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Title Page

Cartographic mismatches and language policy: the case of Hindi in Singapore

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1. Migration, mobility and language policy

The International migration report presented by the United Nations in 2015 highlighted that the number of international migrants worldwide had reached 244 million. Of these, 43 per cent were born in Asia and nearly two thirds live in Europe or Asia (United Nations, 2016).

Given the realities of migration and mobility, scholars (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Nail 2015; Vertovec 2009) have increasingly adopted a transnational perspective to processes of globalisation. An enhanced appreciation of cross-border affiliations and interactional processes among migrants has challenged established ideas of languages as bounded, and complicated presumptive associations between linguistic and community or national identity (Heller 2008) that policies are grounded in. An additional migration related complication arises from responsibilities for creating equitable conditions of participation among all who claim varying degrees of membership in nation states. This requires sensitive balancing between the rights of citizens and claims of noncitizens such as permanent residents or guest workers (Loring & Ramanathan 2016; Soysal 1994). On the other hand, the conditions of transnational migration mean that even as immigrants forsake institutional and public identities associated with the nation of origin and adopt new ones, they maintain simultaneous memberships in cross-border communities on a personal level. Notwithstanding such complications, national policies remain constrained by modernist “ethnolinguistic assumptions” (Blommaert, Leppanen, Spotti 2012) and monoglot ideologies for managing multilingual populations with global orientations.

Cognizant of such contradictions, scholars interested in the confluence of language and migration have critiqued the limitations of ‘bounded units’ such as nation, community, and language (Blommaert 2013; Heller 2008), the power of national institutions in the (re)production of linguistic inequality (Duchene, Roberts, & Moyer 2013), or even gatekeeping measures designed for admission and integration of immigrants (Extra, Spotti, & Van Avermaet 2009). While studies such as these have highlighted the institutional disenfranchisement of minorities, we present Singapore’s language policy as a case of the state’s attempt to respond to demographic and societal shifts..

The state is highly dependent on immigrants to make up for a shrinking demographic core due to declining fertility rates and emigration of its citizens moving overseas for education, training, business, and work (Yeoh and Lin, 2012). As a result, there is an ongoing shift in the demographic profile as immigrants progressively take up temporary or permanent residency, or where eligible, even citizenship. Therefore, the language education policy faces the competing pressure of supporting the resulting linguistic heterogeneity among ‘new’ migrants and of managing a fluctuating foundational population of ‘old’ immigrants.

Over the years, its policy has responded to increased diversity with affirmative actions such as institutional support towards languages of minority Indian groups. Specifically, the ‘semi-official’ representation to 5 additional Indian languages (Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Urdu) in recent years demonstrates sensitivity to the constraints posed by a single language (Tamil) among a linguistically heterogeneous group. However, contrary to policy expectation, provision of the additional languages has not resulted in uptake by their corresponding speakers. A majority of the target Indians prefers to opt for Hindi as the national status conferred to it in India exerts an influence that overrides its minoritised¹ status in Singapore. Despite the lack of restrictions on language choice (that the Chinese and Malay communities are subject to²), and notwithstanding the options available,

¹In distinguishing between ‘minority’ and ‘minoritised’, Wee (2014: 183) highlights that the status of languages is not ‘natural’ but the result of historical, political, and economic factors through which some languages are given prominence at the expense of others.

² The Ministry of Education mandates that Chinese, Malay, and Tamil students study the official language associated with their racial identity. Non-Tamil Indian students have a choice. While policy details have not been clearly articulated, Indian students interested in studying any language other than Tamil are required to apply for dispensation. This is usually granted to the applicant irrespective of background factors such as residency status, place or birth, etc. Asked to clarify the criteria for permission to study a language other than one’s mother tongue, the Minister of State for Education, Ker Sin Tze, clarified that the option was available only to the non-Tamil Indian students and to pupils of mixed parentage but other students were required to study the mother tongue if available. (Ker, 1993). This

1 Indian families appear to be homogenizing towards Hindi because the language is considered to better
2 meet their multilingual ambitions (details below). We argue that the unexpected ‘auto-policing’
3 (Blommaert 2013) illustrates a mismatch between the goals of the education policy as envisaged by the
4 government and those of migrant families.

5 On the surface, the choice of a non-familial language indicates a rejection of state attempts at
6 encouraging linguistic heterogeneity and therefore correcting the past homogeneity (associated with
7 Tamil). However, the preference for Hindi over alternate languages results in a substitute linguistic
8 homogeneity. We posit that the convergence to Hindi illustrates the simultaneous orientation of
9 transnational minorities to multiple policies – local and translocal. A large proportion of transmigrant
10 Indians view Singapore as a temporary destination in their mobile trajectories. Their global mobility
11 requires they remain open to possibilities including a move back to India or another country should the
12 destination offer better prospects or the current one become less attractive. For instance, in case
13 renewal of one’s permanent residency (PR) status or employment pass is unsuccessful, the family may
14 be forced to leave Singapore. In other cases, the uncertainty over whether the male child would want to
15 fulfil his obligation to perform the mandatory two-year national service requires that families remain
16 prepared for a ‘return’ to India or elsewhere. Familiarity with Hindi allows a relatively easier
17 assimilation into the education system in more states in India (discussion on the language policy in
18 Indian follows below) compared to alternatives such as Tamil or non-Indian languages that are not
19 recognized in India. Among such a population, languages in education are viewed as resources that
20 could facilitate or curb mobility. Therefore, language related decisions are based on hedged
21 calculations of least risk and highest return rather than identitarian attachments.
22

23 In this paper, we explore this interface of language and mobility in lives of transmigrant populations.
24 We adopt the notion of *cartographies of language* used by Park (2014) to explain how valuations of
25 language varieties among Korean transmigrants form cartographic devices with which to plot their
26 trajectories through geographic and social spaces of aspiration. Park suggests that “language ideologies
27 that mediate the value of languages and images of their speakers in spatial terms” (p 84) influence
28 trajectories of their mobility. For instance, American English and the associated accent are viewed as
29 more valuable for their potential for job opportunities compared to Singapore English correlated to a
30 disparaged local accent. These perceptions of “competence, legitimacy and economic value of
31 language,” (p 85) are projected in hierarchical terms with the more valuable varieties forming material
32 and social destinations of aspiration. We suggest that similar associations of language valuations and
33 geographic space are implicated in considerations of mobility among the Indians in Singapore. In a
34 manner similar to the Koreans, language choices among Indian parents highlight that language values
35 derive from the range of mobility (e.g., trans-local or trans-national) that languages have promoted or
36 are perceived to help chart in the future.
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38 However, in contrast to the Koreans among whom languages index social differences between
39 speakers, languages among the Indians are viewed in hierarchical dimensions of the range of mobility
40 they are correlated to. Therefore, state languages (e.g., Bengali, Tamil) with regional statuses are
41 necessary for mobility within the local field; federal languages (that is Hindi as the official language of
42 the Union and English as the Associate Official language) with a wider radius, facilitate trans-local
43 mobility. English, with its international status, is also deemed critical for mobility across trans-national
44 spheres. In this view, a regional language contains, in a manner of speaking, a centripetal force that is
45 functionally restricted to the region or the state in which it has an official status. While necessary as a
46 language in education and socialization with others domiciled in the state, a regional language may be
47 inadequate for communication with speakers of other languages in the same region or with speakers of
48 other languages in other regions. However, federal languages are perceived as having a wider
49 centrifugal influence and important for facilitating instrumental and integrative trans-local
50 advancement. In the Indian context, while “Hindi functions as the *de facto* “link language with the less
51 educated interlocutors,” (Sridhar 1987: 24), it is also beneficial for accessing government jobs in most
52 parts of the nation. Similarly, English functions as the alternative *lingua franca* (among those not
53 familiar with Hindi as well as among the educated elite) and is increasingly necessary for securing
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55 flexibility is not extended towards other ethnic groups such as the Chinese. Thus, the linguistic
56 heterogeneity in the Chinese community has led the state to discourage the use of all dialects other than
57 Mandarin, so that the latter is the only acceptable mother tongue for Chinese Singaporeans. For a
58 discussion as to why this asymmetry in flexibility exists, see Wee (2014).
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1 employment. Moreover, as an ‘international’ language, English alone is associated as containing the
2 potential to promote mobility trans-nationally.

3 Among the transmigrant participants of this study these cartographic perceptions continue to influence
4 decisions regardless of stage of transnational mobility. The multi-sited sensitivities of our Indian
5 respondents require that they consider not only official statuses of the various languages in the current
6 stage of their itineraries but also of these languages in possible destinations in the future. Therefore,
7 while the national status of Tamil gives the language an academic value in Singapore, its regional
8 status in India is perceived as limiting academic, social, and professional mobility beyond Singapore.
9 By similar calculation, the lack of official status for Hindi in Singapore is not seen as an impediment
10 for academic advancement while its national status in India enhances its valuation for social and
11 professional growth among participants. On the other hand, while Mandarin has a national status in
12 Singapore, and a high status in the region, its lack of official stature in India diminishes its value for
13 facilitating mobility among the Indians. Consequently, we posit that language valuations do not derive
14 from local language statuses as much as from facilitating envisaged academic, social, and professional
15 mobility in local and potential translocal sites.

16
17 Therefore, we argue that the contradictory orientations of state language policies and Indian families,
18 or what we refer to as *cartographic mismatches*, pose challenges to national policies. We first provide a
19 background of the Indian languages in Singapore and describe the changes in the policy that have
20 expanded language in education choices. We then analyse student enrolment data to illustrate how the
21 choice of Hindi results in an alternate language hegemony than previously established by Tamil. We
22 subsequently explore interview data to assess reasons for the preference for Hindi as a second
23 language among families with non-Hindi familial languages. Finally, we conclude that:

- 24 • so long as multilingual education systems remain grounded in monolingual ideologies of
25 linguistic homogeneity and essentialist community identities (Bokhorst-Heng 1999), they are
26 likely to be resisted by transnational populations regardless of the state goals of mono- or
27 multilingualism.
- 28 • that the multi-sited orientations of migrants are best accommodated by flexible multilingual
29 education models (Weber 2014; Wee & Bokhorst-Heng 2005) that encourage autonomy rather
30 than restrict language access.

31 32 33 34 35 **2. Background to Indian languages in Singapore**

36 Of Singapore’s total population of 5.1 million, citizens and permanent residents (termed *resident*
37 population) comprised 3.8 million in 2010. Of these, 74% were of *Chinese* origin, 13% of *Malay* or
38 Indonesian origin, and 9%, categorized as ‘*Indians*’, of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan
39 origin. The 3% who don’t fall within any of these groups are categorized as *Others*. (Wong 2011). The
40 bilingual education policy therefore expects every school going child to learn English + a mother
41 tongue: Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay for the ethnic Malays, and Tamil for those classified as
42 Indians³. The three official mother tongues are considered equal so no community can claim an
43 advantage over the other.

44 The mother tongues and English are designated different functions: English, as the neutral language,
45 serves as the inter-ethnic lingua franca as well as the language of socio-economic mobility and global
46 advancement. The ethnic mother tongues, necessary for intra-ethnic communication, are considered to
47 be appropriate identity markers and anchors to the ethnic culture. However, even though the
48 assignation of official languages to the various groups has successfully institutionalised ethnic group
49 identities, it has not managed to obscure the linguistic diversity within the groups. The state has
50 therefore offered a certain latitude in the choice of ‘mother tongue’ for students from non-Tamil
51 language backgrounds as well as for those in the ‘Others’ category who have no officially assigned
52 mother tongue. However, if a Tamil student can demonstrate a lack of Tamil education in the past or
53 within the family (for example, if the student has lived in a non-Tamil speaking region before moving
54 to Singapore), permission to study an alternate language may be given. The same exemption rules are
55 possible in the case of Malay and Chinese students but very rarely for those who have grown up in
56 Singapore.

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60 ³ Members of the category of ‘Others’ (e.g., Eurasians) are free to offer any of the official languages as
61 second language in education.
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Notwithstanding the flexibility, the linguistic heterogeneity among the Indians has continued to challenge the language policy. The predominance (at 66%) of those identifying themselves as Tamil at the time of independence in 1965 was a compelling reason for the choice of Tamil as the representative Indian language. However, the relaxation of the immigration policy in a bid to attract ‘foreign talent’ and maintain the nation’s competitive edge globally has resulted in a surge of immigrants from Asian as well as non-Asian nations. Particularly among the Indians, a large number of the new arrivals come from the north of India in contrast to the earlier arrivals from the southern states. Currently, nearly half (54%) identify themselves as ethnic Tamils, while the remaining identify with various languages such as Malayalam, Punjabi, Gujarati, etc. Given the significant linguistic heterogeneity within the community, even though Tamil continues to be the official language, it is not a shared language. The census of 2010 highlights that English was the most commonly spoken language in 42% of the Indian homes followed by Tamil at 37%. As Jain & Wee (2015: 75) posit: Among the newer diaspora, Tamil holds neither an instrumental value (that Mandarin does among the Chinese) nor serves an integrative function (served by Malay among the Malay people).

An awareness of the education challenges faced by these students as well as sustained lobbying from community groups has resulted in a relaxation of the policy. Therefore, since the early 1990s, five additional languages – Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu – have been accepted as ‘mother tongues’ for Indian students. Justifying the choice of these particular five languages, the then Minister of Education, Tony Tan highlighted in Parliament that the decision was determined by the current availability of the languages in the ‘O’ Level examinations managed by the Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate. (Tan, 1989). By implication, if provision for language examination was available, the ministry may consider additional community languages⁴ as second languages in education.

All aspects of language management (instruction, assessment, teacher training, financing etc.) for the five Non Tamil Indian Languages (NTILs) remain the responsibility of the Board for the Teaching & Testing of South Asian Languages (BTTSAL) constituted of the various community groups. The use of state resources is limited to the conduct of national school leaving examinations while all other aspects of maintaining or promoting the NTILs remain with the community groups. Lessons are held during Saturdays on the premises of public schools or even during regular curricular hours in the local schools — in what are known as Parallel Language Programs (PLP) – if student numbers justify the expense and arrangements. The additional Indian languages are broadly on par with the official ethnic languages (Mandarin Malay, Tamil) and weighted as any other school subject in the school curriculum. However, contrary to expectation, the availability of the languages does not lead to their appropriation by the respective language communities. Our findings highlight that Hindi has become the most favoured of the five additional languages. It is popular among families whose languages are not institutionally available (e.g., Malayalam, Marathi, Sindhi), as well as among those whose languages are available as second languages at school (i.e., Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, and even Tamil). We turn to school enrolment data as well as ethnographic interviews to explore reasons for the ascendance of Hindi in Singapore.

3. Hindi: homogenising Indians in Singapore

A comparison of various language enrolment data (Table 1) indicates that among the five languages, Urdu has remained stable over the years while Gujarati and Punjabi have been steadily declining. On the other hand, the substantial growth of Bengali⁵ and Hindi form a stark contrast. In particular, the total student enrolment for Hindi exceeds the total of the other four languages (Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu).

Table 1: Student enrolment 2011-2016

	Bengali	Gujarati	Hindi	Punjabi	Urdu	Total
2011	683	137	3771	1023	313	5927
2012	741	130	4233	940	317	6361

⁴ Despite having the second largest number of speakers, Malayalam could not be included, as it was not offered as an examinable subject by Cambridge.

⁵ Administrators with the BTTSAL explain that the total enrolment in Urdu and Bengali includes students from Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively in addition to those from India. While Bengali has the highest rate of growth among all languages, the subject is beyond the scope of this paper.

2013	820	124	4826	857	317	6944
2014	910	114	5531	804	313	7672
2015	995	108	6475	744	322	8644
2016	960	89	6888	675	301	8913

Source: office of BTTSAL

The increasing popularity of Hindi among the Indians is evident in the volume as well as the 55% increase in student numbers from 2011-2016. Data suggests that not only is Hindi popular among families with alternate familial languages but also that the noncitizen population contributes largely to its numbers.

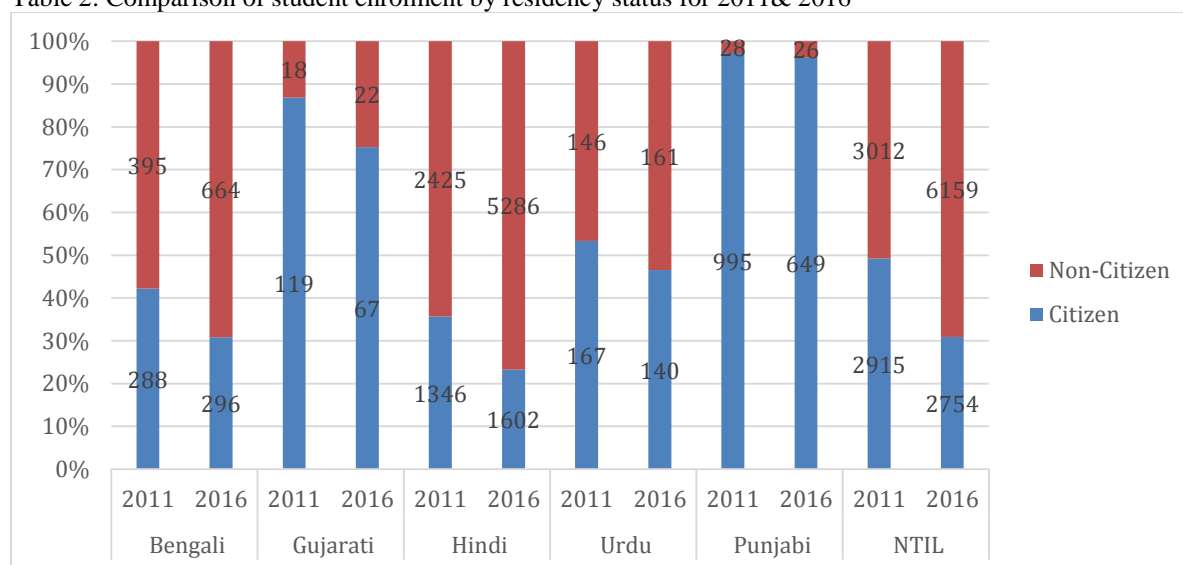
A sample survey of two Hindi weekend language centres indicated that of a total of 248 students in one centre, 51 students (21%) indicated Hindi as their familial language while in the other, of a total of 227 students, 50 students (22%) claimed Hindi as the mother tongue. Similar linguistic diversity among students of Hindi is reported for both weekend language centres as well as during weekday language lessons. A Hindi teacher explains:

Most Indians, North Indian and South Indians prefer Hindi. Even those who can study their languages here [in Singapore] prefer Hindi. We have Tamil, Gujarati, Bengali, Malayalee, Nepali, all language children studying Hindi. Even some children from Myanmar. The numbers are growing every year (F, 54 yrs; employed as Hindi teacher since 2002).

Part of the reason for the high enrolment is evident in the management of the languages that encourage pragmatic decisions over those involving allegiance to family languages. The convenience of the PLP during curricular hours has found maximum take up in the case of Hindi⁶. Of the total enrolment for Hindi in the year 2016, 67% of the students attended PLP classes while 33% attended weekend classes. The number of schools with Hindi PLP have continued to grow and currently are available in 162 of the total 369 public schools (primary, secondary and junior colleges) in the country (BTTSAL website). In accounting for this growth, we examine the residency status of students to ascertain the ratio of residents versus non-residents.

A preliminary analysis of the residency status (Table 2) of students in each language group suggests an inverse correlation between proportion of citizens and size of total enrolment. That is, the higher the number of citizens, the more consistent the decline over time in student enrolment. For example, Gujarati and Punjabi, with the highest proportion of citizens to noncitizens (PR & foreigners) also have the greatest loss in student numbers between 2011-2016 (shown in Table 1). Urdu on the other hand has a fairly balanced number of citizens and noncitizens and its enrolment, has remained nearly steady over the years. In contrast, Bengali and Hindi, the languages with the highest proportion of non-citizens have grown consistently over the years (table 2). That 77% of the total enrolment of Hindi is made up of noncitizens illustrates the popularity the language commands among migratory populations.

Table 2: Comparison of student enrolment by residency status for 2011& 2016



⁶ The only other language to offer PLP is Punjabi with a total enrolment of 13 in 2016.

Source: office of BTTSAL

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2 Analysis of residency status conclusively illustrates that the Indian transmigrants prefer Hindi over
3 available options. Interview data further highlight that the language is increasingly preferred by those
4 whose languages are not institutionally available (e.g., Malayalam, Marathi, Sindhi) as well as among
5 those whose familial languages (i.e., Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu, and even Tamil) are available as
6 school subjects.

7 The unexpected inclination towards Hindi away from the language alternatives created in response to
8 community advocacy, constitute mismatches between policy expectations and ground realities. In
9 attending to these discrepancies, we approach the multilingual Indian community as an instance of the
10 increasingly heterogeneous societies resulting from global migration. We suggest that the collective
11 appropriation of Hindi among the diverse community expresses alternate ideologies of multilingualism
12 that differ from the monolingual ideologies of the multilingual national policy.

13 Therefore, we adopt an ethnographic approach to access reasons for the preference of Hindi over
14 familial languages. In addition to the insights gleaned from membership of the Hindi community of one
15 of the researchers, we rely on interview data with 20 Indian families who have opted for Hindi as the
16 second language for their children. The respondents for the interviews were recruited on the
17 recommendations of community teachers and through snowball sampling. While initial contact was
18 made with Indian families with non-Hindi familial languages, purposive sampling was subsequently
19 used to ensure the recruitment of participants from all languages that are institutionally represented in
20 the education policy. Among the 20 recruited families, 8 claim Tamil as the familial language, 5
21 identity with Bengali, 4 with Gujarati, 2 with Urdu, and 2 with Gujarati⁷.

22
23 We argue that language in education decisions of transmigrant populations are mediated through
24 valuations of languages that allow the widest radius of mobility across multiple sites rather than
25 attachments to linguistic, ethnic, or national communities. Further, these cartographic valuations are
26 dynamic processes shaped by (a) language experiences in places of origin, (b) considerations of current
27 possibilities, as well as (c) expectations in future destinations. In the following sections, we detail how
28 language decisions among our participants are evaluated by the extent of mobility contributed by past
29 choices and how subsequent experiences influences successive judgments.

31 4. (re)positioning Hindi in Singapore

32 a. The past: parental academic experiences

33 The bilingual policy of Singapore, anticipates an uncomplicated correlation between familial languages
34 and choice of the second language in education. However, the experiences of ‘multilinguality’, defined
35 as fluid linguistic behaviour across porous language boundaries (Agnihotri 2014: 365), among our
36 participants challenges such correlation. As our study shows, the typical experiences of mobility across
37 state boundaries in India has meant academic and social exposure to multiple languages among most
38 parents. Given that nearly all the interviewed families in Singapore had either relocated multiple times
39 within India, or had lived in states where the familial and state languages differed, parental language
40 repertoires comprised of multiple languages in varying degrees of proficiency. Among these parents,
41 languages in education decisions do not invoke language allegiance and the choice of a non-familial
42 language is not considered unusual. In examining reasons for the choice of Hindi over the familial
43 language, we find a direct correlation between parental language valuations and their personal
44 experiences of education and socialisation in India.

45 Parental education experiences (and language values) are influenced by the Three Language Formula
46 (TLF) that aims to manage the plurilingual complexity of Indian society. As the foundation of the
47 Indian language education policy, the TLF encourages trilingualism for all children at the secondary
48 stage in the state and federal languages: (1) a regional language (usually the official state language), (2)
49 the official language of the country (Hindi) or the associate official language (English) and (3) a
50 modern Indian language (preferably a south Indian language) if regional language is Hindi and for
51 students in the southern states (e.g., Tamil Nadu), Hindi or another official North Indian language (La
52 Dousa 2010). According to Annamalai, (2001: 44), trilingualism is promoted in order to “to meet the
53 instrumental and integrative needs at three levels: regional, national, and international”. In essence, the
54 formula itself encourages the association of the various languages with progressive ranges of
55 educational and social mobility. It envisages the inadequacy of a single language, or even two

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59 ⁷ Since one of the two recruited families has withdrawn from the study, the data has been ^{excluded} from
60 this paper.

languages, to serve the linguistic complexity of India. Therefore, the policy proposes at least three languages to meet educational, social, and professional advancement.

These values, rather than notions of familial language loyalty, are foregrounded in language decisions as the response of a Punjabi mother with an armed forces background illustrates:

My mother tongue is Punjabi but I've never studied it academically [having moved frequently across the country]. Personally, I feel...we didn't lose out at all when we left Punjabi for Hindi...it was the requirement for us to be more global and Hindi, it buys you a ticket across the country. So it was a necessity. In the [armed] forces, with Hindi we could study anywhere in the country wherever my Dad got posted and so we didn't have to study local languages all the time. We just stayed with Hindi. (Punjabi, F; SC; in Singapore since 2004)

While Punjabi is her familial language, Hindi has facilitated her academic mobility during the years she was schooling in various locations across India. Her own family's frequent relocations through various countries such as Japan, USA, and Korea before Singapore, replicates the previous experiences in India but on a global scale. Given a choice between Punjabi and Hindi, the mother's lack of competence in Punjabi is perceived as constraining her children's academic mobility in Singapore as well as the family's planned mobility in the future (in the event they decide to 'return' to India some day). On the other hand, Hindi is associated as better serving an itinerant lifestyle as it supports their global citizen status through enabling academic as well as aspirational continuity. As she further explains, "Hindi is a stable currency" that retains its value regardless of the family's global mobility. Her personal experiences form the foundation of her preference and the family's subsequent experiences consolidates the position of the language.

In contrast, the familial language is devalued for its potential in constraining academic and social mobility. Parents who had either undergone instruction in the medium of the regional language or studied it as a second language in India felt either that the language has restricted their mobility or had not been an asset in progressing their careers.

Evaluating his choice of Hindi over the Bengali for his children, a Bengali participant, who has lived in Malaysia, China, South Korea, and travels to Norway frequently on work, shares:

Frankly speaking, learning Bengali will not help her in future. See, we are from Bengali [education] background...so we suffered a lot. I mean that if you look for a job all over India we don't get any chance...I realized that learning Bengali in the school, it didn't give me that much benefit in my career. For my children, I don't want to make that mistake. (Bengali, M, on EP; in Singapore since 2010).

A regional language, Bengali is viewed as a language with a shorter range, and therefore restricting one's trajectory. On the other hand, languages of national stature (Hindi and English) are perceived to be more valuable for enabling greater trajectories of mobility. The relative values of the two depend on the needs of the individuals. For this parent, English is more valuable given its potential for socio-economic mobility in India as well as globally, while Hindi is valued for being least restrictive for uncertain itineraries⁸.

However, alternate experiences of socialisation in India enhance the value of Hindi. To another parent, Hindi has a social importance that can't be met by English. Having studied only Tamil and English⁹, this parent finds his proficiency in only one state language a limitation for communication in other states with those who don't speak English:

20 meters we travel and we end up in Andhra Pradesh border and we are complete strangers. We can't even hire a cab [the drivers don't speak English]...and like you travel South and you end up in Karnataka, they are all foreigners to you. (Tamil, M; SC; in Singapore since 2001)

Socially, Hindi has a wider spread than English (Vaish 2013: 40), and is considered increasingly important for communicating with various classes of society. State initiatives "to promote and propagate Hindi as well as to develop it as a link language throughout India" (Ministry of Human Resource Development website) have elevated Hindi to a pan-Indian status through India. The choice of Hindi for this Tamil parent in anticipation that India may feature in their son's future work or travel plans indicates their social preparedness for future possibilities. As he explains, "India has a lot of potential [...] whether you want to be a businessman or entrepreneur in India."

⁸ We thank the anonymous reviewer for rightfully pointing out that while such language perceptions are relevant among the highly educated and well qualified immigrants primarily from urban areas of India, they may not be necessarily shared by all Indians and certainly especially not the less educated Indians in the more remote and rural areas of the country.

⁹ Students in most states study three languages given the nation's TLF. However, since Tamil Nadu prohibits the teaching of Hindi, most students there opt for the classical language, Sanskrit, as the third language.

1 **b. The present: academic, social, professional considerations**

2 In evaluating possible alternatives in Singapore, parental decisions at school are driven by logistical
3 considerations such convenience of language instructions within school premises and time saved over
4 the weekend. Other pragmatic factors include parental lack of facility in the familial language or
5 proficiency in Hindi as a result of their educational experiences in India. Beyond formal language
6 experiences, the complex multilingual exposure of Indian parents makes ‘additive multilingualism’
7 rather than bilingualism the normative goal. Languages in education are therefore approached as assets
8 to be accumulated for global mobility. Given the option of the official languages (Mandarin, Malay,
9 Tamil) in addition to the NTILs, parental decision for Hindi as the ‘mother tongue’ demonstrates a
10 pragmatic evaluation of the languages for their potential for mobility.

11 Among the official languages, the regional status (in India) of Tamil is viewed as constraining mobility
12 to the region (in a manner similar to that of Bengali and Punjabi discussed above). On the other hand,
13 the high regional and commercial status of Mandarin makes it a highly desirable language to acquire.
14 Nonetheless, despite its advantages, parental inability to help children with school work and the high
15 weightage given to language grades discourages the option of Mandarin. The value of the language is
16 reduced due to the constraints it would impose on academic mobility. Further, even though Mandarin is
17 associated with a regional and professional advantage, it is seen as a potential barrier for parental
18 mobility in the event of a ‘return’ to India where it would be neither an academic nor commercial
19 language.

20 A locally born family, where the mother identifies herself as Marwari and the father as Tamil, share:

21 Mandarin would have been really tough for us...the kids would need tuition like three times a
22 week because my husband and I don’t speak a word of Mandarin at al, like zero. And we
23 would be competing with other Chinese students who would be obviously much better
24 because parents speak Mandarin at home. And we decided that Mandarin was totally out for
25 us. (Marwari, F; citizens by birth).

26 Further, even though the mother herself studied Malay at school, and despite the academic
27 advantages¹⁰ associated with the language, Malay is ranked lower than the other options. The mother
28 explains:

29 as a language, Malay is not a global language, and doesn’t have the utility globally. So if they
30 are to become global citizens, it does not offer them any opportunity at all, is not of any use to
31 them.

32 On a similar scale as the Indian regional languages, Malay lacks the potential to promote mobility.
33 Decisions for languages in education are predicated on evaluations of their utility rather than familial
34 allegiance or language inheritance.

35 Nonetheless, all else being equal, most Indian families indicate a preference for Mandarin. Beyond the
36 constraints to academic mobility that Mandarin is presumed to be associated with, the language is
37 viewed as an attractive asset for facilitating social and professional mobility. Participants who had
38 either taken up Singapore citizenship or whose children had grown up here, indicated an interest in
39 having their children learn it as a third language. In their analysis of language shift among the Gujarati
40 community in Singapore, Shah and Jain (forthcoming) find that while “Indian parents prefer Hindi as
41 it bears a lower risk of poor performance in examinations”, many second and third generation Gujarati
42 Indians regret not having learnt Mandarin at school given its importance for professional success in the
43 region.

44 However, the foregoing discussion does not imply that familial languages are not important or not
45 valued by the participants. The point here is that in the experience of the participants, the ‘mother
46 tongue’ of home and that at school are more often than not, independent. Among these families,
47 institutional support (e.g., school) is not deemed necessary for oral competence in the familial language
48 and literacy not considered important for transmission of their language or culture. As a Punjabi
49 participant who learnt Marathi growing up in Maharashtra, points out:

50 In today's world how much do you read and write in the mother tongue at international level?
51 We don't...we use our mother language like on a day to day basis, [...] maybe with family or
52 friend circle, that's it.
53 (Punjabi, F; SC; in Singapore since 2006).

54 The domain of education is seen as offering opportunities for enhancing multilingual abilities while the
55 home for languages with a lower value for facilitating mobility.
56

57
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59 _____
60 ¹⁰ The official languages can be studied at a higher level at school and grades used for extra academic
61 credits.
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1 These pragmatic valuations highlight the complicated meanings associated with the notion of mother
2 tongue in multilingual contexts that scholars (LaDousa 2010; Pattanayak 1981; Tan 2014; Tupas, 2016;
3 Ween 2013) have contrasted with simplistic institutional assumptions in education policies. Discussing
4 the functional definition of ‘mother tongue’ in the context of India, Pattanayak (1981: 54) suggests the
5 term is “both a sociolinguistic reality and a product of the mythic consciousness of a people.” He adds
6 that it is not unusual to have multiple mother tongues among which primacy is determined on “the
7 basis of parental preference, culture, language identity, personal emotional associations, attachments
8 and involvements.” Similarly, Tan (2014: 321-322, citing Rampton, 1995 and Skuttnabb-Kangas &
9 Phillipson, 1989) argues for dissociating the idea of mother tongue from notions of identity and
10 inheritance, to an expanded one “conceptualised by one’s *language inheritance, language expertise,*
11 *language function,* and *language identification.*” As this study shows, the choice of the ‘mother
12 tongue’ among our participants is motivated by these conditions to different degrees and in varying
13 combinations. At the same time, these conditions are served by different languages in the
14 multilingual portfolios of the participants. For example, the primary language of communication is
15 often not the mother tongue among our participants. Equally, a participant may lack even the basic
16 communication skills in the language defined as the mother tongue. Therefore, among Indians,
17 languages such as Hindi are portable assets facilitating moves in transnational journeys. Even as
18 parents negotiate the local policy, the linguistic equity they amass contributes to their (or their
19 children’s) ability to relocate. Language decisions therefore engage a bifocal gaze: one that is focused
20 on the dynamic present and another that is looking forward.

21 c. The future: linguistic visas

22 While the possibility of ‘return’ influences the decision for Hindi among many of the participants on
23 permanent residency or temporary residency permits, the prospect of future travel or work influences
24 those who have taken on alternate citizenships. These multi-sited orientations of transmigrants
25 challenge education policies such as that of Singapore where languages are presumed to have an
26 essentialist link to distinct ethnic groups and to serve distinct functions (authors, forthcoming).
27 Regardless of the time residency statuses and time spent in Singapore, many respondents consider
28 Singapore a stepping stone for future professional mobility.

29 Among participants, even though the familial languages are important for the maintenance of culture
30 and even religion, no single language is constitutive of an essential identity. As a young participant
31 says:

32 I am a Singaporean PR my passport is Australian and I was born in India. So I am a *multi*
33 *person.* (Punjabi, F; 16 yrs old).

34 Even though the family members have taken up Australian citizenship, they remain permanent
35 residents of Singapore and Overseas Citizens of India. These transnational memberships offer multiple
36 options for the future and the choice of Hindi remains concordant with these. Indicating that Hindi
37 forms the safest option for facilitating familial mobility, the father says:

38 We are in between, we don’t know where we are going to go but we will go *where the bread*
39 *and butter will take us.* Hindi will be useful in all places where there are Indians (Punjabi, M;
40 PR, in Singapore since 1998)

41 Therefore, learning Hindi ensures that their projected mobility is not hindered in case of a return
42 ‘home’. While in Singapore, Hindi offers educational mobility but in the event of a move to India, it
43 allows students to access the education system in India with minimum disruption. Additionally, it
44 is valuable for facilitating social mobility. A Tamil parent from Mumbai says:

45 we will keep returning to India. That is not going to go away – in my heart, it remains The
46 Country. When they go back, they need to converse with the people there, they can’t go
47 around like *firangs* [foreigners] there, in India. So to adjust with people there, if they are
48 travelling on a trip, on a tour, it’s very important. (M, Tamil; PR; in Singapore since 2008)

49 Beyond education, Hindi allows Indians to ‘blend in’ socially and to communicate with the locals
50 during travel related to work or tourism. As a young participant offers, “Hindi functions as a ‘visa’ if
51 one wants to go back [to India] in the future”. He elaborates:

52 You definitely need Hindi in the future, if you are Indian. Definitely, you will need to go back
53 to India some time or the other. [...] You go there, you can’t communicate [if you don’t know
54 Hindi]. Also, people take advantage of foreigners, and if we can use the local language
55 fluently, we can bluff them that we are not foreigners. [laughs] And people won’t pick on you
56 and you will be safer. (Kannada-Tamil, M; PR; In Singapore since 2001).

57 For most parents, India is a part of the past, the ‘roots’ they trace their trajectories from. However, for
58 their children, India forms a part of the projected future – a destination for short term travel, visits to
59 extended family, work or even a more permanent ‘return’. Hindi therefore functions as a ‘visa’ for
60

1 seamless access to the education system, and endorses the speaker as a legitimate member in social
2 networks in India. At the same time, while outside India, Hindi is perceived to be associated with a
3 pan-Indian Indian identity and to facilitate socialisation with people of Indian heritage regardless of
4 their linguistic affiliations. Therefore, we suggest that parental language decisions illustrate a
5 triangulation of their past language experiences, current translocal realities and future possibilities.
6 Based on their experiences in India, they associate languages with certain values depending on the
7 degree of mobility these have facilitated in the past. Interview data suggest that the familial/regional
8 languages have importance within the home or the region while Hindi and English, with wider ranges
9 allows academic, professional, and social mobility trans-locally and trans-nationally. Their relative
10 value depends on the familial experiences, current requirements, and future plans. While English
11 remains the most important given its global status, Hindi retains its importance for its potential to
12 permit entry to the speaker in event of future 'return'.

13 **Conclusion**

14 The discussion above has illustrated the subversion of state attempts at acknowledging heightened
15 multilingualism by the very agents who championed the response. This disruption can be traced to the
16 cartographic mismatches between state and individual language values. While Singapore's policy
17 views languages as serving relatively stable independent and complementary functions, the pragmatic
18 orientations of Indian transmigrants to alternate language policies and fluctuating market forces,
19 challenge policy processes. Among the transmigrant population of our study, language values are
20 established by assessments of the radius of mobility (academic, social, and professional) that languages
21 potentially facilitate across multiple sites rather than the official statuses they carry in particular sites.
22 That is not to say that the transnational Indians don't associate languages with values of ethnic,
23 cultural, and national identity but that such values often remain 'indulgences' outside the realm of
24 hedged language education decisions. Among the respondents, languages options at school constitute
25 opportunities for accumulating linguistic equity for their children rather than adjuncts to linguistic,
26 ethnic, or national identities. The home, in contrast, remains the space where the familial language may
27 be maintained. Therefore, even as the choice of a non familial language at school complements
28 individual aspirations, it is not perceived as compromising loyalty to the 'mother tongue'¹¹.

31
32 These sentiments of linguistic commodification are not unique to the Indian community in Singapore
33 but shared among the general population as highlighted in scholarly discussions. As Wee (2003; 2013),
34 Tupas (2016) and Tan (2014) have pointed out for other languages in Singapore, the state's increasing
35 awareness of the economic value of Mandarin (previously ascribed only to English) has influenced the
36 adoption of a more pragmatic approach to language management. The promotion of Mandarin on
37 grounds of its utilitarian alongside its identitarian advantages, marks a dilution of the previous
38 functional compartmentalisation of languages. Similarly too, the 'deregulation' of policy to make
39 provision for additional Indian languages suggest a more liberal outlook. However, such selective
40 policy departures cannot be taken as a sign of a flexible language policy given the continual refusal to
41 recognise English as mother tongue both for the Eurasians and for the general population who
42 increasingly claim it as the most commonly used language in the home domain. A possible reason
43 offered by Tupas (2016:10) is that "ethnicizing English [...] does not benefit the people, but the
44 commodification of Mandarin does." Therefore, while a pragmatic outlook acknowledges the
45 advantages of commodifying Mandarin in light of the growing global stature of China, no similar
46 advantage is seen as accruing from altering the previously assigned non-ethnic function (neutral and
47 instrumental) of English.

49 We posit that the policy's continual compartmentalisation of language functions remains a barrier to its
50 goals of encouraging multilingualism. In fact, its insistence on defining the 'mother tongue' through
51 ethnic or national association is illustrative of an essentialist monolingual ideology. Such a perspective
52 in which multilingual competence involves parallel, compartmentalised codes, illustrates what Weber
53 (2014) calls, 'fixed' multilingualism. On the other hand, flexible multilingual policies are characterised

56 ¹¹ There is clearly a class dimension to these sentiments. Being mobile and flexible in terms of work
57 options are affordances that accrue to better-educated and relatively affluent members of the
58 community. It is their retention, either as formalized citizens or as resident elites, that the state is
59 particularly concerned with and therefore it is they who are likely to have a greater voice and impact on
60 language policy (see also Ong 1999).

1 by greater latitude in defining one's mother tongue and freedom to determine languages in education.
2 The case of the Indians in Singapore suggests a move in the direction of flexible multilingualism.
3 There is therefore a need for language policy to move away from an understanding of languages as
4 bounded entities that bear unproblematic and stable links to bounded communities. This boundedness
5 of language policy is an issue that, unless problematized, will lead to even more intractable policy
6 challenges as the scale of transmigration increases (Jacquemet 2005; Maryns and Blommaert 2001).

7 The flexibility in Singapore's policy constitutes a manner of *linguistic citizenship* (LC) that Stroud
8 (2011) proposes as an alternative to *language rights*. The notion of LC offers a way of avoiding
9 institutionally ascribed linguistic identities that are pegged to considerations of nationhood and
10 citizenship. Circumventing the limitations of these concepts, LC recommends extension of the notion
11 of citizenship to languages rather than communities of speakers. Such representation makes room for
12 minority languages, visibilizes minority language speakers, and promotes a more inclusive and
13 participatory process. According to Stroud, LC, "may 'defuse' a traditional nation-state approach to
14 language issues, and may breach the divide that separates national, regional and local treatments of
15 language questions" (p 350). By this analogy, Singapore's accommodation of the minority Indian
16 languages forms such extension of representation rights to languages rather than communities. At the
17 same time, as the choices of the Indians for non-mother tongue languages highlights, these solutions
18 remain limited by their premises of community and national identities. Assumptions that learners are
19 motivated by desires to preserve heritage languages fail to capture plurilingual realities in which
20 individuals make choices contrary to expectations of policy. Therefore, we suggest that in combination,
21 flexible multilingualism and LC constitute possible responses for dealing with cartographic
22 mismatches. For instance, given the challenges in anticipating various cartographic aspirations and
23 hoped for trajectories, LC and flexibility minimize likelihood of mismatches occurring. The provision
24 of community languages in education along with the latitude offered to the Indians in making
25 individual language choices, allows the accommodation of diverse needs and goals of linguistically and
26 cross-nationally heterogeneous populations.

27
28 We therefore propose that flexible multilingual policies are better suited to balance their obligations
29 towards national groups as well as the expectations of immigrant minorities. Policy provision such as
30 those for additional Indian languages, forms a possible arrangement by which linguistic needs of
31 fluctuating populations are supported while absolving the state from the logistical burden of language
32 management. At the same time, such a model allows individual choices of languages in education that
33 better meets their cartographic considerations. In light of our findings, we suggest that a truly flexible
34 policy would entail the extension of the right of language choice to all ethnic groups including the
35 Chinese and the Malays whose members could similarly make decisions based on personal priorities
36 and future goals. Such an approach not only better accommodates current social realities but is more
37 discretionary in that it allows for subjective choices over institutionally assigned ones.

38
39 Given the rapidly increasing societal diversity as result of migration, policies face deeper challenges in
40 meeting varied goals and expectations of mobile populations. Since multiple and dynamic orientations
41 are neither possible to predict nor accommodate, we suggest that considerations of cartographic
42 perceptions contributes to the robustness and flexibility of language policies. As our study has shown,
43 language valuations are not mere expressions of familial or national identities but critical resources in
44 charting immigrant trajectories across local and translocal boundaries. Therefore, policies that either
45 restrict access to languages or deny the autonomy of choices have a direct impact on the extent of
46 mobility possible among transmigrants.

47 48 **Abbreviations**

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50		
51	BTTSAL	Board for the Teaching and Testing of South Asian Languages
52	NTIL	Non-Tamil Indian Language
53	PLP	Parallel Language Program
54	EP	Employment Pass
55	PR	Permanent Resident
56	SC	Singapore Citizen
57	F	Female
58	M	Male
59	LC	Linguistic Citizenship
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