

*Book Review*

**Language Education, Politics and Technology in South Asia: Shaping Inclusive Societies, Identities, and Futures**, by Uma Pradhan and Mohini Gupta. Routledge, 2025, 278 pp., USD 190.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-032-79272-9

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Given the scholarship and growing interest in language education in South Asia, this book is an excellent addition as it moves beyond an assemblage of theoretical essays by foregrounding empirical research and grounded studies, thereby addressing a critical gap in the existing literature. With case studies, ethnography, and comparative analyses, this book undertakes the task by combining the triad of language education, politics, and technology in South Asia with emerging methodologies. A central concern across all the chapters is South Asia's linguistic plurality, along with the multifaceted challenges and opportunities it presents (Canagarajah & Ashraf, 2013). Language education in South Asia is highly contested, with its dynamic shifts and patterns, and one cannot ignore its colonial past and postcolonial struggles (Thiong'o, 1986; Viswanathan, 1990), apart from its everyday politics (Kachru, 1986; Sadana, 2012), while also looking to the future with hope. The advent of globalisation, the reach of AI and the geopolitical scenarios of the particular context are imperative when it comes to demystifying language education in South Asia.

Recently, as the editors of the book indicate, attention has also been drawn to the ways in which individuals use their daily language practices to foster inclusive spaces. Given South Asia's exceptionally diverse linguistic and cultural landscape (Agnihotri, 2021), the endeavour to untangle language education within the region presents a formidable, yet profoundly valuable, academic undertaking. This complexity arises not only from the sheer number of languages and dialects but also from their intricate historical interactions, varying religious affinity, and the dynamic interplay of language with identity, power, and socioeconomic mobility. Unpacking language education here necessitates a deep understanding of this inherent multilingualism, where insights gained can directly inform more effective and equitable language policies, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices (Anderson, 2017; Mendoza, 2023; Sah & Fang, 2024).

As the editors claim, this book has a two-pronged approach. One, it directly analyses the different South Asian languages, and second, it uses various terminologies, vocabularies, and labels to analyse the languages. The book also postulates the argument that language education functions as a complex platform where power relations are both

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dominant and resisted. In doing so, this edited volume seeks to contribute by adding to decoloniality by featuring marginalised voices and infusing them thematically into the three distinct sections of power and politics, societal inclusiveness and digitality.

This volume is the result of a conference conducted at the University of Oxford in 2023. The book is divided into three parts, thematically – language and politics, language and inclusivity, and language and technology, comprising 13 chapters. Part One focuses on language, power and politics, where the five chapters under this section demonstrate how power unfolds in the linguistic arena and how language speakers work their way in and out on an everyday basis. In chapter one, “Youth Perspectives on Hindi, English and India’s New Politics of Language: Becoming Bharat,” Abhishek Ranjan Datta spotlights the disproportionate importance given to Hindi in India’s New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 over other Indian languages (amplifying the risk of alienation), one that is implicit in the political drama of re-naming the country to “Bharat.” Datta also includes his DPhil ethnographic work, in which he finds that the unequal educational outcomes produced by different language mediums matter most for young Indians amid the language controversy.

Mohini Gupta’s Chapter 2, “Language Textbooks as a Site of Conflict in India: The Phenomenon of ‘Erased Curriculum’,” examines the political and ideological implications of changes in the NCERT Hindi textbook in India, where she observes that a significant portion of the content has been erased. Drawing from her doctoral research, she introduces the concept of ‘erased curriculum,’ urging readers to critically consider what is removed, concealed, or retained in textbook narratives. The third chapter, “The Challenges of Literacy Acquisition and Linguistic Proficiency in Multilingual Educational Landscape of Pakistan” by Azka Syed, is a case study of The Citizens Foundation (TCF) schools across the Punjab province in Pakistan, highlighting the challenges faced by students in acquiring literacy skills in Urdu, their second language, with lack exposure to their first language. The author advocates for Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) as a step towards effectively decolonising the pedagogy of multilingual Pakistan, citing TCF’s exclusive MTB-MLE programme as an emerging success. Kusha Anand’s chapter, “Mother Tongue-Based Education and Indian Teachers’ Views on Language Policy Reforms by the Bharatiya Janata Party,” opposes linguistic dominance and supports a multilingual educational practice, a conclusion she draws after conducting interviews with schoolteachers from multiple states across India following the implementation of NEP 2020. The final chapter of this part, by Jenifer Deivanayagam and Bhavani Sanjeeviraja, titled “Unofficial Bilingualism in English-Only Policy Context: A Postmethod Pedagogy for Difficult Circumstances in Rural Government Schools of Tamil Nadu,” demonstrates the reason for English teachers in rural government schools using Tamil to teach English against the mandated policy. Through their fieldwork, using classroom observation and telephone interviews, they list the advantages of this method of teaching, they call “unofficial bilingualism”, which differs from “guilty translanguaging” (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2018) in the language classroom.

Chapters in Part Two explore the inclusion and marginalisation of languages, where language education becomes a site of active resistance, navigating language hierarchies. Chapter 6, “Kerala’s Language Directive and the Erasure of Gendered Teacher Identities” by Manisha Bhadrán, discusses the recent educational language reform undertaken by the state of Kerala in India, which uses the gender-neutral term “teacher” instead of gender identifiers, and the inherent paradox present in such a scenario. The proposal of gender neutrality dismisses the rich subjective experiences that language educators bring to the classroom, and the author vouches for a gender-inclusive approach suited to the South Asian context. The influence of ‘place’ in education is explored in Saurav Goswami’s “Multilingualism and globalisation in Remote Trans-Himalayan India: How Topography and Place-Experience Impact Language Learning,” where the author looks into the remotely located, almost isolated Leh-Ladakh region of India. Goswami demonstrates the intricate workings of multilingualism and the reach of globalisation in the trans-Himalayan region through participant interviews. This chapter highlights the richness of geographical marginality, while also exploring the linguistic landscape.

In chapter 8, “Future of Madrasa Education in Bangladesh: Between Competition, Integration and Modernisation,” Charza Shahabuddin focuses on the disparities in educational quality, opportunities and outcomes for students in Islamic education. By reiterating the colonial imprint and the current scenario, the chapter emphasizes the need for Bangladeshi decision-makers to adopt a holistic approach in the future. The final chapter of this part, “Language Dialects, Standardisation, and Agency among the Naawa of Nepal” by Mark A. Condra, examines the Naawa community’s intricate relationship with language standardization in Nepal, highlighting tensions between local dialect loyalty and the desire for a standardized written form. It emphasizes the importance of perceptual dialectology and community agency in standardisation efforts, advocating for approaches that respect linguistic variation and local identity.

The final part of this book focuses on the expanding influence of technology in language education, encompassing the politics and issues of inclusivity in South Asia. Sameer Abraham Thomas’s chapter on “Indian Languages and Language Acquisition Apps: My Phone Won’t Teach Me Malayalam” brings the issue of the use of technology for the preservation of non-Western languages, where an app like Duolingo teaches a fictitious language like Klingon to its users, but not Malayalam, with millions of speakers. He also emphasizes the importance of researching non-Hindi Indian languages and their adaptability and inclusivity in the technological sphere. On a positive note, the chapter “Remembering Nepal Bhasa through Artificial Intelligence (AI) Translations: Language, Technology and Indigenous Memory” by Uma Pradhan tells us the determined effort of the Newar community of Nepal to add their language to the Google Translate platform. It is an example of how technology can be used to preserve Indigenous languages.

“Unveiling the Barriers: Exploring EdTech Integration Challenges and Solutions for ESL Instruction in Bangladesh” by Andrianna Bashar addresses the socio-cultural issues that

extend beyond the technical difficulties in ESL classrooms in Bangladesh. She points out that, among the many factors, the lack of digital literacy skills in teachers, correlated with teacher training programmes, is one of the major factors affecting the successful implementation of EdTech in Bangladesh. The final chapter in the volume by Sandapa Dissanayake, Mihiri Jansz and Brooke Schreiber, titled “Virtual teacher communities in Sri Lanka: Difficulties and Possibilities,” examines an online teacher professional development (TPD) initiative for novice English teachers in Sri Lanka. It highlights the technological, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges of digital TPD in the Global South, calling for context-sensitive, locally adapted solutions.

This book offers a timely and valuable contribution to the field of language education by providing an in-depth analysis of how language education, including its politics and technology, works in the diverse and dynamic region of South Asia. Its interdisciplinary approach broadens its relevance, making it highly applicable for scholars, teacher educators and critical practitioners in language education, language policy, and educational technology, especially in the Global South. While one of the book’s notable strengths lies in the methodological diversity adopted by the contributors, including textbook analysis, case studies, and interviews, allowing for a multifaceted engagement with the complex realities of language education, the chapters in this volume are grounded in specific regional contexts which might not be suitable for readers seeking a comprehensive, pan-South Asian account of language education.

That said, readers should approach the volume with certain considerations in mind. Although the book is framed as a South Asian collection, its geographic focus, with seven out of thirteen chapters, is disproportionately weighted towards India. Part three of the volume, focusing on the language and technology facet, does not feature chapters that deal with perspectives and experiences of students, thereby creating a gap by underrepresenting the learners’ voice in discussions about technology-mediated education. Including more chapters on language and politics from South Asian contexts beyond India would have been a valuable addition, offering a more comprehensive and balanced account. Furthermore, as a collection of research papers authored by contributors from diverse academic backgrounds and career stages, the volume presents a variety of writing styles and scholarly approaches. Nonetheless, despite these differences, the book succeeds in presenting a wide-ranging and diverse set of outcomes, reflecting the complexity and multiplicity of issues surrounding language education, policy, and technology in a selected South Asian context.

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