

Hindi Is Our Ground, English Is Our Sky: Education, Language, and Social Class in Contemporary India. Chaise LaDousa. New York: Berghahn Books, 2014. xx + 216 pp.

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Chaise LaDousa's *Hindi Is Our Ground, English Is Our Sky* presents an ethnography of ambivalence, of the entanglements that pervade and make up experiences and uses of language in a postcolonial society. The book offers a close study of English and Hindi "medium" schooling ("medium" referring to language of instruction and examination) in Varanasi, a city of approximately two million in north India. This institutional division between vernacular- and English-medium has long characterized education in South Asia, though, as LaDousa suggests, it has become more salient and severe since economic liberalization in the 1980s and 1990s. By focusing on institutions like schools that are metonymically referred to by standard languages, LaDousa provides an important lens into the languages themselves and, in particular, the ideologies that envelope and are projected by them.

LaDousa writes in the conclusion, "The school system provides an especially important means by which people imagine the relationship between Hindi and English" (p. 184). This sentence makes two important points that are central to the book. First, Hindi and English are not simply linguistic codes but nodal points of institutions. Second, English and Hindi as linguistic institutions and institutionalized languages are enmeshed with each other. This co-constitution, as LaDousa shows, produces contradictions and ambivalences, especially given that it is also a fraught form of hierarchy: between languages of mobility and stasis, of a foreign tongue and one's mother tongue, of money and of "tradition," of elsewhere and of here, of need and of respect. The book's ethnography evinces how these ambivalences are caught up in a range of social processes and practices that register, navigate, and reinscribe such hierarchy. Herein language acts as a pivot, not simply as a medium of interaction or instruction but as an ideologically laden site with respect to which class mobility and maintenance, desire and anxiety, status and stigma, and imagination and self-conception are all oriented and played out. Such dynamics are common in many parts of the world, and the book stands out as illustrating how they work in all their specificity in Varanasi's schools.

One way of glossing *Hindi Is Our Ground, English Is Our Sky*, then, is to say that it elucidates the dialogically entangled enregisterment of (particular varieties of) "Hindi" and "English." It details their mutual ideological establishment as indexically weighty—and performatively constituting—semiotic repertoires, showing how such repertoires are linked to particular intertwined figures of personhood and their attendant metapragmatic stereotypes, disseminated through linked institutional means (viz. schools), and thereby performable (and construable) to variable effect by various individuals in equally diverse contexts. The book shows how neither Hindi nor English can be understood without understanding the metadiscourses surrounding schooling, and further the relationships that are forged (and perhaps also erased) between such languages (and others still, e.g., Bhojpuri) by such metadiscourses.

We might also see the book as an account of what we might call the enregisterment of institution types (viz. Hindi- and English-medium schools), where named languages stand as emblems of a wider set of semiotic repertoires which are, through the processes and discourses that LaDousa details, ideologically rendered as coherent and distinct institutional unities. This tropic extension of the term *enregisterment* aims to point up the similar (meta)semiotic dynamics through which school types come to have relevance and performative force for LaDousa's informants. Such repertoires include language, both as typifying metasign ("English-medium" or "Hindi-medium") and as the code used in such institutions (with significant gaps between the two, as LaDousa shows in chapters 3 and 5). But they also include much more: indexicals of class identity (chapters 1–2), syllabus and supra-institutional affiliation (so-called government or private "boards") (chapters 1–2), fee structures and related expenses (chapter 2), school location and the movements such locations require (chapter 2), signage and advertisement, and thus script (chapter 3), and more still. English- and Hindi-medium schooling—like English and Hindi—comprise a whole congeries of related

indexicalities and media which are linked together in a by-degrees coherent way, articulated to particular metapragmatic stereotypes of personhood, to certain performative entailments, and the like. What is important to note, as LaDousa does, is that the enregisterment of an institution is a social project, one which must ideologically suture together a number of distinct and not always amenable semiotic dimensions. To the extent that such suture holds, the ideological effect of imagining a stark opposition of English-medium versus Hindi-medium schooling becomes possible and thus performative consequential.

The suture doesn't always hold. The book importantly details how individuals navigate and use their (missed) encounters with such institutions to provide alternate identities and stances that exceed the ideological terrain mapped by the division of English- versus Hindi-medium education: the "topper" whose status is found in exam rank rather than linguistic medium (chapter 1); the skeptical biology teacher who questions the naturalized link between medium, educational satisfaction, and the capacity to learn other languages (chapter 4); and lower-class individuals' conceptions of English that locate the social value of English less in schools than in the tasks that English, of whatever proficiency, can be used to accomplish (chapter 5). LaDousa also shows us the languages and school types that go unnamed and untalked about: the erasure of Bhojpuri as a potential medium of education (being enveloped and erased by standard language discourses about education in one's "mother tongue," i.e., Hindi); the erasure of schools run by NGOs for lower-class Dalits that, because they lack board affiliation, disappear from discussions of schooling altogether (chapter 1). Pointing to such exceptions and erasures is important, for it shows the work that must go into articulating disparate semiotic media into institutional forms, creating out of a variegated and complex social field recognizable and seemingly opposed institution types.

In short, a critical contribution of LaDousa's study is demonstrating the dialectical relationship between these two processes and projects of enregisterment, between the enregistering of "Hindi" and/versus "English" and the enregistering of "Hindi-medium" and/versus "English-medium" schools. What language is here is caught up with what schools are. While LaDousa pursues this thesis vis-à-vis the question of the schools themselves, one can interrogate his materials from the other direction: what happens to Hindi and English *qua* languages once they are caught in this dialectic? We get some suggestive hints—for example, the post-liberalization tendency to purify Hindi (chapter 4)—but they do not form a sustained object of the book's investigation. Similarly, while the book shows the work that goes into making Hindi and English (and Hindi-medium and English-medium) distinct and opposing languages (and institution types), more could be done with the fact that such opposition necessarily implies interpenetration, that differentiation betrays a force of attraction. More than the border between Hindi and English is the question of how such entangled processes of enregisterment *push* the borders between these languages, how Hindi and English overlap and come to reside in each other. It isn't enough, then, to say that Hindi (schooling) can't be understood without consideration of English (schooling) and vice versa, but that the line that ideologically, and hence ontologically, resides "between" them itself is questionable. While the analysis is sensitive to this porous liminal space (see, e.g., pp. 168–169), it misses an opportunity to push this argument further by showing how opposition turns on and obscures an intimate comingling at the level of linguistic structure, use, and ideology.

We see signs of this blurring in the ethnographic materials discussed—for example in the sign advertisements discussed in chapter 3 and in the classroom dynamics discussed in chapter 5—but one wonders about how this blurring operates in moments where language isn't being used under the metasign of "language"; that is, in contexts where the question of whether the linguistic forms at play are Hindi or English is either not at issue or not determinable. Much of the data of the book is based around linguistic data already metapragmatically framed by the question of language, whether this is in interviews structured around questions of English and Hindi (chapters 1–2, 4), advertisements or signage about the language-medium of schools (chapter 3), or classroom discussion that is overdetermined by the lesson under question (viz. Hindi class or English class) (chapter 5). What kind of language is used when the question of language is itself in abeyance?

One such source of data would be found in informal interactions, whether it be byplay in the classroom, interactions between teachers or teachers and students outside of the classroom, or interactions among students. Such interactions are largely absent in the book. Most surprising is the absence of students' voices, those who are subject to and made into subjects by the anxieties about and desires for social mobility that parents, teachers, and administrators quite vigorously expressed to LaDousa. How do students use or not use English? Hindi? Bhojpuri?

How do they construe the question of language, of medium (or not)? Much work on youth language shows how youth's linguistic practices are frequently more complicated than the institutional projects devoted to inculcating standard language use would like; and more to the point, that students' linguistic practices often explicitly align in distinction, if not in opposition to such projects, thereby requiring institutional efforts to double down on linguistic standardization, purification, and discipline.

Hindi Is Our Ground, English Is Our Sky is an important addition to the sociology of education, as well as to linguistic anthropologists' understanding of language politics and institutionality in postcolonial settings. It importantly bridges the gap between our understandings of language ideology and institutional organization as they come to register in and as the changing political economy of north India. It will be of interest to scholars of multilingualism, education, language ideology, and youth culture.

Critical Thinking in Slovakia after Socialism. Jonathan L. Larson. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013. xx + 240 pp.

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This book investigates the nature of critical thinking not only through linguistic and socio-cultural discourse; rather, the author expands the scope of the argument to include anthropological, political, and sociological perspectives of how one assesses critical thinking and communication. This produces a more nuanced analysis of how fluid language is for differing interlocutors across ethnic communities. Larson provides a good historical overview of the Slovak context including colonialization by various regimes (feudal, totalitarian, socialist), process of protest during Prague Spring (1968), the Velvet Revolution (1989), and the final reconstruction phase (1989–93). The author's knowledge of the Slovak language and culture provides the reader with a clearer understanding of how language is socioculturally embedded into the thinking process of a culture. More importantly, he is able to highlight ethnic differences between the Slovak and Czech Soviet experience due to variations in pragmatic linguistic interpretations of particular words. The author leads the reader, not just assess language as a static structural component, but a feature of the overall context within a performance act of social discourse. Moreover, there is a strong use of ethnographic stories and meta-narratives relevant to both the context and the argument. The weaving of the ethnography, linguistic, and sociopolitical facets create an interesting and layered argument throughout the book.

First in the introduction, the author provides historical, sociopolitical, and sociocultural overview of critical thinking in East Central Europe. He lays out the book's argument through ethnographic postscripts of life in the region. During this journey, the reader is shown how the author is differentiating critical thought as analysis rather than judgment. After that, he highlights how his argument is anchored not just in the literal analysis of text-based discourse but also the meaning held within the act of communication. Next, he describes the ethnographic methods used to analyze discourse as pertaining to critical thought. Finally, he outlines each chapter of the book. In Chapter One, Larson examines civil and public debate. After the fall of the Soviet regime, the Slovak people attempted to maintain a civil objective criticism in their critical discourse. However, highlighted in the chapters is how easy the critiques shift from evaluation to judgment as highlighted using the examples of two journals; the journal *Kritika & Kontext* used evaluation whereas the journal *Domino* aimed criticism at government agencies and institutions. Larson refers to these changes in discourse from evaluation to judgment as "frame slippage" (63). Moreover, he argues that civil public discourse is rooted in a socio-cultural manner of Slovakian thinking rather than a politically motivated one. Then in Chapter Two, he investigates how intellectuals and activists utilized critical discourse that contained hidden objectives such as institutional criticism, variation in discourse under prevat (92), and emotional display in public speech. For example, the use of the pronoun "them," during Communism, was for those in the government. After prevat or the change in government, the pronoun "us" referred to those in the government. This linguistic change highlighted emotionality in public speech. Moreover, he outlines how the civility of the discourse during the Velvet Revolution turned into deep resentment of past transgressions from the Soviet regime.