

‘Language’ as a Tool of Oppression, Resistance, and Liberation

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the many ways human language has been employed as a medium of oppression, an instrument of resistance, and an apparatus of liberation. This phenomenon is specifically evident in the context of Dalits and marginalized. The discussion concentrates on the adoption of English language by Dalit activists and contemporary writers. To them, English language is an instrument of confronting social injustice, of emancipation, and to defy existing linguistic discrimination. Contemporary philosophers and intellectuals, including B.R Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd among others have seen English as the most effective means to challenge Brahminical supremacy, oppose linguistic dominancy, and emulate categorical resistance to access global platforms. The analysis of this investigation extends the interconnectedness among language, caste, social hierarchies, and power dynamics. It aligns with the multidimensionality of global critical theories and examines Dalit linguistic activism through the lens of inclusive language policies that recognize and validate marginalized voices.

Keywords: Dalits; oppression; resistance; emancipation; linguistic discrimination; liberation

1. Introduction

Human language is an inextricably sophisticated system of communication that uses symbols, signs, sounds, and the principles of how these elements are put together. Primarily, language serves as the medium through which individuals communicate, understand, and express each other in a speech community (Fabbro et al., 2022). Secondarily, language functions as an instrument of suppression, a tool to show resistance, and an apparatus of emancipation in human society (Cauter, 2023; Romariz, 2022; S, 2022). The multitudinous nature of language is not only limited to serving as a medium of communication, instead, it reinforces hegemonic power structure and naturalizes systematic suppression in various social settings (Hargrave, 2022; Gabsi, 2024). Such structured oppression through the lens of linguistic dominance has often remained unchallenged and hindered diversity efforts. Language has perpetuated presiding ideologies and racial subjugation; it has marginalized the voices and empowered communities at the same time (Hargrave, 2022; Cauter, 2023; Gabsi, 2024).

As an apparatus, language strengthens hierarchical doctrines, maintains linguistic superiority and sociocultural dominion, thereby systematically debarring the Dalits and the oppressed from these sectors. In terms of language supremacy and linguistic discrimination in a society, the concept of “standard” language ideology prevails (c.f., Susen, 2009; Gusain et al. 2011; Okata, 2019). So, the

conviction of *linguistic equality* is antithetical in any speech community where one language presides over other(s). The way various authoritative groups employ language and administer hierarchies, reflects how marginalized voices are obscured. On one hand, “language” serves the organized power structure in the society and becomes a means of resistance: the commanding groups suppress the deprecated. On the other hand, the oppressed confront the supreme using “language”. This dual nature of language underscores its importance not merely as a means to communicate but as a formidable mechanism against ascendent social injustices (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Grillo, 1989).

Linguistic supremacy and/or linguistic dominancy works behind the ideological weaponization of language to repress and marginalize the minority. From linguistic discrimination to sociocultural marginalization is a process meticulously and systematically monitored by a handful of upper-caste and/or upper-class people (c.f., Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Hartman, 2003; Umam & Ali, 2024). This social-asymmetry leading toward social imbalance has been alarming to contemporary philosophers and Dalit activists, including B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Chandra Bhan Prasad, and Kanch Ilaiah Shepherd. To them, linguistic favouritism has remained one of the pivotal foundational pillars on which the caste hierarchies stand. They realized that language and sociocultural marginalization are entangled (c.f., Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013; Diwan & R., 2023; Yalamala, 2020; Chauhan, 2023; Punia, 2024). They apprehended that caste-based segregation was systematically maintained through controlling and restricting access to dominant languages for Dalits and marginalized by upper caste people.

Dalit intellectuals and contemporary philosophers, including Phule and Ambedkar, were unwavering advocates of the crucial role of education and the undeniable right to equal access for all (Keerthana, 2024; Babu, 2022; Basak, 2023; Velaskar, 2012; Mathur & Thakur, 2022). To them, education not only disseminates worldly knowledge rather, it also serves as a powerful device to break the chains of inequality, linguistic barriers, and stand against social injustice (Keerthana, 2024; Basak, 2023). Ambedkar and Phule have paved the path of equality, and encouraged numerous individuals to challenge social apartheid. Their active engagement in availing access to education for all aimed at compelling future generations to rise up and assert their potentials (Babu, 2022; Keerthana, 2024). They found that education can actively shape a more equitable society because it is a device for empowerment and social upliftment of the Dalits and the marginalized. They believed that having access to literacy and education was the foundational stone on which oppressive structures could be dismantled and obliterated (see Babu, 2022; Basak, 2023; Keerthana, 2024; Umam & Ali, 2024).

Ambedkar has astutely highlighted the role of a “standard” language in maintaining social hierarchies, and accessing global knowledge and education (c.f., Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013; Velaskar, 2012). To him, language is a mechanism of domination. He realized that the contribution of language could lead to sociocultural, political, and educational exclusion that reinforces caste-based oppression (c.f., Umam & Ali, 2024; Hartman, 2003). The relationship between language and caste presents an opportunity to understand how linguistic influences can shape social hierarchies and address longstanding inequalities (Babu, 2022; Keerthana, 2024; Umam & Ali, 2024). Historically, the Brahmanical order leveraged language as a means to uphold caste-based discrimination, which has also inspired critical analysis and reform efforts from influential social reformers like B.R. Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule. These pioneers have paved the way for a more equitable discourse. Their work encourages a re-evaluation of language’s role in nurturing inclusivity and challenging social divides. In his influential work, “Annihilation of Caste” (1936), Ambedkar confronts the entrenched caste system and calls for a radical rethinking of social structures through the essential lens of language and discourse (Chaudhary, 2022; Kumar, 2023; Giri, 2024; Roy, 2022;

Kumar, 2023; Kisana, 2023).

The emergence of Dalit literature stands as a bold counter-narrative to the dominant literary canon, firmly declaring the significance of Dalit experiences. The term “*dalitification*” decisively reclaims linguistic freedom from upper-caste control and assertively brings caste consciousness into the spotlight of literary discourse (Punia, 2024). Through their literary contributions, Omprakash Valmiki (*Joothan* in 1997), Babytai Kamble (*The Prisons we Broke* in 2008), Urmila Pawar (*The Weave of my Life: A Dalit Woman’s Memoirs* in 2009), Bama Faustina Soosairaj (*Karukku* in 1992) among others express their lived experiences, challenging the historical exclusion from mainstream narratives and actively stimulating a strong sense of identity and resistance (Singh & Kumar, 2023; Dhankar & Sharma, 2024; Rahman, 2023; A, 2024). Their unwavering commitment to reclaiming linguistic spaces demonstrates the transformative potential of language as a tool for empowerment and social change, standing resolutely against the oppressive structures that aim to silence them.

Dalit activists such as Bindu Ammini, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Teesta Setalvad, Aruna Roy, Babytai Kamble, Meena Kandasamy, and Medha Patkar have addressed social oppression and injustices while advocating for the preservation of language rights. They tried to preserve and assert linguistic identities as pivotal mechanisms to achieve social equality (Babu, 2022; Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Velaskar, 2012). Through their literary works, Dalit writers have reclaimed their narratives and stimulated inclusive and meaningful dialogue. They have understood how language can oppress and liberate the marginalized by shaping the social and political landscapes. Thus, to engage with language in a contemplative and critical manner within the social and educational contexts prevails. (Hargrave, 2022; Caüter, 2023; Gabsi, 2024; S, 2022). This phenomenon has led the marginalized activists and educators to harness the transformative potential of language, challenge the oppressive narratives, and cultivate awareness that confronts racial and social injustices.

Language serves as a formidable device in shaping sociocultural and political identity, as well as social stratification, whether in the context of oppression or resistance. The suppression of indigenous cultures, identities, languages, and ideologies through colonial systems must be recognized as a means to maintain hegemonic paradigms (c.f., Uman & Ali, 2024). These systems privilege imported knowledge over indigenous knowledge, effectively repressing native languages to benefit dominant powers and uphold social hierarchies. Maria Lugones (1944 - 2020), a feminist philosopher and a sociologist had promoted the cultivation of a pluralistic ontology as an essential requirement for fostering a resistant consciousness and building coalitions among oppressed groups (Lugones, 2010; Lugones, 2020). Ruby Nell Sales (1948 -), an African American social activist, exemplifies how language can be form of resistance. She has reframed the historical narratives to honour the experiences of Black individuals, promoting a pedagogy of “somebodiness” that empowers marginalized communities (Pearson & Richardson, 2022).

The pursuit of extrication through language has not been easy. It is exhaustive with innumerable challenges, systematically maintained barriers, and entrenched societal attitudes that obstruct the path. It marks the necessity for relentless advocacy and coalition-building (Lugones, 2020). Efforts to revitalize indigenous languages illuminate the extraordinary potential of language as a powerful vehicle for cultural reclamation and unity among diverse communities (see Uman & Ali, 2024). The transformative essence of language has sparked a movement, inspiring Dalit activists, writers, and marginalized individuals across India to reclaim their values and identities within society (Babu, 2022; Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Velaskar, 2012). By all means, it became evident that access to globally recognized language(s) and education empower individuals to envision a future liberated from oppression, inviting them to engage with narratives that resonate with their lived

experiences and reflect their true selves.

2. Research Objectives

Pre-dominant Brahmanical control over marginalized language, culture, and ideology requires a thorough examination and transformation across various sociocultural and political domains, which includes academic discourses. Dalit intellectuals, philosophers, writers, and leaders such as B.R Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Kancha Ilaiah have decisively challenged the existing epistemologies, asserting their narratives by de- Brahmanizing these disciplinary spaces (Babu, 2022; Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Basak, 2023; Keerthana, 2024). Their novel contributions have marked the importance of language as an indispensable mechanism of resistance against social suppression. This transformation has empowered the marginalized Dalit voices and enriched the cultural landscape. The journey from oppression toward emancipation illuminates how language can serve as a potent apparatus for justice and equality.

3. Theoretical background

Language stands as a strong instrument of human civilization. It wields the power to unite and/or divide the social systems. It is often cloaked with political and economic interests through the graded stratagem of discourse (Beaver and Stanley, 2023). Such manipulation is evident in how language can depoliticize conflicts and the pain they cause, obscuring the systemic violence and oppression that lie beneath (Fabbro et al., 2022; Romariz, 2022; Gabsi, 2024). Consequently, it fortifies and sustains the dominant power structures entrenched within society. In this context, Mashiyat Ahmed (2024)¹ writes:

“...With the power of communication at our tongues, diverse perspectives and abstract ideas galvanized humanity towards a newfound sophistication, allowing us to transmit culture, nurture collective identities, and form alliances. However, somewhere between sharing stories around the campfire to creating new writing systems, words slowly transformed into the art of rhetoric, the rules of persuasion, and the basis of deception...”

B.R. Ambedkar had seen language as the fundamental pillar of identity politics and state formation. He had advocated for the creation of linguistic states, viewing this as a strategy for nurturing cultural preservation and enhancing political democracy. However, he also cautioned against the risks of excessive fragmentation and linguistic chauvinism, warning that such tendencies could undermine social cohesion (see Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Basak, 2023; Velaskar, 2012; Punia, 2024). Ambedkar perceptively observed how language movements often serve as ideological veils, concealing deeper political and social tensions beneath the surface. He understood it is the language we speak that fundamentally shapes our sense of nationhood and it can influence how individuals are recognized within their states (c.f., Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Basak, 2023; Keerthana, 2024). In his vision, linguistic unity was essential to avert societal division. He acknowledged the intricate role language plays in constructing social hierarchies and shaping political identities. His compelling advocacy for the principle of “one state, one language” was deeply intertwined with his belief that language not only moulds collective identity but can also be wielded as a tool for broader ideological control (see Ambedkar 1955).

Language serves as a powerful instrument for exercising and maintaining power. Humans express their ideological beliefs and faiths using language. It shapes public perception and influences political discourse (Beaver & Stanley, 2023). Political engagements usually utilize various linguistic

¹ Mashiyat Ahmed (October 7, 2024). “Language is Civilization’s First Weapon”. Language is civilization’s first weapon - The Medi

devices such as presuppositions, and implicature to achieve subtle indoctrination (Beaver and Stanley, 2023). This phenomenon allows linguistic implications to convey ideological positions without explicit statements. Such dynamics reinforce dominant ideologies while marginalizing dissenting voices, thereby sustaining established power structures (Hargrave, 2022; Caüter, 2023; Gabsi, 2024). The ideological manipulation of language is a powerful mechanism that alters meanings and prioritizes specific values by devaluing others. Language, while often weaponized for ideological purposes, it possesses the ability to challenge dominant narratives and empower marginalized voices. For example, in *Joothan*, Omprakash Valmiki (1997) tells us about the Dalit lived experience. He reveals how the marginalized communities in India are oppressed. His narrative culminates the struggles against caste and socio-cultural hierarchies, identity crises, and resilience. Through *Joothan*, Valmiki raises concerns about the broader social structures perpetuating caste discrimination, historically pervasive supremacy, marginalizing the Dalits by the upper castes (Revathi & Bindu, 2019; Nagar, 2022).

By modifying the meanings of linguistic terms and employing their axiological markings, ideological discourses can decisively impose specific worldviews on audiences and effectively transform language into a formidable means of control (c.f., Beaver and Stanley, 2023). This process can subjugate language to ideology and compromise its role as an accurate descriptor of reality (Hargrave, 2022; Okata, 2019; Susen, 2009). Constructing meanings through linguistic terms shapes the narratives that guide collective action and thought (Kreiner, 2013; Mei, 2024; Lucy, 2001). This phenomenon not only normalizes certain beliefs, rather it delegitimizes others and influences societal norms, and values. However, the potentiality of a language for liberation and resistance reflects and shapes social realities, intimately entangled with ideological processes driving transformative change.

Language works as a formidable dogmatic weapon that shapes our perceptions and influences social dynamics. It functions not merely as a communication tool but as a mechanism of power and control. Our linguistic choices consistently reflect and reinforce ideological positions and power structures. For example, in “*Lord of the Flies*” (1954), William Golding highlights the language of the characters mirroring social hierarchies, inherent darkness of human nature, unrelenting lust for power, and the shifting power dynamics. The novel demonstrates how language can dictate social order and drive group dynamics (Khalid et al., 2023; Beaver & Stanley, 2023). “*Lord of the Flies*” highlights the destructive potential of language while prompting readers to recognize its capacity for understanding and cooperation. It challenges the limited view of language as solely a weapon of oppression and discrimination. It also illustrates how language can be shaped by ideological processes while also perpetuating them (Cameron, 2006; Wright & Hailu, 1988). Although the ideological misuse of language undermines its credibility and turns it into a tool for sustaining conflict rather than accurately representing reality. Simultaneously, it empowers the marginalized voices to challenge and redefine societal narratives. It presents a robust means of resistance against dominant ideologies. This duality reflects the interplay between language, ideology, and power in human society (Zaidi, 2012).

Prominent Dalit thinkers, including Jyotirao Phule, Kancha Ilaiah, and Chandra Bhan Prasad, illustrate the ways in which dominant caste ideologies manipulate language as a formidable weapon to maintain entrenched social hierarchies (S, 2022; Okata, 2019; Susen, 2009). This tactic denies access to critical resources such as power and knowledge, reinforcing their subjugation to marginalized communities. Jyotirao Phule has critically examined the Brahmanical religious texts and identified them as instruments of conquest and oppression (Kumar, 2019). These tools have been systematically employed to indoctrinate society, legitimizing caste dominance while simultaneously obstructing educational opportunities for marginalized and

Dalits. Phule has advocated education. He has emphasized the importance of learning languages that provide access to modern technology and knowledge systems (Kumar, 2019). Mahatma Phule's work represents a bold ideological challenge to the longstanding hegemony that seeks to silence and marginalize these communities.

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd takes Mahatma Phule's argument further by asserting that proficiency in English is essential for Dalits seeking liberation from the ideological confines imposed by caste and regional languages (Ilame, 2020; c.f., Shepherd, 2019). He reframes language not merely as a means to express ideas and thoughts, but as a powerful vehicle for emancipation, enabling Dalits to engage intellectually with global discourses and assert their presence in wider societal conversations (Ilame, 2020; Shepherd, 2019). Similarly, Chandra Bhan Prasad champions the English language as both an ideological weapon and a potent symbol of a Dalit Renaissance (Ilame, 2020; Punia, 2024). He critically analyzes the dominance of regional languages, arguing that they often perpetuate existing caste hierarchies and restrict the empowerment of Dalit communities (Punia, 2024). By positioning language choice as a deliberate political act, Prasad underscores the transformative potential of language in the fight for social justice and equality. Together, these insightful perspectives reveal the intricate and contested role of language in shaping social dynamics, where issues of power, identity, and justice are constantly negotiated and redefined (Ilame, 2020; Punia, 2024; Minz & Doreswamy, 2023). Their arguments illuminate the transformative potential of language as a tool for both personal empowerment and collective advancement within marginalized communities.

4.1. Language and Power Dynamics

Language functions as a medium through which power dynamics are articulated and reinforced across various contexts. They include corporate environments, political discourse, and sociocultural institutions (Khan, 2024; Khan & Sajid, 2024). It plays a vital role in shaping organizational culture, influencing public perceptions, and sustaining social hierarchies. Consequently, language has the capacity to either empower or marginalize individuals and groups within society (c.f., Bourdieu, 1991; Gramsci, 1971; Spivak, 1988). This relationship is complex, as language and power dynamics are intricately intertwined. It serves both as a vehicle for expressing and exercising power and as a mechanism that constructs, maintains, and challenges power relations in diverse social contexts (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Heller & Duchêne, 2016).

In the realm of political discourse, language serves as a powerful vehicle for ideology and authority. Political statements often leverage linguistic devices that convey meanings extending beyond their explicit content, subtly indoctrinating the public with specific ideological positions (Cauter, 2023; Beaver & Stanley, 2023; Gabsi, 2024). The strategic use of emotionally charged and sensitive language can create significant resonance within the public sphere (c.f., Beaver & Stanley, 2023). Political leaders, religious figures, and business influencers often utilize provocative language to engage a broad audience. This manipulative power of language not only legitimizes authority but also perpetuates dominant ideologies, shaping societal power structures. The ability to control language in political, religious, and various social institutional contexts marks its role in maintaining power dynamics (Patteti & Rajani, 2024; Green & Searle-Chatterjee, 2008). Language politics encompasses intentionally used language in political arena to consolidate power, shape public opinion, and influence national identity. Governments and political actors deploy language policies to assert control, legitimize authority, and marginalize opposition (Hargrave, 2022; Okata, 2019; Gusain et al. 2011; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Grillo, 1989).

Language instrumentalization has led to enforcing official languages, marginalizing minority languages and specific groups, thereby to perpetuate linguistic oppression (Hargrave, 2022; Cauter,

2023; Gabsi, 2024). Such language politics is extended beyond legislation including rhetoric and propaganda. Various linguistic expressions are manipulated to advance ideological agendas (c.f., Beaver & Stanley, 2023). The resultant impact on social cohesion is profound. It reinforces the hegemonic power structures and shapes the societal landscape (Fabbro et al., 2022; Okata, 2019; Susen, 2009).

Linguistic discrimination constitutes a prevalent form of social oppression that devalues individuals or groups based on their language use, accent, or dialect (Hartman, 2003; Umam & Ali, 2024; Punia, 2024). This form of discrimination is evident in educational, professional, and social exclusion, often intersecting with racial, ethnic, and class biases and exacerbating systemic inequalities (Susen 2009; Velaskar, 2012; Babu, 2012; Keerthana, 2024; Uman & Ali, 2024). The infringement of linguistic human rights undermines cultural identity and autonomy which contributes to social marginalization and internalized oppression (c.f., Punia, 2024). Efforts to address linguistic discrimination necessitates linguistic justice advocating for comprehensive language policies, inclusive pedagogical strategies, and the acknowledgement of multilingualism as a significant social asset. Consequently, addressing the linguistic discrimination is imperative for dismantling broader frameworks of oppression and stimulating equitable participation within society (Okata, 2019; Mathur & Thakur, 2022).

Language is a powerful tool that not only reflects but actively shapes and negotiates power dynamics within hierarchical structures. In society, language serves as a critical vehicle to enact and reinforce ideologies and social stratifications (Hargrave, 2022; Cauter, 2023; Gabsi, 2024). Social theorists like Michel Foucault assert that power is omnipresent. It influences our everyday interactions beyond mere institutional authority (Mooijman, 2023; Elias, 2023). From this standpoint, language is a manifestation of power. Language defines our perceptions, controls the narratives, and expresses dominance in a variety of communicative contexts. These contexts can range from formal political discussions to casual conversations (Mooijman, 2023; Elias, 2023; Diem et al., 2022, Avelino, 2021). The power embedded in language is both overt and subtle, profoundly influenced by social factors such as gender, cultural identity, education, and economic status (Grillo, 1989; Diwan & S, 2023; Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013). Language effectively reflects the ethnolinguistic vitality of communities, where dominant languages symbolize collective power and institutional representation (Hargrave, 2022; Cauter, 2023; Gabsi, 2024). It decisively shapes access to resources and social capital. Thus, language does more than reveal existing power dynamics; it sustains them and has the capacity to forge new power structures. Normalizing the inequalities through discourses like linguistic sexism and racism reinforces male dominance and ethnic hierarchies in everyday interactions (Yalamala, 2020; Diwan, 2023). At the same time, language is a powerful tool of influence. It utilizes strategic narrative framing, agenda setting, and selective communication to uphold or challenge established power asymmetries.

Language not only reinforces power dynamics in society but also serves as a robust means of resistance. In literary contexts, marginalized voices boldly challenge dominant discourses through their narratives (S, 2022; Susen, 2009; Hartman, 2003). A prime example of this is Meena Kandasamy's poetry collection "*Touch*" (2006), where she confronts the societal norms that dictate the experiences of Dalit women. By wielding the English language as a tool for resistance and reclamation, Kandasamy does not just highlight the violence and repression faced by marginalized communities, rather, she radically redefines the concept of touch into a powerful symbol of agency and defiance (c.f., Mooijman, 2023; Elias, 2023; Diem et al., 2022, Avelino, 2021). Her work exposes pervasive caste-based discrimination while empowering lower-caste individuals to reclaim their

identity. Kandasamy's strategic use of English as a means of resistance marks linguistic potential to contest oppressive power structures and drive social change. It emphasizes the dual role in oppression and liberation (Fabbro et al, 2022; Susen, 2009, Gusain, 2011). This compelling focus on the ability of language to challenge entrenched power not only informs but also inspires the audience to advocate for meaningful change.

To recognize a language as superior or designating a particular dialect as "standard" or "prestigious" can significantly influence social mobility. It often results in social institutions and policies that reinforce linguistic hierarchies while neglecting critical inequities (Gusain, 2011; Susem 2009). This dynamic systematically excludes minority and marginalized language varieties. Therefore, it is imperative to advocate for linguistic justice, which includes promoting multilingualism, valuing minority languages, and reforming language requirements in educational and professional settings. Such measures are vital to ensure that language serves as a powerful conduit for social mobility rather than an obstacle. Prominent Dalit writers, including Bindu Ammini, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Teesta Setalvad, Aruna Roy, Baby Kamble, Medha Patkar, Omprakash Valmiki, Urmila Pawar, Bama Faustina Soosairaj, Gurram Joshua, and Meena Kandasamy, have skillfully navigated and dismantled these barriers. They have emerged from oppression to liberation through language triumphantly.

4.2 Linguistic Discrimination and the Rise of Ideological Societies

The term "linguistic discrimination" refers to the unfair treatment that individuals encounter in a society primarily based on their language use. It is intricately connected to the emergence of ideological frameworks that shape how language and identity are perceived (Hargrave, 2022; Okata, 2019, Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Linguistic discrimination is not merely a reflection of personal biases; it is firmly embedded in societal structures and ideologies that establish linguistic norms (S. 2022; Okata, 2019, Susen, 2009; Gusain et al. 2011; Grillo, 1989). The relationship between language and identity stimulates environments where certain linguistic forms are celebrated while others are systematically marginalized (Romariz, 2022; Susen, 2009; Gusain, 2011). This has resulted in a pattern of systemic linguistic discrimination against speakers of "nonstandard" dialects or minority languages in comparison to those who use standard dialects. Consequently, linguistically marginalized individuals and oppressed groups face obstacles in sociocultural hierarchies, educational institutions, and employment sectors due to their linguistic identities.

Education and media are powerful forces in the fight against linguistic discrimination. It is imperative to promote linguistic diversity and cross-cultural understanding actively. By doing so, society can unite to effectively reduce prejudices and cultivate a culture of inclusivity (Umam & Ali, 2024). While emerging ideological societies have contributed to the ongoing challenges of linguistic discrimination, individuals have also recognized the significant potential for change (Romariz, 2022; S, 2022; Susen, 2009). By challenging and dismantling harmful language ideologies, it is possible to pave the way for a more equitable society that celebrates linguistic diversity instead of stigmatizing it. This transformation demands coordinated action from educators, policymakers, and community leaders to create environments that value all forms of communication (Punia, 2024; Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Velaskar, 2012; Basak, 2023; Babu, 2022; Keerthana, 2024).

Language stands as the primary vehicle for cultural expression and societal interaction. It embodies and reflects the values, beliefs, and norms of a community (Umam & Ali, 2024; Chauhan, 2023; Yalamala, 2020). This dynamic interplay is evident across various aspects of culture and society. Language serves as a crucial repository of a society's history, traditions, and social relationships, mirroring cultural identity (Punia, 2024; Diwan, 2023). Over time, this sentiment crystallizes into a strong ideological identity, which frequently manifests linguistic nationalism,

resistance, or separatism (c.f., S, 2022; Susen, 2009). Moreover, linguistic discrimination often intersects with racial, ethnic, and regional biases. Though stigmatizing a language can be a veiled attack on the associated culture or ethnicity (Green & Searle- Chatterjee, 2008; Avelino, 2021; Diem, et al., 2022; Babu, 2022; Irvine & Gal, 2000). This dynamic can fuel the rise of ideologically driven movements that aim to reclaim dignity, assert cultural autonomy, and challenge perceived cultural imperialism (Khan, 2024; Khan & Sajid, 2024; Bourdieu, 1991).

Oppressed linguistic communities recognize their language as a powerful symbol of identity and resistance (Khan & Sajid, 2024; Khan, 2024; Shepherd, 2019). This crucial role drives the formation of ideological societies that unite around language as a rallying point for impactful political and cultural agendas, encompassing everything from civil rights to separatist nationalism (Zaidi, 2012; Wright & Hailu, 1988; Cameron, 2006; Khalid & Ullah, 2023). In response to discrimination, the linguistic groups actively organize educational reforms, and cultural organizations which often results in the institutionalization of their ideologies through political parties (Mei, 2024; Pearson & Richardson, 2022). These institutions not only sustain these ideologies across generations but also solidify social divisions, which can escalate into violent conflict (c.f., Lugones, 2010, 2020; Rahman, 2023; A, 2024; Chaudhary, 2022). Linguistic discrimination not only transcends mere communication, rather, it fundamentally reshapes identities, power structures, and cultural landscapes. This dynamic creates a robust environment for the emergence of ideological societies dedicated to contesting, resisting, or reversing linguistic marginalization, often linking language to significant struggles over identity, autonomy, and justice (Chaudhary, 2022; A, 2024; Rahman, 2023; Kumar, 2023; Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013).

Linguistic discrimination plays a crucial role in shaping ideological societies within speech communities by establishing social hierarchies and perpetuating stereotypes tied to language use (Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Umam & Ali, 2024; Babu, 2022; Basak, 2023). This phenomenon unequivocally devalues specific ways of speaking. It leads to significant social consequences and the systematic marginalization of specific groups (c.f., Diwan, 2023; Yalamala, 2020; Chauha, 2023). Linguistic chauvinism occurs when individuals face unjust treatment due to their manner of speaking, coupled with social stereotypes. These factors reinforce each other, severely limiting individuals' opportunities and social mobility in essential areas of life, including education, employment, and social interactions (Umam & Ali, 2024; Hartman, 2003; Grillo, 1989; Gusain et al, 2011). Language serves as a decisive discriminatory factor, especially in multicultural societies where one language typically dominates. Those who struggle to communicate fluently in the dominant language or who speak it with a non-native accent face a heightened risk of linguistic discrimination. They are commonly referred to as "*glossophobia*" (Kumar, 2023; c.f., Spivak, 1988). This form of discrimination can lead to diminished self-esteem, social exclusion, and heightened anxiety about work and future prospects for those affected.

Linguists have a crucial role in addressing language-based discrimination within society. A socially responsible approach to linguistics could actively contribute to resolving language- related social problems and conflicts by identifying the problematic linguistic norms and values that underpin discrimination. Inclusive education, responsible media, and supportive government policies are essential in combating linguistic discrimination and social stereotypes (Khalid & Ullah, 2023; Pearson & Richardson, 2022). Collective efforts to promote inclusive language use, raise awareness of linguistic diversity, and shift negative perceptions through education and media are vital for creating a fairer and more inclusive society where all individuals are valued regardless of how they speak.

4.3 Adoption of English Language: from Oppression to Liberation

Several Dalit writers, thinkers, intellectuals, and contemporary philosophers, including Dr B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Meena Kandasamy, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, Chandra Bhan Prasad, Narendra Jadhav, and Omprakash Valmiki, have embraced the English language as a means to resist Brahmanical oppression and confront societal injustices through their literary contributions (c.f., Umam & Ali, 2024; Puni, 2024; Diwan, 2023; Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013). Their strategic use of English has emerged as a powerful tool to challenge and dismantle entrenched caste-based power structures (Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013; Keerthana, 2024). By adopting this language, they have opposed the *Sanskritized* linguistic traditions associated with upper-caste dominance, creating a new space for equality and democratic discourse (see, Chaudhary, 2022; Giri, 2024; Roy, 2022; Kumar, 2023; Kisana, 2023; Velaskar, 2012; Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013). As a global language with colonial roots, English has been reframed as an instrument for social change and empowerment, particularly for Dalit and marginalized communities (Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013). This linguistic shift has facilitated enhanced access to education and global opportunities for Dalits. It enables them to articulate their experiences and aspirations in a language that transcends regional and caste barriers (Diwan, 2023; Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Velaskar, 2012; Chauhan, 2023).

In the post-colonial era, the language was reinterpreted as an instrument of change, effectively bridging regional, religious, caste, and class divides (Romariz, 2022). English has emerged as a powerful tool for promoting equality, providing a shared space where caste-based restrictions, such as untouchability, have been challenged (c.f., Punia, 2024; Umam & Ali, 2024). The Anglo-Indian community has contributed to redefining English as an Indian language, which further reinforced its role as a vehicle for social transformation (Romariz, 2022; S, 2022). Dalit writings in English have actively contested Brahmanical control over the language, integrating caste perspectives into Indian writing in English and advocating for its recognition as an independent area of study (Punia, 2024). Ambedkar has deliberately used English as a systematic and principled resistance against the *Sanskritized* registers of Indian languages, which were predominantly influenced by upper-caste ideologies (Mathur & Thaku, 2022; Basak, 2023; Keerthana, 2024). To them, English has been recognized as a critical stepping stone toward liberation from ignorance and exploitation, opening pathways to global educational opportunities for Dalits and other marginalized communities (Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013; Giri, 2024).

Ambedkar's appropriation of the English language played a crucial role in challenging caste hierarchies, yet it is essential to acknowledge the complexities surrounding language politics in India (S, 2022; Romariz, 2022; Susen, 2009; Gusain et al., 2011). The adoption of English by various Dalit leaders has ignited debates about sociocultural identity and linguistic imperialism (Hartman, 2003; Umam & Ali, 2024). Some contemporary critics have viewed this as a continuation of colonial influence. Nonetheless, English has remained a powerful symbol of empowerment and resistance for marginalized communities against caste-based oppression (Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013). The way Ambedkar used English has shaped his identity as a Dalit leader and social reformer, it serves as a potent instrument for fighting against discrimination and oppression rooted in caste (c.f., Yalamala, 2020; Velaskar, 2012; Basak, 2023). By embracing the English language, Ambedkar has positioned himself to confront dominant Brahmanical narratives and advocate for Dalit rights. He has transformed English into a medium of protest and social justice (see, Keerthana, 2024; Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013).

As an emancipatory tool resonating with both national and international audiences, the English language has enabled figures such as Ambedkar, Phule, Chandra Bhan Prasad, and Kancha Ilaiah to

articulate Dalit struggles, thereby elevating the discourse surrounding caste-based discrimination (Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013; Basak, 2023; Keerthana, 2024; Mathur & Thakur, 2022). Ambedkar's writings and speeches in English have contributed to the "Dalitification" of the language, challenging upper-caste hegemony in English literature and promoting Dalit narratives (c.f., Punia, 2024). *Dalitification* of English has emerged as a powerful symbol of resistance for many Dalit activists, who regard English as a "Goddess" that empowers them to confront systemic injustices (c.f., Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013). In terms of Dalit narratives, the translation of Dalit literary works into English has amplified their voices and facilitated broader dissemination of their experiences and struggles (Sayeed & Madhopuri, 2013; Umam & Ali, 2024; Mathur & Thakur, 2022; Babu, 2022). However, while the appropriation of the English language has been crucial for Dalits in their fight for rights, it has also raised questions about the implications of utilizing a colonial language in the pursuit of liberation (Rahman, 2023; Dhaknar & Sharma, 2024; Singh & Kumar, 2023). Some critics argue that reliance on English may inadvertently reinforce the very power structures it seeks to dismantle. It highlights the complexities of language within social movements (Kahlid 7 Ullah, 2023; Cameron, 2006; Zaidi, 2012; Ilame, 2020).

5.3 The Question of Identity, Self, and Language Ideology

The concept of selfhood and identity within Dalit literature are intricately connected to the experiences of social and linguistic oppression faced by the Dalits (c.f., Nagar, 2022; Revathi & Bindu, 2019). Dalit literature has emerged as a response to the historical marginalization of lower-caste voices. It challenges the upper-caste narratives that have long dominated Indian literature (Singh & Kumar, 2023; Dhankar & Sharma, 2024; Rahman, 2023, A, 2024). This phenomenon emphasizes the interconnectedness between caste and gender, particularly in the works of Dalit women, who navigate the dual challenges of caste and patriarchal oppression (Rahman, 2023; Singh & Kumar, 2023). Autobiographical narratives, such as "Karukku" (1992) by Bama Faustina Soosairaj, illustrate the journey from victimhood to agency, showcasing the evolution of self-identity amidst systemic inequalities (Rahman, 2023; Dhankar & Sharma, 2024).

Language has played a crucial role in shaping self-identity, and Dalit writers often utilize vernacular languages to assert their cultural identity and resist linguistic hegemony (Keerthana, 2024; Babu, 2022). The incorporation of local dialects in literature serves to reclaim cultural narratives and challenge the dominant literary canon. It cultivates a sense of belonging and selfhood within Dalit communities (Kumar, 2019; Kumar 2023). This linguistic assertion acts as a resistance against the historical suppression of Dalit voices, enabling a reconfiguration of identity that is both personal and collective (Velaskarm 2012). While Dalit literature powerfully articulates the struggles for selfhood and identity in the face of oppression, it is crucial to recognize that the journey towards equality is ongoing (c.f., Pearson & Richardson, 2022). The complexities of caste and gender continue to shape the narratives of Dalit individuals. This fact necessitates the broader societal engagement with these issues to stimulate genuine inclusivity and understanding (Kumar, 2019; Giri, 2024).

Language ideologies can influence perceptions of linguistic superiority, often favouring standard varieties over regional dialects, which are viewed as inferior (Umam & Ali, 2024). The process of standardization is closely tied to power dynamics, as dominant groups impose their linguistic norms. It marginalizes others and reinforces class distinctions (Hartman, 2003). Linguistic discrimination is fundamentally intertwined with social stereotypes, which actively marginalize speakers of nonstandard language varieties (Umam & Ali, 2024). These clichés significantly diminish individuals' opportunities in education and employment which perpetuates cycles of inequality and reinforcing ideological divides within society (Umam & Ali, 2024; Keerthana, 2024; Babu, 2022;

Basak, 2023). Such segregation entrenches ideological divides as isolated communities develop distinct linguistic identities that mirror their social realities. While linguistic discrimination can nurture ideologically driven societies, it is essential to acknowledge that proactive efforts to promote linguistic diversity and inclusivity can effectively counter these detrimental effects (Basak, 2023).

Conclusion

The idea of linguistic oppression illustrates how language can be employed as a tool for marginalization that affect the Dalits in India. This form of oppression has been entrenched in caste hierarchical systems. The use of a specific language and the pervasive influence of the caste system together perpetuate the longstanding social stratum that has marginalized many. In reaction to such anchored suppression, the Dalits have begun to assert their advocacy by strategically embracing the English language. This shift has transformed English into an influential symbol of empowerment and liberation. English has been represented not merely a means of communication, rather, it became a pathway to oppose the status quo and dismantle discriminatory barriers.

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