

Ambiguities About English: Ideologies and Critical Practice in Vernacular-Medium College Classrooms in Gujarat, India

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Situated amid tertiary-level institutions in the city of Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, India, this article explores how particular ideologies countering English inform pedagogic choices made by language teachers teaching in “vernacular-medium” (VM) college classrooms. The ideologies under discussion are two linked “thought structures.” The first, the Gandhian ideology, is distinctly pro-vernacular and anti-English in its stance, embedded as it is in Gandhi’s struggle for Indian independence (1925–1940s). The second, while markedly informed by Gandhi, yet a distinct ideology of its own, is the Remove English Lobby (*Angrezi Hatao Aandolan*) of the 1970s. My long-term, naturalistic endeavour regarding English and vernacular-medium education in Ahmedabad reveals that these linked-yet-separate ideologies impact choices VM teachers make in what and how they teach in simultaneously direct and indirect ways. Teachers seem to draw on different strains of these ideologies to enhance features of the vernaculars to counter English domination.

Key words: globalization, critical practice, English- and vernacular-medium education, ideologies, tertiary education

In what ways are ambiguities about English reflected in particular language ideologies? How do such ideologies impact how teachers appropriate and justify particular pedagogical choices in classrooms? These questions haunt aspects of the current exploration of particular teaching practices in vernacular-medium colleges in the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, India. This essay will attempt to understand how

and why particular political ideologies have the socioeducational impact they do in vernacular-medium (VM) classrooms. Based on an extended, naturalistic project that explores some nitty-gritty details regarding how English and the vernaculars get conceptualized, taught, and learned in divergent tertiary contexts in Gujarat, India, the present discussion is partially anchored in some of my previous work (Ramanathan, 2002b, 2003, 2004) that discusses ways in which the “English-Vernacular divide” falls along the lines of particular social stratifications, some of which can be traced back to specific colonial and postcolonial policies. Extending a skein from that work, this article isolates two ideological forces that inform anti-English/pro-vernacular sentiments in vernacular-medium, tertiary-levels of schooling. In so doing, it furthers scholarship that has addressed how English operates in particular classrooms in postcolonial contexts (Canagarajah, 1999; Ramanathan, 2004) and attempts to understand how some ideologies are linked to other ideologies (Ricento, 2000), and the local impact these (“linked ideologies”) have in teaching and learning contexts.

I isolate two ideologies for closer examination: (a) the role of Gandhi and his pro-vernacular sentiments articulated during his struggle for Indian independence and (b) the *Angrezi-Hatao Andolan* (The Remove English Committee, REL) that had its roots in Gandhi’s pro-vernacular/freedom movement but began to assume a life of its own in the 1970s. Both of these ideologies were nationalistic in aim and orientation. (Indeed, some current pro-Hindu, pro-vernacular sentiments of the present [at the time of writing] right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India can be seen to resonate with the anti-West sentiments of Gandhi and the *Angrezi Hatao Andolan*). My attention to these two ideologies is most selective: Most of the VM teachers I have worked with, interviewed, and observed in the last 7 years draw directly and indirectly on tenets of these ideologies to explain what and how they think about vernacular languages, choices they make in and out of the classroom, and ambiguities regarding English. While this article does not concern itself directly with the colonial breakdown of the “English-medium” (EM) and “Vernacular-medium” tracks of education in the Indian socioeducational machinery, (this has been previously comprehensively addressed elsewhere; see Pennycook, 1998), it does address some *postcolonial* realities in the “English-vernacular divide,” especially as they pertain to the issue of pro-vernacular/anti-English ideologies impacting language teaching classrooms.

RAW MATERIALS ON WHICH THIS ARTICLE IS BASED

A native to the city of Ahmedabad, having done my K–12 and undergraduate schooling there, I began this exploration to better understand the struggles that students schooled in the VM encounter as they enter colleges where English is the dominant medium of instruction. The endeavour aims to understand how knowledge in the two

mediums is divergently conceptualized, taught, and learned—thereby contributing to the English-Vernacular divide—as well as ways in which English domination is countered, resisted, and bridged. The endeavour, thus far, involves an in-depth exploration of the following three divergent tertiary-level institutions, with VM students and their teachers being positioned divergently in each context:

1. An EM Jesuit institution (in which I did my undergraduate schooling): offers undergraduate and some graduate degrees. While most instruction in this college is in English, there is some instruction in Gujarati.
2. A private, upper-middle-class EM business college: instruction here is only in English in the classrooms (an institutional mandate), although students who have done the K–12 in the vernacular are admitted to the college.
3. An inner-city, low-income VM women’s college: offers a liberal arts undergraduate degree; all instruction in this college for all subjects is in Gujarati, including the teaching of other languages such as English, Hindi, and Sanskrit.

While the bulk of my discussion is based on the views of teachers in the VM women’s college (#3), I will also draw on views from VM teachers (in other institutions in the city) that I have gotten to know but whose institutional workings I have not explored. (Where relevant, I will draw attention to ways in which VM students get positioned in the first two [EM] institutions as well.) As the ensuing sections of the article point out, many VM teachers engage in active critical reflection of the “ways of you English-speaking people” (“*tum Angrezi baat karne vaalo*”), meaning people like me. Hyperconscious, as I have now become, of being “one of the EM [neo-colonial] types,” largely because of the present endeavour, I am also consciously seeking to create a textual space in research, whereby ambiguities regarding English are acknowledged, understood, and addressed. This act of writing about postcolonialism—when I am a postcolonial product myself—is rife with contradictions. Most notable among the contradictions is that while I am seemingly anti-colonial in my privileging the vernacular, I am simultaneously neocolonial in my writing of vernacular issues. My entire understanding, then, treads on unstable ground: I am attempting to understand some pro-vernacular sentiments when I am seen as a product of the very ideologies they are trying to resist. This discussion, thus, is to be understood as being situated in a contact zone “within an area of tension between definition and powerlessness to define, between containment of my subject and recognition of its uncontained plurality” (Spurr, 1993, p. 2).

At the risk of making this project sound like a “positivist study” (when it is not) that can get tidily “written up” in the neat sections of a research article, I would like to explain the nature and extent of my “data.” The present discussion has its anchor in a pool of raw materials collected over the last 7 years. It consists of at least 21 “semi-formal” interviews with faculty members; 80 interviews with both VM and

EM students; more than a 109 hours of classroom observations; countless informal chats over cups of chai, regular weekly meetings with teachers of Gujarati, Hindi, and Sanskrit, and a range of written documents (such as syllabi, exams, student-writing, bulletins). Because the article isolates a few strands for close attention from what is a complex, interconnected system, the current focus is most selective and, thus, “decontextualized.” The writing process—the choosing, highlighting, and selecting of some themes over others—necessarily renders the exploration incomplete.

The article is organized as follows: Section 1 provides a partial but crucial theoretical background by which to address the pro-vernacular, anti-English sentiments of two ideologies under consideration, while sections 2 and 3 are devoted to discussing ways in which particular pedagogic practices resonate—both explicitly and implicitly—with the pro-vernacular-anti-English sentiments of the Gandhi and the REL (*Angrezi Hatao Aandolan*). This section also attempts to move the discussion away from the classroom realm to address how overarching views of “English-madness” (“*Angrezi Paagalpan*”) not only inform both ideologies but also directly sustain the English-Vernacular divide. The final section of the article moves the discussion back to the more general realm of pedagogic and research practices being impacted by ideologies.

IDEOLOGIES AND THOUGHT-COLLECTIVES: PRO-VERNACULAR/ANTI-ENGLISH SENTIMENTS

It goes without saying that the socioeducational practices in any culture are a complex convergence of several intertwining factors, and local realities on the ground are produced, shaped, and sustained by particular ideological and historical forces (Ricento, 2003; Timm, 2001). (Indeed, the effort to disentangle local realities from ideologies is futile, since we will never fully know which “cause” which.) Ideologies, generated, sustained, and reproduced by communities of practices are parts of “thought-collectives” (Ramanathan, 2002a). Circulated among and between members of a collective, a shared thought structure, produced by “common understanding and mutual misunderstanding” (Fleck, 1981), generates similar ways of being, thinking, behaving, and believing and includes, as in the present case, conceptualizing of, teaching, and learning vernacular languages. This relative emphasis on a “shared thought structure” is not to imply that pockets of difference and divergence don’t exist; indeed, as I have explained at length elsewhere (Ramanathan, 2002a), institutions and individuals constantly pick and choose from the tenets of their thought-collectives, ones they wish to further enhance, sustain, and reproduce (thus, producing over time different thought-collectives, sometimes in resistance to previously existing ones; Eagleton, 1991; Panikkar, 1998).

This discussion of thought-collectives helps us partially understand the impossibility of ever figuring out when a “new” ideology emerges to enhance particular strains in current ideologies and when this new ideology assumes a life-force of its own (to where its links to previously existing ideologies become hard to locate in collective memory). The pro-vernacular stances adopted by Gandhi during his struggle for Indian independence and the anti-English stance implicit in the REL examined here can be seen, to some extent, to illustrate these points. Gandhi’s call for freedom and national unity was tied indivisibly to his views on language: He consistently maintained that a new, liberated India could only fully emerge if it completely enhanced the vernaculars and gave up being enslaved by all things British, including, of course the crucial instrument of colonization, namely, the English language. The REL, which can be seen as a thought-collective of its own (with formal documents in the 1970s) can, on the one hand, be seen to draw a lot of its energy and motivation from Gandhi’s nationalistic pro-vernacular stance. In other ways, it needs also to be acknowledged and addressed as a movement of its own, emerging almost 30 to 40 years after Gandhi and emphasizing a kind of grassroots, local activism (partially by removing English). Differences between the two ideologies partially lie in the contexts that produced each:¹ Gandhi’s pro-vernacular/anti-English sentiments were voiced at a time when he was rallying the country’s conscience toward Independence and self-rule (the *Swadeshi* movement), while the REL was lobbying for the removal of English several decades after Independence. While both were pro-vernacular in their orientation, and while both aimed at empowering the poorest of the poor, the REL, for a variety of reasons, seems more extreme in its pro-vernacular sentiments. One reason for this could be that the REL was not hitched to another larger cause (such as Independence) but was explicitly oriented to *removing and destabilizing the role of English* since it seemed to believe that the suppression and devoicing of the poorest person continued because of English usurping the place of local languages. Its primary and sole goal was to create an environment where even the smallest of “smallest human was on par with highest of high by virtue of his/her vernacular language and background” (“*Ek aise samaaj ka nirman karna jisme chote se chote aadmi bhi bade se bade pad par apni bhasha ke madhyam se pahoonch sakeh*” Vaidik, 1973, p. 46). As we will see, some of the VM teachers make explicit connections to both Gandhi’s ideologies; others articulate views that seem to resonate more strongly with the REL. Still others view “English domination” as part of a larger surge toward general “English madness” (*Angrezi Paagalpan*). For this last set of people, some of whom are staunchly Gandhian as well, the current craze for English—English programmes on television, state-level policies to introduce English instruction at earlier grade levels in VM schools, Westernized ways of dressing and using language—that they see in their children and students, needs to be actively countered. By saying that (EM and VM) teachers seem to draw on these linked-but-separate thought structures, I don’t mean to draw crude lines between their views and the thought-collectives that spawn them; indeed, the very nature of

thought-collectives and their ideologies evades such fixing. What I am trying to underscore is the idea that teachers of VM students draw on different strains of thought when articulating their pro-vernacular/anti-English sentiments, sentiments that can sometimes be seen to echo more closely with one thought-collective than the other. In this sense the exercise of attempting to connect classroom practice with ideological currents undertaken here is interpretive. A direct one-to-one mapping between ideological currents and actual practice is just as (im)possible as a direct mapping between thought and language: There is always an element of fuzziness built into the enterprise.

CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND IDEOLOGICAL ECHOES

I turn now to addressing some ways in which VM teachers explain their use of pedagogic choices in their language classrooms. Before I begin, though, I should briefly address some ways in which my presence undoubtedly influenced what and how the teachers responded to my queries. As one who was schooled in the city's English-medium schools, I was conscious of representing some of the very associations VM teachers resent: snobbery and distance from my vernacular heritage, for example. Now, with years of sustained contact (over the summers and over e-mail), many of them are comfortable enough to speak teasingly of English-medium people such as myself (*tum English-medium vaalo*; you English-medium people), and to directly articulate some of the motivations underlying their teaching practices (detailed below).²

Pro-Vernacular Gandhian Ideologies (in Choral Practices in) Classrooms

In previous research (Ramanathan, 2004), I have called attention to the practice of particular pedagogies in VM classes and would like to draw on some of those points to address the present discussion on ideologies. Most notable among these practices, and particularly relevant to the present discussion because of its pro-vernacular justifications, is the practice of using choral repetition in language classes (Sanskrit, Hindi, Gujarati, and English). The following segments from Sanskrit and English-language classes are intended to partially illustrate this point:

Sanskrit class excerpts

1. T: *kaya text laavanu cche?* (which text is to be bought?) 1
 Sts: (responding chorally): *Kaadambari text laavanu cche.* (Kadambari [a Sanskrit play] is to be bought) 3
 T: *kyan thhi laavanu cche?* (where is it to be bought from?) 4
 Sts: *Ratan pol maathi laavaanu cche* (from Ratan pol) 5

2. T: *tho eh vakhate Avanti eh, kone?* (so at that time Avanti, who?) 1
 Sts: Avanti 2
 T: *Avanti eh kharraab laagy. Su laagy?* (Avanti felt bad. What did she feel?) 3
 Sts: (responding chorally) *Kharraab laagy* (felt bad) 4

Excerpts from the class in English

3. T: *Kayaa form karvaana chhe ame?* (What form are we doing this year?) 1
 Sts: comedy form (said in English) 2
 T: *Ane kaaya playwright vaanchvaanu chhe?* (And which playwright are we reading?) 3
 Sts: Wilde 4
 4. T: *Tho, Millie eh light joyu. Suu joyuu?* (Millie saw a light. What did she see?) 1
 Sts: *light joyuu* (saw a light)

In each of these excerpts the questions on the part of the teacher are uttered in distinct ways: slowly in a sing-song manner with an exaggerated rise at the end.³ The general explanations given by the language teachers for using this method so extensively ranged from “classical languages like Sanskrit have always been sung or chanted” and “singing and chanting allows you to memorize information” (Faculty Interview Number 18, Page 2, or FI 4:2) to “this is what they have been used to in school and other nonschooling areas” (FI 4:1). Indeed, as some instructors and students pointed out, this kind of elicitation of choral responses is not unusual, especially in discourse events such as “*kathas*” in temples where priests take certain Hindu myths and explain their relevance to everyday living (*ameh katha maa kevi rithe kahiye cche?* How do we speak in Kathas?) As explained elsewhere (Ramanathan, 2004), breaking off to ask questions in the middle of extended narrative turns in order to elicit choral responses, serves the dual purpose of ensuring audience participation as well as testing attention. One of the instructors who also gives these *Kathas* in local temples (indeed, many of the students had attended them) maintained that chorusing responses—a vestige of a strong oral, vernacular tradition (Crook, 1996)—allows novices to engage in learning without apprehension of being judged. Several of the interviewed students said they often picked up “answers” from their friends in such responses and that they could recognize the intonational cues of their teachers’ voices that prompted such responses because they were used to it in other relatively nonacademic, and noninstitutionalized settings.

Most of the instructors found it “natural” to use/transfer “vernacular” practices in classroom contexts. (I use “vernacular” in quotes here because it is *I,* as relative outsider, who sees them and these practices as “vernacular”; they don’t. This was not a pedagogic practice I was familiar with, except in Sanskrit language classes, where Sanskrit mantras were typically chorally chanted at the start of every class.) Indeed,

several instructors said they deliberately refrained from using English even in English language class: “Why speak English when Gujarati is available? Why speak English when Hindi is available?” (FI 18:2). This seeming pride in the (Gujarati) vernacular was explained to me by one VM teacher as follows:

See, you have been raised in the English-medium so you may find all this very different. You don’t understand what it is like for Gujarati-medium people. See, Gandhiji gave a lot of importance to preserving Gujarati culture (*Amaari je Gujarati sanskruti cheh ne, ene tho Gandhiji eh bahu j mahatva aapyu*). So, sometimes what you see in the classes is what a lot of us were used to in our own schooling. These are some Gujarati ways of learning. In fact, if you think about it, Gandhiji went as far as to say that unless we only use Gujarati we will not be able to develop adequate vocabulary for some terms in Mathematics and Science (FI 16:1).

This drawing on vernacular resources (and Gandhi’s justification for using them), including the mother-tongue, seems evident in schooling realms such as VM (K–12) teacher-education as well. The following excerpt from a commonly used teacher-education text illustrates this point:

The teacher may use the mother-tongue to explain the peculiarity of certain sounds in English and to compare them with sounds in the mother tongue.

He may use the mother-tongue to explain unfamiliar words when the explanation of those words in English is more difficult than the words themselves. For example, abstract nouns, ideas, etc.

He may use the mother-tongue to explain abstract words, phrases, and idioms.

He may explain some particular grammatical points of the English language in the mother-tongue to make those points easy for the pupils to learn. At times the teacher may compare and contrast the grammatical points in English and in the mother-tongue.

He may use the mother-tongue to help pupils to collect ideas and then to organize them when they prepare to write compositions.

He may use the mother-tongue to teach pupils different types of reading.

He may use the mother-tongue in the classroom to test pupils’ comprehension.

He may use the mother-tongue to help pupils to learn to use the dictionary.

He may use the mother-tongue when giving instructions to pupils. (Raval & Nakum, 1996, pp. 103–104)

Integrating the vernacular, then, seems to be a traditional practice that operates in nonschooling settings as well as a formal *schooling* practice that (K–12) teachers are socialized into. Several of the teachers at the VM college recall their own VM schooling practices where the vernacular was both extensively used and regarded

as valuable and integral to language teaching, both inside and outside the classroom. When I showed the excerpt to some of the VM teachers during a group discussion, all of them said that the list of situations when teachers could use their mother tongues basically covered all instances of classroom behaviour (“If you actually go to see, we use Hindi and Gujarati in our classes all the time, isn’t it?; outside this list what else is there in the class?” *Aise dekhenge to hum Hindi aur Gujarati constantly use karte hein, na?; yeh list ke alaava kya baaki hain class mein?* Student Interview, or SI 4:1).

Brought up, as most of these teachers were, at a time when Gandhi’s pro-vernacular calls were at their peak, not drawing on vernacular practices seems unnatural to them. “I grew up learning in this way like a lot of these students have; it is quite common in temples and classrooms; how can I not use it? It’s natural.” Besides, we have to remember our roots and our heritage. And this is our Gujarati *sanskriti* (“culture,” FI 4). Views such as these echo Gandhi’s sentiments strongly:

We and our children must build on our own heritage. If we borrow another we impoverish our own. We can never grow on foreign victuals. I want the nation to have the treasures contained in that language, and for that matter the other languages of the world, through its own vernaculars. (Gandhi, translated by Kumarappa, 1954, p. 5)

Pro-Vernacular Gandhian Sentiments in Two-Way Translations

Another pedagogic practice that seems to resonate strongly with Gandhian principles of drawing on the vernaculars can be partially seen in the extensive two-way translating that both teachers and VM students engage in. I was able to observe versions of this in a range of contexts—both in and out of the classroom—in all three colleges. Not only do teachers translate most of what they say in the vernacular(s), they also test student comprehension by having students translate what they have just heard or read. Teachers of VM students, regardless of whether they were themselves educated in EM or VM, maintain they do so to partially aid comprehension and to mitigate “mindless parroting” (there’s far too much parroting; by translating both of us [teacher and student] focus on the meaning; *bahuj gokhikaade che; translate kariye neh, tho banne ne khabhar pade ke meaning su cche*; FI 18:2). (In the EM colleges, where the teachers have themselves been schooled in English, the two-way translations seem to occur between English, Hindi, and Gujarati, whereas in the VM women’s college, the translations go back and forth between English and Gujarati.) Indeed, several students felt that an instructor who does not translate enough or who tended to use more English in class was generally seen as more difficult to understand and was not, in general, regarded as a good teacher (“*Gujarati ane Hindi nathi*

vaparathi, ane amne mushkil laage cche" [She doesn't use either Gujarati or Hindi and we find that difficult] SI 19:3). Most everything in VM classes—directives, vocabulary, entire paragraphs from short stories—is first read in English and then translated and explained in Gujarati. Teachers frequently called on students to read a passage aloud from their textbooks and then had them translate it into Gujarati or Hindi as a way to check comprehension. Two-way translations serve other purposes as well: By using vernaculars teachers were not only drawing on resources students brought with them to class—thus validating their home identities and discourses—but also proactively partially working to reduce the pressure students feel to engage in extensive memorizing. As one teacher in the VM college put it,

If I have them translate what I have said or what they read back into Gujarati, then I know they have understood. This helps a lot. I do think that if they understand what they are reading, they are less likely to simply parrot all the stuff. (FI 15:2)

While this teacher does not actively invoke Gandhi, his views clearly resonate with Gandhi's views regarding "foreign" education encouraging "imitators" and "crammers." The following quote from Gandhi's ideas on the "foreign" vs. vernacular education partially illustrates the connections:

The foreign medium has caused brain fag, put undue strain upon the nerves of our children, made them crammers and imitators, unfitted them for original work and thought, and disabled them for filtrating their learning to the family or the masses. The foreign medium has made our children practically foreigners in their own land. It is the greatest tragedy of the existing system. The foreign medium has prevented the growth of our vernaculars. If I had the powers of a despot, I would today stop the tuition of our boys and girls through a foreign medium, and require all the teachers and professors on pain of dismissal to introduce the change forthwith. I would not wait for the preparation of textbooks. They will follow the change. ... (Gandhi, *Young India*, 1-9-'21, in Gandhi, 1954)

This invoking of Gandhi and the general role that his anti-English/pro-vernacular philosophy plays in the classroom and culture at large demands a fuller explication. Gandhi's views on English and the vernaculars were closely allied with his struggles for (Indian) Independence and were printed in *Harijan* and *Young India*, newspapers that carried his calls for freedom (Richards, 2001; Ruthnaswamy, 1922). Gandhi's insistence that the vernacular should be the medium of instruction for all children can be traced back to his retrospective account of his time in school, which emphasized English over Gujarati. The following quote effectively captures the "barrier" he seemed to think English posed:

My head used to reel as the teacher was struggling to make his exposition on Geometry understood by us. I could make neither head nor tail of Geometry till we reached the 13th theorem of the first book of Euclid. And let me confess to the reader that in spite of all my love for the mother-tongue, I do not to this day know the Gujarati equivalents of the technical terms of Geometry, Algebra and the like. I know that what I took four years to learn of Arithmetic, Geometry, Algebra, Chemistry, and Astronomy, I should have learnt easily in one year, if I had not to learn them through English but Gujarati. (Gandhi, 1954, pp. 4–5)

Gandhi's ambivalence about English seemed to stem from his views about it not only being a "borrowed" language that coexisted uneasily with local, indigenous languages, customs, and lifestyles but one that threatened the delicate, newly acquired self-respect of the country. The following two quotes capture this:

I must not be understood to decry English or its noble literature. The columns of the *Harijan* are sufficient evidence of my love of English. But the nobility of its literature cannot avail the Indian nation any more than the temperate climate or the scenery of England can avail her. India has to flourish in her own climate, and scenery and her own literature, even though all the three may be inferior to the English climate, scenery and literature. We and our children must build our own heritage. If we borrow another we impoverish our own. We can never grow on foreign victuals. (Gandhi, 1954, p. 5)

Surely it is a self-demonstrated proposition that the youth of a nation cannot keep or establish a living contact with the masses unless their knowledge is received and assimilated through a medium understood by the people. Who can calculate the immeasurable loss sustained by the nation owing to thousands of its young men having been obliged to waste years in mastering a foreign language and its idiom, of which in their daily life they have the least use and in learning which they had to neglect their own mother-tongue and their own literature? (p. 13)

The fact that Gandhi's home state was Gujarat played a role in the language policy adopted by the state when it came into being with the dissolution of the old Bombay Presidency and the creation of the two states of Maharashtra and Gujarat (Gujarat came into existence in 1960). Gandhi's own attachment to his mother tongue of Gujarati, and his emphasis on non-European languages as a means of expressing nationalist sentiment, went some way in shaping the policy of a state in which English has not been able to put down roots (as it did in, say Bengal, or Madras Presidency [present-day Tamil Nadu]). The reasons for what seems like the relatively superficial hold of English on Gujarati litterateurs and the educated public are not easy to unravel; despite English education in some parts of present day Gujarat, there was not a "westernized, Anglicized class of the kind

found in Bengal, or a class of people who mastered the intricacies of the English language” (S. Ramanathan, personal communication, November 6, 2002). One reason may be the fact that large parts of present-day Gujarat were princely states and were not directly under British rule. Hence the British presence was not quite as pervasive or strong as in other parts of India that were British India.

Language policy issues that evolved in Gujarat after Independence (1947) have generated considerable controversy regarding “appropriate” mediums of instruction at both K–12 and beyond (Jayaram, 1993), although, on the whole, the state has generally followed the “three-language-formula” (Jayaram, 1993) adapted by most of India’s northern states. Despite areas of sharp dissension, one area of general consensus has been that students opting to be educated in English take the vernacular language as a foreign language requirement, while students opting to be educated in the vernacular have English as a foreign language. In either case, the foreign language is typically introduced in Grade 5. When Gujarat was declared a state in 1960, its people enthusiastically took to Gujarati for official purposes and introduced it as a medium at the tertiary educational level as a parallel with English (Chavda, 1982). By 1965 all official communication was only in Gujarati. This led to a decline in the general amount of English used in the public sphere and to what was (and is) perceived as “poor performance” on Civil Service exams that were (until very recently) conducted only in English. Indeed, Gujarat College, an old government college affiliated with the old Bombay Presidency (and one of its premier institutions) changed character as it “Gujarati-fied” itself and a Jesuit institution became one of the better sites for “English education” in the state.

Gujarat, from its inception, as the foregoing sketch suggests, privileged the vernacular over English. The anti-English stance was evident in other local realms as well. Morarji Desai, a prominent politician from Gujarat and Prime Minister for a brief period, was strongly anti-English. Also, Gujarat University, in an election for the Vice Chancellor, chose L. R. Desai, an academic of the nativist kind over Vikram Sarabhai, who stood for progressive, Westernized education (and who was a Cambridge-educated scientist with an international reputation and is generally viewed as the architect of India’s Space Programme). Westernized models of education, then, seemed to be unacceptable to “Gandhian” educationists, a view that gets echoed in varying ways among the VM teachers in Ahmedabad. The need to take pride in all things vernacular—including the language, teaching practices, and modes of actions and re-actions, as the previous sections partially indicate—was and still seems to be, in some vernacular-medium settings, posed as diametrically opposed to all things associated with “you English-medium” folks (a phrase typically used to and about people like me, who are seen to represent degrees of estrangement from their vernacular roots).

THE REMOVE ENGLISH LOBBY (*Angrezi Hataao Aandolan*)

Gandhi's views on empowering average Indians with an education in a medium that they could relate to was picked up by the *Remove English Lobby*, which was vehemently pro-vernacular. Emerging as a force with formal documents in the 1970s (about 35 years after Gandhi's pro-vernacular calls), this thought collective can be seen to be both linked to Gandhi (given its anti-English stance) and a movement on its own, given the time lapse since Gandhi, and its insistence on destabilizing the role of English. While not Gujarat-based, the values of the REL resonated strongly with then pervasive sentiments in Gujarat,⁴ and was perhaps sweet music in this state. What makes thought-collectives such as the REL interesting—apart from their intense anti-English, pro-vernacular sentiments—are their written documents which partially capture some of their key tenets. One (original) document produced by this committee is in Hindi (published in 1973) and is about 46 pages long. I have, for the purposes of this article, picked out and translated those sections that best capture their stance and views on English. The information is presented in Table 1.

The earlier segments are intended to partially demonstrate the general drift of some of the arguments proposed by anti-English lobbyists. In excerpts 1 and 2 English is seen as an elitist phenomenon that separates Indians; in 3 and 4, it is pitted against other languages with power flowing disproportionately between them; excerpt 5 partially formalizes that English-vernacular dichotomy explicitly (“To replace English with Indian languages”). The overall motivation of the committee—as the last goal of excerpt 5 indicates—was to empower the masses by enhancing the vernacular so that they, too, could strive for high social positions. In other words, the vernacular medium was to be the foundational rung of the social ladder. According to Chatterjee (1992), English at this time was not considered desirable because it was, among other things, seen to negate democracy by dividing “the Indian people into two nations: the few who govern, and the many who are governed” (p. 300). Indeed, the lobby seemed to heavily emphasize programs that would enhance all vernacular-related projects, especially those relating to grassroots activism.

ECHOES OF THE REL IN PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES

The relatively clear links between (Gandhian) ideologies and classroom practices of the previous section are not nearly as plain with the REL, which as we will see are more apparent in teachers' attitudes and orientations than they are in observable pedagogic practice. The Remove English Lobby is directly tied to a strong nexus of associations that are often posed synonymously with “removing English:” encouraging pro-vernacular sentiments, empowerment of poor/disadvantaged people, working

TABLE 1
 Excerpts From Vedpratap Vaidik's (1973) *Remove English: Why and How?*
 (*Angrezi Hatao: Kyon aur Kaise?*)

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1. Making English compulsory [in Indian schools] has rendered hundreds of thousands of children handicapped. About 2% of the country's population has control over the country's resources through English. There appears to be only darkness of thousands of poor, oppressed villagers ... (p. 1).
 2. English has divided Indians from other Indians. Because of English, there is in the country a small elite that looks down on the common person. Through English, one big part of this country remains weak and poor, and a very small portion rich. This was begun by the British and continues, appallingly, to this day. The removal of English is a matter of cultural and civic pride. Without removing English, we cannot eradicate poverty (p. 3).
 3. Those who believe that English is an international language also believe that the world's knowledge is produced only in English, whereas in reality there are all kinds of domains in which progress has been made in a range of other languages. We either remain in ignorance of this knowledge or read about it only when it is translated into English (p. 5).
 4. The country that wishes to keep all its doors open to the world must also keep all its windows open, not just the window of English. Keeping only the window of English open does not behoove us. Does a well-planned house have only one window? No, it has several from which winds from different directions can blow through. If there is a stench from one window, you have the option of opening other windows. But the well-established language institutions in this country seem to have made only one window. Whether there emanates a fragrance or a stench from this window, whether it overlooks a beautiful scene or an ugly one, it is the only one that is deemed to stay open (p. 7).
 5. Goals of the committee:
 - To remove English and English influence in all domains of everyday life
 - To resist making English mandatory in law courts, educational institutions, and other important areas
 - To replace English with Indian languages
 - To establish such a community/society whereby the poorest of persons can reach the highest of social positions through the medium of his/her vernacular (p. 46).
-

in local communities toward building up vernacular roots, resisting “the English-craze” (*Angrezi paagalpan*), advocating the use of the vernacular in all realms of existence. Thus, as Vaidik, the compiler of the treatise, maintains, “When we talk about removing English, we are talking about doing away with things/associations that English represents and finding our pride in what is native to us: our culture, our languages, our ways of knowing” (Vaidik, 1973, p. 1). While this thought-collective is allied to the Gandhian set of ideologies in its shared commitment to enhancing the vernacular—indeed, there are direct references to Gandhi and his views—it seemed to, in the mid to late 1970s, gain momentum and emerge as a thought-collective of its own, with its own points of emphases, most especially those relating to community service and grassroots projects that were directly “integrated into people’s lives” (Vaidik, 1973, p. 15) and that were explicitly aimed at “empowering the poorest of the poor” (p. 3). To give an idea of the dominant themes in the document, I made a list

of the following phrases/sentences, variations of which occurred more than seven times in the 46-page document:

1. REL is a lobby that aims to free the average person.
2. REL is opposed to using language as a divisive force.
3. English has produced an elite and fake class of people that hate the average person.
4. The only way to completely remove English from our lives is to supplant it with our Indian languages.
5. We have to find ways of bridging the gaps between the rich and the poor and of empowering average people so that they too can participate in the running of this country.
6. We have to return to what we know best: our languages, our culture, our people.

Echoes of these REL themes can be traced in the views of VM teachers both inside and outside the classroom. Especially prominent is the idea of “empowering” VM students in realms outside the classroom in order to eventually effect changes in it. Recognizing that teaching their largely low-income students English is not going to empower them (“Teaching them English is not going to do it; that has to come later.”) the VM teachers at the women’s college have found “back-door” approaches to enhancing both the vernaculars and the self-esteem of their VM students (Ramanathan, 2003, 2004). Interpreting “empowerment” and “pro-vernacular” in terms of addressing local, community problems, some teachers in the VM college began a local chapter of a nationwide social service sector (called The National Social Service). This is a nationwide volunteer organization that trains students in the rudimentaries of social work and sends them out in teams to areas (primarily poor, rural, villages, and farms) on special projects that range from inoculating babies in villages, to raising awareness about health issues, to doing investigations on the purity of water in particular regions. The primary aim for starting this project was to involve students in local community issues. Although none of these projects is directly related to English or vernacular teaching, they are crucial to the pro-vernacular sentiments of the school. One of the teachers who started this social service project at this college specifically mentions the need to “awaken in students the spirit of self-reliance” (FI 14:3). As he says,

Having them engaged in an extracurricular project such as this makes them really strong citizens. They are learning to take pride in so many different things at the same time: their background, their home language, their communities. These students have a lot of [low] self confidence issues. Most of them want to be like you: they would have liked to have gone to EM schools and done well. Now they are beginning to see that being in the VM is really

valuable: many of them will not be able to do the community work if they did not know Gujarati. Some of them have even told me they are not as crazy about English anymore. Suddenly they are realizing that they can be self-reliant with their mother-tongue. (FI 14:5)

While this teacher does not explicitly mention the Remove English Lobby in his remarks to me, connections to the thought collective are resonant, especially in relation to “being awakened” to value their home languages. The following excerpt from the lobby’s formal treatise, translated from the original Hindi, shows how closely the teachers’ views dovetail with those of the REL:

The *Angrezi Hataao* movement is not like any other average movements. This not a national party, it is a movement. ... It does not aim to achieve any goals, but aims to *awaken the public*. ... The organizers of the movement hope that each small movement that emanates from this one will operate on its own and will not depend wholly on the central organization. ... This work has to start this year itself and what better time for it, since this is the year of Gandhiji’s anniversary?

The public should be made clear that this movement is not the vehicle of any particular national party, but is *a movement that aims to reawaken the national spirit so as to allow us to recognize ourselves through our local cultures and heritages*. (*New World*, October 8, 1968, cited in Vaidik, 1973)

While “empowering” at this college takes partial form in extracurricular activities (such as the National Social Service Scheme), “re-awakening” seems to occur directly in classroom practice, where the focus seems to be more on being pro-vernacular as opposed to anti-English. The following views of a lecturer in Gujarati literature (at the women’s college) illustrates this point:

See, I begin with what they already know, and that is Gujarati. For most of these students, Gujarati is their mother-tongue. And once they have learned to appreciate Gujarati literature, once I have re-awakened their interest in stories in their mother-tongue, other kinds of literature open up. Slowly, I get them reading English literary texts, and we draw connections. Recently, I assigned *Sophie’s Choice* and they really, really loved it. We worked really hard and at the end of it, one of them talked to me about what she had learned from this text and the Gujarati novel we had just finished, about how complex life’s choices are and we cannot make simple judgments about where people end up in their lives. I almost cried when she said that. For an 18 year old to say that with feeling meant that something in our class had clicked. Just sparks like that make everything in this place worthwhile ... Some of these students, by the time they come to the second year have become more thoughtful and by their final year are genuinely interested ... I am convinced

we have to start with Gujarati [the vernacular] and move outward from there. Imposing English from the outside is not going to do anything for them, except make them more frustrated. (FI 19:1)

“Reawakening” for this teacher, then, is not a matter of “removing” English as much as it is of using vernacular and vernacular knowledges (see Ramanathan, 2004) as starting points.⁵ While this teacher is not actively anti-English as she explains in the quotation, she very clearly stresses vernacular literatures as a way into “re-awakening” and “empowering” her students. When asked if the grassroots activism upheld by some members of the college (who are strongly pro-vernacular and so also anti-English) ran counter to her English teaching, she said,

See, I am a literature person, first. My job is to awaken in these students an interest in all of literature. I happen to believe that the best way to do that is by stressing vernacular ways of thinking, reasoning, and believing. That is what I meant when I said English has come later. Gujarati definitely has to come first ... you have to keep in mind how using your mother-tongue allows you to experience things in a way that can be quite different from English. Gujarati, the way I see it, empowers ... English does not do that here. (FI 19:2)

A general sense that emerges, then, from quotations such as these is that many VM teachers view their ways of teaching, learning, and living as being diametrically opposed to English and its general associations (the implication being that all things English “suppress,” “disempower” and “devalue”).

This polarization of English and the vernaculars seems to echo in nonclassroom contexts, as well, with several VM teachers voicing their ambivalence at what they call “*Angrezi Paagalpan*” (“*English madness*”). Recently, the chief minister of Gujarat has been lobbying to start English instruction in VM schools from Grade 1, especially in math and science classes. While this bill has not yet been passed, it was a topic of discussion in our meetings in the summer of 2002, with several VM teachers voicing mixed feelings about the competing pressures surrounding English and the vernaculars. As one faculty member eloquently puts it,

You see, we are now at a stage where we have become completely mad about English. Our children see it on cable TV, the programs are all American or British, our chief minister now wants to start English from Grade 1—they have already started that in Delhi—there are English language classes all over the city. And the craze is seen more among VM students; you EM people are familiar with this from the beginning (*tum EM vaalo ko tho pehle se hi in sab baatho ke bare mein pehchaan hai*). It is us Gujarati-medium people who have to now figure it out. You ask me what I feel about it; I would have to say I am confused. My son who was himself schooled in the Gujarati

medium is now thinking of putting his child in an EM school. Somewhere deep down that is troubling me. What is wrong with our Gujarati-medium that he has to think about enrolling Amrish in English-medium schools? You tell me. (*Iske bare mein mujhe thoda dukh hain. Hamaare Gujarati-medium mein kya kharaabi hai, ki voh Amrish ko EM mein dale? Tum hi bataao mujhe.*) (FI 19:5)

The faculty member does not explicitly draw on either Gandhi or REL but attributes his ambivalence about English and the EM to the general “*Angrezi paagalpan*” (English craze) that they see as all-pervasive. Indeed, the numerous English-language classes mushrooming in Ahmedabad, the explicit specification in job ads that applicants need to be fluent English speakers, the recognition by VM students that they run the risk of being left out of the country’s growing computer industry can all be seen to bear out the teacher’s views. There is, then, ambivalence and self-questioning on the part of (both EM and VM) teachers about the divisiveness between English and the vernacular languages on the one hand and a pull towards English on the other. The search and drive for English occur simultaneously with a serious questioning and resistance of the same.

MOVING BACK TO THE LARGER PICTURE: PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES, RESEARCH PRACTICES, AND IDEOLOGIES

A key question that emerges from the preceding sections is how do the linked ideologies cumulatively inform what goes on in classrooms? While answers to this are debatable, they do raise interesting pedagogic and research issues, especially as they pertain to establishing connections between ideologies and practice. Bikhu Parekh observes,

We have not so far devoted enough thought to the analysis of the logical structure of political doctrines and inquired where precisely to locate their identity. Political doctrines are highly complex and fluid conceptual structures, with one foot in the world of abstract ideas and the other in the humdrum world of human practice. Unless we know where to look for their identity, we are bound to end up misunderstanding them. (Parekh, 1975, p. 2)

The pedagogic choices that VM (and EM) teachers make regarding their VM students both in and outside classrooms are drawn from and embedded in a rich, vibrant world of practices, and ways of living. As one of the VM teachers maintained, this self-conscious focusing on “abstract ideas” (the Gandhian, *Angrezi Hataao*, and *Angrezi paagalpan* ideologies) and “humdrum ... human practice” (in classrooms)

in our group meetings ran the risk of “gluing Gandhi into my classroom” when in fact both ideologies and practices are completely fluid and dynamic. The discursive act of writing about them—as I am doing in this article—relegates them to an even more decontextualized realm that is at once scary yet unavoidable.

The previous exploration has also heightened my awareness of how my own ideological proclivities impact the writing of this article (on ideologies) and has led to at least one disquieting realization: the pro-vernacular sentiments of the VM teachers and students—sentiments with which I am very sympathetic—are also echoed by the current (at the time of writing, but now defeated) BJP government to which I am staunchly opposed. While the BJP party is not necessarily anti-English (Sontag, 2000), it is decidedly back-to-tradition in its orientation, especially in its drive to officially de-secularize India and make it a “Hindu-rashtra” (Hindu nation), and one strong strain in this direction is the general validation of all things Hindu, including vernacular Hindu traditions. While that leaves me, as researcher, hopelessly caught, it opens up interesting questions about pedagogic practices, research, and ideologies in general: In what ways do some of these pedagogic practices echo strains of the rhetoric coming out of the recently defeated BJP government? Can we say that the back-to-tradition stance of this government finds some resonance in the grassroots activism of the REL? Certainly, the pro-vernacular (read pro-Hindu) leanings of the government permit these connections. How does this position me as “researcher?” Regardless, though, of how ideologies in thought-collectives melt into other thought structures, their all-pervasive nature informs most areas of human existence, including the crucial realm of education. Because we are all embedded in different ideologies, and because ideologies and local classroom realities intersect in complex, difficult-to-map ways, we are called on as researchers to find ways to address the messiness, if only to realize that a thought-collective is no mere casual jumble of disconnected and arbitrary experiences of particular peoples, that choices that VM teachers make in their what and how they teach are partially culled from and justified on the basis of strong ideological sentiments. “Languages are not mere media but rather stand at the very core of major cultural and political questions. We must seek to understand the complex totalities of these relations” (Pennycook, 2000, p. 56). This article is a partial, self-conscious response to this call.

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tem that they are a part of and that evaded me during my schooling and graduate years when I was in it.

ENDNOTES

¹I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to articulate these differences.

²Addressing current social realities in any realm in terms of selective aspects of the past runs the risk of imposing on past (and to some extent current) events a linearity and chronology that is more an entity in the author's/historian's head than it is a "fact" or set of actualities. The discussion offered here draws on both aspects of reconstructing the past: toward understanding why VM college teachers in Gujarat make the pedagogic choices they do, I attempt to "reconstruct" aspects of ideologies they draw on, since these ideologies are strongly associated with particular historical figures and movements. My deliberate effort at highlighting vernacular teaching practices can be seen as "decisionist" (Chakrabarty, 2000) in orientation: I am drawing on the past as a warehouse by which to understand current educational realities.

³The English and Sanskrit classes had 8–10 such interactions, as opposed to an average of 2 such interactions per class in the content-area classes.

⁴In fact, Gujarat's lack of proficiency in English was a subject of jokes in other states. The now defunct weekly *Current*, edited by Dr. F. Karaka, ran a column showing two Gujaratis, dressed in typical Gujarati attire, wearing dhotis and Gandhi caps, standing at a bus stop and talking in less than fluent English. Every column ended with "Boycott British Language!" [a clear reference to Gandhi's Boycott British Goods campaign].

⁵I thank an anonymous reviewer for helping me notice the irony in this segment.

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