



Investigating the impact of caste, class, and gender on
student attitudes to English in India

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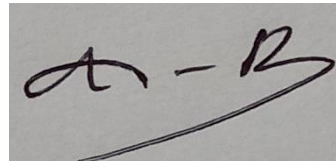
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Journey before destination.

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ABSTRACT

Prior research has noted that different social variables can predict the direction and magnitude of language attitudes, across contexts. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have investigated whether one's position in the the South Asian caste system affects their attitudes towards different languages. To fill this gap, this study uses thematic analysis to explain attitudes towards English in 10 school students aged 13-14 at a public school in Mumbai, India. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and field notes. The participants were found to come from different castes, each with a history of struggle for power within the caste hierarchy. Results indicate that caste location does significantly influence attitudes towards English; however, this effect is likely mediated by the language ideologies with which the students have been in contact.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background information for study

Two observations have provided the motivation for this study. The first of these is that most studies on attitudes towards language in society have used quantitative methods. Multiple researchers have noted statistical relationships between language attitudes and various social variables (e.g., Baker, 1992); however, they have not been able to agree upon a theoretical framework that can explain why language attitudes are affected by categories such as class, gender, race, and so on. Nor have they examined how implicit social values about language – also known as language ideologies – colour individuals' opinions of and aspirations towards various languages. This is because the dominant approach to linguistic decision-making has treated the individual as an atomised category rather than situating it within a social context. The notion of performing qualitative approach on feelings towards language is therefore a relatively unexplored one.

The second observation that has motivated me to conduct this study is the general dearth of literature on caste as a variable in sociolinguistics. Despite the widespread awareness that English as a global language changes social dynamics across the world (Crystal, 2003), there has been no research on how it interacts with the caste system in South Asia. This is surprising because South Asia is home to a large number of people who speak English as a second or foreign language. The movement to abolish the caste system in India has long painted English as a source of liberation, but linguistics researchers have not yet examined the impact of this messaging on individual English users in India.

This study, therefore, acts upon both observations, attempting to enrich both language attitudes literature as well as sociological imaginations of caste.

1.2. Dissertation outline

Chapter two of this dissertation provides crucial context on language attitudes in general and caste in India, pointing out the gaps that may be filled by new research. It also lists the research questions of this study. *Chapter three* explains how the methodological structure of the study is apt for the participants, research questions, and setting. In *chapter four*, the findings of the study are provided. *Chapter five* discusses these in light of the research questions, then summarises the key conclusions and limitations of this study. Finally, a list of references, and appendices with the documents that were vital to data collection, are provided at the end of the dissertation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview

This chapter examines the relevant literature on language attitudes and caste, highlighting the theoretical frameworks that can explain the origins of the former and the persistence of the latter. After this, it points to how language attitudes literature may be enriched by the inclusion of caste as a social variable. Finally, it lists the two research questions of the current study.

2.2. Language attitudes

2.2.1. Defining language attitudes

The concept of attitudes originated in the field of social psychology in the early 1900s (Baker, 1992). An attitude can be defined as a “mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience” (Allport, 1935, p. 810), that influences behaviour. Early researchers believed that the more they understood an individual’s attitudes towards a given theme or topic, the better they could predict how that individual would behave when encountering it in a real-life scenario (Garrett, 2010).

Any attitude related to language can be referred to as a language attitude. Since people tend to have opinions on a wide array of language-related topics, there is no consensus on what exactly falls under the purview of language attitudes research. While some may choose to study attitudes towards linguistic variation, others may focus on attitudes towards language policy, language learning, linguistic conflict, representation of language in media, and so on (Baker, 1992). However, across all these fields, language attitudes are generally considered as vector quantities, with most researchers defining them in terms of how ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ they are (Baker, 1992; Cargile et al., 1994; Garrett et al., 2003). This dissertation understands language attitudes as either net positive or net negative dispositions towards specific languages and/or language communities (see: Gardner, 1985).

2.2.2. Measuring language attitudes

Since language attitude research began within social psychology, at the time a field with a very quantitative slant, the main instruments used to study language attitudes were derived from psychometric sources (Baker, 1992). Since the 1960s, data on language attitudes have been collected using one of three main techniques: the content analysis of public perceptions of language, direct communication with individual participants, and the matched-guise technique, wherein participants are made to listen to audio recordings and make guesses about the

identities of the speakers (Cargile et al., 1994; Garrett et al., 2003; Garrett, 2010; Lambert et al., 1960).

The data that is collected from individuals via direct communication is usually quantitative in nature, as it is derived from objective questionnaires. According to Garrett and colleagues (2003), researchers have used three scales to measure the language attitudes of individual participants. These include the *Thurstone scale*, wherein participants indicate their agreement or disagreement with weighted statements; *Likert scale*, wherein participants indicate the *degree* to which they agree or disagree with different statements; and the *semantic differential scale*, wherein participants indicate where their opinions lie between two semantically opposing statements.

Researchers may also gather direct data via qualitative interviews. While interviewing may produce a large amount of data, making it challenging for the researcher to identify the answers to their research questions, the advantage of interviewing over questionnaires is that it allows for more nuance in the interpretation of language attitudes. This is significant when attempting to understand the environmental factors that have shaped attitudes to a given language.

2.2.3. Existing theories on language attitude formation

Two frameworks that help explain the formation of language attitudes are those laid by the *socio-educational model* (Gardner, 1985) and the *social process model* (Cargile et al., 1994). The core features and implications of these frameworks are discussed below.

(a) The socio-educational model of language acquisition

Research on attitudes had been ongoing in social psychology since the early 20th century, but it was only in the 1950s that there developed a specific interest in *language* attitudes. One of the first studies to display this interest was conducted by Gardner and Lambert (1959). Leading up to this study, there was a popular belief that the main factor behind language learning success was innate talent, or aptitude. However, Gardner and Lambert (1959) hypothesised that language achievement was also influenced by learner attitudes towards the target language. The results of the study confirmed this hypothesis, demonstrating a direct correlation between the two variables. Furthermore, the researchers put forth the idea that language attitudes were shaped by not only the desire for material benefits that might come with knowing a target language, but also the desire to join a target language community. They termed the former *instrumental orientation*, and the latter, *integrative orientation*.

In hindsight, the concept of integrative orientation was especially significant because it hinted at a socio-political angle to language learning. It opened up the possibility that the demand for certain languages and varieties was not purely economical, but also reflective of broader processes involving large groups, such as cultural assimilation, nation-building, and globalisation. However, the mainstream Western academia did not explore this possibility until decades later, choosing instead to highlight the role of individual emotions in language acquisition.

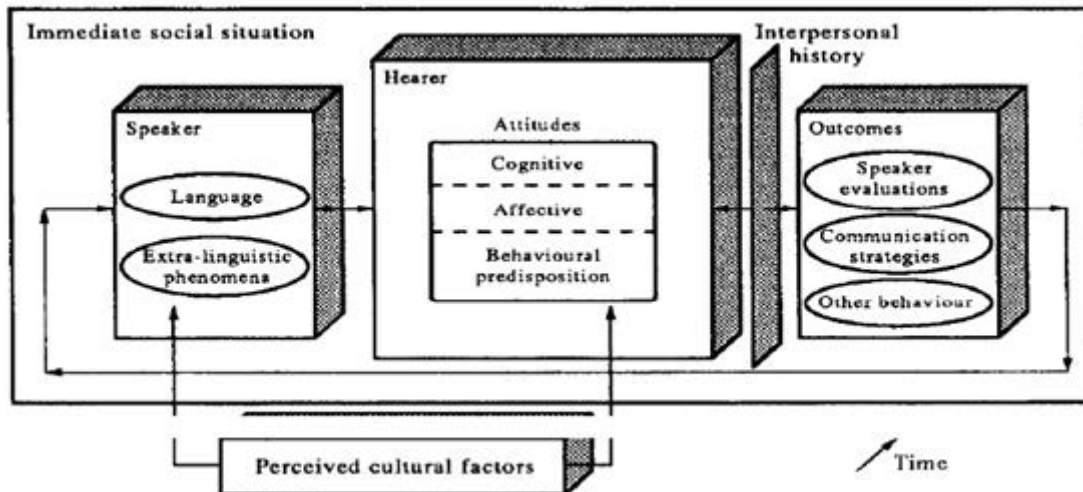
A year after Gardner and Lambert's (1959) study, the social psychologists Rosenberg & Hovland (1960) put forward the tripartite model of attitudes, which described attitudes as having three parts: conscious opinions ('cognition'), deeper feelings ('affect'), and behaviours or plans of behaviour ('readiness of action'). While this model was not commonly cited outside its field, it no doubt contributed to a sense in the academia that the 'affective component' was relevant to education. Perhaps inspired by this trend, Stern (1983) argued that the 'affective' influenced language achievement "at least as much as, and often more than...aptitude" (p. 386).

Drawing on the general acceptance of the 'affective' as a concept, Gardner (1985) proposed what became known as the *socio-educational model* of language acquisition. The socio-educational model posited that language learning is a part of human socialisation and thus involves not only aptitude, which appears biologically determined, but also attitude, which is socially constructed. In this model, attitudes towards a language are shaped by both *general beliefs about language learning* as well as *attitudes towards the target language community*. Tracing multiple studies on language attitudes, aptitude, and achievement, Gardner (1985) concluded that the strongest correlations between language attitude and achievement occur when the primary goal of the learner is to join a new language community – in other words, integrative orientation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Although this conclusion was later criticised for over-simplifying the relationships between different linguistic communities (see: Taie & Afshari, 2015), it remains a useful lens through which large-scale linguistic shifts may be viewed and interpreted.

(b) The social process model of language attitudes

Following the emergence of the socio-educational model, different researchers attempted to situate language attitudes in a dynamic system that could accommodate the effects of interaction between different social variables and constants. The most important of these was the social process model of language attitudes (Cargile et al., 1994). This model emphasised that since language attitudes are based on the interpretation of past experiences, they can and

do change with time. In other words, not only do language attitudes heavily influence language use, but the feedback that one receives during language use can contradict, and thus modify, language attitudes. This feedback loop is what allows broader perceptions of a language to change within a given society (Cargile et al., 1994). The social process model is highly detailed, accounting for not only interlocutor dynamics but also the outcomes of speech events, biases towards different language communities, and the immediate social context that underlies each interaction.



Source: Cargile et al. (1994)

While the socio-educational model argues that language attitudes are influenced by long term goals – social integration and personal economic gains – the social process model highlights the effect of interpersonal relationships and communicative contexts on language attitudes. The latter may not be able to predict how an individual will use language in future scenarios, but it offers a more nuanced representation of how language attitudes change in real-time. A language learner may indeed be driven by the long-term need to integrate in a new country or find a more remunerative job; at the same time, their attitudes to language will also be influenced by their immediate perceptions of linguistic situations.

Thus, a balanced approach to language attitudes must draw from both Gardner's (1985) model as well as Cargile and colleagues' (1994) model. However, one criticism that can be applied to these and related frameworks is that they do not acknowledge the social structures underlying all interactions, linguistic or otherwise. When interlocutors judge each other for their linguistic choices, one must question whether these judgements originate in broader stereotypes about social categories like class, gender, ethnicity, and race (Giles & Marlow, 2011). Similarly, if an

individual wishes to join a particular language community, one must question the social and economic incentives for this aspiration.

Without an analysis of how power imbalances affect linguistic choices, one cannot understand language shifts across the globe, especially those that occur among subaltern groups. Therefore, inspired by sociological research on power and capital, the following section proposes a new framework of language attitudes. The aim of this framework is to not to dismiss the socio-educational and social process models, but to enrich them by connecting individual language attitudes to material realities.

2.2.4. Capital, ideology, and language attitudes

There exists a common perception that some languages are more ‘powerful’ than others. Linguistically, there is no evidence to support this statement: no language has *intrinsic* power. However, languages are given *symbolic* power by virtue of the communities that speak them. The reason most people consider English a language of power, but would not say the same about Sentinelese, is that wealth and status have historically been concentrated in the hands of English speakers. This wealth and status, of course, was accumulated not by coincidence, but by centuries of imperialism, manifested in both direct colonisation under the British Empire as well as the enforcement – military and diplomatic – of American economic interests around the world (Crystal, 2003). On the other hand, the Sentinelese language is spoken by an island community that has had little wealth and status even when compared to its closest geographical neighbours. This is why English Language Teaching (ELT) is a lucrative international business, while the demand for Sentinelese teachers is non-existent.

Therefore, it follows that an individual’s attitudes towards a language are inseparable from the material conditions of the target language community. However, attitudes towards language are also shaped by the material conditions in which the *individual* resides. While native speakers of English may primarily view English as an expression of cultural identity, many non-native speakers adopt an instrumentalist attitude towards it, seeing it as a means of accessing what Marxist thinkers refer to as *capital*.

(a) Language and capital

According to traditional Marxist economics, capital refers to that upon which labour is performed in order to produce a good or service (Marx, 2016). Physically, it manifests as goods that are used as “productive inputs for further production” (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 2001, p. 270), such as factories, buildings, machines, and so on, but it is also understood to encapsulate non-tangible financial creations such as stocks and shares, since these connote ownership of

physical capital. Under the dominant economic system of today, capitalism, capital is concentrated in the hands of a small minority, to whom the vast majority of humanity sell their labour in exchange for wages. For all practical purposes, those who own capital enjoy power over those who sell labour. Thus, symbolically, capital is a social relation that grants power over social energy (Marx, 2016; Bourdieu, 1985).

In an extension of Marxist theory, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu sought to transform capital into a concept that could explain *all* forms of power in society. Much like his predecessors, he acknowledged that the root of power was indeed economic capital, but then put forward the additional notions of cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1985). Cultural capital, which represents access to information, exists in three states: the *embodied* state, within the mind; the *objectified* state, in the form of books and other cultural objects; and the *institutionalised* state, as academic qualifications. The rate of growth of cultural capital is exponential, suggesting that families with high cultural capital tend to produce the most poets, artists, thinkers, and philosophers in society. In modern society, cultural capital is often associated with 'skilled' jobs, which tend to be more remunerative than their 'unskilled' counterparts. As an individual's disposable income increases, they become more able to invest in stocks and other assets. Thus, cultural capital indirectly helps accumulate economic capital.

Social capital, on the other hand, refers to the power to benefit from one's social networks. The larger these networks are, the more easily an individual can count on the support of others, thereby tapping into *their* cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1985). In premodern societies, access to social capital was restricted by explicit rules such as endogamy, but under capitalism, these restrictions are closely related to wealth and lifestyle: for instance, in order to form relationships with others in a club, resort, or library, one may be required to pay a high membership fee.

Language, as one of the main vehicles through which people convey information, functions as a gateway to all three kinds of capital. Firstly, for any given language, the more it is used in interpersonal communication, the more social capital it grants. Secondly, the more knowledge, cultural objects, and academic qualifications are expressed in it, the more cultural capital it offers. Finally, the more it is used in business, the more it is associated with lucrative salaries, which in turn can help individuals invest in more economic capital. Therefore, while language *in itself* does not have intrinsic power, individual languages offer access to different amounts of capital. The degree to which a language does this can be called *linguistic power*. Global

languages, which allow access to high levels of capital, contain high linguistic power, while more localised languages contain relatively low linguistic power.

One might expect that all individuals would have positive attitudes towards ‘powerful’ languages, and that the greatest initiative to learn these languages would come from the most marginalised sections of society. However, this expectation would fail to account for one crucial factor in the formation of language attitudes: language ideology.

(b) Language ideology

In the words of Verschueren (2012), ideology refers to the “underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation” (p. 7). In common parlance, it is understood as a set of *explicit* messages, but, as the neo-Marxist philosopher Žižek has argued, implicit ideological messaging is present in everything we consume, from movies to food to academic information (Fiennes, 2012). The values that we consider most natural and least deserving of explanation are, in fact, the most powerful expressions of ideology (Žižek, 1984). Ideologies may concern different aspects of social life; for example, *nationalism* calls for the creation of sovereign states based on nationality, while *atheism* rejects belief in the divine. However, all ideologies have political and economic ramifications that benefit some groups over others. Therefore, it is possible, in any given society, to differentiate between ideologies based on whose interests they serve. Since the dissemination of ideology depends to a great extent on access to the media, mainstream ideologies tend to be those that serve the interests of dominant social groups (Žižek, 1984).

A *language ideology* is a set of values about language that people have internalised over the course of their lives (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). While language attitudes indicate whether languages and language communities are viewed positively or negatively, language ideologies are the underlying sociocultural values that shape these attitudes (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Two examples of language ideologies are native-speakerism and linguistic purism. These are explained in further detail in the following subsections.

Native-speakerism

Native-speakerism is the belief that the ultimate authority on how to use a language is the native speaker of that language. This language ideology is most commonly observable in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT; Holliday, 2006), where both learners and teachers tend to judge English usage based on British or American standards. Native-speakerism in English owes much to colonialism, which taught the world to associate English with the power of the British Empire and the current superpower status of the USA (Tupas, 2022; Crystal,

2003). This could explain why British and American Englishes continue to be held as standards for ELT in most developing countries (Rezaei et al., 2019; Tupas & Salonga, 2016; Pishghadam & Sabouri, 2011; He & Li, 2009).

To reject native-speakerism in a colonial language represents an opposite ideology that one might term *linguistic decolonisation*. Linguistic decolonisation could explain why, in Suriname, a *local* variety of Dutch is gaining popularity, while Netherlandic Dutch is “ideologically depreciated” (Ghyselen et al., 2022, p. 21). It could also explain the small but growing tendency to reject English native-speakerism in erstwhile British colonies like Malaysia (Ng & Diskin- Holdaway, 2021) and India (Bernaisch & Koch, 2016). However, linguistic decolonisation may manifest in different ways: for some, it leads to the complete rejection of the coloniser’s language (wa Thiong’o, 1986), while for others may decide to claim ownership of the coloniser’s language (Achebe, 1977).

Linguistic purism

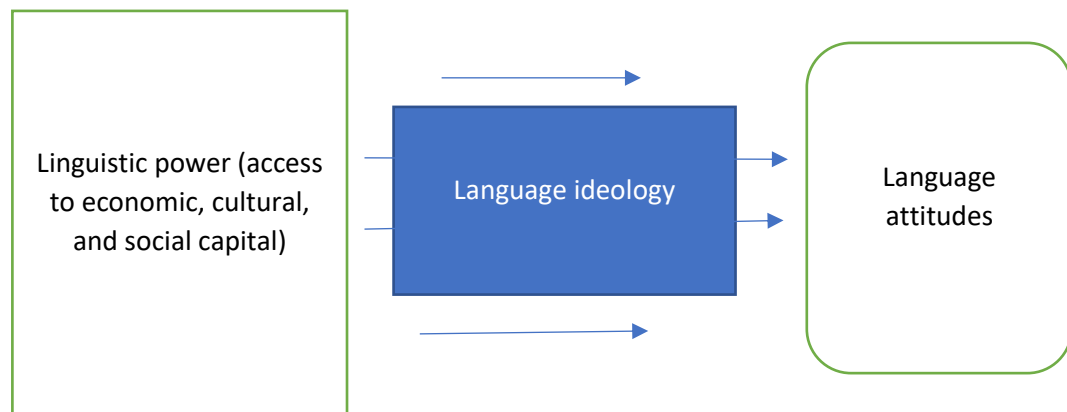
Another language ideology, linguistic purism, encourages greater conservatism in language use, leading people to avoid any linguistic elements deemed foreign. In a study involving Polish students, Hansen and colleagues (2018) observed that the more strongly a participant identified as ‘Polish,’ the more likely they were to avoid loanwords in the language. Interestingly, the authors asserted that there was a difference between conscious purism and feelings of community pride, and that purism had had only a small effect on the behaviour of their participants. The problem with this conclusion was that it could not produce alternate reasons (beyond purism) for why a participant might wish to avoid loan-words. Applying Zizek’s (1984) conceptualisation of ideology as an all-pervasive phenomenon, one could well argue that based on the data found in this study, all participants *demonstrated* linguistic purism, even if they did not wish to associate themselves with the phrase.

(c) A materialist model of language attitude formation

As argued in section 2.2.4 (a), language regulates access to social and cultural capital, and therefore, learning powerful languages can lead to a raise in living standards. This is applicable to all individuals but is especially valuable for those from marginalised groups. However, since all perceptions of reality are coloured by ideology, and most mainstream ideologies benefit dominant groups, individuals from *non*-dominant groups often cannot see which linguistic decisions will provide them with the most material benefits. This may lead them to adopt attitudes that are not conducive to linguistic achievement, unknowingly preventing themselves from gaining more social and cultural capital. For example, by accepting native-speakerism, non-native speakers of English around the world often view their varieties of English with an

attitude of shame, and this causes them to expend large amounts of money on language teaching programs that teach standardised American or British Englishes. These monetary investments benefit American and British language schools, but do not always prove useful for language learners, because despite their best efforts, most non-native speakers cannot produce native-like English (Selinker, 1972). It is thus common for language ideologies to make individuals act against their own interests.

Drawing from Bourdieu's (1985) theory of capital and the neo-Marxist definition of ideology (Zizek, 1984), I postulate that language attitudes are formed when language ideologies colour one's aspirations towards linguistic power. This process is visually depicted below:



To begin with, all individuals seek to access as much social, cultural, and economic capital as possible (Bourdieu, 1985). Language in general offers this access, and different languages grant it to different degrees. However, people cannot perfectly guess the amount of *linguistic power* that each language contains. This is because information itself is an unevenly distributed resource. Thus, they must rely on metanarratives about language – in other words, *language ideologies* (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994) – when deciding which languages are best suited to their material interests. Whether they adopt a positive, negative, or neutral *language attitude* towards a particular language or language community will depend on the language ideologies that they have internalised most strongly. At different points in one's life, one may be more influenced by some language ideologies than others. This is because one's level of exposure to each ideology is never a constant. As a result, language attitudes, too, are subject to change.

This model explains integrative orientation as the drive to increase social capital, and instrumental orientation as the drive to increase cultural and economic capital (Gardner, 1985;

Bourdieu, 1985). It also connects the language attitudes that arise in real-time linguistic situations (see: Cargile et al., 1994) to the long-term aspirations of language users. Therefore, it can be understood as an extension of the socio-educational and social process models.

2.2.5. Language attitudes among marginalised groups

The previous section argued that all language attitudes can be traced back to the desire to increase capital. To the best of my knowledge, the formulation of language ideology as the interpreter of this desire is new. However, previous researchers have suggested that some social variables correlate with particular language attitudes. For example, Labov (1966) noted that socioeconomic status (SES) could predict attitudes towards English dialects in New York. This observation was replicated in Hong Kong and Haiti by Lai (2010) and Ulysse and Masaeed (2021), respectively. Gender, too, appears to predict language attitudes; according to Talbot (2010), this is because women and men are socialised to view language use in different ways. Differential socialisation could explain Bilaniuk's (2003) observation that her female participants displayed stronger positive attitudes towards English than her male participants.

Since all of these studies relied primarily on quantitative methods, they could not delve deep into subjective explanations for their findings; nevertheless, they all suggested that socially marginalised groups – such as low-SES individuals and women – view language learning from the lens of liberation. Taking this idea further, one could suggest that language attitudes are influenced by not only gender and class, but also other social categories that restrict access to capital.

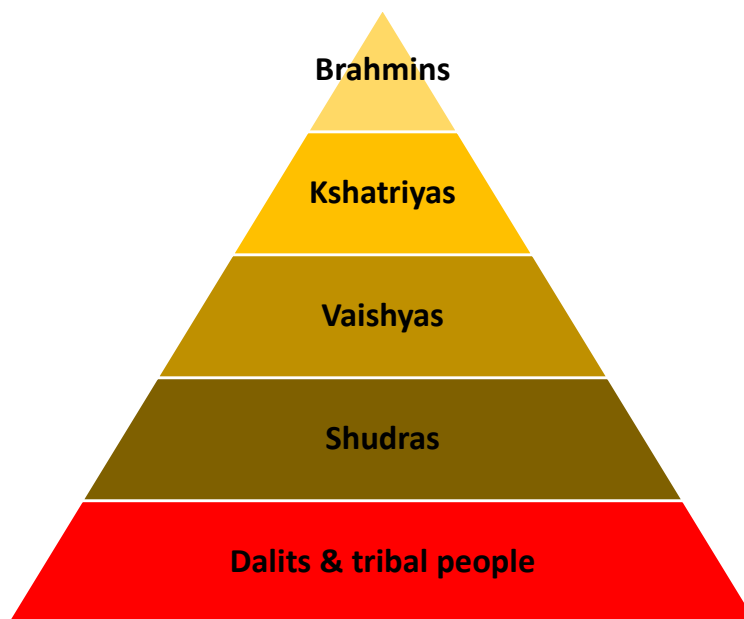
2.3. Caste in South Asia

If class is the primary axis of social differentiation in Europe and the Americas, its South Asian counterpart is caste. Before studying the relationship between caste and language, it is important to state what exactly caste means and how it is distinct from related categories like class, race, and gender. The aim of this section is to unpack the components of caste, establish its relevance as a variable in social research, and then explore how it interacts with the most 'powerful' language in India: English.

2.3.1. Components of caste

The first step to understanding caste is to acknowledge that the word 'caste' does not exist in any of India's languages. As Dirks (2001) argued, the contemporary view of 'caste' as a legal category was created by the British empire in an attempt to rigidify divisions within the people of the British Raj (what is now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). However, the *experience* of caste is a material reality for all South Asians (Teltumbde, 2016).

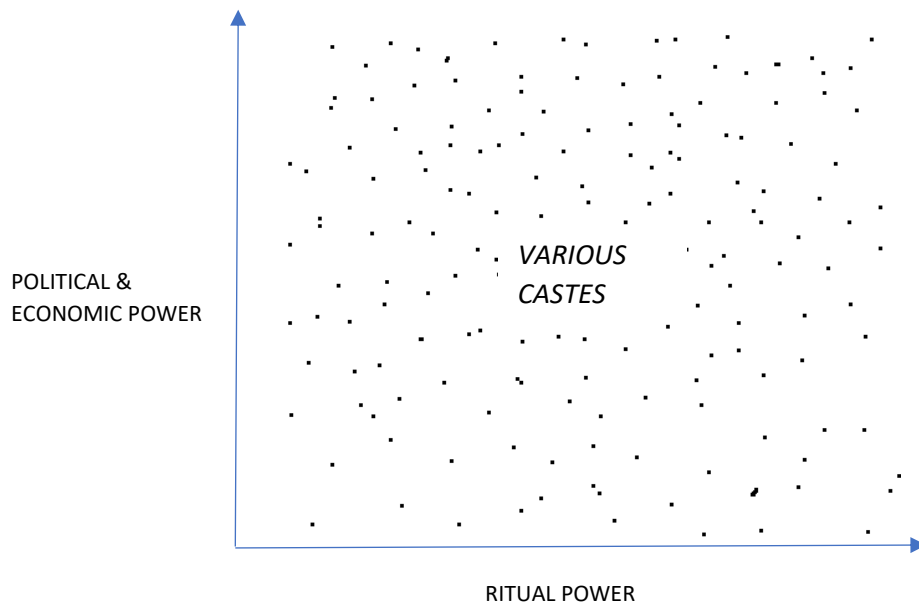
As Beteille (2010) and many others have explained, what is termed as ‘caste’ in English really refers to not one, but *two* concepts. The first of these is *varna*, and it refers to one of the four social classes that were believed to have existed thousands of years ago in the Indian subcontinent – primarily within Hinduism. The four *varnas*, in descending order of a ritual hierarchy, include the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants), and Shudras (peasants and servants). These four groups are collectively called *savarnas*. In addition, there is an unofficial fifth category, the *avarnas*, which consists of tribal people and the so-called Dalits: those considered so far beneath the others that they are placed outside the *varna* system.



The second concept encapsulated by ‘caste’ is *jati* (Beteille, 2010; Telumbde, 2016). In South Asia, a *jati* is one of the thousands of social groups in India, each of which has its own origin myth, history, internal divisions, and rituals. Every *jati* is an endogamous social unit that positions itself as either superior or inferior to every other *jati*. This means that *jatis* exist only in relation to one another (Ambedkar, 2014). Moreover, every *jati* is associated with a historical occupation, and members are forbidden – or at least, strongly discouraged – from working in alternate fields. This means that one’s access to social, cultural, and economic capital is greatly restricted by the *jati* into which they are born.

When the word ‘caste’ is used in the academia, it generally refers to the real social unit, *jati*. However, it also hints at the hierarchy implicit in the abstract notion of *varna*, because *jatis* often position themselves as being sub-categories of one *varna* or the other. Since the real

experiences and identities of all South Asians are tied to both concepts, it makes sense to continue using the term 'caste', even if it was formed by a "concrete encounter with colonial modernity" (Dirks, 2001, p. 5). For the sake of explanation, the dual nature of caste – as based on ritual *and* material power – can be depicted as below:



2.3.2. Caste as hierarchy

Louis Dumont, one of the first sociologists to present a theory of caste in the early 1900s, asserted that the social structure created by caste was justified by the Hindu religion (Dumont, 1974). His model suggested that all South Asians knew their place within the caste hierarchy. However, his work was speculative, not empirical, because it had no evidence to prove that caste was a top-down structure. The fundamental flaw with Dumont's approach was that it assumed that every caste had agreed on where it would fall in the hierarchy.

Perhaps in response to this idealism, the Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas presented the idea of *dominance* in the caste system. To Srinivas, dominance implied the possession of material advantages such as high ownership of land and high population (Srinivas, 1959). Srinivas (1952) suggested that it was possible for a caste to elevate itself in the ritual hierarchy, but that to do so, it would have to replace its own rituals and practices with those of more powerful castes: a process termed 'Sanskritisation'¹.

However, the wider literature on caste politics, especially following the end of British rule in the subcontinent, revealed flaws in Srinivas' approach. For one, anti-caste theorists (e.g., Roy, 2021)

¹ Sanskrit was historically associated with the highest castes.

criticised Srinivas (1952) for presenting Sanskritisation as a force that could eradicate caste. Since the process Sanskritisation begins with believing that the culture of another caste is superior to one's own, it cannot dispel the notion of caste hierarchy. Secondly, caste is *not* solely rooted in material power. A *jati* may claim to belong to one *varna*, but there is no assurance that it will be seen by other *jatis* as a component of that *varna*. Historically, disagreements over a *jati's* position in the ritual hierarchy often resulted in the radical reimagining of origin myths and the formation of new caste coalitions, as was seen among the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh (Michelutti, 2002, 2008), fisherman castes in Kerala (Alex, 2020), and peasant castes in Bihar (Jha, 1977). Srinivas (1952) might have viewed these political developments as examples of Sanskritisation, but others, such as Dube (1978), pointed out that since the castes involved did not always discard their own cultures in favour of higher-caste cultures, they were in fact challenges to Sanskritisation. It is unclear how Srinivas might have characterised conflicts where the weaker caste – henceforth referred to as the 'lower' caste in the caste system – was forced into submission.

2.3.3. The anti-caste movement

Perhaps Srinivas' views on Sanskritisation, and his reduction of casteism to material power, can be explained by his identity as a Brahmin man² who had never witnessed the violence that keeps members of relatively lower castes locked in conflict. While Srinivas came from a position of great caste privilege, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, the father of the modern anti-caste movement, was born into a Dalit caste, and thus viewed as *avarna* by those around him. In defiance of all the discrimination he faced, he went on to become a revolutionary and scholar, fighting for the emancipation of all Dalits. His 1936 work, *Annihilation of Caste*, identified Hinduism itself as the root of the caste system, and argued that to progress as a society, India would have to give up caste – even if it meant giving up Hinduism (Ambedkar, 2014).

The first criticisms of caste that Ambedkar presented were based in the values of the Enlightenment (Ambedkar, 2014). For instance, he argued that the idea of caste is detrimental to meritocracy, since it prescribes that people follow their ancestors' occupations. He also attacked caste for preventing the formation of social solidarity among Indians, and for being based in cruelty and humiliation. However, his opposition to caste was not solely academic. Following India's declaration of independence from the British Empire, Ambedkar played a major role in formulating the national constitution, weaving in his commitment to create an India where all citizens could be free and equal. In 1956, he renounced his identity as a Hindu

² Specifically, a man whose caste claimed (and could enforce its) Brahmin status

altogether, converting to Buddhism and inspiring thousands of others to follow his example (Roychowdhury, 2020). As a member of the most oppressed section of Indian society, Ambedkar was what Gramsci (1971) would have called an 'organic intellectual': a thinker whose ideas were rooted in lived experience rather than abstract philosophy.

However, Ambedkar was by no means the *only* leader of the anti-caste movement: in his own state, Maharashtra, he had been preceded by the legendary Mahatma Phule (O'Hanlon, 1985), and he was a contemporary of EVR 'Periyar' Naicker, who led the struggle in the southern state of Tamil Nadu (Periyar, 2019). What tied all these figures together was that they recognised the relationship between casteism and the unequal distribution of capital in all its forms: social, cultural, and economic. Consequently, all of them viewed mass education as a key step towards liberation. This was why Ambedkar famously called for oppressed castes to "educate, organise, agitate" (Kumar et al., 2022).

2.3.4. Caste, modernity, and English

As was suggested in the section critiquing Dumont (1974), there is no convincing reason to believe that caste as a system is consensual. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate that caste is enforced through violence. In the media, this violence is treated as synonymous with atrocities, many of which are committed against Dalits (Human Rights Watch, 1999), but it can also take more subtle forms. The existence of a caste hierarchy reflects and promotes the unequal distribution of resources, with lower castes being denied access to quality education (Kapoor, 2008; Pankaj, 2021; K. Khan, 2018), healthcare (Patel et al., 2018; Mahapatro et al., 2021) and ownership of land (M.R. Khan et al., 2021). In some areas, Dalits still struggle to access drinking water because their upper-caste neighbours believe that they will 'pollute' the water if they touch it (Dutta et al., 2015). This aligns with the fact that many people in South Asia still practice untouchability (Shah et al., 2006; Chishti, 2014; Teltumbde, 2016).

Some battles have been won in the struggle to abolish caste. One of these was the reservation of seats for Dalits (SCs/Scheduled Castes), other backward castes (OBCs), and tribal people (STs/Scheduled Tribes) in government, educational institutions, and public workplaces (Tharu et al., 2007). This has granted the oppressed sections of Indian society more platforms in which to relate their lived experiences. However, casteism still prevails and is reflected in all areas of life for not only Hindus but all South Asians. Bearing this context in mind, one may wonder how the emergence of English as a global language has impacted caste dynamics in India.

During the early decades of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, English was used primarily by the British, but thanks to politicians such as Macaulay (1835), it became a means to create a friendly Indian bureaucracy that would support the imperial government (Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy, 2006). Over time, English became associated with the growing Indian middle class, who incorporated it in the mainstream nationalist movement (Mohan, 2006). Since Indic society had been caste-based for thousands of years, it was no accident that the upper castes were disproportionately represented in this middle class. By the time the British were expelled from the new Republic of India, English was still concentrated in the hands of this upper-caste minority.

However, right from the mid-1800s, there had been a perception that English a tool that could help fight caste. This was because it stood for the caste-free education systems of the West (Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy, 2006). The fact that Ambedkar himself had completed his education via English lent credence to this view. Therefore, from the time India achieved political independence up to the present day, voices in the anti-caste movement have portrayed English as a means of liberation, especially for Dalits (Shepherd, 2022; Ilame, 2020; Kothari, 2013). In some places, this notion has become so powerful as to accord English divine status (e.g., “‘Dalit Goddess English’ temple in UP’s Banka village”, 2010).

2.4. Assessment of gaps in the literature

During the conduction of this literature review, two major gaps in the literature were identified. The first of these was within language attitude *theory*: although many studies that have been conducted on language attitudes across the world, researchers have not yet produced a grounded framework that can connect individuals’ language attitudes to the social, political, and economic forces that make some languages more ‘powerful’ than others. Nor have they accounted for the role of language ideologies in influencing whether a particular attitude towards a language or language community is ‘positive,’ ‘negative,’ or ‘neutral.’ As a result, they have missed out on the opportunity to connect the formation of language attitudes in society to the material interests of different social groups.

The second gap that was identified was within language attitude *research*. While there have been studies showing that gender and socioeconomic status (alternately referred to as *class*) have a statistical effect on language attitudes, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have investigated whether *caste* interacts with language attitudes. This is surprising because India’s anti-caste movement, as a whole, has repeatedly asserted that marginalised caste groups will benefit from learning English.

To tackle the first gap, this chapter proposed a model of language attitude formation that extends Bourdieu's (1985) theory of capital, neo-Marxist definitions of ideology (Zizek, 1984), the socio-educational model of language acquisition (Gardner, 1985), and the social process model of language attitudes (Cargile et al., 1994). This new model has not been tested using quantitative methods, and thus cannot determine the *degree* to which language ideology influences perceptions of linguistic power. However, it allows the researcher to visualise how material realities – the 'power' that different languages carry – and invisible social values (ideology) influence individual dispositions.

The main aim of this dissertation, though, was to address the second gap by examining how a learner's experience of caste affects their language attitudes. Considering trends within the anti-caste movement, the language I chose to focus on was English. Caste is distinct from class or gender but does intersect with these categories in some ways. Therefore, while gathering data for this study, I incorporated a secondary focus on these variables. The research questions driving the study were:

1. *Are students' attitudes towards English influenced by their experiences of caste? If yes, how?*
2. *How does access to English impact one's position within the ritual and material hierarchies of caste?*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overview

This chapter describes the methodological paradigm, setting, instruments used to collect data, and the handling of ethics in the study. Bearing in mind the lack of research on caste in second language acquisition, the study's methodology drew inspiration from broader postcolonial, anti-caste, feminist, and Marxist explorations of inequality.

3.2. Research structure

This section draws on key concepts of research methods in applied linguistics to structure the methodology: approach, paradigm, and design (see McKinley, 2020).

3.2.1. *Research Approach: Qualitative*

Caste in India works in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, other social facts, such as gender and sex, and these interactions are not quantifiable. The aim was not to demonstrate correlations between caste and academic performance, mental health, employment, or access to resources; this literature already exists. Rather, it was to illustrate the complexity of caste in interaction with other factors in the life of an individual. Moreover, language attitudes are, by definition, subjective, and thus best represented by verbal data (Aziz et al., 2021; Nguyen & Hamid, 2016). Therefore, descriptive qualitative methods were used in the collection and synthesis of data in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to facilitate working within the nuanced shades of grey necessary to investigate the complexities of caste.

3.2.2. *Research Paradigm: Constructivism*

This study situates itself in the constructivist tradition, which is more interested in understanding how individuals construct their perceptions of reality than in establishing causal relationships between empirical variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach was adopted for two reasons: firstly, because there is little prior literature on caste in SLA, which would be requisite to design a quantitative study; and secondly, because caste is highly experiential and has different connotations for different caste groups.

3.2.3. *Research Design: Ethnography*

Understanding the social construction of reality is well facilitated by ethnography, or the study of ritualised patterns of behaviour in a given cultural group (Fetterman, 2008). This approach to research was deemed appropriate when working with castes in India, which, tend to be rigid, endogamic, and culturally distinct from one another (Ambedkar, 2014).

Typically, ethnographers look for cultural symbols and rituals linked to the larger themes of the research (Fetterman, 2008), then attempt to describe the world as seen from the eyes of their participants. Although it is impossible to eliminate researcher bias, which colours the interpretation of participant narratives, researchers may reduce its impact by explicitly acknowledging their own relationships with the themes and participants in research. This acknowledgement is known as reflexivity (Maxwell, 2008; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Historically, ethnographies were conducted over extended periods of time, with researchers embedding themselves in their target cultures. However, as Jeffrey and Troman (2004) have argued, it would be fallacious to judge the depth of an ethnography solely based on the *amount of time* spent in the field: one must also account for the *level of immersion* in the research environment. Owing to time constraints – imposed by both the structure of the researcher’s Masters programme as well as the school calendar in Mumbai – the researcher was compelled to complete the data collection within the time period of one month. However, efforts were made to visit the research location at least four times a week, regardless of whether the researcher had interview appointments, and to learn about the history of Mumbai as part of this research process.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is one in which the researcher has a list of questions to explore but allows the conversation to flow naturally (Brinkmann, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are apt in situations where one wishes to address specific themes in research while also leaving room for their participants to be spontaneous and flexible. In each interview, the researcher attempted to find a balance between receptive and assertive interviewing styles (Brinkmann, 2020), making adjustments based on how willing each participant was to steer the conversation.

While conducting interviews with students, the researcher had a checklist of topics to cover, but tried their best to let the conversation flow naturally, without interrupting or changing topic too abruptly (see Appendix A for interview checklist). Active listening, which entailed attention to not only the words that were uttered but also tone, body language, and setting, was practiced throughout (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3.3.2. Field notes

Field notes are a common method of collecting data that is based on observations, speculations, and informal conversations. They are used to better understand the context in which research is conducted, so that during the analysis of the main data, the researcher can put themselves in the shoes of their participants. However, they are not usually analysed in depth.

Early notes in this study were concerned with the school as an institution: its distance from the nearest train station, the amount of space it occupied, the year of its founding, its affiliation to a prominent NGO, and so on.

3.4. Context and participants

3.4.1. Context

Since the main social variable that the researcher wished to examine was caste, he had to work with a South Asian population: preferably one in India, where he was familiar with the dominant histories, languages, and cultures. Rather than study adult participants, whose opinions would have been more ossified by experience, he chose to work with school-age children, who would still be exploring their values and ideologies.

After considering a list of schools in which the study could be conducted, the researcher selected an English-medium school in the city of Mumbai, India. The primary reason for this choice was that a close contact, who had been teaching at this school, had confirmed that it – unlike most educational institutions in India – was open to conversations on caste. Besides, most of the students in the school came from low-income backgrounds and were first-generation learners of English, meaning that the researcher could explore how English Medium Education (EMI) affected marginalised groups. With the help of his contact, the researcher was able to communicate with the principal of the school and then plan a research trip to India.

Located near the Cotton Green area, once the site of an army cantonment, this state-funded school works with children – both boys as well as girls – from classes IV through X. Many of these children are the first to be educated in their families, and their parents continue to work as taxi drivers, sweepers, and small shopkeepers. Since employment in India is closely linked to caste, it was guessed that many of these children would be from castes classified as OBCs, or Other Backwards Castes: that is, castes that may enjoy some mobility when compared to the landless, disenfranchised Dalits, but still experience some social and economic marginalisation.

Thus, it was assumed that the participants' lived experiences would be diversified by not only class but also caste.

The school is situated in a residential area about fifteen minutes from the local railway station. Like most public schools in India, it is underfunded, and thus, shares its building with two other schools. It is situated on the second floor, while the first and third floor are used by a Hindi and Marathi medium school respectively. Shortage of space was a consistent motif during data collection. The school in which the study was conducted had a total of 11 rooms. Ten of these were used as classrooms, and the last room was used as a staff room, with a small desk, chairs and shelves lined with files. Since the staff room was not large enough for every teacher to occupy it at the same time, some of the teachers had to work on benches in the hallways. Most of the field work was conducted in these hallways by the researcher.

3.4.2. Participants

The study included twelve individuals. Two of them were English teachers, one of whom worked with class VIII and the other with class IX. They were invited to help with the study based on their personal availability and were considered indirect informants rather than distinct cases.

The main participants were 10 students: five from class VIII and five from class IX. They were recruited through purposive sampling, with the priority being to include a mixture of castes, genders, and economic classes. To approximate these characteristics, the researcher relied on both his field notes and the recommendations of the teachers.

3.5. Research Procedures



The fieldwork for the project consisted of four stages:

1. Acquiring permissions
2. Making classroom observations
3. Conversing with teachers
4. Interviewing students

Each of these is described below.

3.5.1. Acquiring permissions

(a) Ethical clearance

Before the study was conducted, an application was made to the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), explaining the goals, procedures, and ethical considerations that had been borne in mind while designing this study. While the committee was reviewing the application, the researcher stayed in touch with his contact at the school, so as to remain up to date on the dates of school vacations and other potential complications surrounding Covid-related school closures.

(b) Clearance from school principal

As soon as the study was approved, the researcher travelled to India for data collection. An official email was sent to the principal of the school, explaining the study in detail and requesting permission to collect data from students and teachers. Additionally, a visit to the school was made and the principal was met. Although she was willing to allow the study to be conducted in the school, she had some questions regarding the recording of information. Thus, she was presented with copies of all consent and information documents that would be given to the participants. After she had parsed these, the researcher was granted permission by the school to begin the study.

(c) Clearance from teachers

As the last step before collecting data, the researcher approached two English teachers – one of whom worked with class VIII and the other, with class IX – and invited them to participate in the research project. Each teacher was given an information sheet and asked whether the researcher could (i) observe one of their English classes and (ii) have a casual interview with them. Both teachers readily expressed their interest in the study and signed a consent form.

3.5.3. Classroom observations

In the second stage of fieldwork, two qualitative observations of English classes were conducted. One was for class VIII, and the other, class IX. In both, the researcher remained a non-participant, sitting quietly at the back of the classroom and taking notes while remaining unintrusive (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Classroom observations in educational research are often used to study teacher engagement with the classroom, but here, the researcher paid close attention to how many students spoke up, which topics they seemed to enjoy most, and how they responded to teacher feedback. This information helped illustrate how they felt about English as a taught subject.

3.5.4. Teacher conversations

Next, the researcher conducted an informal recorded interview of each teacher, asking them for their general views on the school and its students, the Indian education system, and English as a global language. Since these interviews were taken to build context, and not subjected to in-depth analysis, they could be treated as field notes.

3.5.5. Student interviews

Finally, with the help of the teachers, the researcher identified ten students to interview, and requested to speak to them for five minutes during breaks in between their classes. During these sessions, he explained the aims of the research and asked the students whether they were willing to be interviewed. All the students expressed their verbal interest. However, as per CUREC guidelines, this could not be taken as consent since the students were below 16 years of age. Hence, the researcher gave them consent forms and requested them to get these approved by their parents. Separate information sheets for the parents were also given to the students. Once the consent forms had been signed by the parents of the ten students, the students' interviews began.

Out of the 10 interviews conducted, only two could be conducted in a quiet room. 8 were conducted in a hallway, at a desk that was exposed to the general sounds of talking students and lessons in progress. This could not be helped because, as mentioned earlier, space was very limited in the school, as were time slots in which the participants were available. To navigate these complications, the researcher had to make small adjustments, such as looking for the quietest hallway on the floor and informing any surrounding students not to interrupt.

At the start of each interview, participants were reminded that they were under no obligation to share information that they felt uncomfortable sharing. They were also asked whether they had any questions for the researcher. Finally, they were requested, once again, for their verbal consent. None of them had any qualms about participation, although some of them did ask the researcher why he was doing the project and what he hoped to learn. They all appeared satisfied with the explanations and confirmed that they were comfortable being audio-recorded during their interviews.

A rough rubric was followed by the researcher as he posed questions to the participants:

1. Key personal data on caste, gender, and academic class was recorded early on, followed by information on the participants' family backgrounds.

2. Next, participant views on English, both within as well as outside the classroom, were investigated.
3. To conclude, the researcher thanked each participant and encouraged them to contact him – or their English teacher – in case they had further questions or feedback.

3.5.4. Analysis of data

The method of data interpretation used in this study was *thematic analysis*. After being collected, the interview data were transcribed and organised into manual codes on NVIVO. Next, these themes were grouped into categories, which in turn were placed under themes. Once the coding process was complete, the final themes were sorted by (a) the number of interviews in which they had appeared, and (b) number of times participants had referred to them. The themes that emerged at the top of this sorting have been listed in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

3.6. Epistemological concerns

While designing, gathering data for, and analysing the results of this study, a number of epistemological concerns were considered. These are discussed in the following subsections.

3.6.1. Validity and reliability

Since most qualitative studies cannot establish the validity of their measures, it is vital that they prove their trustworthiness by other means. Creswell and Cresswell (2018) suggest that qualitative researchers use multiple validity strategies to ensure that their findings are perceived as accurate by both themselves as well as their participants and later, colleagues. Five of his listed strategies were used by the researcher in this project:

1. Rich, thick description was utilised during the analysis of the data. While the researcher was making field notes, as much attention as possible was spent on describing the context of the study for later review.
2. Researcher bias was made explicit. Having occupied a position of extreme privilege in comparison to their participants, it was paramount for the researcher to explain that their findings must not be treated as absolute, and that their own embeddedness in the Indian social milieu likely influenced participant responses during the interviews.
3. Negative information was shared and analysed. Rather than being dismissed as discrepancies, findings that contradicted the researcher's expectations were taken into consideration during the transcription and analysis of the interviews.
4. Prolonged time was spent in the field. On the one hand, as someone who had lived in India all their life, the researcher was familiar with the broader cultural values of the participants. On the other hand, recognising that their participants were from a

different part of India, he made an effort to be immersed in the local culture of the city. Not only did he stay in a relatively low-income, mainly lower-caste neighborhood of the city, gaining some insight on the environments in which the participants had grown up, but he also made regular visits to the research site over the course of a month.

5. Peer debriefing was utilised with the help of the friend who had first put the researcher in touch with the school. Following each day collecting data, the researcher engaged in conversations with the friend, asking them how they had navigated the presence of caste, class, and gender in the classroom. The researcher also explained the structure of this study to the friend multiple times, and in the process, identified gaps that needed to be filled during data collection. However, at no point during these discussions was research data shared with the friend or anyone else.

To establish reliability, the researcher piloted the data collection instruments several months before the main project began with an informed expert. The pilot involved the semi-structured interview of a PhD scholar, based in India, who currently works on expressions of caste in popular culture and is thus familiar with the themes of this project. Being much older than the intended participants of the main study, this scholar was asked to recall the degree to which his high school self could have articulated his experience of caste in the English classroom. The results appeared promising. Much later, during data collection for the main study, the researcher aimed to preserve the reliability of his work by maintaining a research record, checking the sound quality of interview recordings, and clarifying any changes to be made, however minor, with his supervisor.

3.6.2. Ethical considerations

The primary objective of research ethics must be to preserve the well-being of all involved stakeholders – especially direct participants – in both the short run as well as the long run. According to Traianou (2020), ethical research is that which minimises harm, respects autonomy, and maintains privacy. In addition, for research to be ethical, it must provide clear benefit by expanding the body of literature on a topic, or helping the participants involved ('reciprocity'; Carpenter, 2018). These principles have been encoded in most reputable research institutions, and were treated as integral during the formulation of this research project

Ethical approval for research was granted by DREC prior to the commencement of this study. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, several additional precautions were made. For example, Mumbai's political news columns were regularly followed, personal contacts were

kept informed of the researcher's whereabouts, and the participants were reassured that their data was safe and confidential.

3.6.3. The politics of research

Research, especially that involving human participants, is inherently political because the access to and investment of academic resources towards the pursuit of knowledge is a privilege in most parts of the world (Giardina & Newman, 2020). Data collection often entails the interaction of researchers with people who have far less access to social and economic capital than themselves. While conducting research on caste, class and gender, the researcher was compelled to acknowledge the lifelong advantages granted him because of his caste, class, and gender. In particular, he was reminded that being upper-caste, he had a responsibility to learn about the experiences of other caste groups without occupying spaces that lower-caste groups had been fighting to gain for centuries.

3.6.5. Privacy during interviews

There is evidence to suggest that participant behaviour is influenced by the setting of an interview, and that whether the presence of others stifles or relaxes participants depends on the cultural milieu in which the research is embedded (Streib, 1973; Edwards & Holland, 2013). Privacy as a construct does not receive the same level of importance across cultures (Mneimneh et al., 2018), and as a result, can sometimes be difficult to obtain. In this study, both teacher interviews, and eight of the student interviews, had to be conducted in a hallway owing to a severe lack of space on the school premises. The researcher did not observe discomfort in the participants; the latter did not seem to worry about where the interviews were conducted, even when the conversation shifted to more personal questions.

For the most part, other than general background noise, the interviews were uninterrupted. However, in one of the interviews that was conducted in a (mostly) empty classroom, a student who was scheduled to be interviewed later in the day listened in on parts of the conversation and started interrupting. Streib (1973) suggested three ways to deal with such situations: requesting the extra person/people to leave, changing the setting of the interview, or rescheduling the interview. The second and third options were unviable in this situation because of spatial and timing-related limitations in the school. Thus the researcher requested the third person to wait their turn to be interviewed. Although the student did not leave the room, she stopped interrupting (see: Gagnon et al., 2015).

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Overview

This chapter outlines the results of the study. Beginning with an overview of the participants, it delves into the major themes that emerged from the interview data.

4.2. Thematic framework

During the coding process, six primary themes were identified, as listed in the table below, accompanied by coding information regarding frequency of codes across the dataset (references) and coverage of codes across interviews (files).

Theme	Files	References
Linguistic environment	8	19
Access to English	10	30
Language attitudes	10	134
Socioeconomic reflections	10	61
Family and community values	10	86
Globalisation, power, and English	10	95

These themes encapsulated the following information.

- *1. Linguistic environment:* the languages that the participants had been in contact with during childhood, both within their homes as well as outside.
- *2. Access to English:* the exposure that participants had had to English media
- *3. Language attitudes:* the beliefs and values participants had attached to the different languages they knew.
- *4. Socioeconomic reflections:* participant reflections on their own castes, the Indian education system, and Indian society in general
- *5. Family and community values:* how the participants' families and larger communities felt about the participants' access to English
- *6. Globalisation, power, and English:* participant reflections on the place of English in the context of globalisation.

In this chapter, Theme 1 is discussed as a subsection under Participant Backgrounds, since it does not contain enough unique information to warrant a section of its own. The data linked to themes (4) and (6) were not deemed sufficiently linked to the research question, and thus,

were not allocated their own sections. However, being of peripheral importance, instead they have been merged with the other themes, whenever relevant.

4.3. Participant backgrounds

The previous chapter broadly described the context in which the qualitative study was conducted. What follows is a description of the participants' caste, class, and gender locations, as well as a count of the languages they reported to know. These details have been collated and presented in the table below.

Pseudonym	Sex	Grade	Caste	Caste status	Family profession(s)	Household size	L1
P1	F	8	?		Father: casual laborer	7	Urdu
P2	M	8	Teli	OBC	Father: taxi driver	4	Hindi
P3	F	8	Kumhar	OBC	Father: lawyer	5	Konkani
P4	F	8	Sonar	OBC	Father: electrical contractor	4	Bhaya (Bhojpuri)*
P5	M	8	Ahir	OBC	Father: flour mill worker	5	Hindi
P6	F	9	Gurjar	OBC	Father: school caretaker	5	Hindi
P7	F	9	?		Father: driver	6	Urdu
P8	F	9	?		Mother: household help	6	Hindi
P9	M	9	Maratha	FC	Father: salesman, Mother & brother: work at diamond shop	7	Marathi
P10	F	9	Teli	OBC	F: carpenter	8	Bhojpuri

** P4 used the terms interchangeably, implying either that her L1 has two names or that she speaks a specific variety of Bhojpuri.*

Since the aim of the study was to understand the role of caste, class, and gender in shaping attitudes to English, the researcher had hoped to find participants from diverse caste, class, and gender locations. However, sampling in this regard was limited.

4.3.1. Class

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the school in which the study was conducted was a government school, and most of its students were from low-income families. The researcher had thus expected all their participants to fit into the category of ‘working class,’ defined in the Marxist sense. However, the results challenged this categorisation. Seven of the participants had parents who worked in Mumbai’s informal sector, doing jobs like driving and carpentry, but the parents of participants P3, P4 and P9 worked in more remunerative areas: law, electricals, and sales, respectively. To avoid grouping the wealthier participants with the poorer ones, it was decided to consider the latter three participants ‘middle-class’ and the former ‘working-class.’ These new groupings were based solely on estimations of income, *not* on the Marxist conception of class.

It must be noted that initially, participant household sizes had also been recorded, in the hope that they might reveal something about each family’s financial needs. However, a preliminary reading of the results revealed that there was insufficient data to pinpoint each family’s expenses. Thus, the only measure of economic wealth being used in this study was estimated family income.

4.3.2. Caste

Seven participants were open about their caste locations and places of origin. After recording this information, the researcher looked up the reservation policies in each participant’s state of origin to find out which of them had been recognised as OBCs (Other Backward Castes), FCs (Forward Castes), and SCs (Scheduled Castes) as per the Indian government’s policy of affirmative action. Six participants belonged to castes considered OBCs and one belonged to a caste considered an FC. The three participants who did not share their caste locations were all Muslims: P1 and P8 identified as Sunnis, and P7 as a Wahhabi.

In accordance with the reservation policies of the state of Maharashtra, all the non-Muslim participants³ have been guaranteed reservation in education, employment, and government. For historical reasons, this includes the participant whose caste comes under the FC category.

4.3.3. Gender

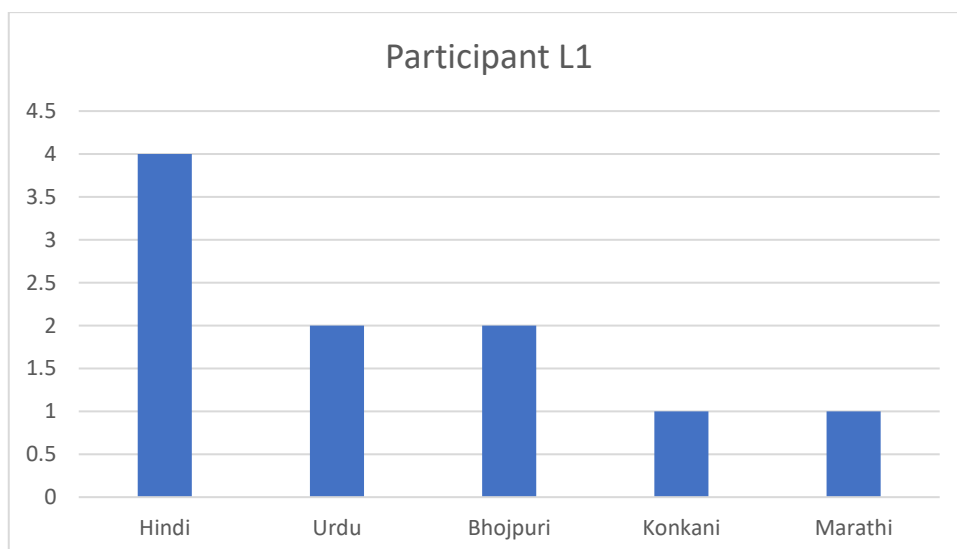
None of the participants stated or implied that their gender identities were different from those assigned to them at birth. In fact, only one participant even mentioned knowing about the LGBT+ community, stating that the world was very “transphobic,” and that it should learn to include “LGBTQ and stuff” (P1). Therefore, it was assumed that all of the participants identified as cisgender at the time of the interviews.

Gender ratio



Initially the researcher had hoped to find an equal distribution of genders, but the actual ratio of girls to boys was 7:3. This could be considered as either an advantage or a limitation: on one hand, it uncovered interesting links between casteism and patriarchy, but on the other, it became more difficult to determine whether social restrictions were based on gendered or casteist logic.

4.3.4. Linguistic environments



³ The term ‘Hindu’ is here avoided because it did not occur as a strong marker of identity in the data.

The state language of Maharashtra is Marathi, but only one participant reported being an L1 speaker of the language. This was because all the other participants were from families that had migrated to Mumbai a generation ago. The most common L1 among the participants was Hindi, the state language of Uttar Pradesh. With Hindi and Marathi being the most spoken languages in Maharashtra, and English being the medium of instruction at the school, it was guaranteed that when the data was being collected, *every* participant was receiving regular linguistic input in at least three languages.

Eight out of the ten participants shared that before starting school, they had grown up with exposure to more than two languages. One of them, P1, lives in a neighbourhood that includes speakers of not only Marathi and Hindi – the most spoken languages in Mumbai – but also languages from the south of India, which belong to the Dravidian language family:

P1: So a lot of south Indian people, mostly people from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, they have come in our...they are there in our area...

Being an L1 speaker of Urdu, which belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family, P1 was not familiar with the linguistic landscape of Chennai, a melting pot of diverse Dravidian communities. Thus, it is entirely possible that while growing up, she was exposed to snippets of not only Tamil but also other Dravidian languages. Nevertheless, the cultural and linguistic gap between P1 and her neighbours meant that to communicate, some degree of vocabulary exchange had to occur:

P1: No, they don't speak English...they don't speak Hindi also...yeah, we learned...some Hindi words, they speak, and some Tamil words, and we understand.

Note that P1 spoke of *Hindi*, not Urdu, despite having stated that her L1 is Urdu. One might here assume that she considers Hindi and Urdu two versions of, or two names for, the same language.⁴ On one occasion, she disavowed this notion, listing them as separate languages:

INTERVIEWER: And... ..what all languages do you speak?

P1: Hindi, Urdu, English...I am also learning Persian and, yeah... ..and Marathi. That's it. On another occasion, however, she stated that “Hindi and Urdu are the same.” Her contrasting views on the nature of her language were somewhat echoed when she shared that her parents and sister spoke in “this particular dialect of Hindi which is Bihari” (P1). The question of whether something is a language or a dialect is a political one, not a social one, leaving one to wonder

⁴ This language has been referred to as Hindustani (Britannica, n.d.). However, Hindi and Urdu are *legally* recognised as distinct languages, and past political movements have termed Urdu a ‘Muslim’ language and Hindi a ‘Hindu’ language.

why P1 had conflicting feelings about Urdu but was clear that she did not consider Bihari a language.

At the time the data was collected, none of the participants could communicate in English with their parents or grandparents: at least, not fluently. Only one participant reported having a close family member – a *phuppa* (uncle) – who would converse regularly in the language. However, six of them had siblings who spoke to them in English, or a mixture of English and their L1 (P1, P3, P7, P8, P9, P10).

4.4. Access to English

Being the first generation in their families to study in an English-medium school, none of my participants had much adult guidance when navigating English media. As P8 put it, they could learn native Indian languages from “another things also,” but English, they could “only learn in school” (P8). This meant that their enjoyment of English media was closely tied to their experiences of learning English in the classroom.

One might expect that they would be reluctant to take on what might feel like additional work. However, far from avoiding the cultural world that had been opened to them, six of them stated that they actively sought to immerse themselves in it. To make sense of their new experiences with English media, they sought books, films, poetry, and music that resonated with them. P1, who loved literature, shared that not only had she found solace in classics like *Jane Eyre* and poets like Sylvia Plath, but she had also written a book of reflections in fourth grade and – more recently – joined a writing community on Instagram. P2 explained that when he had mentioned being put off by Google returning results in English, his brother had offered to change the language, but had also suggested that as students of English, they could “catch out” [deduce] (P2) the meaning of the results. In contrast, P4 preferred to immerse herself in English music as a way to regulate difficult emotions. She stated that during “difficult time[s],” English music, with its “hard beats,” could “give peace” to her, “refreshing” her mood (P4).

In ways similar to those illustrated above, three more participants mentioned a willingness to explore English on their own. The following section dives deeper into their attitudes towards their L1s, heritage languages, and English.

4.5. Language attitudes

4.5.1. Towards L1 and heritage languages

Two categories emerged when the researcher was coding the participants’ attitudes towards their L1s. First came the question of *distinctness*: whether or not the participant considered

their L1 a distinct, legitimate language. In a previous section of this chapter, it was explained that it was unclear whether P1 viewed Urdu as a register or language, and that this might indicate conflicting feelings about the legitimacy of her L1. A similar contradiction surfaced in the interview of P3, who initially claimed that Marathi was her L1, but then corrected herself, stating that it was actually Konkani. It is interesting to note that just as Hindi and Urdu are mostly intelligible, Marathi and Konkani are historically related, belonging to the same branch of the Indo-Aryan language family.

In contrast to P1's uncertainty about her L1, P4 took a definitive stance, stating that her L1, which she referred to as both Bhaya and Bhojpuri, was somewhat intelligible with Hindi, but still a unique language. The question of whether Bhojpuri is a language or dialect is a particularly heated one in Uttar Pradesh, P4's state of origin.

The second question that emerged was that of *status* (prestige). Both responses that touched on prestige were about Bhojpuri. P4, who had asserted the distinctness of Bhojpuri/Bhaya, described it as a 'respectful' language because in the language, pronouns are inflected to indicate the level of respect that interlocutors feel towards one another. However, P5, whose family spoke Bhojpuri as an L1, acknowledged that – at least in his ancestral village – Bhojpuri was not seen as valuable. While the villagers would “mostly respect” speakers of English, as they associated English with being “literate” and “knowing more” about the world than them (P5). On the other hand, they would call Bhojpuri monolinguals “useless” (P5). P1 and P3 spoke of the importance of learning Persian and Sanskrit, respectively. As a lover of literature, P1's motivation was to access Farsi poetry. On the other hand, P3, being from a religious family, sought to follow in her parents' footsteps and read sacred Sanskrit texts like the *Bhagawad Gita*, thereby reaffirming the Hindu identity she had been born into.

Based on all these responses, it seemed that certain languages bear *cultural* significance, but when held up against more powerful global languages like English, they are viewed as possessing less utility in the modern world. These beliefs allow language communities to attach themselves to the positive connotations of the new, prestigious language while also maintaining a sense of belonging.

4.5.2. Towards English

a) External motivators

Participant attitudes towards English appeared to have been moulded by two external entities. The first of these was their families. Judging the overall responses of the participants, it was surmised that their parents could not, or at least preferred not to, communicate in English. P2

shared that before his parents had left their ancestral village, they '[had] not know[n] that English [was] there in the world' (P2), and that it was only after moving to Mumbai that they had accepted its existence. However, none of the other participants had similar experiences. Their parents had all *seen* English around them but had never had the opportunity to study in an English-medium school. It must also be borne in mind that the working-class parents – i.e., all the parents except those of P3, P4, and P9 – had been denied good education *in general*. Thus, when they looked at their children, who were now studying via English at a school led by a reputed NGO, they tended to see a manifestation of their own desires. This was summarised by P1 and P7 in the following extracts.

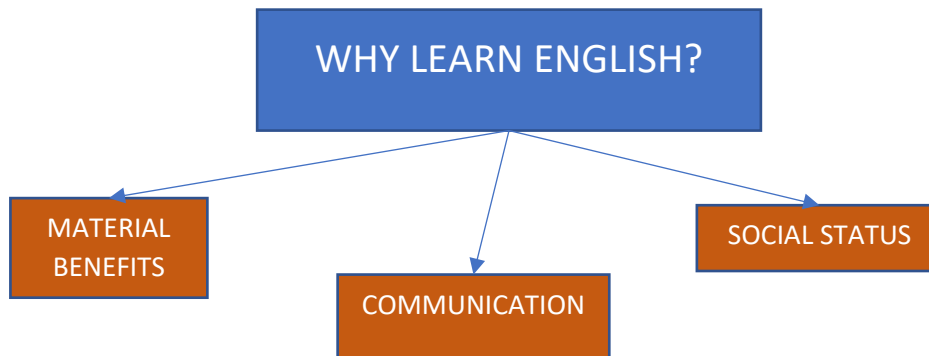
P1: They are very proud because we are first generation learners. And they are seeing what they wanted in themselves.

...

P7: (laughs) I don't know. I'm- mother says that "I want you to speak English. Just...speak in English to me. If I don't understand, then also, speak English to me."

The second factor affecting how participants felt about English was the school itself. As shared by four participants and corroborated by the fieldwork interviews with the English teachers, the school explicitly pushes students to communicate in English, not only within the school buildings but also at home. One teacher, who feels her students are not adequately exposed to English outside school, regularly shares English music with them. Additionally, being a writer, she posts her content on Instagram and is read by her students, who feel comfortable enough to ask her to explain difficult words and concepts. The other teacher takes a different approach, using English to teach her students about Anglophone culture and history. Both teachers stress the importance of using English in present-day India, encouraging an instrumentalist attitude towards English usage.

b) Reasons to learn English



Material benefits

Thanks to the efforts of the school and of the English media that they had been exposed to, all participants demonstrated an awareness that English would provide invaluable material benefits to them. Refrains they associated with English included ‘independent’ (P1), ‘mature language’ (P8), ‘big speaking’ (P9), and ‘international language’ (P2). Eight responses displayed a perception of English as a language that was necessary if one wished to prosper in the future. None of the participants suggested that English was *intrinsically* superior to any other language, but they all recognised that it possessed far more utility than others. To P10, Hindi and her L1, Bhojpuri, represented the old world, while English stood for positive change:

P10: And it is nice to speak in English. It is nice to study English, because *bhaiya* in my village I have seen so much children... I have asked them, “In which medium...are you studying?” They says, “I’m- I’m studying in Hindi...” I says, “why are you... studying in Hindi? Why can't you study in English?” They says that... they [find it]...difficult, because *bhaiya*, in [my] village... they love Bhojpuri, because...from childhood they [have been] living there only. They haven't changed their place.

In one sense, to “change one’s place” means to move from one location to another, like most of the participants’ parents had from their ancestral villages to Mumbai, but the phrase can also indicate displacement within the sphere of social relations. The acquisition of material wealth allows one to access more resources than before, improving their standard of living, and in the context of capitalism, this means that they have been ‘successful’ and must be respected. Both meanings can be derived from the extract above.

Communication

In addition to jobs, another reason participants had for thinking English was more instrumental for the future was that they believed English could help diverse groups of people communicate. Only one participant stated that if she was talking to people from other parts of India, she would use either Hindi, which she had learned “from childhood,” or English, which was “not

bad" (P10). A larger number of participants (6) saw it as something that could help Indians communicate with people from other *countries*. This, three participants explained, was because English was "common in everywhere" (P2) and "useful...in every manner" (P7), especially if the interaction involved foreigners "asking something" (P8).

Elevated social status

While culture and history were attached to the participants' native languages, English represented an equalising force that could improve the quality of their lives, promising not only better employment but also increased respect from society. Considering that caste is the most hierarchical social institution in South Asia, English, therefore, can play a key role in changing caste dynamics. This idea was elaborated by P5.

P5 identifies as an Ahir, one of the many castes in the state of Uttar Pradesh that belong to the Yadav confederation. Being OBCs, the Yadavs may not own as much land or have as many ties with the state machinery as the upper-caste Thakurs, but they are still a powerful player in the region's politics. In P5's ancestral village, the Ahirs are in the middle of the caste hierarchy, being considered inferior to the rich Thakur caste. However, they feel superior to the Bhars, a Dalit caste whose members work as domestic and agricultural laborers under the Thakurs. Like every other Dalit caste in India, the Bhars are arbitrarily subjected to brutal acts of violence from both their Thakur employers as well as the police, who tend to favour only those with wealth. Since they do not own much land of note, and are sometimes paid by the Thakurs with agricultural produce rather than with money, the Bhars possess very little socioeconomic capital. Thus, they cannot afford to study at any of the private schools in the village. However, this does not mean that they have given up on education. Inspired by the example of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, whose teachings they accessed via television and word of mouth, they resolved to make the best of their situation by attending the local public school. Here they gained access to English.

P5 did not indicate when this first happened. However, he shared that to this day, non-Bhars in his village display surprise when they hear a Bhar speaking in English:

INTERVIEWER: ...so...in your caste, or in the Thakur caste, if you see a [Bhar] who's been... who speaks English, you know, how do you feel about it? What do you do?

P5: Bhaiya, I'm...we're shocked! "*Isko kaise aaya?*" "How did he [know English]?" Yes, so we, means, we try to make friend..."Bhai, what is your name? How do you know like this? How do you know English? What is your opinion?"

Interestingly, the acquisition of *material* wealth by Bhars does not have the same effect on caste relations:

P5: Yes, if you have money, then yeah, you...you will...you will be respected, otherwise no.

INTERVIEWER: If you have money...do you...so if there is a rich...are there any rich Bhars?

P5: Bhars? Then also [they] will be get respected...but from not us. From the Bhars only.

INTERVIEWER: Oh OK, OK. So even if you are a rich Bhar, the Thakurs won't respect you?

P5: No, not at all. They will say "*tu hamara hai, naukhar hai, naukhar hi rahega.*" [*You are ours; a servant; you will always remain a servant*']

Clearly, English represents something that, in the minds of the upper castes, can transform a *naukar* ('servant') into someone that can be befriended.

The awe of English was a subtheme that was reflected in the responses of every participant. If P5's story shed light on how knowing English affected caste dynamics, those of the other participants highlighted that it could also upturn the Indic belief that age confers authority. While the participants themselves refrained from extolling the virtues of English, 8 of them shared that in multiple situations, their knowledge of English had won them the respect and adoration of not only their parents, but also other people in their communities. One participant (P6) shared that her brother had been offered a seat at his preferred college *on the day of the interview* simply because he had spoken to the interviewer in English. Two others said that they had been asked to help others improve their English (P3, P9). Yet another recounted the time she had saved her grandfather from embarrassment by stepping in and speaking to a government official in English (P7).

There is no singular answer for why English has had a disruptive effect on social relations in India. From a postcolonial psychoanalytic perspective, one might argue that it is because the language triggers internalised beliefs about the power of the British Empire and American culture. After all, both have exerted dominance over Third World countries, perpetuating the notion that the Anglosphere world was so powerful precisely *because* of its language. From a materialist perspective, one might argue that it is because today, English grants access to the most financially rewarding jobs. A third perspective suggests that English vastly improves networking in a globalised world. The responses of the participants hearkened to all these perspectives.

c) The question of ownership

Every participant was clear that knowledge of English was something to which to aspire, but when asked 'what kind of' English they would like to learn, or which English they would

consider 'good' or 'bad', their responses were varied. Two conflated 'bad English' with 'bad language,' suggesting that they considered civility more important than accent or grammar (P6, P4). Others spoke about the dialect of English that they would prefer to learn: three (P1, P10, P9) felt that *desi* (South Asian) varieties were best suited to Indian students, one (P8) felt that American English was the most 'proper' form of English, and two (P2, P3) felt that English belonged to the British. Most interestingly, one participant (P5) suggested that the 'best' English was that produced by those "trying to learn English, understand English, and change their mind that all languages are equal." He appeared to be alluding to the interlanguage, or the variety produced by early learners of the language.

Not only did these responses indicate the way the participants felt about themselves, the British, and the Americans, but they also connected to the question of whether English was seen as 'Indian.' P1 was comfortable enough with the language to write a book of reflections in it. P10 could communicate an emotion as uncomfortable as anger in English. P9 said she spoke English so regularly with her friends that she felt it was "like [her] native language only" (P9). In addition, the researcher frequently witnessed *all* the participants inserting Hindi words or phrases in the middle of their interviews and during the classroom observations.

On the other hand, three other participants spoke of English as something foreign to them: something that they had adopted for practical reasons, but which was not something their communities could accept as their own.

INTERVIEWER: But if you think...you were saying we should learn about English from the British. So if we...

P3: So, I think that...I think that we should learn, learn **their language... their technology** and all, and we should make changes in India, but the good values, not other bad- bad things.

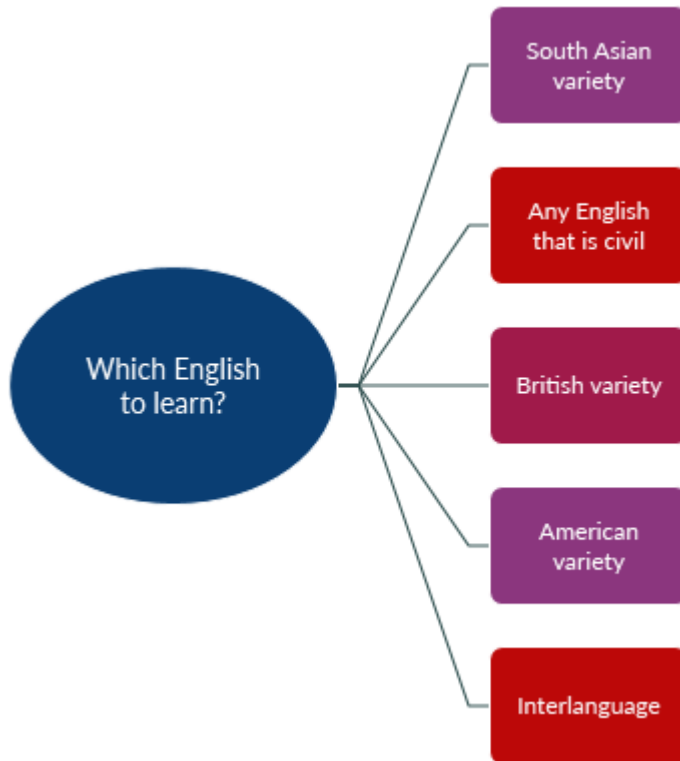
...

P4: Actually [my family] **don't have any problem**, me learning English...but...they feel like...it's good for her and her future. So they don't have any problem and they are ok with my English learning.

...

P8: ...I like to talk in English but not that much because some people around us, they thought...they thinks that "They are talking in English, maybe they are telling something bad about us," that's why we don't talk in English. It happened with me very- many times, that's why I didn't talk.

All in all, it appears that the participants were in the process of acquiring English and making it feel like something they could own, but had to battle the internalised belief that the language was foreign to them.



4.6. Family and community values

P5's anecdote about Dalits learning English illustrated the emancipatory power of the language, but the significance of this cannot be fully comprehended without first understanding the family and community values that the participants had internalised over the course of their lives. This section examines two subthemes that shed light on these values.

4.6.1. Norms

The responses of 7 participants point to the existence of restrictions based on the internal logics of caste and gender. Interestingly, none of the participants characterised these factors as separate from one another. Only 3 of them (P10, P4, P5) specifically talked about how casteism restricted their relationships with others. As can be seen in the interview extracts below, a recurring idea was that marriage could only occur between members of the same caste.

INTERVIEWER: So in your family, if somebody...marries someone who is not a Teli, what will your family say? Will they accept it?

P10: Bhaiya actually my mother says that it is not bad, but if we were- if...**in my village, this says that it is very bad.** "You are, means, *ajibi* ['strange']...you supposed to go from here. You are not part of my home. You are not part of my religion. You are- you can go

from here. You are not my, means, son. You can go. I am not your mother. I'm not a father..." They, means, *tod dete hain, rishta ek dusre se.* [*'They break relations with each other.'*]

...

P4: There is so much caste discrimination. In my home only...They all say, means..."this is of this caste, this caste, and all and all and all..." ... sometimes when we talk about marriage, mummy says ki **"You can marry only in our caste."** ...They get very angry...I have friends who are very low in caste from me. And they are my best friends.... **My parents don't allow me to stay with them.**

...

P5: Only if I am Yadav...[and] you are also Yadav... **...marriage will happen. [Unclear] our friendship will happen. Otherwise no.**

Other (female) participants felt more restricted by traditional gender roles, which expected them to perform domestic tasks at home even if that meant compromising their own desires. P10 shared that in her village, girls were not allowed to study, and while her mother was liberal enough to let her pursue an education, she also expected her to perform domestic chores. Likewise, while P10's grandmother was alright with her interacting with others, she had also instructed P10 that all conversations must be 'for some work only. And not with boys.' P7 shared a shared similar story. While her parents permitted her to go to school and play outdoors, they still maintained some rigid rules, perhaps because other people had suggested P7 was going against her religion.

P7: Some of the people from our area...there, there is one old lady, she is very...means, she is very angry woman. She always...first, I used to ride cy- bicycle, so she used to sees me and she used to just say me ANYTHING...

INTERVIEWER: What kind of things would she say to you?

P7: "You are being a girl and you are riding a cycle; you should be in your house...it's not good to ride a cycle on the road..."

Based on eight responses, it was surmised that most parents were supportive of the participants' choices in life, even if this support came with caveats. For instance, P6's mother had a fixed understanding of what constituted 'good' clothing, but allowed her to wear short clothes nevertheless. Five participants reported that their parents were willing to let them discover their passion and pursue whatever career they liked. Only one said that her parents had been pressurising her to pursue a career abroad (P3).

4.6.2. Alienation from the community

A total of 8 participants mentioned having experienced alienation from their larger community. Two kinds of alienation were identified: alienation based on linguistic factors and alienation based on non-linguistic factors. To stay close to the research question, only the former is explored in this subsection.

Four participants reported that language restricted communication within their own families. Having grown up in Mumbai, P5 could not *speak* Bhojpuri, the heritage language of his caste. However, when listing out the languages he *knew*, he did mention Bhojpuri. Similarly, P8 and P1 could *understand*, but probably not speak, their parents' L1s, Bengali and Bihari respectively. P10 shared that although *she* was comfortable with Bhojpuri, her L1, one of her sisters could not understand much of it. One likely reason for these linguistic gaps was that all these participants had migrated to Maharashtra from other states in North India.

As mentioned earlier, none of them reported being able to speak *fluently* in English with their parents, while all of them suggested that they could do so with their siblings. This implies that the usage of English created bubbles of privacy within the homes of the participants. Two participants directly confirmed this hypothesis:

P5: So my brother, sister...when we're...we want to say something personal, then we say in English, then my only father and we understand. No one else. Like that.

...

INTERVIEWER: ...and what about English? How many of your...family uses English?

P8: Only me and my sister. We both only...She's also in thi- she was also in this school. She's now in 12th standard. So if we have to talk any personal things, so we talk in English only, sometimes.

From one perspective, English can be seen as empowering P5 and P8, allowing them to speak their minds more freely, but from another, it can be viewed as something that created a divide within their homes. P1 alluded to the awkwardness when she described how she felt when she used English around her parents, who had been trying to incorporate English words (e.g. 'canister', 'ventilator') in their everyday speech:

INTERVIEWER: ...that's interesting. But when you speak, do you ever try speaking English to them or around them?

P1: No, it's very awkward.

INTERVIEWER: What do they say? Do they ever...if they hear you speaking English, do they say anything?

P1: They are very proud because we are first generation learners. And they are seeing what they wanted in themselves.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. But you also said it's a little...awkward. So could you talk a little about why?... Could you explain a little more? Do you feel awkward, or do they feel awkward?

P1: I feel awkward. Not them. They are really happy when they speak - see me speak English.

INTERVIEWER: OK. But you want them to understand...right?

P1: Yeah...no!

The latter lines of the extract could help explain the source of the awkwardness. While P1 wanted simply to express herself, her parents may have overlooked this and instead acted impressed, reminding her that she had something they lacked. At the same time, a part of her may have felt a guilty pleasure at being able to communicate 'personal' thoughts with her siblings. Thus, whether or not her parents meant to convey envy, P1 likely felt alienated from her family in such situations.

Three participants reported that their friends in the community viewed the ability to speak English as pretentious, suggesting that English evoked feelings of envy. This complemented the earlier finding that English granted respect to the people speaking it, because both responses from the community were only possible thanks to the prestige attached to English.

P2: They always, means, laugh at us....they always show off that you knows and others don't know. Means any, means, another area child came means, we also have group and they also have group. So when they come, we talk in English, and... say that [our] group..."we have English-learning people and you don't." [We] tease each other.

English, in the above anecdote, appears to have emphasised in-group and out-group differences, however temporary these divides may be in the long run.

4.7. Summary

The most significant results of the study were as follows:

- The majority of participants were female, working-class, and belonged to the OBC (Other Backward Caste) category.
- The most common first language was Hindi/Urdu.
- Being first-generation learners of English, many of the participants actively sought out English media outside class.
- The participants had differing opinions on whether Indian English or native varieties of English were preferable.

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- The usage of English granted respect to all participants – and to the Bhars, an extremely oppressed caste in one participant’s native village.
- Many participants reported facing social restrictions, and these restrictions could be linked to caste or gender.

In the next chapter, these results are interpreted and passed through the models of language attitude from chapter 2.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Overview

This chapter situates the study in the social, political, and historical context of India. It begins with an exploration of how the researcher's identity may have influenced their research goals, involvement in the data collection process, and perception of the results. After this, it discusses the results of the study considering the research questions.

5.2. Reflexivity in this study

It is impossible to eliminate bias in research. This is because all stages of research – from planning to data collection to the analysis of results – involve the subjective judgements of researchers, each of whom has their own motivations and interests. However, the *impact* of this bias may be lessened by the practice of reflexivity, or the explicit acknowledgement of the researcher's personal interests and relationships with all entities being studied (Berger, 2015). In addition to increasing trust and transparency, reflexivity also trains researchers to be conscious of how their own presence impacts the quality of data they procure. Therefore, in qualitative research, which examines the complex interactions between social variables, reflexivity is considered a must.

As an Indian, I am deeply embedded in the three main social variables that my study examines: caste, gender, and class. Firstly, I belong to the Iyer caste, which claims and enforces Brahmin status. Secondly, I am a cis-heterosexual man from a part of the world that has been patriarchal for millennia. Finally, although I do not come from a business family, I was still born into more wealth than the majority of people in my country. These parts of my identity have placed me in a position of privilege throughout my life, and have certainly influenced my engagement with this dissertation.

While I enjoy the aforementioned advantages, my participants included children at a public school, most of whom were from lower-income families, female, and belonged to disadvantaged social groups (OBCs and Muslims). During data collection, I was not seen as a neutral entity within the school, but rather, a respected outsider who must be given time and attention. The responses I received during interviews may have looked very different had I embodied less authority.

My main source of motivation for choosing to study caste and language attitudes was that having personally benefited from my access to English, I wished to uncover the extent to which my caste privilege enabled this access. I write not only as a South Asian connecting my experiences with colonialism, but also as an upper-caste man attempting to open conversations on caste privilege at a highly prestigious university. The political ideologies with which I resonate, including Marxism, anti-casteism, decolonisation, and feminism, have informed not only my approach to theory in this dissertation, but also my broader understanding of ethics in research.

5.3. Perspectives on caste

The first observation that can be made based on this study's findings is that caste and gender were very closely connected variables in participant narratives. As explained in Chapter 2, gender norms in South Asia serve to protect endogamy, thereby perpetuating caste boundaries. This means that the participants whose families had strict rules regarding marriage and other relationships had witnessed both sexism as well as casteism. On the other hand, caste and class were not linked in participant narratives. None of the participants reported personally facing casteism – either because they had been protected from it, or because they did not feel comfortable broaching the topic – but most of them did acknowledge the role of economic poverty in their everyday lives. This shows, at the least, that they could distinguish between the two. Ambedkar (2014) drew a clear distinction, arguing that while class is a division of labour, caste is a division of labourers. Since access to social, economic, and cultural capital in India is already tied to caste, class in terms of merely socioeconomic status plays a tangential role.

5.3.1. Literature on participant caste histories

All but one of the participants in this study belonged to a caste categorised as an OBC (Other Backward Caste). In other words, all of them came from castes that had experienced some degree of historical marginalisation. However, OBC is a broad category, and does not describe the nuances of inter-caste relations. Knowing that a caste represented in the study is an OBC tells one that it enjoys the benefits of reservation (see Chapter 2), but not how much power it has in comparison to other OBCs. To answer the latter question, a secondary review of literature was conducted and the history of each participant's caste was briefly traced. Notes on these histories are provided below.

Teli

The word 'Teli' is derived from the Hindi word for oil, *tel*, hinting at the ancestral occupation of the Telis as oil pressers in northern India (Krishnam, 2019; Sharma, 2017). Yang (1998) notes that in the late 19th century, although they were tradesmen, they were still considered part of the Shudra *varna*. By gradually taking up more remunerative trades, the Telis hoped – and perhaps still do – to elevate themselves to Vaishya status (Yang, 1998).

Kumhar

The Kumhars, also called the Kumars, are a potter caste spread across most parts of the Indian subcontinent. Legally they are classified as OBCs, but in practice, they are subjected to untouchability by more powerful castes, albeit not as much as SCs (Saraswati, 1979). Heierstad (2017) claimed that as a *community*, they have not ventured far from their ancestral occupation.

Sonar

In 1911, in what would later become Pakistan, an organisation of the Sonar caste made a presentation to the local king, claiming that the Sonars had once been Rajputs (Kshatriyas) who had been forced to give up their military traditions (Rowe, 1968). However, today, the Sonars are largely viewed by others as part of the Vaishya *varna*, as their primary occupation is goldsmithing (Schwartzberg, 1968).

Ahir

The Ahirs are a North Indian caste associated with agriculture and dairy farming. Once, they constituted a cluster of clans related by marriage, but by the 18th century, these had united based on the claim that they were all descended from the Hindu god Krishna (Michelutti, 2008). In the 1900s, the Ahirs and some other peasant castes came together to form the new Yadav confederation. While doing so, they adopted the practices of higher castes, such as vegetarianism and cow-worship (Michelutti, 2008) – a clear example of Sanskritisation (Srinivas, 1952). Today they constitute one of the wealthiest and most politically mobilised castes in rural North India.

Gujjar

It is unclear whether the Gujjars (also: Gujars/Gurjars) are a caste, tribe, or other ethnic group, considering that the term was adopted by multiple Indic peoples – both sedentary as well as nomadic – over the last 1300 years (Mayaram, 2016). Although they are now classified as OBCs, Gujjar organisations have agitated to be considered a Scheduled Tribe (ST; Mayaram, 2016). Historically, Gujjars have adopted a wide range of pastoral occupations (Mayaram, 2016).

Maratha

The people who would eventually claim the Maratha identity came from various castes in central and western India (Deshpande, 2004). Between 1600-1800, under leaders such as the legendary Shivaji, they evolved into a powerful military force. While they were initially considered Shudras, they went on to claim Kshatriya status (Deshpande, 2004). After the withdrawal of the British Empire from the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Marathas remained a prosperous people in the state of Maharashtra, where they still constitute about 26-30% of the population (Mhaskar, 2021). Noting that the Indian government's policy of reservations for oppressed castes can grant socioeconomic power, the Marathas have repeatedly agitated for OBC status (Mhaskar 2021). While they are still considered FCs, they have secured reservations based on economic need. Their language, Marathi, is currently the state language of Maharashtra.

5.3.2. Interview data on participant caste histories

Prior to the data collection phase, it was expected that any Dalit and FC participants in this study would have strong opinions on caste, since the system accords their communities the most oppression and the most privilege respectively. I was unsure of how participants whose castes were in between these extremes – i.e., OBCs – would respond to questions about caste privilege and language. During the interviews, of the seven participants who shared their castes, six turned out to be OBCs. One may surmise, from a reading of section 5.3.1, that these six participants had been born into varying levels of capital.

The fact that the Kumhars experience untouchability implies that in the eyes of others, they straddle the line between the Shudras and Dalits. Therefore, not only does P3's (Kumhar) father being a lawyer demonstrate his economic success, but it is also a symbol of upward social mobility for his entire caste. According to P3, the reason her parents wanted her to learn

Sanskrit was that Hindu scripture was written in Sanskrit. However, considering the Kumhars' low ritual status in the caste system, and the association of Sanskrit with upper-caste culture, P3's learning of the language seems to be an example of Sanskritisation (Srinivas, 1952).

While the Kumhars struggle to mobilise as a community, the Ahirs/Yadavs have already gained wealth and political recognition, signalling that they are a relatively powerful OBC caste – at least in rural India. In the cities, though, there is a tendency for them to join the working class. P5's family may have been reputed in their home village, but in Mumbai, far from their fields and cattle, they must sell their labour to business owners in order to earn a living. Their confrontation with capitalist modernity divorces them from their land, the physical manifestation of their power. The transformation of a class under feudalism into a class under capitalism can also be seen in the families of the Teli, Gujjar, and Sonar participants. The fathers of P2 and P10, both Telis, took up taxi driving and carpentry, respectively, while the father of P6, a Gujjar, is a school caretaker. P4's father, a Sonar, has a white-collar job as an electrical contractor. All of them have ventured away from their traditional caste occupations, but it is not clear how this has affected their self-perception as members of specific castes.

The Marathas may have been considered Shudras a few centuries ago, and benefit from special reservations in government, employment, and higher education today, but are seen as powerful enough by the Indian government that they have Forward Caste (FC) status. P9 is the only participant whose parents both have well-paying jobs outside the home: his father is a salesman, and his mother works at a diamond shop. It is not unreasonable to assume that their caste membership, and their status as native speakers of the dominant language in Maharashtra (Marathi), have given them advantages over the other participants' families. In recognition of the struggles that brought the Marathas to the fore of Indic history, P9 worships Maratha leaders like Shivaji as deities, suggesting that for his family, caste identity is a major component of religion.

5.3.3. No castes in Islam?

While seven participants divulged their castes, proving that even children are cognizant of caste identity, three participants, all Muslims, did not do so. When asked what caste they belonged to, each of them stated the name of an Islamic sect. This might be interpreted in one of three ways. For one, it could simply mean that caste is not present among Muslims. Secondly, it is possible that the participants did not want to discuss their castes – perhaps because they saw sectarian differences as more relevant to Islam than caste. Finally, perhaps

these participants simply did not know their castes. Unfortunately, the data did not provide an explicit answer to the question of which hypothesis was true, but all three options raise further questions on how the caste system may influence religions other than Hinduism.

5.4. Perspectives on English

5.4.1. English as 'valuable'

Language attitudes may be imagined as having two dimensions: attitudes to a particular language or variety, and attitudes to the speakers of that language or variety. In India, it can be difficult to distinguish between attitudes toward the English language and attitudes toward Anglophones. This is because English was historically brought to India by a colonial power – the British Empire – and is now the *de facto* official language of the sole global superpower, the USA. Its history makes it a manifestation of Western supremacy, which in turn is and has been enforced via economic and cultural imperialism. At the same time, the establishment of a global economic order along the lines of free trade (*laissez-faire*; Harvey, 2005) has contributed to a belief that anyone can access modernity if they adopt Western cultures and languages. This can explain why English in India is in such high demand.

Overall, as had been expected, the participants of this study shared very positive attitudes towards English. However, they focused on the advantages offered by the language, while not discussing the English language community in any depth. In other words, participants showed only instrumental orientation, and no integrative orientation at all (see: Gardner, 1985).

5.4.2. English and social mobility

This study replicated the discovery that low-SES groups and women – here, girls – can successfully recognise linguistic power. Applying the materialist model of language attitudes (Chapter 2), one may interpret their affinity to English as an attempt to increase access to capital in the long run. Interestingly, the side-effect of knowing English that participants relished the most was the *respect* it granted. This implies that for some people, social and cultural capital can be more attractive than economic capital.

As city-dwellers, the participants had been relatively sheltered from the caste politics of *their ancestral villages*, but this did not mean that they had escaped caste altogether. Considering the information uncovered in sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, it is clear that whether or not they saw it, the participants' current socioeconomic conditions were the result of their ancestors' struggles to elevate caste status. It appears that the participants are more fortunate than

many others in their castes, since they go to an English-medium school in a metropolitan city. One might think that this exposure weakens caste boundaries – and after all, none of the participants shared that they personally discriminated against others on the basis of caste. However, the very fact that the school is a government school means that most of its students are from economically weaker sections. Since there is a strong *correlation* between legal caste status and economic prosperity, this in turn suggests that the majority of the students are *not* FCs. In other words, while the school offers students the opportunity to enter privileged caste spaces in the *future*, at present, it is not a particularly privileged caste space in itself.

Nevertheless, the most powerful piece of evidence to show that caste influences attitudes towards English is P5's narrative, which is set in rural India. As an Ahir who *also* identifies as a Yadav, P5 is probably aware of how his caste formed a larger confederation in the previous century. His village in Uttar Pradesh is the perfect example of a complex social network in which multiple castes project how they feel about themselves and each other. One's position in the caste hierarchy is asserted directly through violence. This would explain why the Thakurs (an FC) routinely commit hate crimes against their lower-caste Bhar workers, who are officially OBC but have been demanding SC status (Shah, 2013). However, violence is not the *only* means of asserting power in the village. With no support from the state machinery or the Ahirs, the Bhars turn to education – specifically, English-medium education. On the one hand, although increasing their wealth does not directly improve their image in the village, education can give them the means to find better jobs and thus attain a higher standard of living. On the other, learning to speak English instantly wins them the respect of the other castes in the village.

Respect as a concept has different meanings for different castes. For the Bhars, it connotes basic dignity, but for the participants, who come from relatively less oppressed castes, it is more about gaining advantages in social networking, higher education, and employment. As a Brahmin who systematically benefits from caste oppression, respect was something that my conditioning taught me to expect rather than seek. For a Bhar to learn English can mean the difference between facing humiliation and indifference, while for 'upper' castes like myself, English has much less relative value. Therefore, it can be stated that one's position in the caste system influences the strength of one's attitude towards English.

5.4.3. The role of language ideology

As explained in Chapter 2, language attitudes originate in the desire to increase access to capital – social, economic, or cultural – but cannot be divorced from the pervasiveness of language ideology. According to P5, the Bhars strive to attend school not because their local schools are excellent, but because the words of Dr Ambedkar encouraged them to view education – especially in English – as key to liberation. Similarly, many participants confessed that they had learned of the emancipatory power of English from their own school. In both examples, instrumentalist language ideologies helped people see that English contained high linguistic power, and this resulted in the formation of positive attitudes towards learning English.

Other language ideologies observed in the study were native-speakerism and a version of linguistic decolonisation. Some participants felt that the ‘best’ Englishes were those spoken in the UK and USA, while others saw Indian English as more apt for the Indian context. Since all of them were teenagers at the time of the study, it is unlikely that they had acquired tools that could dismantle and analyse their own internalised ideologies. However, the fact that they were able to explicitly describe their beliefs about English suggests that they also take active responsibility for their linguistic choices.

5.4.4. Conclusion

First, this dissertation combined the sociological concepts of capital and language ideology to propose a simple model to explain the origin of language attitudes in societies. In later chapters it referred to this model as the *materialist* model of language attitude formation.

Next, it demonstrated that caste is an important social variable within the South Asian context, and argued for its inclusion as a subject of study within language attitudes research.

Finally, it explained the results of a study on how English is perceived by Indian students from different caste locations, drawing on not only the materialist model, but also the framework defined by Gardner (1985). It noted that while English functions as a gateway to all three kinds of capital (Bourdieu, 1985), marginalised caste groups in India may especially value English because they see it as a way to gain respect – and avoid humiliation – in society. It suggests that in some contexts, English may be more useful than wealth when it comes to fighting the caste system. This discovery indicates that India’s anti-caste movement has strategic links with the English use and pedagogy in the country.

However, one major limitation of this study is that it cannot make *generalisations* on how caste may affect attitudes to English in India. All it has done is explore how a carefully chosen group of learners, in a relatively stable educational context, have been influenced by their experiences with caste, class, and gender when trying to learn English. To shed light on how dominant ideologies and socioeconomic changes affect the relationship between English and the caste system as a *whole*, one would need to conduct a large-scale study in South Asia.

It must also be noted that throughout my life, as an upper-caste man, I have experienced caste as something I can *ignore*: something that does not actively impede my aspirations as an individual. It has only been through repeated engagement with anti-caste thinkers that I have started to understand the implications of my caste privilege. Perhaps, if this study had been conducted by a researcher from a different caste, the results and their interpretation would have been completely different. Therefore, future studies will benefit not only by including a larger number of participants, but also by connecting to South Asian academics from more diverse caste locations.

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APPENDIX A

Interview checklist

1. What is your name?
2. Which caste do you identify with?
3. What do your parents do for a living?
4. How long have you been learning English?
5. Do you encounter English outside of school? If yes, where?
6. What do you think is the use of learning English?
7. How do people around you feel about you learning English?

APPENDIX B

CUREC confirmation email

Firefox

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/id/AAQkAGRIYjc4NjAyLTU5ZTA...>

CUREC

Fri 3/11/2022 2:18 PM

To:

Cc: Student CUREC <student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk>

Dear [REDACTED],

The influence of caste on student attitudes to English learning [CIA-22HT-016]

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

Our prior discussion on this was very useful – an impressive team as ever, and project, vastly experienced, and a model of genuine care in relation to research ethics.

I am pleased to inform you, then, that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

Please continue to follow all current guidance issued by CUREC during the pandemic, notably COVID-19: CUREC guidance on research involving human participants, <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/coronavirus>

If relevant please also check the CUREC website for their best practice research guides, these can be very useful in refining the writing up of ethical considerations in your research – see <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/btpg>

Good luck with your research study,

Keep well and safe,

Yours sincerely,

All good wishes,



Senior Research Fellow, Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford
Associate Professor, Department of Education, University of Oxford
Conjoint Full Professor, Newcastle University, Australia
Docent, University of Helsinki, Finland
Extraordinary Professor, North-West University, South Africa
Visiting Professor, Irish Institute for Catholic Studies, MIC, Limerick, Ireland
Honorary Senior Research Fellow, School of Education, University of Birmingham

APPENDIX C

Participant information sheet

The influence of caste on student attitudes to English learning

INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 11 TO 15 YEARS

Ethics Approval Reference: [CIA-22HT-016]

We are inviting you to join in a research study. Our names are [REDACTED] and Dr [REDACTED], and we work at the University of Oxford in the Department of Education.

Before you decide if you would like to join in, it's important to understand what the study is about, why we're doing it and what it would involve for you. Please read and think about this leaflet carefully. Please feel free to talk to your family, friends, or the researchers about it if you want.

If anything isn't clear or you have more questions you can ask your parent/guardian to give us a call and we can discuss it with you and your parent/guardian.

Why are we doing this research?

People learn languages for many reasons: for example, to bond with a new community, live in a new place, or find a specific job. As you can guess, these reasons may be personal, social, or both. We are interested in understanding the social reasons for learning English in India. We believe that the background of a student – their caste, gender, and economic class – plays a major role in shaping their attitude towards learning English.

There has been a lot of research on how gender and class affect attitudes towards English learning. However there has not been any similar research on how caste affects the same. Our goal is to find out whether learners from different castes, genders and economic classes have different views on learning English.

Why have I been invited to take part?

We are inviting you to take part because you are a young person, aged between 11 and 16

years.

We are inviting 10 young people to take part.

Do I have to take part?

No - It is up to you. We will ask you to sign a form to say that you agree to take part (an assent form). We will give you a copy of this information sheet and your signed form to keep. You are free to stop taking part at any time during the research without giving a reason, by telling the researcher. If you decide to stop **before** the study has been completed, we will not use the information we have already collected from you. However, if you ask to leave the study **after** it has been completed, we may not be able to erase your data from our report.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in this study, you will be approached for an interview. This may last between 20-40 minutes. It will take place in a quiet place on your school campus.

During the interview, you will be asked questions about your personal background and your views on learning English. You can answer in as much detail as you like. The conversation will be in English, but if you need to, you can use some basic Hindi as well.

The researcher will be taking notes. If you are OK with it, they will also be audio-recording the interview.

What happens to the results of the study?

The information you provide during the study is the **research data**. Any research data from which you can be identified (e.g. name, gender, caste, class, audio recording), is known as **personal data**.

Personal data will be stored in a secure OneDrive folder on the official Oxford University server. After the project is completed, all personal data, *except for your consent form*, will be permanently destroyed. The consent form will be deleted after a minimum of 3 years.

Other research data will be stored for 3 years after the completion of the research project.

The research will be written up as part of the researcher's Masters dissertation. Their findings may also be published in scientific journals or presented at a conference, but this may be two to three years from the end of the study.

What are the advantages / disadvantages of taking part?

There are no risks involved with participating in this research study. You will not have to talk about anything more than you want to, and all the information you provide us will be made anonymous, so that no one can trace it back to you.

After the project is completed, you will be provided with a certificate and a note of thanks!

Will anyone else know I'm doing this?

We will keep your information private. This means we will only tell those who have a need or right to know, such as the research team and your parent/guardian. We will only share information that has your name and address removed.

What if I don't want to take part in the research anymore?

Just tell your parent/guardian and the people carrying out the research that you don't want to take part. You don't have to give a reason, and no one will be annoyed with you. It is YOUR choice.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is organised by the Department of Education at Oxford University.

Who has reviewed the study?

Before any research involving people can start, it must be checked by a Research Ethics Committee to make sure that it is OK for the research to go ahead. This study has been approved by the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem or something goes wrong?

Please tell us if you are worried about any part of this study, by contacting the researcher [REDACTED]. You may also talk to your teacher/parent/guardian who will let the researcher know. If you are still unhappy or wish to make a complaint, either you or your teacher/parent/guardian can contact the chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford:

Chair, **Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee**; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

Data Protection

1060028

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data and, as such, will determine how your personal data is used in the study.

The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest.

Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <https://compliance.web.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>.

Contact details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:



Thank you for reading this – please ask any questions if you need to.




APPENDIX D

Parental consent form

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

CUREC Approval Reference: CIA-22HT-016

The influence of caste on student attitudes to English learning

- Your child’s school has agreed to take part in a study run by Oxford University looking at students’ attitudes towards learning English.
- If your child takes part, a researcher will come to their school and interview them.
- If you are happy for your child to take part, please fill in the form below and return it to your child’s class teacher as soon as possible.
- T  an
a  cher,
C 

Name of child: _____
Surname
Forename

Name of school: _____

I have read and understood the details of the above study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study with others. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions. I understand that the project has received ethics clearance through the University of Oxford’s ethical approval process for research involving human participants, and I understand who will have access to the data, how it will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the study. I understand that participation is voluntary and that my child and I are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my child’s education being affected in any way. I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

I agree for my child to be audio recorded

Yes

No

I understand how audio recordings / videos / photos will be used in research outputs

Yes

No

I give permission for my child to take part in the above study.

1060028

Name of parent/guardian: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name of researcher: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Dissertation title change email

Firefox

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/id/AAQkAGRIYjc4NjAyLTU5ZTA...>

RE: Confirmation of dissertation title

Applied Linguistics <applied.linguistics@education.ox.ac.uk>

Thu 8/18/2022 3:50 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

I can confirm that we have your new title:

Investigating the impact of caste, class, and gender on student attitudes to English in India

Best wishes,

Cat

From [REDACTED]

Sent: 18 August 2022 15:00

To: Applied Linguistics <applied.linguistics@education.ox.ac.uk>

Subject: Re: Confirmation of dissertation title

Dear Team,

A gentle reminder - please could you confirm the title of my dissertation as per your records?

Thanks and regards,
[REDACTED]