

10 The global translinguistics of Bengali Muslims

Articulations of the Umma through the premodern Islamic genres

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Introduction

Scholars of language have long been interested in the widespread plurilingualism of South Asian communication. People across South Asia speak over 1,200 languages, with the majority competent in more than one. The areas of language use also overlap significantly and so people tend to use multiple languages simultaneously in their daily interactions. These linguistic practices provide promising grounds to understand the contradictions of nation-states and their use of standardized languages; the colonial overdetermination of the state system in South Asia has meant that the emergence of modernist conceptualizations of communication had to exist with the plurilingualism of its users. This understanding merits a historical perspective because sociolinguistic researchers can learn from South Asia's manifold and continuous interactions between local and global social networks and civilizations.¹

This chapter will present an analysis of language use and literacy practices as they index Asia as a global phenomenon in one geographic region, Bengal, and one community, the Bengali Muslims. I will discuss two genres of religious texts common among Bengali Muslims during the first part of the 19th century in terms of their use of global or local perspectives in their historical context.² They will be shown to articulate “stratified scales of interaction” (Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc, 2016) of community, language, and religion for semiotic con-substantiation of the local Muslims into the *umma*, the Islamic community of believers. I will also argue that the literacy practices of these texts signal a shift from a translanguing conceptualization of languages as “mobile semiotic resource” (Canagarajah, 2013) to a modern conceptualization wherein they are seen as owned and organically associated with specific “speech communities” (Morgan, 2014). I will show that writers of *puthis*, verse narratives composed before the 19th century, saw languages as tools and resources to communicate Islam to the local populations. Their literacy practices were marked by a type of language called *dubashi*, a mixed language mode corresponding to what sociolinguistic scholarship identifies as “downscaling” (Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc, 2016) and “codemeshing” (Canagarajah, 2013). In comparison, authors of early 19th-century religious instructional texts called *nasihat nāmās*

espouse a transformation of Arabic and Persian as “codes” essentially connected to Islam and the *umma*, and Bengali as connected to the local ethnic populations of which the Muslim audiences were also a part. Their literacy practices framed communication through “upscaling” (Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc, 2016) and what might be considered “codeswitching” practices.

In the first part of this chapter, I will lay out the concept of TimeSpace scales and how it has been formulated in scholarship on language and literacy studies. I will also show the benefits of this framework for highlighting the ideational practices of globalism in linguistic utterances, especially textual genres composed during the transitional period between premodernity and modernity in Bengal. Elaborating on my analyses of the textual examples listed above, my argument highlights what sociolinguistics might learn from the contradictory literacy practices manifesting in ideas of global Asias, in particular historical situations and contexts. Understanding linguistic phenomena with such a framework avoids simplistic views of language use and shows them more accurately as layered social practices. It also shows that contemporary literacy practices of globalization we celebrate as innovations of the moment are more accurately understood as a return to premodern norms, and it is rather modern monolingual conceptualizations of language and societies that are a historical aberration.

What are Linguistic Scales and Why Use Them to Analyze Premodern Bengali Genres?

Sociolinguistics has pointed towards the value of interpreting languages in terms of TimeSpace scales, an idea adopted from human geography and sociology. Making use of the work of Deborah Massey (1993) and Immanuel Wallerstein (2004), research in this vein examines the languages of mobility and the mobilities of languages in terms of migration, particularly how they operate as “semiotic resources” to constitute respective “geocultures” (Wallerstein, 2004) and “ideoscapes” (Appadurai, 1996). Sociolinguists have proposed that utterances made in global contexts often index discourses and ideations on multiple spatial and temporal scales and acknowledging these processes enables us to account for their occurrence in relation to the global or the local (space), the *longue durée* or the event (time). The use of scalar analysis in sociolinguistic research has been advocated in particular by Jan Blommaert (2010, p. 34), who initially formulated a structuralist framework of scales:

	<i>Lower Scale</i>	<i>Higher Scale</i>
Time	Momentary	Timeless
Space	Local, situated	Translocal, widespread

Scalar frameworks have been used to analyze the practices and utterances of texts and language users on the move productively in the years since. Blommaert (2010) illustrates how even interactional language use in the contemporary global moment might only be adequately understood if we can identify and analyze the indexing of layered contexts. Canagarajah and De Costa (2016) and Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc (2016) have since modified and elaborated on these scalar schematics to show that TimeSpaces operate as “categories of semiotic practices,” often negotiated by the language users in their utterances, and not “categories of analysis” (Canagarajah and De Costa, 2016, p. 7). Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc (2016) argue that the concept is insightful for understanding the developments of linguistic practices across time, laying out how “people’s [language and literacy uses] become differently valued across time and space” (p. 264). The current work in this area, in other words, makes use of TimeSpace scales as a verb, foregrounding the fact that “social life features inequality, power, and differences, [and] scaling practices involve contestation... [and] consider their ongoing construction and reconfiguration” (Canagarajah and De Costa, 2016, p. 3).

Sociolinguistic scalar frameworks provide a promising way to examine how Islamic discourses and local linguistic practices interacted in the complex social context of Bengal during the era of transition into modernity and colonialism. They bring into focus the layered ways in which language uses operate and thread-in complex conceptualization of the local Bengali Muslim identity and the global *umma*. Even though the primary purpose of the texts examined here is the communication of the religion of Islam, their iterative meaning undergoes a process of layering in an articulation of TimeSpace for a community in between the *umma* and the local Muslim audience, one which would evolve into the modern nation over the next century.

Codemeshing and Downscaling in the Syncretistic Tradition: Puthis and the Communication of Islam during the Mughal Era

Scales, Canagarajah and De Costa (2016) argue, “Are semiotic constructs of people, as they are constructed, defined, cued, and negotiated by talk and sign systems” (p. 55). Religious texts aiming at communication illustrate this aspect of language as semiotic construct particularly well because their primary function is a ritualized semiotic consubstantiation and so must define, cue, or negotiate continuously. The *puthi* tradition that developed in Bengal during the 17th and 18th centuries can be understood, I would argue, in this perspective. Global Islamic discourses articulated in the local context of religious syncretism in Bengal in this genre frame communication in terms of downscaling and codemeshing. The texts iterate the translocal pan-Islamic norms to suit the local audience and purpose. Their writers compose them using a local register called *dubasha*, or “a mixed language mode” (Seely, 2008), characterized by a codemeshing of Hindustani (the initial form of a

language currently known as Hindi and Urdu), Bengali, Farsi, and Arabic. They also mesh features of narrative epics (a normative form of literate Hindu culture) with stories of some of the foundational figures and ideas of Islam. The purpose of these adaptations is to maximize the reception of the tenets and cultures of a global ideology to local converts.

Richard Eaton (1993) has termed the early conversion period of East Bengal an era of “civilization building ideology” (p. 301). When new agrarian plains opened up in the northeastern parts of the subcontinent, new populations moved in to settle them.³ The majority of these peoples were “lower-caste” Hindus or Buddhists whose descendants took on a syncretistic form of Islam. The frontier nature of the area meant few traditional Hindu institutions were present there and so these communities were more open to messages of Islamic preachers: *pirs* who traveled and settled there to convert the local population.⁴ It is also important to remember that the Mughal emperors, even as they were distant figures, were the rulers of these new lands and so Islam was viewed as the religion of power. The Mughal Empire, though not older than the conversion projects in the region, in other words, catalyzed them. The *pirs* and “cultural mediators” (Roy, 2014) of this early pre-modern era saw themselves as charged with communicating the culture and cosmology of the “true religion”—one based on the tenets and cultures of a distant civilization—to converts. For them, the ideas of Islam were fundamental to the salvation of the people in the hinterlands of the Islamic world. The aims of the state also aligned with their particular goals and so they, I would argue, did not meet wider political resistance. To accomplish this work, the genres of literature and popular culture were crucial spaces and mediums of communication.

Even as they engaged with spreading the message of Islam through such genres, *puthi* writers faced substantial resistance from the local Muslim community. Islamic ideas and practices were connected *prima facie* to Arabic and Persian and many Muslim scholars and leaders thought translating Islamic ideas into the local vernacular was blasphemy. Arabic was the language of the Qur’an and religious dogma held that Islamic scripture had to be practiced in its original form by all Muslims; Persian had been the official language of the Islamic courts in India since the days of the Delhi Sultanate in the 11th century and so represented the language of power. The ruling class of Bengali Muslims in the early pre-modern period, called *ashraf*, was the community from which the majority of the *puthi* writers hailed.⁵ The *ashraf* primarily spoke and wrote in Persian and had little to no preference for using Bengali, viewing it as associated with Hinduism, not Islam.

Yet within the pre-modern linguistic “orders of indexicality” (Blommaert, 2010), where Arabic and Persian represented a higher scale pan-Islamic global Asia, there were still substantial members of literate Muslims who believed in a localizing ethos of communication. These Muslim writers and teachers pioneered the practice of communicating Islamic scriptures in

translation and narratives to the illiterate locals despite their ambivalence. These mediators include a writer such as Sheikh Muttalib in the 17th century, who admitted his conflicted feelings in his *Kifayat*:

I am sure that I have committed a great sin in that I have written the Muslim scriptures in Bengali. But this I am sure in my head, that the faithful will understand and bless me. The blessings of the faithful shall involve a great virtue and forgive my sin.

(as cited in Roy, 2014, p. 77)

There were also writers who felt no anxiety translating Islamic scriptures because they believed that what was important was the meanings communicated rather than the form. Shah Abd al-Hakim, composing in the 17th century, in *Nur Nama* says:

Whatever language a people speak in a country, God understands that language. God understands all languages, whether the language of Hindu [i.e., Sanskrit, the language of literature] or the vernacular language of Bengal or any other... For generations, our ancestors have lived in Bengal, and instruction in our native language is, therefore, considered good.

(as cited in Roy, 2014, p. 77)

It is worth noting that Abd al-Hakim's perspective aligns with the perspectives contemporary sociolinguistic scholars espouse as "translingualism" (Canagarajah, 2013). Translingualism articulates a pragmatic view of communication that prioritizes the practices of meaning-making rather than adherence to a code. He reasons that God is not limited by competence in one language and "understands all languages." So, it does not matter what the language of prayer and religious texts is since as acts of communication with God we can use whatever one is "native" in. Furthermore, this approach also signals the writer's position that multilingualism is not synonymous with sin, which Canagarajah (2013) explains is an antecedent Christian position which modern national monolingualism grew out of. In the story of the Tower of Babel in the Bible, God punishes the people (only remaining survivors of the flood) who were building a tower that could reach heaven by confounding their single language into many. It frames multilingualism as punishment. In Islam, in contrast, the existence of multiple languages and races in the world is explained as a source of God's mercy and power. Islamic traditions and the Qur'an explain social differences among men as a source and opportunity for believers to learn from difference and gain wisdom.⁶

The emphasis on communicating pan-Islamic culture and values, articulating semiotic consubstantiation to the newly converted, means *puthis* drew from local literary and extra-literary elements as well as high scale Islamic

texts. They presented foundational Islamic stories and ideas in forms that meshed those traditions with extant Hindu epics in their structure and genres. These stories, which all took place in the distant Middle East and peopled by religious characters of different races and cultures such as the prophet or the Sahabaha (first generation of converts), often described local landscapes, flora and fauna, food and dresses, customs and values familiar to the Bengali audience in telling their stories.

This codemeshing is seen in the following example from the 18th-century *puthi Yusuf-Zuleikha* by the Faqir Garribullah, in how it indexes both the local and trans-local. In this narrative poem based on the story of the Jewish prophet Joseph in Egypt, Garribullah describes Joseph's physical beauty in a way his Bengali audience would find familiar:

Transliteration of the original text
(Words of Perso-Arabic and Hindustani
origin are underlined.)

mukh niramal yena purnimar sasi/
bhomar gunjare yena dui cakkhe basi/
bhuru dui yora yena kamer kaman/ sthala
padma yena tera duti kan/ ati khin maja
yena sekari baghini/ calan khajan here
bole sab muni/ sugathan matir mala sarir
niramal/ yubati na bandhe man dite
cahe kol

English translation

Your face seems like the clear full
moon/ your eyes are black as if bees are
buzzing round them/ Your eyebrows
seem the bow of Kama/ Your ears seem
like the lotuses of the shore/ Your waist
is as slim as that of a prowling tigress/
Sages forget all when they see it/ Your
body is as perfect a string of pearls/ A
maid therefore, cannot stop thinking
about your embrace

The utterance above threads in multiple semiotic systems or codes. The first aspect is the blend of languages that make up the *dubhasi* register. The codemeshing of Bengali and non-Bengali lexis is substantial. There are verbs (“yena” instead of “jeno” for “seem”), nouns (“sugathan mati” instead of “mukhto” for “jewels” or “pearls”), and adjectives (“ati khin” instead of “ato chikhon” or “so thin”) of Hindustani and Perso-Arabic origin. The second aspect is the comparisons making explicit reference to local idioms and culture. Kama is the Hindu god of love, the lotus is a common poetic symbol in the region, and Islamic cultures never had the figure of the sage in the Hindu sense—though there is certainly a long tradition of mystics and imams in Islamic traditions. The third is the generic form of the romance that connects to the woman turning the male figure into an object of erotic desire, a common theme of Hindu epics. This trope was common in Hindu literature and would have been very familiar and resonant with the Muslim audience.

These downscaling and codemeshing practices were common to the *puthi* genre and strongly evidence the “translingual competence” (Canagrajah, 2013) of the cultural mediators as they articulated a pan-Islamic geoculture

in the region. The overriding concern for the *puthi* writers was to constitute and maintain the *umma* through their communication of Islamic values and ideas; as Syed Sultan wrote in the late 16th century, “upright in the kali [dark] age” when “the prophet speaks one language and the people another” (as cited in Roy, 2014, p. 98). This moral motive was the core of a geocultural ideology of a certain form of pan-Islamism; even though it was constituted within premodern societies, the genre evidences a layered space of codemeshing and synchronist norms as complex as any in our contemporary period.

Codeswitching and Upscaling in the Revivalist Tradition: *Nasihāt Nāmās* and the Teaching of Islam during the Colonial Era

“Scales need to be understood,” says Blommaert (2010), “as ‘levels’ and ‘dimensions’ (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 136–150) at which particular forms of normativity, patterns of language use and expectations thereof are organized” (p. 36). His well-known analysis of the interaction between a graduate student and a tutor—namely that a graduate student talks about their work and tutors reframe their conversation in terms of the larger academic community and the institutional environment—show that power and appeals to power often function in practices of upscaling. When speakers refer to norms that operate at a bigger order of TimeSpaces, they appeal to and impose extant orders of social power. This ordering discursively shapes articulations in terms of its rationales, in effect controlling what can and cannot be said, and what conceptualizations are uttered.

In comparison to *puthis*, Islamic religious texts written in the early part of the Colonial Era correspond to modern conceptualizations of genre. They exhibited a view of language as a unified system. Uses of different languages in them—Bengali and Arabic and Persian—are framed as acts of codeswitching. In other words, these texts consequently represented upscaling practices indexing a “Herdeian triad view” connecting “language, community, and place” (Canagarajah, 2013). These writers conceptualized the *umma* as inclusive of and constituted only by those who were competent in Arabic or Persian or Urdu (a modern register of Hindustani that became the language of the Muslim population in Northeast India). Religious activities and Islamic membership thus had to be conducted in these languages.

The *atrāf* Bengali Muslims were viewed as divergent members of the *umma* for this reason. The form of Islam practiced by the *atrāf* at that time was syncretistic, and religious leaders and writers at the time viewed such practices as *shirk* or apostasy. Correspondingly, they also criticized the texts of *puthis* and *puthi* writers as wrong and set about composing and circulating religious instructional texts to properly educate the local Muslims on Islamic orthodoxy and dogma. A popular genre that emerged as a part of this pedagogical mission at the time is called *nasihat nāmās*. These texts were expositions of religious scriptures (i.e. verses from the Qur’an or direct

sayings of the Prophet, known as Hadiths) and instruction on religious practices, functioning to promote orthodox religious practice among Bengali Muslims and to disabuse them of syncretistic practices. To this end, these texts communicate a view of language that is more fixed than what *puthi* writers might have understood. The features and functions of this genre were upscaling practices of “higher scale rationale[s] to assert authority or assume position[s]” (Stornaiulo and LeBlanc, 2016, p. 273) that actively presented more didactic literary presentations of Islamic ideas and foundational figures as historical and factual.

This perspective towards a language can be seen in a text such as an 1878 *nasihat nāmā* and its presentation of Islamic rituals and practices as inseparable from Arabic and Persian utterances:

The first obligation is to recite *kalema* with honest intentions.
The *kalema* should be in Arabic...
Secondly, offer *namaz* regularly.
This will count on the day of judgment.
Thirdly, *roza* is very important. It is obligatory on all adults...
Fourthly, *zakat* must be paid on wealth... *zakat* is obligatory on all men of wealth.
But no one is exempted from *kalema*, *namaz*, or *roza*.
Fifthly, it is obligatory to go on pilgrimage to bait al-ka’ba
On those who can afford to pay for their passage and maintenance...
Anyone who abides by these five injunctions is truly a Muslim according to the Kitab.

(as cited in Ahmed, 1981, p. 93)

All the mentions of Islamic rituals use Arabic or Persian rather than Bengali terms. *Kalema* is an Arabic term and refers here to reciting the Muslim creed, *the Shahadah*. *Namaz* and *roza* are the Persian terms for prayer and fasting, respectively, and used in the region rather than the Arabic words *salat* and *sawm*. *Zajat* is the Arabic term for the obligatory contributions to charity, *Bait al-ka’ba* is the shrine in Mecca towards which all Muslims pray, and *kitab* is the Arabic word for “book,” specifically the Qur’an. Naming Islamic practices using non-Bengali words was about Islamizing the community, equating the language to a code of the *umma* rather than the local populations. Consequently, the text had to switch between codes and maintain a separation between them.

Sufia Uddin argues that the ritualistic approach to literacies and genres is crucial to constructing the Bengali Muslim into a community in the modern sense of the word. In *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, ethnicity, and language in an Islamic Nation*, Uddin (2006) analyzes a Qur’anic commentary by the influential Islamic revivalist writer Muhammed Naīmuddīn. She shows how Naīmuddīn created a series of texts that aimed to instruct the

Bengali Muslims. That is, it was a conceptualization of a “community of believers” overlaid on a Herderian “speech community.” Therefore, strategies employed in these *nasihat nāmās* communicated Islamic dogmas and rules using Bengali even as they strictly marked Islamic ideas and scripture as non-Bengali (as is seen in the previous example), and avoided mixture with icons of Hinduism, which is a prominent characteristic of the *puthi* tradition. Uddin writes about one of Naīmuddīn’s writings:

In the preface, Naīmuddīn indicates that the book answers questions posed by an observant, educated Muslim. First, he states that although earlier writings on shari‘a exist, many educated Bengalis object to the books’ language and style. *Jobdātal masāyĀel*, however, is written in standard colloquial Bengali and is therefore accessible to far more readers. This book is also so innovative because it is not a translation of an earlier Arabic book but instead represents the author’s personal understanding of the main points of Islamic law pertinent to the lives of Muslims in nineteenth-century Bengal.

(Uddin, 2008, pp. 79–80)

The details of this book, Uddin explains, appeal to Bengali Muslims as a homogenous community by using “standard colloquial Bengali.” This reflects a tacit admission that most religious books on Islamic laws (*sharia*) are not accessible because they are written in Urdu and thus unfamiliar to general Bengali Muslims, the *atrāf*, who were speakers of Bengali. Furthermore, *Jobdātal masāyĀel* is not a translation of an extant Arabic text but a representation of a Bengali Muslim’s understanding of Islamic laws from said perspective. In other words, the text functions to articulate the Bengali Muslims as a part of the *umma*. It provides an utterance from a local writer communicating and constituting the high-scale and translocal cultures of Islam to the local population, but at the scale above the local. It represents an upscaling move that consubstantiates the audience into the transnational *umma*, as well as the communal scale of the Bengali Muslim.

The significance of these codeswitching and upscaling practices shaping the utterances of religious instructional texts ought to be understood in the historical context of the general movement of Islamic revivalism that occurred in the region in the early part of the Colonial Era. Scholars of South Asian history generally agree that the victory of the British East India Company at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 had a catastrophic impact on Muslim communities in the region. In the decades following this defeat, the Muslim populations across India became even more marginalized. Generally, Muslims in India were communities of low-caste origins who had converted because they were not provided adequate opportunities to adapt to the educational and governance institutions set up to administrate the British Colonial project (i.e., the land and the local populations). Like their compatriots in other parts of the Subcontinent, the *ashrāf*—the upper classes

of Muslim Bengalis—also abandoned any organized attempt to lead the local Muslims, otherwise known as the *atrāf* population. The situation grew so dire that peasant revolutionary movements erupted across the region.

These peasant movements coalesced around a revivalist Islamic order, aiming to organize and consubstantiate themselves into a transnational *umma* to resist British power. Assembled by early subjects of colonization and imperialism, these movements exhibited discursive and social contours that prefigured many of the anti-colonialist insurrections of the 20th century, complete with appeals to communalism and monolingualism. The Faraizi and Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya movements (heavily influenced by the Wahabist ideologies emerging in Arabia at the time) were the most significant examples of these peasant revolutions and have had profound effects on the development of Muslim Bengali politics and society. Ahmed Sofa (2002), in an influential essay “The mind of the Bengali Muslim,” points to these two revolts as examples of subaltern actions “[because both were completely absent of] any modern nationalist or social ideologies [and] was motivated solely by religion” (p. 31). Furthermore, he also explains that while these movements represented progressive political views (rule by peasants rather than the elite landowners), they were also regressive (i.e., fundamentalist) in their social outlook and rejected most common religious practices by Bengali Muslims as *shirk* or apostasy.

The literacy practices illustrated above, therefore, exemplify the emergence of an early “monolingual disposition” (Gogolin, 1994). The Islamic revivalist movements argued that the fall of Islamic communities was evidence of disfavor from God because these communities had strayed from Islamic values and practices. The way forward was to return to the original tenets of Islam, and this meant a purification of religious practices. The overriding concern for the revivalist writers and genres was to consubstantiate the Bengali Muslims into the *umma* as an ideal global community that would manifest those norms in particular local communities. Naī muddīn’s texts frame utterances in this form of upscaling practices. His texts are written in “standard colloquial Bengali,” assuming, in other words, the idealized speaker and a code used by said speaker. His writings consequently had to switch between the two and thereby reify the integrity of distinction between them as “semiotic systems” rather than “mobile semiotic resources” (Canagarajah, 2013), predicated on indexing a TimeSpace that is presented as universal and global. Being part of the *umma* is not about being part of a historical community but a transhistorical one, a universal ideal spread out across the geographies that comprised the many societies that made up the Islamic Empire during its Golden Age.⁷ Furthermore, the hegemony of the colonial system means literacies became normalized around standardized reading and writing practices, and so *nasihat nāmās* framed its utterances according to audiences who corresponded to such a reader. It assumed and privileged the norms of the colonial project in South Asia, which would eventually mature into the modern nation-states of Pakistan and India bifurcated along religious lines in the 1947 Partition.

Understanding the Process of Transition to Modernity through the Literacy Practices of Islamic Genres

The analysis I have been providing in this chapter examines religious genres in Bengal in the transition to modernity. It also spotlights linguistic practices aimed at and by the general populations of Bengali Muslims, marginalized by the elite and middle classes of Bengali Muslim and Hindu populations. The texts and the viewpoints I present here illustrate the complex mix of literacy practices indexing global ideas of Asia—specifically, Islam as a culture and ideology of the Middle East—how such utterances are scaled, and how their “scope of actual understandability manifest[s] in the discourse” (Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc, 2016, p. 267). It also shows how such practices align with and transition into the larger conceptualizations of communities and societies that circulate this time.

The literacy practices of *puthis*, I argue here, illustrate a view of language that dominated prior to the development of colonial society in Bengal. The “cultural mediators” who composed those texts approached communication and language functionally, in terms of its overall purpose of imputing values of Islam to the local population. Textual practices in these genres consequently frame themselves in terms of downscaling; they do not demarcate languages or genres. The *dubashi* registers and hybrid nature of the narratives are essential characteristics of *puthis*. Their writers’ intentions do not treat languages as codes but as semiotic resources of purpose. The ideoscapes of Islam, and not its dogmas, are given primacy in terms of communication. Meanwhile, the literacy practices of the revivalist writers, in comparison, show another view of genres and languages. Even as they resist the colonial regime of the British, their textual practices evidence the subtle transformation in the role and conceptualization of language. With the emergence and popularization of revivalist Islamic texts, we come to see a different view of the *umma* and the Bengali Muslim community, one where the local population must observe the orthodox practices of Islam, and which are inseparably associated with non-local populations. The genres frame themselves in terms of upscaling practices. Religious language and local languages become separate codes at this time, and the writers take on codeswitching practices when they are communicating between the two.

These movements illustrate the transformations of globalization that have taken place in the region and how linguistic practices illustrate the interconnectedness of language and society. Scholars of language have long highlighted the social functions of Sanskrit as lingua franca in the region (Pollak, 2009), and my examination of *dubashi* as the language of *puthi* genres shows the same phenomenon taking place in Muslim communities. Sociolinguistics research recognizes the processes through which everyday language users resist and accede to positions of power, and in this way creates new social structures. Scalar practices have been a way to identify the indexing of discursive and TimeSpace norms in given utterances and how

languages play out in situated, local contexts even as they also connect to distant and abstract social configurations.

The indexical moves I highlight also refer to the translingual nature of local utterances and how global flows of ideas have shaped the ways Islam has spread among the local populations of Bengal even as Bengali Muslims remain relatively non-competent in the classical Arabic found in religious prayers. It has been a complex historical process that shows how premodern empires and modern colonial regimes fostered different views of language, with literacy practices that took place during the colonial regime that correspond to the view of languages as discrete codes. The view of globalism that manifested in the religious texts presented here showed that codemeshed texts and languages as semiotic resources were the norm of early Islamic literature in Bengal. Such a perspective gradually shifted into a more modernist conceptualization within the context of the anti-colonialist revivalist movements that emerged in the region, formed in response to the marginalization of the general Muslim population during British colonial rule.

Images and networks of the “global” have shaped the linguistic practices of South Asia in profound ways. The long histories of migration, trade, conflict, and conversions (among others) that have framed interactions between South Asian peoples and the rest of Asia have also shifted with their historical context. The emergence of the modern, monolingual consciousness in a place such as Bengal is certainly deeply connected to the colonial project that established the modern nation-state in the region, but it also drew from and marshaled other cultural forces. The analysis I provide here shows that Islam and the image of a global Asia, specifically the *umma*, had shaped the ways a certain view of language was practiced and transformed. The emergence of a monolingual disposition in Bengali Muslims occurred in the context of social resistance against the status quo of the colonial regime that promoted such a view of language. This contradiction is instructive because of the view that plurilingualism is de facto a form of resistance in certain strains of research because it frames itself against a set idea of codes (Lee, 2019). Linguistic phenomena, my analysis reminds us, is more complex than that, and resistances in certain contexts play into the overall strategy of power in the long term (Foucault, 1978). Our considerations for the indexing of TimeSpace scales in utterances go some way to show that linguistic practices are layered and polycentric, and refer to multiple globalisms, from Asian to colonial.

Conclusion

The history of South Asia and the syncretistic nature of religious practice in the region make clear one-to-one analysis of social dimensions of language and the extreme difficulty of linguistic practices. Many texts contradict the norms of language at their time and even as modernist regimes of community and languages developed, syncretistic folklore thrived and struggled

against orthodox religion—*pirs* and religiously themed music remained foundational pillars of Bengali Muslim culture even as Wahabist orthodoxy became more dominant. It is also true that these counteracting forces have defined Bengali Muslim culture since the beginnings of the revivalist movement and Bengali Muslim culture will likely continue to be shaped by the struggle between these two camps in the immediate future.

Nonetheless, it is clear to see from the analysis presented that a certain textual practice dominated the communication of Islamic values before the nineteenth century in Bengal. This was defined by a continuous indexical downscaling practice, a form of conveying distant values of religion to the local population using the communicative tools at hand. Language functioned as a primary tool in this process and was furthermore conceptualized as a mobile semiotic resource by these writers. There was no sense of fixity and ownership of a “community” vis-a-vis language in the writings of the premodern Islamic writers and cultural mediators. This process shifted with the advent of the colonial regime in the region and the marginalization of the majority, the region’s Bengali Muslim population. In this context, the revivalist movements that sprung up took on literacy practices aligned with the modernist notion of language as a “code” owned by particular communities and grounded in specific spaces. They also utilized upscaling practices in their genres to consubstantiate the local population with the broader *umma*, a community of believers that was transhistorical and global.

Research in translingualism has recognized the need to highlight examples of translinguistics as the norm in premodern contexts. The examples I provide here should be read as a part of this overall larger project. It should also show that ideas of globalism are not modern concepts but prefigure the colonization of Asia. South Asia, in particular, has had deep connections and interlocutions with societies of the Middle East and Africa for thousands of years. These continuous contacts have led to a particular conceptualization of language and linguistic practices that have only taken on a modern form with colonization. As globalization puts linguistic hybridity and contact at the forefront once again, it is important to recognize that complex codemeshing practices are not new, but are in fact how most language users around the world have always communicated.

Notes

- 1 The earliest recorded organized society in South Asia were the collection of city-states known as the Indus Valley Civilization, which lasted from the third millennium of Before the Common Era to the second millennium of Before the Common Era. Archaeologists have found mentions of trade networks between these city states and Sumerian city states of that era. Clay tokens with scripts used by the Indus Valley societies—undeciphered as of yet—have been found as far West as Babylon and Egypt, suggesting that there was significant communication and interactions between Ancient Egyptian, Sumerian, and Indus Valley civilizations.
- 2 The modern state system matured in Bengal in the second half of the 19th century. Hindu College, currently known as Presidency College, was established as the first

secular educational institution in Kolkata in 1817, and should be generally understood as the start of a formal establishment of the modern state in the region. Wider standardizing practices and developmental initiatives were scaled up and also began to absorb parts of the Muslim Bengali populations after the 1857 Rebellion.

- 3 Richard Eaton makes the case that sometime during the reign of the Mughal Emperor, Akhbar, in the second half of the 16th century, the Ganges shifted eastward to its current flow. This change happened relatively quickly and transformed the landscape of what is now Bangladesh into alluvial plains—unlike the thick forests, swamps and mangrove—in a matter of decades and opened up the region for settlement. The city of Dhaka was established around this time and along with the regions of Assam and Sylhet became an important center for Bengali Muslim communities.
- 4 *Pirs* might be understood as a catch-all term for Islamic gentry. Though derived from the Persian word for Sufi mystics, the use of the category was much wider in Bengal and generally referred to a broad range of preachers, saints, imams, etc. connected to the Islamic cultural and social system of the area. It was even sometimes used to refer to spirits inhabiting natural features, such as trees or rivers. Such animist and institutionalized conceptualizations of *pirs* are heretical in orthodox Islam, and led, in part, to the Islamic revivalist movements such as the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiyah during the 19th century which I also speak about in this chapter.
- 5 The Bengali Muslim community prior to modernity was rigidly segregated into the elites, called the *ashraf*, and the masses, *atrāf*. The *ashraf* community generally viewed themselves as non-Bengali and connected to the nobility of the northwest regions or Persia. In comparison, the *atrāf* were seen as debased local converts with little or no connections to authentic Islamic cultures or the elite groups of the Empire.
- 6 An oft-cited *ayat* (roughly translated as verse) from Surah (roughly translated as chapters) Ar-Rum goes: “And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth; and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.” This verse is often supported as rationalizing the fluidity of the people making up the *umma*. Under an Islamic sense of society, the most important distinction and difference is between Muslims and non-Muslims. Between Muslims all differences in language and ethnicities are signs of God and therefore inherently good; difference is source of knowledge to know God’s intentions and will, that is Truth.
- 7 The Islamic Golden Age is generally understood to run from 800 CE to 1300 CE. This era continuous to cast a profound shadow on contemporary Islamic societies because of its image as a time when Muslims were the most advanced peoples in the world, and were not deeply disenfranchised by Western powers. The Islamic empires of this era were called the Caliphates and is the discursive image in which modern jihadist movements often operate.

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