicitly, these two imaginaries capture a central tension within the novel, a loose binary negotiation of past and future, as understood and embodied by these two characters. I explore the negotiation of these subjective ideals through the metaphor of twilight (borrowed from the title of the novel), of a waning day slowly melting into the purple embers of a new evening, the slow middle between an end and a beginning. Reflecting on the novel, Sumatra Baral writes:

Twilight indicates in-betweenness and liminality – the position of Delhi between two languages – English and Urdu and two empires, the Mughal and the British. [...] Twilight, which usually hints at a transition between day and night, here posits itself between life and death, tradition and change, orthodoxy and progression. (2021)

This half-light semi-darkness speaks to the bilingual (if not plurilingual) colonial speakers’ experience of the in-between, of a sort of double consciousness engendered by their oscillation between linguistic traditions, further heightened in the case of *Twilight* by Ali’s choice to author the novel in English, despite local criticism and constant rejection from British publishers. The novel was part of an enormous body of controversial work produced by Ali and his peers in PWM. These were Urdu literary dissidents, attempting to shake the foundations of socioreligious orthodoxy through a radical retelling of North India, most notably in a collection of Urdu short stories titled *Angaaray* that would ultimately be banned (fig. 1). And yet, Ali chose to write *Twilight* in English. Could we read this as the author mirroring his younger protagonist’s English aspirations? Ali offers clarification in a 1975 interview:

I have been wondering why I write in English. [...] It was not because, as some people have said, that I wanted to curry favor with the British. That's nonsense. It was an escape for me from many things. I could not express myself in Urdu when I was young, so I had to express myself somehow and English was all right for them [his family] ~ it was the ruler's language, the baré sahib's [big officer's] language, so they couldn't take objection to that in their minds. [...] Urdu had been taken away from me because of the great resentment people had toward my writing in Urdu. (JSAL, 1975, p. 122-3)

His comments point to the position English holds as a marker of social mobility and intellectual progress in Indian society. Could this explain the motivations behind his choice to write in the language of the colonizer? Or did he claim it as his own?

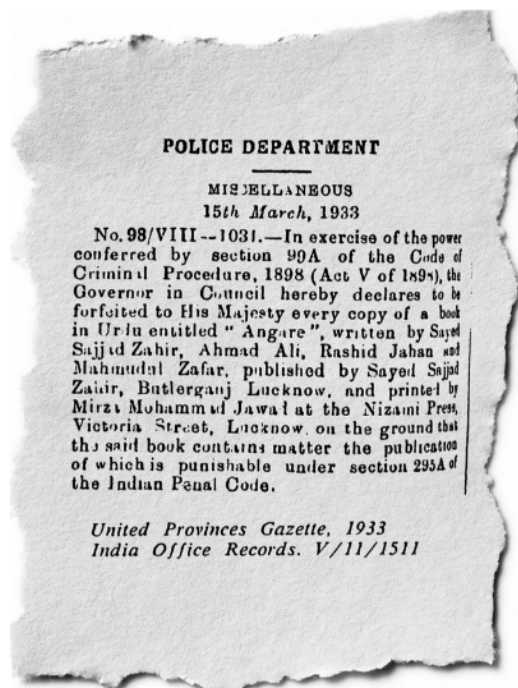


Figure 1 (left): Police notification on the ban of *Angaaray*, published in the *United Provinces Gazette* in 1933. Figure 2 (right): A portrait of Ahmed Ali smoking a pipe, circa 1955.

Within and beyond the novel, we encounter transitory subjectivities, author and character reflexively experiencing and redefining themselves within a marked discontinuity. Twilight, in this context, becomes a mode of knowledge, an in-between that resists description, a liminal (un)becoming that transgresses two imaginaries of seeming incompatibility, conjuring a discontinuum that is as generative as it is inertial. I locate my research within this linguistic twilight, investigating the transitory subjectivities that emerged and (d)evolved in response to English and the powers, specific sites—be it caste, class, or gender location—and motivations that informed this transfiguration.

Sexual Englishes: An Extralingual Reading of Ramabai Ranade's 'Himself'

In thinking about English and its emergent subjectivities, I turn to a 2012 book by Shefali Chandra titled *The Sexual Life of English: Languages of Caste and Desire in Colonial India*. Chandra's reading of the history of English education in India artfully introduces gender and caste as active agents in the articulation of new subjectivities, socialities, and forms of extralingual citizenship. Using a wealth of relatively unknown literature from the turn of the 20th century, written primarily by women authors from the subcontinent, her work captures the surreptitious ways in which British India's English-educated Indian elite secured the power of the English language within their own caste and class position (p. 5). While their register was derogatorily termed Babu English, as previously discussed, knowledge of the language ultimately afforded elite natives new ways to extend their privilege in Indian society. In turn, by extending English education only to their own wives and daughters, these men mapped the "colonial-native matrix over their marital bonds" to create a new female Indian subject (p. 5). Chandra notes:

[...] British India's English-educated subjects taught English to their own woman [...] Bringing English to their wives and daughters, British India's English-educated men successfully secured the language of power within their class and caste location. [...] This idealised female figure was key to the India elite's quest for cultural equivalence with Europe, its distinction from "other" Indians, and its ability to speak in the name of a national commodity." (p. 5)

To demonstrate, let us consider *Himself: The Autobiography of a Hindu Lady*, a 1938 autobiography of Pandita Ramabai Ranade. In *Himself*, Ramabai documents her experiences learning English from her Brahmin husband (and social reformer) M. G. Ranade and its subsequent effects not only on her own psyche but also on the social contract she shared with her husband. Ramabai, who was only eleven at the time of her marriage, is said to have lacked a compassionate bond with her much older husband. Instead, M. G. Ranade decided to teach his new bride the English language. Their nocturnal pedagogic endeavors in the privacy of his office/classroom became a proxy for domestic intimacy. Speaking to this "symbolically affective bond," Uma Chakravathi queries, "Short of brutally consummating the marriage what would one do in such a situation except begin teaching the illiterate wife in alphabet?" (p. 217). How these experiences shaped Ramabai provides a model to understand an evolving female subject in India at the turn of the twentieth century; in this case, an upper-caste Hindu wife. Chandra notes:

Ramabai's memories sheds light on the interface between English and sexual identity, between individual desire, and social power. [...] Her individuated desire to possess the cultural power of English was interwoven with her awareness that it was her male relatives who were learning the language. (p. 144)

Ranade's stepbrothers, who were around the same age as Ramabai, had also begun learning English at that time. By aligning herself with the social power of English within an unconventional marital contract, Ramabai was able to access a phallogocentric social power previously alien to Indian women. Most notably, it reconfigured her relationship with other women in the household, particularly with her widowed sister-in-law Durga, who had been denied the opportunity to pursue her education because she was married at an incredibly early age (p. 139). Chandra:

English education threatened to disrupt existing domestic hierarchies and, by the way of the “new” compassionate love [between Ramabai and her husband], to diminish the authority of other women in a female-centered household. (p. 148)

Indeed, one could argue that Ramabai’s selective education was sustained within the household through the expectation of free widowed labor. The lack of English education, in the case of the widowed Durga, produced another kind of female subject, one marked by labor, marginalization, sexual punishment, and a staging of lack. Chandra articulates the position of Durga and other women in the household when stating that “English-educated women would disdain their domestic roles and thus cease to respect domestic markers.” At the same time, Ranade’s ability to mediate Ramabai’s education elevated his own power within the household (p. 145). Chandra notes that “Durga’s complex reactions averred that ‘English’ was a mobile, linguistic sign of vast material ramifications, indicating, expressing, and actively shaping a new hetero-conjugal contract” (p. 145). Evidently, the extralingual citizenship afforded to Indian women remains regulated by their marital association with masculinity.

Here too, we engage with the centrality of twilight as the site of extralingual discontinuity and the centrality of desire as a guiding force towards English language acquisition. English language use, in this context, is a key mode of soft power that radically transforms the subjective capabilities of the language user as well as their relationship to the ruling state and their place in it. Fundamentally, I argue that an education in the English language is an introduction to the state of twilight-as-linguistic-discontinuum, to both sociolinguistic dissonance and possibility, their unstable boundaries rendering a new kind of female citizen in colonial India.

Angrezi Medium: This Language Is Kampleks

Cut to the present. In *Hindi Is My Ground, English Is My Sky*, Chaise LaDousa describes an interview with a Varanasi-based school principal on the experience of Hindi-medium students entering English-medium environments. This prompts the mention of a feeling of inferiority on the part of the Hindi-medium students (2014, p. 37) which the interviewee calls a ‘complex’ (*kampleks*). This colloquial expression captures the inability to resolve twilight, so common in its social usage so as to highlight the ubiquity of language-informed class disparities. Note, a ‘complex’ is not the same thing as a *kampleks*. Here, the sign remains the same—unlike Lamar’s translation—but its texture changes when carried across linguistic contexts. *Kampleks* (unlike complex) illustrates the very real fear of being perceived as a language misuser, and the subsequent denial of the extralinguistic values—intelligence, class, authority—associated with it. A direct outcome is the articulation of multiple streams of English education in India performed within a spectrum of class identities. The socially mobile bourgeoisie inhabits an English that is analogous to hegemonic British and American varieties while the remaining population occupies various degrees of pidginized (and inordinately delegitimized) Englishes gathered through the medium of their schooling (or lack thereof). Their interplay results in the production of different *English-markets* within the broader marketplace of languages.

To clarify: consider the English Coaching industry in India that services thousands of aspirants for jobs (in call centers, government, etc.), higher education, or civil services examinations. These centers are informal educational institutions, often set up within dense

urban residential colonies⁵, occupying the same liminal space that births the experience of the *kamleks*. Here, the concern is not the status of knowledge as much as its material possibilities, as evident in how these centers are marketed (fig 4).

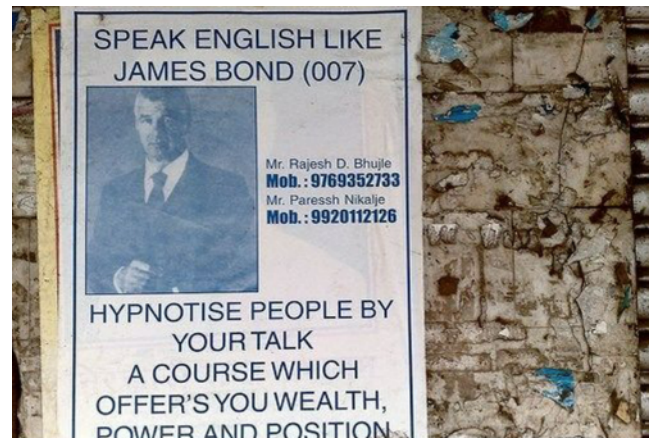


Figure 3: Public advertisements for English Coaching Centers in Ulhasnagar (left).

Figure 4: Mumbai (right); both in the state of Maharashtra in India.

In contrast, consider Writing Centers in India’s upcoming liberal arts universities (Ashoka University, Jindal, Flame University, et. al) that view the Writing Center as a site for developing critical faculties, analytical skills, and research capacities, attracting a decidedly upper-class clientele. This brand of intellectualism is in stark contrast to the pragmatic “Smart English” promised by coaching centers (fig. 4). While both models are valid responses to their respective class contexts, they enforce dramatically different conceptions of the English language and their attendant markets, which have little to no overlap. Evidently, these English-markets inhabit differing positions within binary center-periphery constructions such as rural/urban, Indian/Western, professional/creative, et. al. interchangeably mapped onto a logic of appropriateness and afforded varying degrees of agency. English, in this context, is more than the language of global capitalism—it is a contested linguistic field, a discursive space occupied by multiple configurations of extralingual citizenship, each enabling the creation/differentiation of specific markets, material opportunities, and social expectations. It is worth highlighting that liberal arts education and attendant writing center pedagogies have been noted as being primarily of US origin. Here, Hotson and Bell:

As neocolonial commodities, U.S. writing courses and writing centers are also easily exported, especially as American English is the lingua franca of knowledge acquisition and publication. (2022, p. 53)

⁵Writing in a 2021 paper on UPSC coaching centers, Chaise LaDousa provides a comprehensive illustration of the inner workings of these institutions: “One of the most successful coaching teachers I met in Delhi was named Ram. He had come to rent out a three-room flat in the heart of Mukherjee Nagar’s cluster of multi-story buildings devoted to coaching tutorials. One entered a waiting room that was adjacent to Ram’s office. To the side of the office was a narrow hallway that led to Ram’s assistant’s office and a bathroom. [...] Across the way from the waiting room was a lecture hall that accommodated approximately 40 students. The room was equipped with a chalkboard mounted above a slightly raised platform from which Ram delivered his lectures. Such was the setup of all of the coaching teachers I met who had been working for anywhere between 10 and 25 years. [...] Most of the students were from smaller metros or from small towns, and explained that the prospects for work, either at home or where they had gone to university, were particularly bad.” (2014, p. 114)

Further:

We observe this currently occurring in Brazil and Russia, where DOS regional English language officers (RELOs), “a kind of teacher-diplomat,” support the establishment and national organization of writing centers as U.S. cultural diplomacy initiatives to “support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics.” (2022, p. 51)

This is a radical departure from “HYPNOTISE PEOPLE BY YOUR TALK. A COURSE WHICH OFFER’S YOU WEALTH, POWER AND POSITION.” Instead, we confront writing centers as a site of neocolonial soft power similar to the Anglicist ideologies that informed Lord Bentinck’s educational policy of 1890. The regulation of wealth, power, and position, in this context, is raised to geopolitical terms and continues to be defined extralingually. Subsequently, this alignment with neoliberal values affords students access to a kind of global class mobility that remains completely alien to clients of English coaching centers.

Conclusion

If you have come this far, I offer my genuine gratitude with the hope that these wavering ideas sparked new questions, or at least invigorated existing ones. I leave you now with some closing points of inquiry. First, how do we ascertain a global grammar to English without becoming overly reductive? Can we accommodate the inherent fractalization of the English language—and the various linguistic and cultural traditions it has been influenced by—in its teaching and performance? Consequently, can its teaching encompass the myriad material values the language makes possible while still addressing / countering / reorganizing the moral / social / ideological logics it extends? And, ultimately, if none of this is possible, where does this leave us, and what might still be the gift of such a line of questioning?



Figure 5: A cartoon from a national daily newspaper from New Delhi, circa the 1990s.

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