

## **Register levels of ethno-national purity: The ethnicization of language and community in Mauritius**

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### ABSTRACT

Language is involved in processes of group identification in that it provides a focus for explicit discourses of identity and constitutes a field of less overt practices for creating groupness. Drawing on examples from Mauritian television broadcasting, this study traces the ethnicization of Mauritian Bhojpuri as a “Hindu language” through the hierarchization and subsuming of linguistic practices under larger language labels with ethno-national significance. Purist forms of Mauritian Bhojpuri that are locally perceived as “intermediate” registers between Hindi and Bhojpuri are used to represent Hindi as a language spoken in Mauritius, and at the same time to link Mauritian Bhojpuri ideologically to Hindu identity. This blurring of language boundaries serves a Hindu nationalist agenda in a diasporic location by establishing new links between linguistic forms and ethno-national values. (Linguistic anthropology, nationalism, language ideology, language and community, multilingualism, Mauritius, Indian diaspora)\*

### INTRODUCTION

Bhojpuri is the only Indian language commonly spoken in Mauritius, a predominantly Mauritian Creole-speaking society in which two-thirds of the population of 1.2 million are of Indian origin. Mauritians of Indian background are diverse in terms of both religious identification and regional origin. Hindus alone comprise 52% of the total population; Muslims constitute 16%.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of Indo-Mauritians are the descendants of indentured laborers who entered Mauritius between 1834 and 1919, replacing slave labor on sugar plantations after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire (Tinker 1974, Carter 1995). Varieties of Bhojpuri were spoken by these Indian immigrants, and have long been recognized locally as a “language of Indians” in general. In recent years however, Hindu organizations that represent only a part of the Indian population have become involved in pro-Bhojpuri language activism intended to stop a language shift toward French-lexicon Mauritian Creole. Mauritians have increasingly shifted

from considering Bhojpuri a common “Indian” language toward categorizing Bhojpuri as a “Hindu language,” thereby ideologically assigning authentic ownership of Bhojpuri only to the Hindu subgroup of the Indian community. At the same time, Hindus very frequently associate Mauritian Bhojpuri with Hindi. The promotion and spread of Hindi has been a Hindu nationalist cause in South Asia since the late 19th century, and Hindi is also officially considered the “ancestral language” of Hindus in Mauritius.<sup>2</sup> How has Bhojpuri become ethnicized? That is, how has an understanding of Mauritian Bhojpuri as a rural idiom of people of Indian origin been narrowed into the concept of an ethnic language of Hindus, who constitute only a part of the Indo-Mauritian population? To put the question in more general terms, precisely how does language become attached to ethnic values, and how is it made available as a means of ethno-national mobilization?

“Mauritian Bhojpuri” is the label commonly assigned to the linguistic practices of most Indian immigrants who entered Mauritius as indentured laborers. Originating from present-day Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh in northern India, a majority of Indian migrants destined for the sugar plantations of colonial Mauritius appear to have been speakers of varieties of Bhojpuri (Baker & P. Ramnah 1985, Baker & A. Ramnah 1988). In Mauritius they created a new composite kind of Bhojpuri, described as a *koiné* by linguists who have examined other destinations of indentured North Indian laborers (Barz & Siegel 1988, Gambhir 1988, Mesthrie 1993). Although Bhojpuri in Mauritius has always been associated with North Indians from Bihar and neighboring regions who left for Mauritius via the port of Calcutta, Mauritian Bhojpuri was also learned and used by many Mauritians of South Indian origin, from the Tamil- and Telugu-speaking lands. During the 19th century it became the dominant language of the Mauritian countryside, the lingua franca replacing other North Indian dialects (Gambhir 1986). It was spoken by most people in the predominantly Indian villages and was firmly associated with sugarcane agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Locally known as both *motiya* ‘the coarse one’ and *kalkattiya*, pointing to the Indian port of departure of most of its speakers, Bhojpuri was locally embedded in a double indexicality: On one hand it was evaluated as a rustic, unsophisticated medium of humble indentured laborers in the sugarcane fields; on the other, it pointed to a particular place of origin, a “homeland” in India. That is, Mauritian Bhojpuri, though seen as unquestionably “Indian,” became ideologically mapped onto more complex spatial distinctions. On one hand, it became associated with a rural/urban divide in Mauritius between an Indian-dominated countryside and towns in which Creoles were initially more numerous; on the other hand, Bhojpuri was taken as indicative of a North/South differentiation in India with respect to what were considered the North Indian origins of most of its speakers.

Ethno-religious divides among the population of Indian origin in Mauritius became increasingly pronounced in the course of the 20th century. The most salient development was that “Indians” started to identify as either Hindus or Muslims by the middle of the century; they developed opposed political affilia-

tions and were listed separately under these labels for the first time in the 1962 census, supplanting the previously used categories “Indian” or “Indo-Mauritian” (Bowman 1991, Simmons 1982). This distinction is now also enshrined in the constitution.<sup>4</sup> Such ethno-religious divides, however, do not seem to have been relevant for distinguishing Bhojpuri speakers from speakers of other languages. Despite indicating forms of belonging to particular places in both India and Mauritius, religious ethnicity appears never to have come into play until fairly recently. Most Hindus and Muslims of North Indian background are known to have migrated to Mauritius from the present state of Bihar (Carter & Deerpalsingh 2000). Hindu and Muslim families can often be traced back to the same districts (Deerpalsingh 2000) and know their ancestors as Bhojpuri speakers.

In present-day Mauritius, however, Bhojpuri is largely considered a “Hindu” language. This perspective is also suggested in Richard Barz’s analysis of the relationship between Standard Hindi and Mauritian Bhojpuri. Barz conducted his research at a time when Bhojpuri language activism was beginning to emerge in postcolonial Mauritius. According to him, the relationship between the two languages is “symbiotic” (Barz 1980:7), since Mauritian Bhojpuri provides Standard Hindi with “living roots” in Mauritius in the form of a “large and linguistically healthy body of speakers of Mauritian Bhojpuri” (1980:11), a view echoed by L. P. Ramyeed (1985:267). Barz carefully notes the presence of Muslim speakers of Bhojpuri and states that, in principle, such a “symbiotic” relationship could obtain also between Urdu and Mauritian Bhojpuri.<sup>5</sup> However, his analysis focuses on the links between Bhojpuri and Hindi in the promotion of Hindu traditions, since Mauritian Bhojpuri is nowadays claimed as an element of “Hindu heritage” by Hindu organizations. Those involved in related language activism are almost exclusively Hindus who are trying to stop the shift from Bhojpuri to Creole among Indo-Mauritians (Eisenlohr 2001).<sup>6</sup> Numerous Muslims are also speakers of Bhojpuri, combined in the usual bilingual situation with Mauritian Creole. However, they are much less interested in laying a claim to Bhojpuri and are also less concerned about the language shift to Creole in their community. Why has there been such an ethnicization of language in Mauritius, and how has Bhojpuri become “hinduized”? Why has Bhojpuri, formerly the language associated with all “Indians,” become a language specifically of the Hindus in Mauritius?

In order to explain such large-scale shifts of language ideology in a society, we need to look at the particular practices that have articulated an ideological link between Bhojpuri and Hindu group identity in Mauritius. As I will explain below, the cultural construct of an “ancestral language” plays a crucial role in this process.

#### LANGUAGE AND THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITIES

For a long time, linguistic anthropologists have argued against equating a population that shares a linguistic code with the status of an ethnic unit. Franz Boas (1995 [1911]) stressed the need not to conflate race, language, and culture, while

Dell Hymes and John Gumperz demonstrated that the use of common linguistic varieties, held to be evidence of “linguistic communities,” did not necessarily turn the populations concerned into ethnic units, “tribes,” or “communities” of any kind (Gumperz 1972 [1968], Hymes 1984 [1968]).

Although long dismissed in linguistic anthropology, the assumption that “shared language” leads to the creation of groupness has made an influential comeback in contemporary theories of nationalism. Benedict Anderson’s and Ernest Gellner’s accounts of the rise of nationalism both assign language a crucial function in their explanatory models of the emergence of national processes of identification. According to these authors, a common standardized language provides the necessary medium of communication through which the idea and awareness of the nation can spread (Anderson 1991, Gellner 1983). Both approaches combine a focus on capitalist modernization with a particular theory of communication in which the boundaries of the national community are established through linguistically determined boundaries of communication. In Anderson’s narrative of the spread of print capitalism, linguistic difference limits the circulation of print commodities, the regular consumption of which creates a sense of national belonging with co-readers, to groups of people who “share” a nationalized print-language. The spread of particular print-languages then establishes the boundaries of the imagined national community, and the “fatality of human linguistic diversity” (Anderson 1991:43) accounts for the multiplicity of national communities. Although Gellner’s approach to nationalism differs in several ways from Anderson’s, the problem of communication through a shared linguistic medium plays a similarly privileged role in Gellner’s explanation of the creation of nationality. Following Gellner, these new forms of group-identification appear above all to be the result of modern industrial societies’ “objective need for cultural homogeneity” (Gellner 1983:46), an argument which is then extended to the level of language. His functionalist approach explaining nationalism as a new cultural form necessary for the integration of modern industrial societies emphasizes a high degree of linguistic uniformity as a precondition for processes of supposedly standardized “context-free” communication (Gellner 1983:35), which he holds to be indispensable for the success of industrialized modernity. National communities rely for their very existence on the availability of a common linguistic medium, standardized and protected by a state-sponsored educational system.

In contrast, more recent linguistic anthropological work on language and community has avoided identifying communities with populations that communicate through a shared linguistic code. Instead, the link between language and community has increasingly been conceived as resting on ideological mediation. Within a new research paradigm of language ideology, researchers have analyzed how politically charged ideas about language have resulted in processes of ethnic and national group identification (Gal 1993, Kroskrity 2000, Schieffelin et al. 1998, Silverstein 1996a, Woolard 1989). Similarly to much recent scholarship on na-

tionalism, linguistic anthropologists interested in language ideologies have treated ethnicity and nationalism as processes of collective imagination – that is, as dynamic cultural phenomena. However, unlike what is seen in mainstream theories of nationalism – where language plays the role of a communicative channel, facilitating or blocking the spread of national ideas – the focus shifts toward language as a cultural site through which “communities” are conceived and membership in them is assigned or denied.

In analyzing the workings of language as a cultural site and area of political conflict, researchers have highlighted the role of semiotic processes involved in the ideological mediation of communities. Perceptions of linguistic differentiation or sameness are shaped in both everyday and expert discourses working through the semiotic processes of iconicity, recursivity, and erasure (Irvine & Gal 2000). That is, imaginations of community and linguistic difference can be linked through ideologies representing indexical links between linguistic forms and social groups as based on a perceived essential “likeness” and therefore as self-evident and “natural” (iconicity). Further, linguistic ideologies may transpose perceived patterns of ethno-linguistic difference from one particular social or historical case to others (recursivity), and they may entirely ignore sociolinguistic facts that are at odds with the ideological vision being promoted conceptually (erasure).

The conceptual tools and mechanisms of linguistic ideologies have become increasingly well understood, but an understanding of how such politically charged interpretative schemata are mapped onto people, events, and situations also needs to be grounded in an analysis of how institutional and everyday practices form a constitutive part of such ideologies. Even though some researchers have shown language ideology to be constituted by scholarly and institutional practices (Gal & Irvine 1995, Urla 1993), and also to be immanent in linguistic practice by virtue of being involved in processes of indexicality (e.g., through informing the routine contextualization of snippets of discourse; Silverstein 1998), much recent investigation of linguistic ideologies remains focused on explicit ideological discourse about language (Blommaert 1999, Blommaert & Verschueren 1998).

In this essay, I argue that an understanding of language ideologies needs to combine an analysis of explicit metapragmatic discourse with an investigation of other, sometimes less overt institutional and linguistic practices that actually perform ideological shifts. While focusing on ideologies linking linguistic forms and ideas of groupness, I pay particular attention to how changes in language-based ideological mediations of community and the semiotic processes involved are performed in practice: that is, through the hierarchization of linguistic forms and their simultaneous subsumption under larger language labels with ethno-nationalist significance. By drawing on evidence from a Mauritian television program and contextualizing it within wider processes of trans-state Hindu nationalist identification, I describe how language becomes ethnicized. Bhojpuri is made into a language of Hindus, and Hindi, the assumed “ancestral language” of Hindus in Mauritius, is turned into a “native” language.

"ANCESTRAL LANGUAGES" AND HINDU NATIONALISM  
IN MAURITIUS

Mauritians of Indian origin claim a number of standardized Indian languages as "ancestral languages" (Hookoomsing 1986).<sup>7</sup> Among this group, Hindus of North Indian origin, whose ancestors mostly came to Mauritius as Bhojpuri speakers, consider modern standard Hindi in its heavily sanskritized form as the "language of their ancestors," and as an important emblem of ethno-national identity.<sup>8</sup> Hindu missionaries from India and organizations such as the reformist Arya Samaj introduced the cultivation of Standard Hindi to Mauritius from 1910 onward (Ramyeed 1985), at a time when Indian emigration to Mauritius had almost reached its end.

Although English, the legacy of British colonial rule until 1968, is the official language of the Mauritian state, it is a bureaucratic medium but not a spoken language there. By contrast, French is used as medium of everyday interaction by at least a small part of the population and dominates the private-sector economy and the print media. Mauritian Bhojpuri is spoken by roughly one-quarter of the population in a bilingual situation with the dominant vernacular language of Mauritius, Mauritian Creole. In India, "Bhojpuri" functions as a cover term for a range of nonstandardized regional dialects of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh with only a limited literary tradition. From a metropolitan, Delhi-centered perspective, Bhojpuri has low prestige and is seen as clearly subordinate to Hindi, which is the official language even in the state of Bihar, where most Bhojpuri speakers can be found. In Mauritius, the hierarchical relation between standard Hindi and Bhojpuri exists as well. However, Hindi is not a daily spoken language in Mauritius. In addition, the common assessment that Hindi and Bhojpuri are related but nevertheless quite distinct languages is probably even more pronounced in Mauritius, where the local variety of Bhojpuri contains many Creole words.

Against this backdrop, Hindu activists in Mauritius have sought to ethnicize Bhojpuri as a "Hindu language" and at the same time to indigenize Hindi by presenting the widely spoken Bhojpuri as a local version of Hindi. They seek to strengthen the basis for the recognition of Hindi as the emblem of a pure Hindu identity in Mauritius by trying to demonstrate the actual rootedness and presence of Hindi in Mauritius. The main avenue for these attempts at ideological subsumption is the dissemination of the idea that local Bhojpuri is really a form of Hindi. In an effort to highlight the central role of Hindi for Mauritian Hindu identity, Bhojpuri is declared a subcategory of Hindi.

A transnational network of Hindu activists has turned out to be a significant force for providing Mauritians of Indian origin with ideas about "ancestral languages," the cultivation of which is represented as maintaining a "pure" Hindu identity in the uncertainty of the diaspora. It is above all the teaching and learning of Hindi that is regarded as "purifying" in an environment that is often experienced by Hindu activists as culturally "creolized" because of the culturally and

ethnically diverse quality of Mauritian society and the particularly strong impact of French cultural traditions.<sup>9</sup> To this end, an alliance of local Hindu organizations and transnationally operating Hindu nationalist organizations such as the Arya Samaj, the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) calls for state support of the teaching and status of Indian “ancestral languages,” above all Hindi, in Mauritius.<sup>10</sup> Members and followers of this broad-based activist network can be found not only in local Hindu bodies but also at various levels of the government and state apparatus in Mauritius, up to the ministerial level.

Hindu nationalist imaginations in Mauritius are centered on the notion of Hindi as the “ancestral language” of the Hindus in Mauritius. Given the central importance of Hindi for Hindu nationalism in Mauritius, many Hindu activists find it irritating that Hindus in Mauritius do not speak Hindi in their daily lives, and that many of them know hardly any Hindi. Hindi is taught to Hindu children in the school system from the primary level onward on an ethnic basis. Hindi is also taught in temples by the three main state-subsidized Hindu organizations in Mauritius, the Mauritius Sanatan Dharm Temples Federation, Hindu Maha Sabha, and Arya Sabha, which receive government funds to run these classes. Despite this, standard Hindi is not a commonly spoken language in Mauritius, and its use is mostly confined to religious contexts. Hindu activists are also concerned about the language shift among Hindus from Mauritian Bhojpuri toward French-lexicon Mauritian Creole, which is by now spoken by virtually the entire population. According to the activists, the tenuous status of Hindi in Mauritius and the dominant position of Mauritian Creole in daily linguistic practice even among Hindus represents a threat to Hindu identity.

In discussing the politics of Hindi and Bhojpuri in Mauritius, it is important to remember that conceptions about language play a central role in producing the ethnic and social setup of Mauritian society, with far-reaching consequences for issues of political power, diasporic allegiances, and ideas of nationhood. Ideological representations of the assumed ancestral and refined qualities of particular linguistic forms, as well as their “nativeness,” are vital to the construction of a “Hindu community” in Mauritius. These representations draw on an authenticating diasporic link, which in turn is used to buttress local claims for political dominance.

#### INDIGENIZING HINDI: EXPLICIT IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

The circulation of discourse in the mass media has been shown to have powerful implications for the creation and integration of communities: It provides speakers across a large-scale, anonymous audience with common linguistic reference points, which can then be the focus of active engagement and recontextualization (Spitulnik 1997). In many cases, political actors and institutions seek influence over the mass mediation of discourse with the goal of encouraging particular pro-

cesses of recontextualization while discouraging alternative ways of reworking discourse. In Mauritius, the political connections between Hindu organizations and the Hindu-dominated Mauritian government and state apparatus have had an impact on not only the Mauritian school system but also the state-controlled mass media sector.<sup>11</sup> One of the central projects of Hindu activists in Mauritius is the effort to “indigenize Hindi” – that is, to present Hindi as natively spoken by Hindus in Mauritius, a project which operates on two main levels. On one hand, there is a steady stream of explicit metapragmatic discourse in the school system and by government-subsidized Hindu organizations which claims that Bhojpuri is a form of Hindi. On the other hand, one can also discern a public performative enactment of subsuming Bhojpuri under Hindi in some television and radio programs broadcast by the state-controlled mass media. A purist register of Bhojpuri is used in such a way as to demonstrate the subsumption of Mauritian Bhojpuri under the larger category of Hindi. This purist register of Bhojpuri is characterized by avoidance of Creole lexical items, which are very frequent in commonly spoken Mauritian Bhojpuri, and by an increased adoption of sanskritized Hindi vocabulary. To a lesser extent, there are also grammatical constructions and phonological features taken from Standard Hindi to be found in this purist register.

Apart from English, the official medium of education, French is the most important European language in Mauritius. In addition, the Mauritian school system teaches so-called ancestral languages to students of Indian origin. By far the most important of these ancestral languages is Hindi. The government of Mauritius, under pressure from Hindu organizations, has always paid special attention to the teaching of Hindi, highlighting its links to Hindu identity in Mauritius. One of the main driving forces behind the cultivation of Hindi and its institutionalization in the school system is the concern about the purity and maintenance of Hindu identity in Mauritius. This is especially evident in concerns about “creolization,” a term applied both to the language shift from Bhojpuri to Creole and to living in a culturally impure, “creolized” environment in Mauritius. Hindu activists in the state apparatus and in Hindu organizations argue that special efforts are needed in order to preserve the purity and integrity of Hindu identity in Mauritius. Two ways in which their anxieties are played out are the intense identification with Hindi as the “ancestral language,” and the official designation of Hindus as “Hindi-speaking.”

The official determination of the Mauritian government that its school system should produce citizens who will be able to contribute to making Mauritius a competitive player in a globalized economy (meaning less reliance on sugar, and more on garment production and tourism) manifests itself in the language policy adopted in its schools. The main emphasis falls on English and French. Hindi and other Indian languages play a lesser role in Mauritius’s exchanges with the outside world, especially in its commercial transactions. However, the Mauritian state’s aim to train citizens for the future “Mauritius in the Indian Ocean,” in-

cluding the South Asian diasporic orbit, does not contradict the great efforts expended on disseminating knowledge of Hindi as the ancestral language. It is precisely the fear of the negative consequences of “development” and globalization – imagined to be violent crime, disintegration of families, unmarried motherhood, and drug abuse – that fuels a conservative discourse about the necessity of preserving ancestral values.<sup>12</sup> In this way, the state-supported teaching of Hindi will help to convey to Hindu children the reified “ancestral culture” that is thought to be residing in Hindi, supposedly supporting the project of a successful Mauritius in a global economy.

The ideology of Hindi as Hindu language is taken for granted in the educational system, in which Hindi is available as a subject from the first year of primary school on. When I asked teachers and administrators how they decided which first-grade students entering school should study Hindi, they replied that, naturally, Hindu students were supposed to learn Hindi. Students are automatically assigned to Hindi classes without consulting the parents, and as several school administrators told me, the selection is made solely on the basis of the students’ names, from which their religious identity is inferred with the aid of local knowledge about families’ ethno-religious identification.

Students in Hindi classes in state schools are reminded that Hindi has several forms and dialects, and that Bhojpuri is supposedly one of them. In Hindi classes, the meaning of “Hindi” is regularly identified with the “national language of the Hindus,” and students are told that Hindi is also their “mother tongue” (*matribhasa*, in Standard Hindi *mātrbhāṣā*). When, in one class I witnessed, a student remarked that his mother actually spoke Bhojpuri, the young Hindi teacher took this as a starting point to lecture on the diversity of Hindi. He pointed out that Hindi is spoken in different forms, stressing that Bhojpuri is a form of Hindi (*Bhojpuri Hindi ka ek rup hai*), a dialect of Hindi just as are (according to him) Braj, Avadhi, Maithili, and even Hindustani.

This pedagogic presentation of Hindi as firmly rooted in daily linguistic practice in Mauritius skillfully exploits the ambiguity of the term “mother tongue” (*matribhasa*) in order to portray Hindi as both the language of the ancestors and the language Hindu children in Mauritius grow up with. *Matribhasa* among Hindus in Mauritius is often considered the equivalent of “ancestral language,” a category formalized in the census, legislation, and the educational system. Literally translating as ‘mother-language’, the central idea of ‘mother’/‘motherhood’ provides a link to the ancestors immigrating from India, who are assumed to have spoken Hindi, and to the divine Hindu concept of motherhood, embodied in the Goddess in her various forms. But it also links the issue of social conflict implied in questions of language to a wider range of Hindu religious imagery. The designation of Hindi as *matribhasa* also includes an identification of Hindi with a divine mother-image, here Hindi *mām*, who needs to be worshipped and protected by her sons. This image of Hindi, which includes a gendered relationship

between “Mother Hindi” and her children, the Hindus, resonates with other gendered representations of Hindi in Hindu nationalist campaigns in India since the late 19th century (King 1989). It also plays a central role among Hindu militants in Mauritius, as a rallying call for the “protection” of Hindi and a means of pressuring the government to provide more resources for its teaching and institutionalization.

This understanding of *matribhasa* is, of course, quite different from the current English translation of the concept, *mother tongue*, which is used in the English-medium government bureaucracy of Mauritius alongside the notion of *ancestral language/langue ancestrale*. But the slippage between these two notions of *matribhasa* – revered language of the ancestors of the Mauritian Hindus as opposed to the language of childhood socialization – is employed precisely to establish the indigenosity of Hindi in Mauritius. The identification of Bhojpuri with Hindi, or rather its hierarchical subsumption under the larger, more prestigious category “Hindi,” represents an important attempt to resolve this contradiction.

Likewise, Hindu nationalists and their organizations in Mauritius, for which the promotion of Hindi is one of the most important political demands, routinely seek to demonstrate the living presence of Hindi in Mauritius by presenting Bhojpuri as inseparable from Hindi. According to the preface of a recent collection of Mauritian Bhojpuri folksongs, proverbs, and stories written by a Hindi teacher and sponsored by the Human Service Trust, a local Hindu organization with close ties to the Hindu nationalist VHP and the RSS, the two languages are so close as to be virtually interdependent:

In Mauritius the relation between Bhojpuri and Hindi is like that between soul and body. If in the body, Hindi, the soul, Bhojpuri, will remain alive, then Hindi will be on the road of progress. If Hindi remains alive, then the culture (*sanskriti*) will remain alive and we can be proud to call ourselves Hindus. (Mohit 1994: 7)

The interpretation of Bhojpuri as a mere variety of Hindi is also frequently presented in the context of a particular reading of the history of Indian immigration and settlement in Mauritius. This reading privileges the roles of both North Indian Hindus and Hindi. In a commemorative publication dedicated to the efforts of various Hindu organizations for the propagation and dissemination of Hindi in Mauritius, a former minister and senior official of the Hindi Speaking Union states that “Hindi in the form of Bhojpuri used to be the link language among Indians of the entire island of Mauritius.”<sup>13</sup> The Mahatma Gandhi Institute is the leading academic institution for research and training in Indian languages in the country, set up as a joint venture with the government of India. The head of its Hindi department claims, in another historical retrospective, that since most Indian immigrants to Mauritius came from the area of the present state of Bihar, “there has mostly been a propagation and spread of two styles of Hindi here [in

Mauritius], Bhojpuri and *kharībolī*.”<sup>14</sup> The latter is a cover term for a range of North Indian dialects spoken in the area west and northwest of Delhi, commonly considered the regional variety on which Standard Hindi is based. In this way, Hindu activists in Mauritius have engaged in explicit metapragmatic discourse, highlighting not only what they see as the “ancestral” quality of Hindi for Hindus, but also seeking to demonstrate its “living presence” in Mauritius by declaring various forms of local linguistic practice as instances of “Hindi.”

## REGISTER LEVELS OF ETHNO-NATIONAL PURITY

Explicit ideological discourses linking Hindi, Bhojpuri, and Hindu identity are not the only ways of ethnicizing language in Mauritius. Other ideological practices less reliant on metapragmatic discourse play a crucial role in linking linguistic forms to ideas of ethno-national belonging. For this purpose, let me now turn to the relationship between Hindi and Bhojpuri in the mass media. One of the most illustrative phenomena in this regard is the use of a purist register of Bhojpuri in special programs on state-controlled television and radio. These programs provide a striking contrast to the usual linguascape of Mauritian mass media, which is dominated by French-language programs and some programming in Hindi. The purist register of Bhojpuri predominating in such broadcasts in effect represents a sort of intermediary variety between Hindi and Bhojpuri, because of the ample use of lexical, phonological, and even grammatical elements that are distinctively Hindi. There is certainly a social origin for this purist register of Bhojpuri, which can be found in the sanskritized genre of religious discourse and sermons of Hindu pandits, who generally have a good knowledge of Hindi. Associated with a performative genre of oratory linked to religious and social authority, this genre undergoes substantial recontextualization when employed in conversational interchanges in talk-show style television programs.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, this register retains its indexical links to Hindu religion and ethnic identity in Mauritius. But the point I want to highlight here is that purist Bhojpuri in state-controlled mass media is used in a way that emphasizes the ideological link between Bhojpuri and Hindi postulated by Hindu nationalists. Purist Bhojpuri contains a large number of elements that speakers of Mauritian Bhojpuri recognize as characteristic of sanskritized standard Hindi. Consider the following example, taken from the Bhojpuri-language Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation television talk-show program *Chingari* ‘Spark’, discussing the issue of senior citizens in society and representing different speech levels.<sup>16</sup> This example shows three speech levels, three ways of uttering text-sentences of identical referential meaning. Being aware of this speech level phenomenon and starting at level two, I then sat down with a range of native speaker consultants,<sup>17</sup> who provided the equivalent versions corresponding to the two sentences dealt with here, but on “higher” and “lower” speech levels one and three.

(1) Three speech levels: (1) Hindi; (2) Purist Bhojpuri (“Bhojpuri-Hindi”); (3) Bhojpuri

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Kyonki jab ek admi kam rok deta hai</i>   | <i>to kya hota hai voh sochta hai ki</i> |
| 2. <i>Kyonki jab ego admi kam rok dewela</i>  | <i>ta konchi hola u sochela ki</i>       |
| 3. <i>Parski jab ego admi kam arrete kar dewela</i>   | <i>ta konchi hola u sochela ki</i>       |
| Because when a man work stop+gives then what is he thinks that  |  |
| 1. <i>samajik drishtikaun se uske man girta hai. Jab admi avkash grahan karta swasthya</i>  |  |
| 2. <i>samajik drishtikaun se okar man girata. Jab admi avkash grahan karela swasthya</i>  |  |
| 3. <i>sosyalman okar valer girata. Jab admi retret karela lasante</i>   |  |
| socially his value drops. When man retirement does health   |  |
| 1. <i>bhi bigaR ho jata.</i>  |  |
| 2. <i>bhi bigaR ho jaila.</i>   |  |
| 3. <i>bhi gate ho jaila.</i>  |  |
| also spoiled becomes  |  |
| “Because when a man stops working, then what happens, he thinks that socially his value drops. When a man retires, his health also goes bad.” |  |

We see here a pattern resembling the famous Javanese speech levels (Errington 1985). We are confronted with text-sentences that share the same referential meaning, apparently “saying the same thing,” but that differ in their indexical values mainly through lexical substitution, resulting in a particular register-effect. As in the Javanese case, the speech levels differ in terms of their honorific value. But in contrast to the Javanese scenario, the most salient feature of the three levels of speech registers outlined here is that they contrast in terms of ethno-national purity. They represent a cline of cultural and ideological valuation within a nationalist framework, ranging from “ordinary” Bhojpuri, a frequently stigmatized register characterized by the ample use of Creole borrowings or lexical items of Creole origin, up to standard Hindi, according to its 19th century creators the “national language of the Hindus” (Dalmia 1997). Creole-influenced Bhojpuri is very frequently used in daily life, while Hindi never is, and the intermediate level is used only on formal occasions, mainly in oratory. The point is, however, that the frequent occurrence of Creole lexical items is frowned upon by Hindu nationalists in Mauritius as a danger to the purity of Hindu identity. It is associated with wider implications that “creolization” is supposed to have, above all assimilation to the Creole ethnic group. The three register levels are described by the ethno-pragmatic labels “Bhojpuri” and “Hindi.” Level one, sanskritized standard Hindi, contrasts with levels two and three, both dubbed “Bhojpuri”; however, the intermediate level two is sometimes also referred to as “Bhojpuri-Hindi” as opposed to the “ordinary” Mauritian Bhojpuri represented by level three. It is level two that plays a key role in this schema, as I will explain.

The creation of different registers in terms of a hierarchy of ethno-national purity through lexical substitutions is greatly facilitated by the fact that standard Hindi and Mauritian Bhojpuri are very similar in syntactic structure, despite important differences in phonology, grammar, and morphology. An example of differences beyond the lexicon is in verbal morphology; compare *sochela* to *sochta* in (1). But this does not change the circumstance that the syntax is shared. For this reason, it is possible to treat the three levels outlined here as different levels of a

common syntactic system, analogous to the Javanese case, with different words able to fill the same syntactic slot. While level three “ordinary” Bhojpuri is marked by its “mixing” with Creole words (boldface in the example), the purist register of Bhojpuri, level two, is characterized by the erasure of such items and their replacement by standard Hindi elements of often markedly sanskritized quality (underlined in the example).

Such ranking of text sentences and its solidification into three registers or speech levels, distinguished and labeled by speakers as Hindi, Bhojpuri-Hindi, and Bhojpuri, is a function of ideologies articulating cultural valorizations based on nationalist ideas. Because Hindu nationalism in Mauritius is largely based on ideas about the maintenance of ethno-national purity through religious and national purity as well as authenticity imagined to reside in the “ancestral language” Hindi, speech performance is more highly valued the more closely it approaches the revered “mother-tongue.” This vision is reinforced by anxieties about the maintenance of Hindu identity in the diasporic situation of Mauritius. For this reason, Creole items seem suspect and threatening. The notions evoked by “creolization” in local Hindu historical consciousness – cultural “mixing” associated with Creole, and eventual assimilation of Hindus to the Creole ethno-religious group, who are Catholics – are seen by Hindu nationalists as a danger to Hindu identity.

Another factor reinforcing the hierarchical ordering of speech forms solidified into registers discussed here is the notion that linguistic forms and social identities share certain common qualities, which Silverstein has called a “theory of consubstantiality of some essence” (Silverstein 1996b:283) of linguistic forms and cultural or ethnic identities. The sanskritized lexical forms so characteristic of modern standard Hindi are seen to exhibit a “refined,” virtuous, authentic quality which Hindu nationalists hold as characteristic of Hindu civilization and religion in general. Conversely, from the perspective of Hindu nationalists, linguistic forms recognized as Creole share the uncivilized, polluting, impure qualities that Mauritian Creole culture has in their minds. Therefore, it can be said that such linguistic forms – here, lexical items on which speakers’ awareness is focused, the boldfaced and underlined elements in (1) – represent certain social qualities and identities because they are perceived to possess an iconic resemblance to them (Irvine & Gal 2000).

To return to the question of the indigenization of Hindi, this imagined consubstantiality of linguistic forms and social identities plays a crucial role in the ideological identification of Bhojpuri with Hindi so important in bestowing upon Hindi the credentials of an “indigenous,” regularly used language in Mauritius. The intermediate, second register level dubbed “Bhojpuri Hindi” is of special importance for such a claim because the salient Hindi elements substituted for more common Creole variants are seen as proof that Bhojpuri is indeed very close to Hindi, if not actually a particular form of it. Although the distinctions between the three speech levels of ethnonational purity treated here are fairly salient for

most speakers, the effect is to blur the distinction between the overall categories of Bhojpuri and Hindi.<sup>18</sup> These two language labels do not correspond exactly to the threefold hierarchical division of registers outlined here. Because the main focus of speakers' awareness is on surface-segmentable items, such as the lexicon (Silverstein 2000 [1981]), the "Hindiized," purist Bhojpuri can pass as a local version of Hindi despite the important phonological and morphological differences which remain, especially in verbal morphology, thereby affirming the claim that Hindi is a widely spoken language in Mauritius.

The broad integration of Hindi elements in a cognate language such as Bhojpuri suggests the assumed existence of a continuum between Hindi and Bhojpuri, further blurring the boundaries between the two languages. It therefore represents a performative enactment of the subsumption of Bhojpuri under the larger, more prestigious label "Hindi." This performative enactment of indigenizing Hindi by suggesting that Bhojpuri is a subcategory of Hindi is also evident in some features of conversational interactions. Keeping in mind that it is often the lexical level of language that commands most of the awareness of speakers, it is not surprising that the introduction of Hindi vocabulary is the most salient way of marking the assumed closeness of the two language labels. Let us look at the following examples. Examples (2)–(4), from the host of the talk-show Bhojpuri language television program mentioned above, represent veritable vocabulary lessons, in which Creole lexical items (boldface) commonly used in Mauritian Bhojpuri are juxtaposed to words with approximately identical referential meaning taken from standard Hindi (underlined). These juxtapositions are effected not only to explain the purist Hindi terms and their meaning – which, unlike the ubiquitous Creole words, may be unfamiliar to many – but also to demonstrate the correctness and greater appropriateness of the purist versions.

- (2) *Aur kuch log aisan bhi ba jon bhar baris kam karelanja aur aisan avastha awela*  
 And some people such also are who full years work do+HON and such age comes  
 'And there are some of these people who work all their lives and when such an age is reached,  
AVKASH jab yani ulog **retrete** ho jalanja  
 retirement when that is they retired become+HON  
 'retirement, that is they retire'

The speaker's stress is on the sanskritized *avkash*, while the much more current *retrete* is embedded in an explanatory construction initiated by *yani* 'that is', giving the passage an almost pedagogical note.

- (3) *Accha hiya par hamni apan shri shankar ji se puchilaja i jon **vyeyes** buRhapa*  
 Good here we our mister shankar ji from ask+HON this which old age old age  
 'Well, here we ask our Mr. Shankar ji, this old age issue,'  
VRIDH AVASTHA ha okar bare men konchi bolelan  
 old age is about it what say+HON  
 'what does he say about it.'

Example (3) is particularly illustrative for the point I want to emphasize here, since it features three referentially equivalent lexical items in a row – *vyeyes*,

*buRhapa*, *vridh avastha* ‘old age’ – representing a sequence of increasing purity. *Vyeyes* is derived from Creole, *buRhapa* is a non-sanskritized Bhojpuri term, and *vridh avastha* is a sanskritism completely unfamiliar to most Mauritian Bhojpuri speakers.

- (4) *Jon admi ke saTh sal ho gal ba u akela rahela kiraya dewela okar lokasion*  
 Who manPOS sixty years become+PT he alone lives rent gives his rent  
 ‘A man who has become sixty and lives alone paying rent, rent we say,’  
*bolilaja ta unke sarkar chau sauchalis rupya kiraya ke dewelaja*  
 we say+HON so to him government four hundred forty rupees rent for give+HON  
 ‘the government gives him four hundred forty rupees for rent.’

Example (4) is similar to (2) in that the common Creole-derived term *lokasion* is embedded in an explanation of the hindiized but, ironically, not really sanskritized choice *kiraya*, which is actually of Persian and ultimately Arabic origin. The following example, (5), is a token of an instance of conversational compliance with the insistence on using a standard Hindi term that the host apparently considers more appropriate. Note especially how the invited guest’s compliance with the host’s urging to use purist Bhojpuri is only partial. He uses words of Creole origin typically used in “ordinary” Bhojpuri, such as *pei* and *retret*, which he apparently does not consider especially inappropriate here.

- (5) Guest: *Ta jon desh men u sistem dalal gal ba u moris men saki*  
 Then that country in that regulation put in+PAS+PT it Mauritius in can  
 ‘The regulation which was introduced in that country can be introduced in Mauritius’  
*jay dale*  
 put in+PAS  
 Host: *Ego nyam ha matlab*  
 One regulation is meaning  
 ‘That is to say a regulation’  
 Guest: *Abhi jon pei men niyam dalal gal ba retret ke bare men*  
 Now that country in regulation put in+PAS+PT retirement about  
 ‘The regulation which was introduced now in that country about retirement.’

The host interrupts one of the invited speakers, insisting on the use of sanskritized Hindi *nyam* instead of *sistem*, meaning ‘rule’ or ‘regulation’ (the Creole word is obviously derived from French, but in contrast to French does not mean ‘system’), and the speaker follows, using *nyam*. The invited guest complies, while continuing his utterance, but continues to use words of Creole origin, apparently unaware at that moment of their status as Creole words. This is the case despite his other efforts to speak purist Bhojpuri, for example in saying *desh* ‘country’ instead of *des*, which would be the commonly used Bhojpuri word aside from Creole *pei*. The substitution of [ʃ] for [s] in *desh* is an example of the adoption of Hindi phonological elements, here [ʃ] substituting for [s] in purist Bhojpuri. This contrast is a fairly common one distinguishing Hindi and Bhojpuri versions of lexical items, such as in Hindi/Urdu *shadi* versus Bhojpuri *sadi* ‘wedding’, Hindi *sharir* vs. Bhojpuri *sarir* ‘body’, Hindi/Urdu *shaher* vs. Bhojpuri *saher* ‘town, city’.

Although speakers' awareness in evaluating the different registers treated here is mainly focused on the lexicon, it is evident that important grammatical and morphological variations also occur within the unified syntactic framework of the type of register variation discussed here, though they are less remarked on by speakers. As another example, speakers of purist Bhojpuri following Hindi usage sometimes introduce grammatical gender into Mauritian Bhojpuri, which latter lacks this. In the following example, the Mauritian Bhojpuri possessive marker *ke* becomes Hindi *kii* in order to agree with *bat* 'thing, saying, matter', which has feminine gender in Hindi, but none in Mauritian Bhojpuri. Note also the two different environments of the two versions of the possessive particle within the utterance: *kii* follows the Hindi version of 'ten percent', *das pratishad*, while *ke* is placed after the Creole and also common Mauritian Bhojpuri 'ten percent', *di pursan*. In this case there seems to be a link between purism on the lexical level and the use of standard Hindi elements on the level of grammar.

- (6) *Abhi das pratishad kii bat hol di pursan ke bat hol*  
 Now ten percent POS+FEM thing is ten percent POS thing is  
 'Now it is a matter of ten percent, a matter of ten percent'

In the examples shown here, the superiority of purist, hindiized Bhojpuri over "common" Mauritian Bhojpuri with its frequent use of Creole words is demonstrated by presenting the purist Hindi elements as more appropriate in a formal, public context such as a television broadcast. All this points to the central importance of the intermediary register, purist Bhojpuri, for performatively establishing an overlap of the identities of Hindi and Bhojpuri. The effect of this instance of language ideology as manifested in linguistic practice is that Hindi, through its assumed local form, Bhojpuri, can count as a language rooted in daily use in Mauritius. At the same time, use of this intermediate register performs both a "hinduization" and a "hindiization" of Bhojpuri.<sup>19</sup> It thus satisfies the Hindu nationalist desire for Hindi to be a "native" language of the Hindus in Mauritius.

#### CONCLUSION

The rallying for Hindi in order to promote the "Hindu cause" in Mauritius is made possible by identifying Hindi as the "language of our ancestors," regardless of the fact that the vast majority of the 19th-century North Indian immigrant ancestors of present-day Hindus in Mauritius were illiterate Bhojpuri speakers. It also ignores the fact that the language in its particular variety promoted in Mauritius, sanskritized *śuddh hindī* 'pure Hindi', began to be widely used in India only from the end of the 19th century, in the context of an anti-Muslim and anti-British nationalist struggle (Brass 1974, Dalmia 1997, King 1994, Lelyveld 1993).

I would like to draw some conclusions by putting the case discussed here in the context of debates about language, ethnic community, and language-based nationalism. It has long been claimed that language can be a vehicle of ethnic and

national values. But how exactly is this accomplished in contexts of ethno-nationalist mobilization? Theorists such as Anderson and Gellner have emphasized the role of language as a channel of communication, limited by the diversity of linguistic codes, through which ideas of national belonging can be spread among a particular population knowing a particular language. The boundaries of distribution of a particular linguistic code, standardized and printable, also represent boundaries of communication that limit the spread of a particular nationalism. However, the Indo-Mauritian case presents a rather different scenario. The link between ethno-nationalist imagination and language is not based on its function of providing a medium of linguistic interaction through which people receive the ideology of the nation; nor is limited distribution in terms of limited knowledge of a “national” language a discriminating factor regarding membership in ethno-national groupness. Rather, language becomes the focus of ethno-national mobilization because of its institutionalized link with “ancestors,” and therefore a reference point for ethno-national idioms and practices of identification. Linguistic practices are hierarchized and subsumed under a larger linguistic label by drawing on the cultural construct of “ancestral languages,” which function as emblems of ethno-national group identification without providing a medium of linguistic interaction for the great majority.

If languages of everyday interaction are not necessarily involved in processes of ethno-national group identification, as is the case with Mauritian Creole for Indo-Mauritians (see also Eriksen 1990), how then does one account for instances in which “vernacular” languages *do* become ethnicized and emerge as foci of ethno-national imagination? It is precisely this process that appears to be evident in the use of Mauritian Bhojpuri, one of the two languages of everyday interaction among Indo-Mauritians. I propose that in order to explain ethnicization of language, one should pay particular attention to performative processes of hierarchization and subsumption like those evident in the “hinduization” of Mauritian Bhojpuri and the “indigenization” of Hindi in Mauritius. I argue that a ranking of linguistic practices in relation to ethno-national values and their simultaneous subsumption under the linguistic labels that point to such values are ideological techniques that result in the ethno-nationalization of a diversity of local linguistic practices.

The problem of language and ethno-national identity has recently become a major focus of investigation among linguistic anthropologists interested in language ideologies, who are producing a growing number of studies that systematically explore the links between ideas about language and ideologies of nation and state. A major focus of this work has been the study of metalinguistic and metapragmatic discourses, often by elite groups, intellectuals, or state institutions. Although the analysis of discourse explicitly linking politically charged ideas about language with imaginations of ethnic groupness or nationality provides important insights into the ethnicization of language, it is also necessary

to investigate other practices through which linguistic forms are tied to values of ethno-national belonging. A focus on the ethnicization of language as a set of practices involving the hierarchization and subsumption of everyday forms of linguistic interaction is likely to yield new insights into the workings of language ideology. Linguistic ideologies are not effective simply because they embody new ideas and conceptions of group identification. They also involve particular practices that produce the ideological connections between linguistic features and forms of belonging that have drawn so much interest in linguistic anthropology recently. That is, language ideologies should not only be understood as configurations of ideas about language that have political implications. They should also be thought of as practices ordering and classifying forms of speech with respect to ethno-national valuations.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Other ethnic groups are the Creoles (28%), who are Catholics and in their majority descendants of African slaves, the Sino-Mauritian community (less than 2%), and an even smaller but economically powerful Franco-Mauritian group. A small number of Indians converted to Catholicism in Mauritius, and some immigrants of Tamil background were already Christians when they arrived in Mauritius; their descendants are nowadays often considered members of the Creole community.

<sup>2</sup> Hindi is officially recognized as the “ancestral language” of Hindus in the education system, in the state-controlled television system, and in the allocation of funds to Hindu organizations. Hindi also features as an “ancestral language” in the census; however, since the admission of Bhojpuri as a valid category for census purposes in 1983, Hindi has been clearly overshadowed by the latter.

<sup>3</sup> During my field research, older informants repeatedly stressed that especially before World War II, it was common even for Franco-Mauritian overseers in the plantation economy and rural Sino-Mauritian retail merchants to be competent in Mauritian Bhojpuri.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Mauritian constitution, the population is divided into four “communities,” Hindus, Muslims, Sino-Mauritians, and the “General Population,” comprising everyone not belonging to the three other groups, in effect Creoles and Franco-Mauritians.

<sup>5</sup> In order to underline what they see as the close relationship between Hindi and Mauritian Bhojpuri, other authors have gone as far as claiming Bhojpuri to be a kind of Creole Hindi. “Bhojpuri is to Hindi what Creole is to French” (Buckory 1988 [1967]:9). Peter Stein, too, suggests that Mauritian Bhojpuri is a Creole language (Stein 1982:131); however, he differs from Buckory in describing Bhojpuri as standing in a diglossic relationship with respect to both Hindi and Urdu (Stein 1982:135–136).

<sup>6</sup> The Mauritius Bhojpuri Institute was founded in 1982 by Sarita Boodhoo, an educationist with a long career in Hindu activism and the spouse of a former vice-prime minister. This institution, which also houses a small library, has organized folklore festivals, poetry recitals, and public talks aimed at promoting the use of Bhojpuri in Mauritius. In the activities of the Bhojpuri Institute, Bhojpuri is

presented as intimately connected to Hindu traditions in Mauritius. The institute seems to have been less active in recent years as its founder-director has shifted toward the promotion of Hindi, having dedicated herself to the cause of a World Hindi Secretariat to be established in Mauritius with the support of both the government of India and the government of Mauritius. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute, an academic institution originally set up as a joint venture with the Indian government, is dedicated to research in and the promotion of Asian and African cultures and languages in Mauritius, its main emphasis being Indian traditions. This institution also plays an important role in the training of teachers and the production of teaching materials for “ancestral languages.” The Mahatma Gandhi Institute has also established a Department of Bhojpuri and Oral Traditions working on the documentation of Bhojpuri verbal art, as well as on a dictionary of Mauritian Bhojpuri. Suchita Ramdin, the head of the department, has published a major collection of Mauritian Bhojpuri folksongs sung at Hindu rites of passage (*sanskār*), principally weddings, with analysis and commentary in Hindi (Ramdin 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi are considered “ancestral languages” (referred to as *langues ancestrales* in French, *lang ban anset* in Creole, *purvajon̄i kī bhāṣāem* in Hindi) of the Indo-Mauritians. They are taught in the school system on an ethnic basis and receive other forms of government support by way of subsidies to the ethno-religious organizations propagating them. Some Muslim groups have argued for the recognition of Arabic instead of Urdu as “ancestral language” of Muslims of Indian background. The status of ancestral language does not imply that many members of the Indo-Mauritian ethnic groups claiming such languages as part of their “ancestral culture” have knowledge of them, nor that their ancestors actually spoke them. However, they are understood to be signs of ethnic group identification in Mauritius.

<sup>8</sup> See Eisenlohr 2001 for a detailed account of the history and political implications of Indian “ancestral languages” in Mauritius.

<sup>9</sup> “Creolization” in Mauritius is a highly malleable concept, shifting between three principal interpretations combining ideas about cultural and linguistic “mixing” in different ways. The not very successful idea of a pan-Mauritian nationalism based on the idea of Creole as “national language” stands in conflict with the alternative notion that the dominance of Mauritian Creole on the island against the background of the legacy of French colonization supports *francophonie*. Further, the idea of creolization is locally understood to apply exclusively to the Creole ethnic group, whose perceived racial and cultural “mixedness” is ideologically contrasted to the putative purity of Indian “ancestral cultures.” The latter interpretation, dominant in Mauritius, is widespread among Indo-Mauritians and is also presupposed by Hindu nationalists in their concerns about a feared dilution of ethno-linguistic traditions through “creolization” (Eisenlohr 2001:223–59).

<sup>10</sup> The boundaries between the local “mainstream” Hindu organizations and those with transnational *Hindutva* affiliations are not always sharply drawn in Mauritius, since there is some overlap of membership and sharing of meeting facilities as well as of organizational and political platforms. However, there is a certain division of labor between these two camps. The main government-subsidized organizations are active primarily in the management of temples, the organization of the main Hindu festivals, and the teaching of Hindi, while organizations forming part of the RSS-VHP network, such as the Human Service Trust, the Hindu Council, and the Hindu House, portray themselves as public spokespeople of Mauritian Hindus on current political issues in which they consider “Hindu interests” at stake. A good example of this dynamic was the debate triggered by a senior cleric of the Roman Catholic Church who publicly denounced the exclusion of Creoles from state jobs in Mauritius, against which the Hindu Council vehemently protested, stating that the Hindu community had been insulted by the Catholic cleric (*Le Mauricien*, 26 August 1998 and 28 August 1998).

<sup>11</sup> In Mauritius this refers to the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation, which at the time of research still held a monopoly over television and radio broadcasting originating from Mauritius, and whose director is usually a political nominee carefully chosen by the prime minister. Since 2002, the airwaves have been liberalized and several private radio stations are in operation. The primarily French-language print media are privately owned and not under the control of the government. Television from the neighboring French island and overseas *département* of Réunion is also easily received in Mauritius.

<sup>12</sup> According to Armoogum Parsuraman, minister of education from 1984 to 1995, the Mauritian government attempts to combat the negative consequences of “modernization” by the introduction of “human values” and “cultural values” into the school curriculum, which in turn are promoted through the study of “ancestral languages” (Parsuraman 1988, n.d.). Recently, a minister of public works even

connected the persistence of ancestral languages in Mauritius with the continued existence of Hindus as a distinct group in Mauritius: "The day when oriental languages are going to disappear [in Mauritius] the category 'Hindu' will also disappear" (*Le Mauricien*, 7 November 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Ravindra Garbaran in *Pankaj: Hindī Pracāriṇī Sabhā kī sahitik trimāsik patrikā* (Pankaj: Literary Quarterly Journal of the Society for the Propagation of Hindi), year 4, issue 10, 1997, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Keshvadutt Chintamani in *Pankaj*, year 2, issue 4, 1995, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Discourse in purist Bhojpuri can function as a form of authoritative discourse because the code choice involved can be understood as an attempt to narrow the "intertextual gap" (Briggs & Bauman 1992) between the generic model of temple sermons and the purist discourse performed. The "gap" at issue here is due to the circumstance that generic forms are never permanently fixed, and that the actualization of a particular genre always remains a problematic performative achievement (Hanks 1987).

<sup>16</sup> At the time of research, there were two regularly scheduled programs on Mauritian Broadcasting Corporation television advertised as Bhojpuri language programs. One was an amateur folksong contest named *Bhojpuri Bahaar* (translatable either as 'Bhojpuri spring [the season]' or 'Bhojpuri merriment'); the other was *Chingari*. *Bhojpuri Bahaar* was clearly presented as a celebration of Indian rural folklore in Mauritius, and participants were exclusively Hindu. *Chingari* was consciously modeled on Western-style talk-show programs, dominated by a host interviewing and conversing with invited guests and also taking questions from telephone callers. The themes discussed were general social issues rather than contents specifically associated with a particular ethnic group. Both Bhojpuri programs were hosted by the same person, who is also a fluent Hindi speaker, trained at All India Radio. Compared to television, Mauritian Broadcasting Corporation radio features a somewhat greater variety of Bhojpuri language programming, including folklore programs in which Bhojpuri folktales and jokes are transmitted, programs with Hindu religious content, and call-in shows in which listeners can ask for Hindi film songs to be played.

<sup>17</sup> During my field research I worked with several University of Mauritius students who were bilingual in Creole and Bhojpuri and lived in rural communities. They not only assisted me in transcribing tape-recordings but also provided me with locally informed evaluative comments and insights on linguistic variation phenomena that seemed striking from their perspective as bilinguals.

<sup>18</sup> The role of the intermediary register in blurring the boundaries between Hindi and Bhojpuri recalls Kathryn Woolard's (1998) discussion of "bivalency" in Catalan/Castilian bilingual discourse. However, unlike in the Catalan case – where the regional language enjoys a long literary tradition, considerable prestige by virtue of its association with the economically powerful Catalan bourgeoisie (Woolard 1985), and now also state support – the effect of the "bivalent" register phenomenon in Mauritius is further to hierarchize linguistic practices in relation to a pole of purist authenticity.

<sup>19</sup> The ideological "hinduization" of Mauritian Bhojpuri as shown here is, however, unsuccessful at reversing the language shift among Indo-Mauritians to Mauritian Creole. Quite the opposite is the case. Non-Hindu speakers of Mauritian Bhojpuri, such as rural Muslims, have less and less interest in retaining a language increasingly claimed as Hindu linguistic heritage. Bhojpuri speakers from all ethno-religious communities, including Hindus, also feel that their linguistic practices are devalued in comparison to the purist Bhojpuri advocated by activists. As a consequence, young people in particular are discouraged from using Bhojpuri (Eisenlohr 2001:197–202). This scenario recalls the effects of purist language ideology on Mexicano (Nahuatl) speakers in central Mexico as described by Hill (1985, 1998).

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