

*Education, Poverty and International Development*

# **THE POLITICS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY**

**GLOBAL PRESSURES, NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND  
SCHOOLING IN INDIA**

Maya Kalyanpur, Padmini Bhuyan Boruah,  
Sarina Chugani Molina, and Sunaina Shenoy



‘This exquisitely complex book is invaluable for those of us seeking deeper understandings of the role played by English in magnifying economic inequalities globally. Building on wisdom drawn from their own life experiences with linguistic, transnationalism, and English-as-medium-of-education policies, these four authors render skillful analyses that shed light on the complicated dilemmas surrounding language-in-education policy. Offering insightful understandings widely applicable beyond the contemporary Indian context, the book provides supportive and constructive guidance for enacting critical resistance in the context of a range of often-neoliberal language policy reforms.’

*Subanthie Motha, Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics/TESOL,  
English Department, University of Washington, USA*

‘This book provides critical insights into processes of globalization and multilingual education from the perspective of the less privileged. Embodied by the personal experiences of four scholars from different regions and language groups, and richly situated in classrooms and communities in India, the book portrays dysfunctional outcomes. Educational policies motivated by the global pressures of economic progress and national goals of development hamper proficiencies in both heritage languages and English. We leave persuaded that a pedagogy that honestly addresses economic disparities, critiques ongoing colonial designs, and values heritage languages and epistemologies is more beneficial for the Global South.’

*Suresh Canagarajah, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Applied Linguistics,  
English, and Asian Studies, Pennsylvania State University, USA*

‘This book makes a significant contribution to bringing together post-colonial scholarship on the politics and practices of language policies and language education. It draws on rich lived experiences of the diverse language identities of the authors. This richness is evident throughout the text as the authors engage in a nuanced manner with a complex intellectual terrain on language politics, whilst drawing on research evidence from the field. The arguments presented in the book also problematise the construction of disability and the labelling of learning disability especially in schooling contexts, such as those in India. The book raises important points in relation to how ‘disability’ labels are uncritically adopted in settings such as many English medium schools which provide access to first generation learners and largely non-English speakers from low-income background.’

*Nidhi Singal, Professor of Disability and Inclusive Education,  
University of Cambridge, UK*

‘This provocative book will change how you think about language teaching and learning. In *The Politics of English Language Education and Social Inequality*, Kalyanpur, Boruah, Molina, and Shenoy offer an incisive analysis of how English language education operates as a colonizing presence. With a focus on a multilingual nation that has a complex relationship with English – India – the

authors brilliantly weave personal experiences with research data and theory in order to illuminate reverberations of language policy, language teaching, and the language experiences of children across dimensions that range from identity to national policy to global domination.'

*Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita, School of Professional Studies,  
California State University-Monterey Bay, USA*

'This book, authored by four Indian women, is unlike any other. It is written from the heart and from the women's own life experiences and academic research. Theory about the role of English education in colonialism and globalization, as well as its relationship to poverty, flow here from the local Indian context, as the authors reflect jointly and foreground their own positionality. The book is an example of decolonial resistance not only to traditional English language education, but also to academic treatises that do not reveal the authors' selves.'

*Ofelia García, Professor Emerita, The Graduate Center,  
City University of New York, USA*

# The Politics of English Language Education and Social Inequality

Based on policy analysis and empirical data, this book examines the problematic consequences of colonial legacies of language policies and English language education in the multilingual contexts of the Global South.

Using a postcolonial lens, the volume explores the raciolinguistics of language hierarchies that results in students from low-income backgrounds losing their mother tongues without acquiring academic fluency in English. Using findings from five major research projects, the book analyzes the specific context of India, where ambiguous language policies have led to uneasy tensions between the colonial language of English, national and state languages, and students' linguistic diversity is mistaken for cognitive deficits when English is the medium of instruction in schools. The authors situate their own professional and personal experiences in their efforts at dismantling postcolonial structures through reflective practice as teacher educators, and present solutions of decolonial resistance to linguistic hierarchies that include critical pedagogical alternatives to bilingual education and opportunities for increased teacher agency.

Ultimately, this timely volume will appeal to researchers, scholars, academics, and students in the fields of international and comparative education, English and literacy studies, and language arts more broadly. Those interested in English language learning in low-income countries specifically will also find this book to be of benefit to their research.

**Maya Kalyanpur** is Professor of Inclusive Education, Department of Learning and Teaching at the University of San Diego, USA.

**Padmini Bhuyan Boruah** is Professor and Head, Department of English Language Teaching at Gauhati University, India.

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## **Education, Poverty and International Development Series**

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Madeleine Arnot

*Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, UK*

This series of research-based monographs and edited collections, which was set up in collaboration with the late Professor Christopher Colclough, contributes to global debates about how to achieve education for all. A major set of questions faced by national governments and education providers concerns how the contributions made by education to reducing global poverty, encouraging greater social stability and equity, and ensuring the development of individual capability and wellbeing can be strengthened. Focusing on the contributions that research can make to these global agendas, this series aims to provide new knowledge and new perspectives on the relationships between education, poverty, and international development. It offers alternative theoretical and methodological frameworks for the study of developing-country education systems, in the context of national cultures and ambitious global agendas. It aims to identify the key policy challenges associated with addressing social inequalities, uneven social and economic development, and the opportunities to promote democratic and effective educational change in the name of social justice.

The series brings together researchers from the fields of anthropology, economics, development studies, educational studies, politics, international relations, and sociology. It includes work by some of the most distinguished writers in the fields of education and development, along with new authors working on important empirical projects. The series contributes significant insights on the linkages between education, the economy, communities, and society, based on interdisciplinary, international, and national studies.

Selected volumes include critical syntheses of existing research and policy, work using innovative research methodologies, and in-depth evaluations of major policy developments. Some studies will address topics relevant to poverty alleviation, national and international policy-making and aid, while others will be anthropological or sociological investigations of how education functions within local communities, for households living in poverty or for particular socially marginalized groups. The authors explore a diverse range of themes from the challenges associated with providing quality teacher, professional and entrepreneurial education, to those associated with promoting gender equality, reducing gender violence, understanding the impact of poverty on constructions of childhood, or assessing the impact of learner-centered school pedagogies. They offer sharp, critical studies that are intended to have a strategic influence on the thinking of academics, researchers and policy-makers.

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**Maya Kalyanpur, Padmini Bhuyan  
Boruah, Sarina Chugani Molina,  
and Sunaina Shenoy**

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To my father, who left me when I was ten, but with English to grieve and articulate the void. To my homeland, with the hope that this book provokes, challenges and inspires us all to look anew at our tryst with English.

Padmini

I dedicate this book to my mother, who taught me, through her healing ways, my rightful inheritance of Indigenous wisdoms and traditions handed down from times immemorial. And to all the disenfranchised people who have succumbed to the weight of colonialism and experienced the loss of their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Sarina

In memory of my parents: my mother, Leela Rao, who was fluent in the language of every region of the world she lived in, Konkani, English, Hindi, Bahasa, Mandarin, and Kannada, and my father, Bhaskar Kalyanpurkar, who was not (and whose gene I have inherited).

Maya

To my mom who is a Professor of English;  
To my dad who is a proud Malayali;  
And to my husband who is a Konkani at heart;  
You have made me a scholar in English, a quick-witted Malayali and a susegad Goan!

Sunaina



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# Abbreviations

AAE	African-American English
AAL	African-American Languages
AAVE	African-American Varieties of English (aka Ebonics)
AINET	Association of English Teachers
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BE	Black English
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
CABE	Central Advisory Board on Education
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Teaching
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CBSE-ELT	Central Board of Secondary Education's English Language Teaching Project
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
DIBELS	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
DIKSHA	Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing
D.El.Ed.	Diploma in Elementary Education
easyCBM	Easy Curriculum Based Measures
EEC	Education for Ethnic Children
EFA	Education for All
ELT	English Language Teaching
ELTAI	English Language Teachers Association on India
ESL/EFL	English as a foreign or second language
ESOL	English as a Second Language, English to Speakers of Other Languages
FLI	Forum for Language Initiatives
IATEFL	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
ITM	Indigenous, Tribal and Minority
L1	first language

L2	second language
LFP	low fee paying
MLE	Multilingual Education
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCTFE	National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education
NCTE	National Council for Teacher Education
NEP/NPE	National Education Policy/ National Policy on Education
NPST	National Professional Standards for Teachers
NGO	non-governmental organization
ORF	Oral Reading Fluency
RELO	Regional English Language Office
RTE	Right to Education for All
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SD	standard deviation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEC	Secondary Education Commission
SEDG	Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups
SES	socio-economic status
SOAP	Subjective narration, Objective data and observation, Assessment and Planning
SWAYAM	Study Webs of Active learning for Young Aspiring Minds
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TLF	Three Language Formula
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TOSREC	Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension
UEC	University Education Commission
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization

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Padmini Bhuyan Boruah

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Sarina Chugani Molina

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who is the most prolific researcher and literacy expert in the field, as well as the best role model and advocate for his students. Chapter 6 is from my postdoctoral work and I extend my thanks to my postdoctoral supervisor, Dr. Richard Wagner from the Florida Center for Reading Research who is a rock star in the field, but the most humble person I have ever met. I would also like to recognize the support I have received from my Special Education department at the University of New Mexico, especially from our chair, Dr. Ruth Luckasson, my program coordinator, Dr. Margo Collier and my other colleagues, who have whole-heartedly supported my research efforts. Finally, a special thanks to Maya Kalyanpur who invited me to work on this book with other scholars in the field. For the first time, I have found “my group” of researchers with whom I do not have to explain my positionality, and I look forward to future discussions, collaborations and continued friendship with my co-authors.

Sunaina Shenoy

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Maya Kalyanpur

# Prologue

## Our language stories

All the authors of this book have been significantly impacted in personal ways by language. We share our stories here and in subsequent chapters. The themes that emerged from our personal experiences reflect the dilemmas and challenges that present themselves at a global level. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that all four of us are of Indian origin, although we met in the U.S. Among us, and because of India's rich multilingual heritage, we know several languages – Assamese, Hindi, Japanese, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Sindhi – some being our mother tongue languages, other being languages we learnt in the regions in which we grew up. Yet, the one language that all of us are the most fluent in for reading, writing and speaking, and is common to all of us is English. All four of us have been impacted by postcolonial linguistic imperialism as English has gradually become the global *lingua franca* within our current context of globalization and neoliberal economics (Canagarajah, 2006; Phillipson, 1992).

Our experiences of losing our own languages as we became less literate in our regional or mother tongue languages, or *linguicide*, is a result of the perception of a hierarchy of languages where local languages are considered inferior to a national or a global language (see Alim, Rickford, & Ball, 2016). The Indian Constitution recognizes Hindi as the official language, and all states are encouraged to teach it at school as part of the Three Language Formula policy (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3). However, none of us spoke Hindi at home and were introduced to it either in school as another subject to study, as another language in the local environment or through Bollywood films. Sunaina recalls having to undergo painful years of private tuition in Hindi during her school years and resisting being forced to learn it. “I watched Bollywood movies, I understood Hindi,” she explained, “why did I have to study it?” Our mother tongues were either not taught to us at all in school or taught as a second, even a third, language. Padmini regrets allowing her literacy in her mother tongue, Assamese, to slide. While she struggled to read in Assamese, she enjoyed reading and writing in English, which was the medium of instruction at school, and in time, began to author short stories and poems in English. Sarina attended an American English medium school in Japan, where there were no opportunities to learn her native language, except through listening in on conversations between her parents and elders in the community. She was also