



TGIF: The NTU Linguist Chatroom

**Join us! Friday, 29 September 2017, 3.30pm
@ HSS Conference Room (HSS-05-57)**

The 'other' tongue policy: Non-Tamil Indian Languages in Singapore

In keeping with its strong commitment to promoting multilingualism, Singapore relies on both official and semi-official policies to encourage the learning of familial languages. In addition to its founding goals of singular representative community languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) for its main ethnic communities, the government has allowed five additional languages (Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu) in lieu of Tamil for ethnic Indian students. Notwithstanding the availability of familial languages as subjects in education, many of the target learners prefer Hindi to alternatives.

Offering a critique of the supportive measures, this presentation presents findings of a larger study investigating reasons for, and impact of the preference for Hindi among non-background learners. Assuming a Spolskyian (2009) approach that language decisions are influenced by policy makers at various societal levels, it assesses the congruence between official and non-official language managers

The study analyses enrolment data as well as semi-structured interviews with 75 respondents for insights into motivations shaping language choices. It finds that intra-ethnic linguistic diversity constitutes a growing challenge to identity based (language) policies. Further, it locates contradiction to state policy in the pragmatic evaluation of mobile individuals with uncertain trajectories. The second language decisions among immigrants indicate their assessment of anticipated socio-economic returns rather than identitarian attachments. Among mobile individuals, institutional support and enhanced mainstreaming is not deemed critical for maintenance of familial languages. The study cautions that contradictory orientations between state language policies and Indian families pose a significant challenge to state language policies. It proposes that flexible multilingual education models offering support and autonomy to minority communities are more appropriate in meeting the expectations of both settled/indigenous communities and accommodating multi-sited orientations of immigrants.

Speaker



Dr Ritu JAIN is a lecturer at the Language and Communication Centre, NTU, where she teaches a variety of modules centered on research writing and communication to graduate and undergraduate students.

Her research and academic interest lies in the area of language management. In her doctoral work at the National University of Singapore (NUS), she examined the role of the language education policy in the promotion and maintenance of Indian languages in Singapore. In particular, she investigated the implications of the growing prominence of Hindi for the maintenance of other Indian languages as well as intra-ethnic community harmony. In her current Tier I research project, she is studying the shift to English among the Indian language communities of Singapore.

Dr Jain has won several teaching awards and remains on the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (NUS) Honour Roll for winning the Graduate Student Teaching Award three times in a row. She has also won the SICCI prize for the best PhD thesis and the Student Leadership Award for creating awareness for the rare genetic condition Epidermolysis Bullosa through her patient-support/advocacy organization, DEBRA Singapore.

The TGIF seminar series is organised by
the Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies, HSS

