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**‘North Indians’ and ‘South Indians’ online: A Discursive
Psychological study of the use of membership categories on social
media**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ by social media users in online conversations. Anecdotal evidence shows that people use these categories in everyday conversations with friends, family members, colleagues, and peers, to discuss differences of language, geography, race, ethnicity, and caste between peoples of India. However, they are elusive categories in academic literature. My review of India’s social and cultural history of the 19th and 20th century suggests that current scholarship has not examined the use of the explicitly labelled categories ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian.’ There have instead been studies of the peoples of north India and south India through accounts of other socially constructed categories like language, caste, region, or race. In the 20th century these other constructed categories and the peoples of north India and south India were also mobilised in political movements such as state reorganisation on linguistic basis in 1956 and were therefore of academic interest for political scientists. Despite serving such varied purposes, the specific use of ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ has not been systematically investigated in social psychology. Moreover, the interest in these groups has seemingly declined in these other fields such as history, political science, and anthropology.

While these categories have not been extensively investigated in academic literature, I reviewed some work from media and culture studies; my analysis of films and popular culture shows that descriptions of ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ people are depicted in films and media through storylines, song lyrics, dialogues, costumes, and food. Interactions from social media also reveal that people use these categories in mundane conversations with each other. Drawing on Conversation Analysis’ (CA) and Discursive Psychology’s (DP) interest in and assumptions about categories that they are mobilised for local purposes in interactions, I systematically examine how, when, and for what purposes these categories (‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian’) are used in such mundane, social media interactions.

The data collected for analysis includes ‘threads’ from Twitter and Question-and-Answer ‘posts’ from Quora. By taking a CA/DP approach, I identify and examine four contexts in which the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ are invoked. The first is that of agreeing or disagreeing with a food assessment of a south Indian food, idlis. The analysis shows that membership of the category ‘south Indian’ was used as an epistemic resource to agree or disagree with the food assessment. I also present some instances wherein the category ‘south

Indian’ is invoked as a resource to question the legitimacy of proffering the assessment; this is done by treating the assessed food (idlis) as a cultural object that is tied to membership of the category ‘south Indian.’

The second context in which the categories are invoked is that of complaining about someone’s use of the categories ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian.’ This is identified as the complainable matter because the complainer infers it as morally condemnable and criticisable. The complainer also constructs the complainable conduct as a recurring pattern of behaviour and as intentional, which marks the criticism of category use as a complaint.

The third context is that of asking ‘loaded’ questions and answering them. I present two questions posted on Twitter that are phrased as information-seeking questions. These questions are also ambiguous, which is exploited by those answering them. This is demonstrated by looking at the answers because they construct the question as doing more than merely seeking information. I argue that the questions are treated as being ‘loaded’ with unfair expectations category members. Users reply to these questions with indirect answers, by posing counter questions, or by invoking alternative (more ‘appropriate’) categories and category-bound attributes.

The fourth context analysed in this thesis is also of Question-and-Answers, but these data are from Quora. The categories ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian’ are invoked within questions seeking descriptions of members of these categories. The answers contain detailed descriptions or lists of attributes or characteristics. In some instances, the answers also contain hedging or disclaimers, which may allow those answering to manage the delicateness of producing general lists and inoculate themselves against accusations of sounding biased or harsh in producing the descriptions of categories ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian.’

This examination of the categories allows me to draw some important conclusions. First, ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ are treated by users as meaningful categories in describing recognisable characteristics of people. I argue that invoking the category ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian’ serves critical purposes in an ongoing interaction, like allowing Twitter and Quora users to accomplish actions like agreeing or disagreeing with an assessment, complaining, or asking and answering different types of questions. The discursive analysis also allows me to examine phenomena, like assessing, complaining, and question-answering, and to situate my findings within the existing literature. I also show that social media users make

use of various features, like replying, mentioning, liking or upvoting, and adding emojis, to aid in accomplish the various discursive actions identified. This adds to the ongoing conversation analytic study of interactions in the virtual space, particularly on social media. Importantly, I argue that the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ are very much ‘alive’, meaningful, and functional to the people using them and this thesis is a novel study to examine members’ use of these seemingly ‘elusive’ categories.

Lay Summary

Growing up in India, I have very often heard people talk about north and south Indians. The stand-up comedian named Rahul Subramanian once described north Indians as reckless drunk drivers, and south Indians as *andu-gondu* speakers, in a hilarious segment. There are countless such examples from not only stand-up comedy segments, but also from films, Reddit and Quora forums, and family dinners, where north and south Indians have been thus described or caricatured. Of the many ways, are their dressing styles, eating styles and cuisines, films, accents, and languages. Given that these categories are used so commonly in everyday talk, it was surprising that neither historical records nor academic literature have researched how they are used and for what kinds of purposes. This thesis was, therefore, the first-of-its-kind, novel attempt at systematically examining these *elusive* categories. I was particularly interested in the use of these categories on Twitter and Quora.

After looking at several threads and posts from both platforms, I will show how these categories were used in three contexts from Twitter and one from Quora. From Twitter, they were used in responding to a controversial evaluation of idlis. Secondly, they were used in complaining about someone or something. Thirdly, these categories were used in asking and answering *ambiguous* questions. From Quora, these categories were described in various ways, in response to open-ended questions.

There are three important implications of my findings. Firstly, they show that north Indian and south Indian are very much *alive* and *functional* categories. Secondly, they are shown to be meaningful to people, in ways that become relevant to the context of their interaction. Thirdly and most importantly, I begin to unravel the rather *elusive* nature of these categories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore when, how, and for what purposes, do users of social media sites like Twitter and Quora invoke the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ in mundane conversations with each other.

1.1 About India and Interest in the Categories

India is a land of vast cultural and social diversities, where people speak different languages, wear different types of clothes, eat varieties of foods, follow different religions, and yet all live together. Geographically, India is spread across more than 3 million square kilometres of area (India Facts, n.d.), is divided into 29 States, and is home to people speaking almost 1652 languages. The population of Indian states is comprised of many ethnic diversities. People follow different religions and belong to different castes and tribal groups (Zimmermann , & Gordon, 2022). There are also diverse ethnic groups such Indo-Aryans (or Aryans), Dravidians, and Mongloids (Ali, 2019) that inhabit this country.

Given these vast diversities, people have devised a wide variety of geographical, ethnic, linguistic, and caste-based categories to identify and address each other, especially when engaging in conversation with one another. Of particular interest to me are “north Indian” and “south Indian.” I have come across the use of these categories in conversations with friends, peers, colleagues in various mundane contexts. For instance, I have heard these being used in conversations at dinner parties, or over tea or coffee, and even while introducing oneself or another person to one’s friends. What makes these particularly interesting to me, is that a wide range of meanings are attributed to someone when they are categorised as “north Indian” or “south Indian.” Therefore, these categories are seemingly flexible, but the meanings ascribed to people is a sort of repository of shared cultural knowledge.

Since I am interested in examining the use of categories in conversations that are mundane in nature, I will rely on past research that has made the case that categories can be used by participants, as a way of describing people to accomplish locally relevant actions (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015). Categories have also been understood as repositories of knowledge about cultural and social norms which are shared among members as “common-sense knowledge about the world” (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015). This knowledge is relied upon by members to

communicate with each other about what is happening and why. The use of categories can therefore be understood as an occasioned practice, and depending on the context of the conversation, the meanings ascribed to the categories used can change, making them flexible and deployable for accomplishing specific purposes (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015).

I am interested in how this understanding of categories-in-use and categorisation practices is applicable to understanding the use of “north Indian” and “south Indian” categories. The meanings ascribed to these categories have differed over time. I am using two approaches to explore how “north Indian”, and “south Indian” categories are used. The first approach is by looking at the history of north Indians and south Indians during the 19th and 20th centuries. Here, I will briefly summarise scholarly contributions of various foremost experts from the fields of sociology, anthropology, history, literary studies, and political science.

Scholars of colonial Indian history (19th and 20th century) attempted to draw up some early accounts about “north Indians” and “south Indians”, based on geography and language. These accounts were produced from research sanctioned by the colonial administration and has since been contested and criticised (Trautmann, 2007; Thapar, 2014). Prominent in these accounts was a theory proposed by Max Müller. He contended that there was a linguistic difference between peoples of north and south India, whom he referred to as Aryans and Dravidians (Gunasékara, 1921), and whose languages he classified as belonging to *Indo-Aryan* and *Dravidian* families respectively. This predominantly geographical and linguistic difference was supplemented by colonial scholars who discussed differences in physical features, such as skin colours, head sizes, facial features, and so on (Gunasékara, 1921). Some colonial accounts described Indo-Aryans (or Aryans, or people of north India) as a tribe of people that settled in ancient India, after entering the subcontinent from across the Sindhu (or Indus) River. They were said to have settled in parts of North India (Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir) and spoke Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, and other Indo-Aryan Languages (Shukla, 2006). On the other hand, Dravidians were described as the aboriginal tribe, or as settlers who lived in southern states of India (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala) and were even known as traders of tea, spices, and coffee from the ports in the southern Indian peninsula (Das, 1921). The Dravidian people spoke Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Telugu (Bhaskararao, 2006; Nair, 2006; Sridhar, 2006; Subrahmanyam, 2006). Following is a map of India illustrating the various states:

south (Laxman. K, 2016). The leaders of political parties like “Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam” (DMK) in Tamil Nadu were able to weaponize the contested Aryan-Dravidian theories to politicize regional issues (Jaiswal, 1969) and acquire political power. One such mobilisation was for the political movement demanding linguistic reorganisation of Indian states. A demand for separate statehood was first made by an activist Potti Sriramulu (1901-1952) who fasted-unto-death, for Telugu language speakers’ identity and statehood (created on October 1,1953) (*POTTI SRIRAMULU*, n.d.; Wangchuk, 2019). The second movement was the anti-Hindi agitation which was gaining momentum in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu (prominently in the year 1965). As a part of this movement, numerous Tamil speaking students immolated themselves protesting the promotion of Hindi (in January 1965) (Forrester, 1966) (widely spoken in north India) to the status of national language. The protestors were instead demanding equal representation in India’s social and legal systems for their *mother tongue* (Tamil) (Ramaswamy, 1997).

The differences and conflicts between north and south Indians are thus more complex than merely that they speak different languages, or have different caste systems, or even that they belong to different ethnic tribes. Moreover, many of these differences overlap with one another and were mobilised by politicians to create conflicting narratives which could be weaponised for political and socio-economic purposes.

As a response to the anti-Hindi agitation and the demand for separate statehood, the government of India took two actions. Firstly, Indian states were reorganized along linguistic lines (*The States Reorganisation Act, 1956*, 1956). Each state now has a recognised official state language typically the language spoken by majority of the state’s residents. The state governments conduct their official business in this state language. It is taught in schools and even used as a medium of education in many state-sponsored schools. Additionally, an amendment was made to the Indian constitution and a bill was introduced, that listed 22 Indian languages (including several state languages) as official languages; this is referred to as the eighth schedule in the constitution. Reserving this special status for 22 Indian languages was the response to Hindi being nominated as a national language, thereby providing all these languages, equal representation in the legal and official capacity. Following is a map to depict the geographically the north, south, east, and west Indian states:

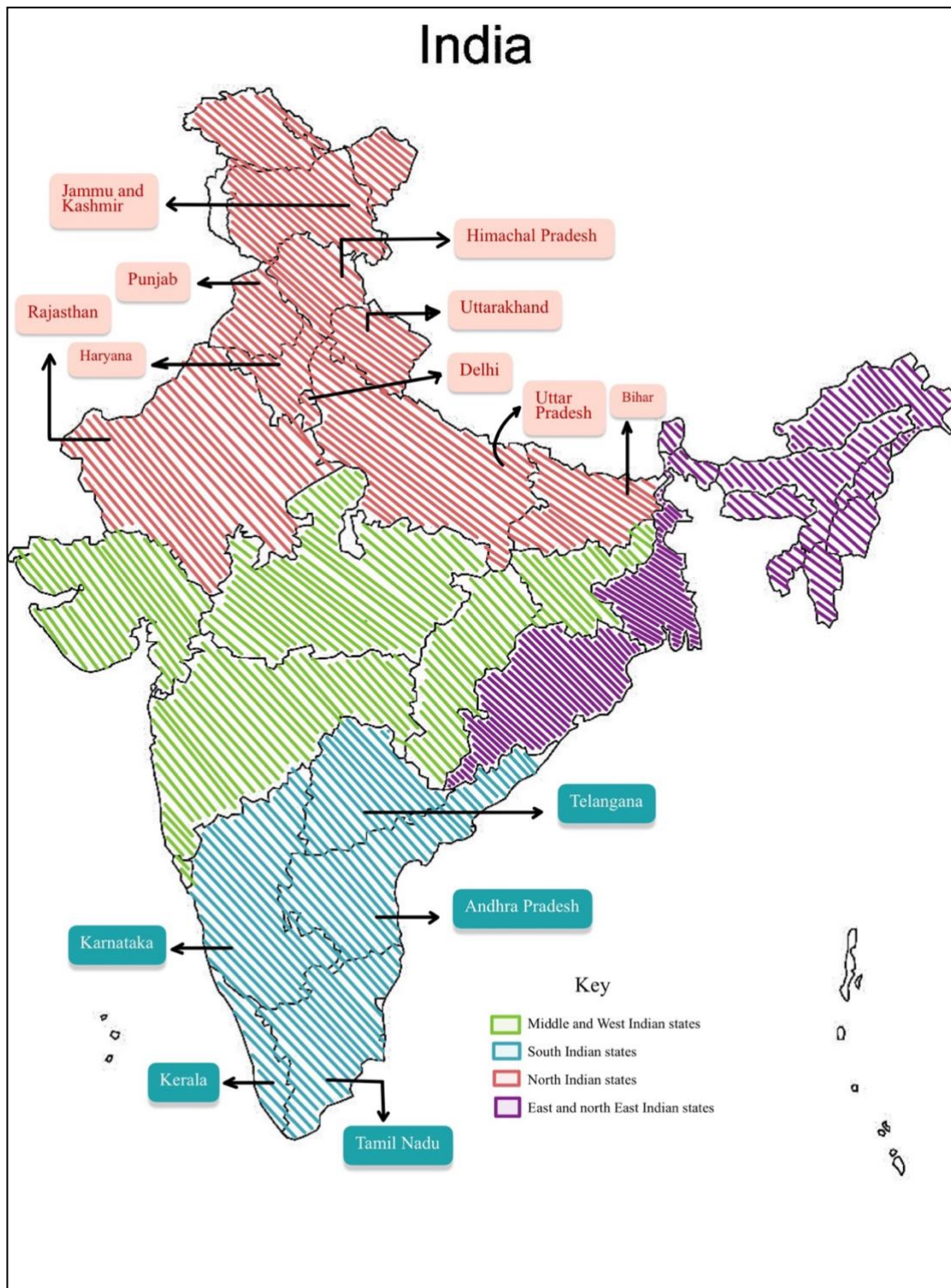


Figure 2: A visual (map) representation of 'north Indian' and 'south Indian' states.

The linguistic reorganisation of states and constitutional amendment seemingly resolved the conflict between people of north and south India on language imposition. Subsequent decades gave rise to other conflicts at the regional level, often with religious, caste-based, or economic

(Annamalai, 2010; Tillin, 2013a) undertones. The tensions between north and south Indians thus assumed a more “latent” academic interest (A. K. Das, 2014; Mohanty, 2010).

Despite not being mobilised for the ongoing socio-economic or political movements, people still use these categories in interactions with each other and treat them as relevant and meaningful. One prevalent context where they are invoked is in posts on social media sites. However, the use of these categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” in such mundane contexts has not been systematically investigated. As such, these categories are “elusive” in nature. This is the primary goal of this thesis: to explore how, when, and for purposes are these categories deployed (in the 21st century) in conversation on social media sites, like Twitter and Quora.

People use these categories while conversing about a variety of topics and people, such as political news, food, movies, songs, actors, politicians, influencers, and co-workers. Additionally, there are ‘threads’ on social media sites like Reddit and Twitter, where these categories are invoked by users to participate in ongoing interactions. Following are some examples of such instances:

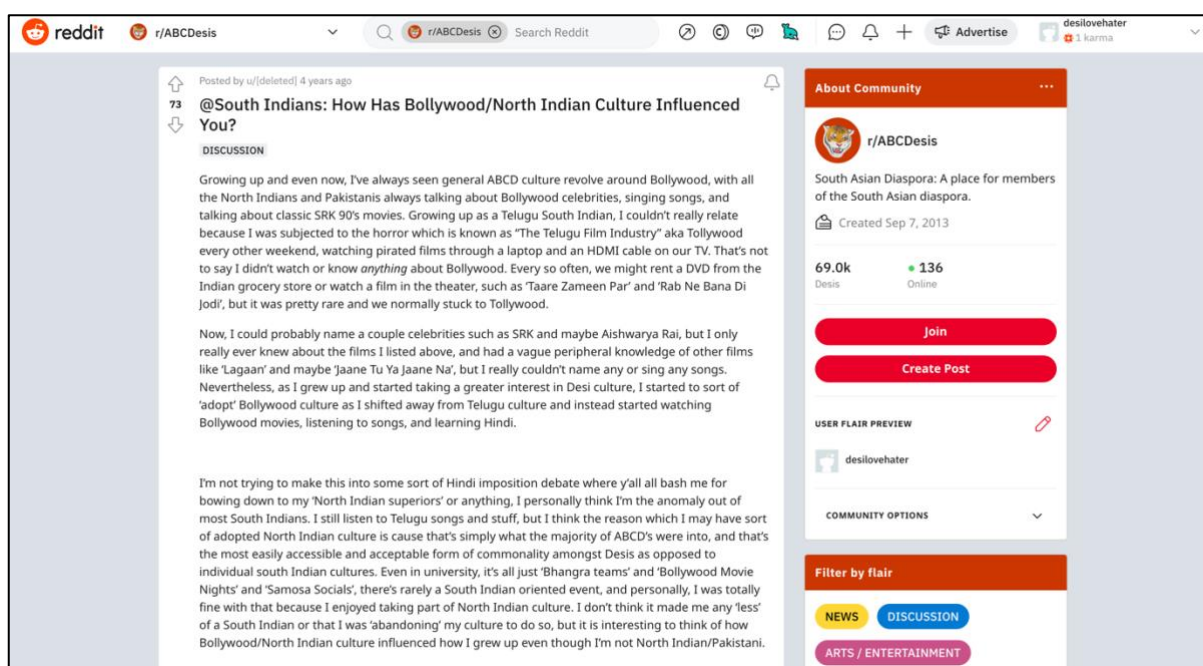


Figure 3: Screenshot of a Reddit Post

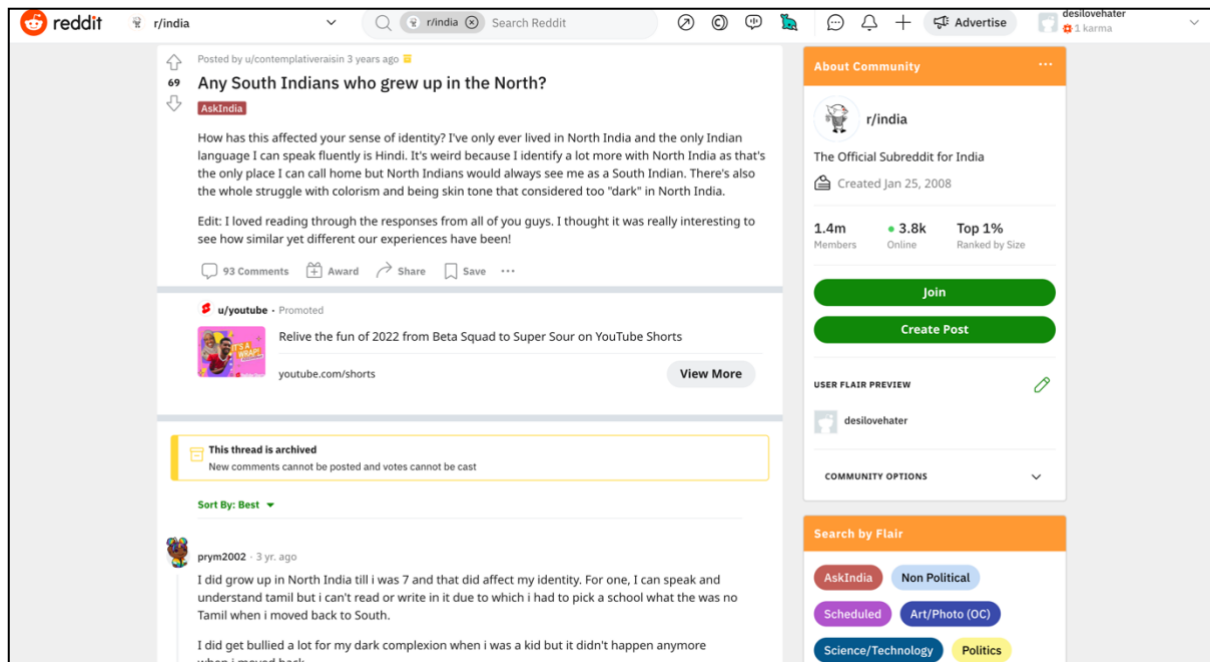


Figure 4: A screenshot of a Reddit Thread

Investigating the use of categories and their use in mundane interactions has been studied for a long time by scholars of Discursive Psychology, Conversation Analysis, and Membership Categorisation Analysis (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1995b; E. Stokoe, 2012). This methodological and conceptual framework fits my research interests, and thus, I propose the following research questions:

Question 1: When, and for what purposes do individuals use the categories ‘north Indian/south Indian’ in conversations with each other?

Question 2: What meanings do people ascribe to the categories ‘north Indian/ south Indian’ in these interactions?

1.2 Overview of the chapters

I have discussed earlier in this introduction that people categorised as north Indian and south Indian have a rich but complex history. Several historians, political scientists, anthropologists, and scholars of literary traditions have produced accounts of this history (Dalmia, 1997; Mitchell, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1997; Tillin, 2013b; Yadav, 2021). I will briefly summarise some of their work in the next chapter (Chapter 2: A Brief History of north Indians and south Indians.

I will establish this as the historical background of the peoples of north India and south India and use the background to show that the categories were studied as “constructed” for social, political, and economic practices, through the 19th and 20th century in India. The constructed nature of categories will allow me to establish my argument that these categories are flexible and can be used in context-specific ways to achieve locally relevant actions or purposes.

In the subsequent chapter (Chapter 3: Concepts and Methodology), I will outline my conceptual and methodological frameworks and my rationale for choosing them. I will discuss some principles of Discursive Psychology, and why this conceptual framework is suitable for my research interests. I will also discuss the methodologies of Conversation Analysis and Membership Categorisation Analysis, and why this is a suitable methodology to answer my research questions. Lastly, I will outline the process of data collection, describe my dataset and transcriptions, and four contexts in which the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” are used.

Each of the context listed in the preliminary analysis will be one of the next four analytic chapters (Chapters 4-7). With examples from my dataset, I will illustrate my analytic conclusions. Chapter 4: Responding to Assessments will show how posters on Twitter use “north Indian” and “south Indian” in responding to a food assessment of idlis. Through my analysis, I will show that there are three ways in which users respond to a negative assessment of a food item, idlis: by agreeing with, disagreeing with, or by doing neither. When agreeing with the assessment, respondents invoke their own epistemic rights to construct their agreement as credible and independent. When disagreeing with the assessment, the respondents ascribe category memberships to the assessor to undermine the assessor or dismiss the assessment. Those who neither agree nor disagree, instead question the production of assessment in the first place, but instead dismiss the assessment as not permitted. It is as an epistemic resource that the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” are invoked here.

Chapter 5: Category Uses in Complaint Formulations will examine some Twitter threads in which users are formulating complaints. The complaints are about the complainees’ use of “north Indian” or “south Indian” categories. I will first illustrate in each case, what makes the complainer’s action a complaint. I will also show that some complaints are responded to with an affiliation. I will discuss how the use of “north Indian” or “south Indian” is problematized in the complaint, with a criticism and by constructing it as morally condemnable, allowing the complainer to therefore complain about the category’s use.

The next two chapters will look at how the categories are invoked in asking and answering questions. I will present examples from Twitter in chapter 6 and from Quora in chapter 7. In Chapter 6: Ambiguous Questions and their Answers, I will examine two questions posted on Twitter, which are framed as information-seeking, but it are treated as ambiguous by responders. The answers will be shown as treating the question as doing something more than merely eliciting information about invoked category members. The answers do this by responding in indirect ways and, in some cases, by questioning the appropriateness of asking for examples from the relevant category invoked by the question.

Chapter 7: Questions and Answers from Quora presents a different kind of question and from the platform Quora. I will present three questions that are seeking descriptions or characteristics of “north Indians” or “south Indians”, and are minimal, brief, and open-ended in form. I will also examine several answers to these questions which supply descriptions and characteristics as asked. However, I will show that asking these questions and answering them is constructed as not a neutral thing to do, through use of various discursive strategies that inoculate the descriptions of “north Indians” or “south Indians” from accusations of being stereotypical and generalised. Lastly, I will discuss the implications of asking these questions and answering with these descriptions produced this way.

The final chapter (Chapter 8: Discussion) will collate my findings together and summarise my answer to the research questions posed above. I will also discuss some overarching conclusions about the uses of these categories “north Indian” and “south Indian.” I will also discuss some learnings about the contexts in which these categories and their uses were studied, namely assessments, complaints, and question-answer sequences. I will then evaluate my findings and discuss some strengths and limitations of this study. Lastly, I will discuss the implications of using social media platforms like Twitter and Quora as a source of interactional data and explain some of my contributions to past literature on category-use, categorisation practices in social psychology.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of north Indians and south Indians

In the previous chapter, I introduced my interest in the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” and noted that they seem to be used in mundane interactions by people. Following are two examples of people using these categories in such interactions. The first is an excerpt from a stand-up comedy segment titled “North Indians can talk to anybody” performed by a comedian named Kenny Sebastian (Sebastian, 2015). The video was taken from YouTube.

Kenny Sebastian: north Indians can talk to anybody.

1 So, I'm Malayali. Any MALAYALI'S IN THE HOUSE?
 2 (0.2) (hhh)
 3 REALLY? See, no one gives a sh(hh)it.
 4 (0.2) (hhh)
 5 So, I'm Malayali and uh (0.01) I recently had the
 6 privilege (0.01) of going to Amritsar.
 7 (0.3)
 8 It's like... for a Malayali to go to Amritsar is like
 9 stepping into a Bollywood film, okay. (0.2) I thought I
 10 was on the sets on Veer Zaara. It is awesome.
 11 (0.1)
 12 So, on the flight (.) from Delhi to Amritsar, it was
 13 insane because the entire flight was full of >Sardars
 14 And I look< ... >And I'm like, oh okay< (.) So everybody
 15 knows each other.
 16 (0.4) (hhhh)
 17 That's what I assume.
 18 (0.3) (hh)
 19 Obviously, it's a big family, travelling together.
 20 Then I realize, nobody knows each other.
 21 (0.1) (hh)
 22 → ↓ And that's when I realize that North Indians don't
 23 have the problem that South Indians do... Which is
 24 <hesitation to start conversation>.
 25 (0.2) (hhh)
 26 Okay? (0.01) (hh)
 27 So, on the flight... (0.01) (hh) there's this huge...
 28 Everyone's huge.
 29 I'm the tiniest guy on the flight. (0.1) (hh)
 30 Like, people had booked middle seats to put their biceps
 31 in it.

32 (0.2) (hhhh) ((clapping))
 33 It was h(hh)uge. I'm just so small (.) (hhh)
 34 And my seat's on the aisle there was a guy who was
 35 Punjabi. >I knew he was Punjabi< because he was taking
 36 <way more space than he needs> (0.2) (hh)
 37 Because he was sitting like this
 38 (0.3) (hhh)
 39 Like his leg was outside the window. I don't know how
 40 (0.1) that's even possible. (hh)
 41 So, I wanted to ask him, 'Hey, can I put my bag down'
 42 okay.
 43 (0.01)
 44 → Now, if it was a South Indian guy he would have just
 45 made a face (0.01) And waited for the air-hostess to
 46 come and tell me you can't put your bag down.
 47 But because this guy was Punjabi >and I asked him, 'Hey,
 48 can I put my bag down?'<
 49 >There is no problem. We will deal with it later.
 50 ((mumbling loudly))<
 51 I'm like, 'Oh. You are my best friend now.' (0.1) (hh)
 52 Like we just had a heart-to-heart conversation. (0.01)
 53 (h)

In this excerpt, the categories are invoked on lines 22-23 and 44. Leading up to line 22, Kenny Sebastian is narrating an anecdote from his travel experiences and establishes the premise to make an observation about north Indians. What he concludes is a characteristic attributed to being “north Indian”: being extroverted and being able to easily communicate with strangers. This is contrasted on line 44, wherein Kenny Sebastian claims that a “south Indian” would be introverted and lack this ease of talking to strangers (“would have just made a face”, lines 44-45). Kenny’s experience (presented as an anecdote) is grounded in his self-categorisation as “Malayali” (a language spoken typically in south Indian state Kerala) in line 1, and his experience of traveling to Amritsar (a city in north Indian state Punjab).

The second excerpt is a short clip from a video by a YouTuber named Dhruv Rathee (Rathee, 2022). The video provides information about north and south India in terms of socio-economic development of the two regions.

Dhruv Rathee: Why is south India more developed than north India

1 North India versus South India. It is a highly

2 debated topic, from political debates to comedy shows.
3 It's another issue that most of the debates on this
4 → topic is anchored on pride. North Indians and south
5 Indians often mock each other and make stereotypes about
6 → each other. North Indians mock South Indians based on
7 their skin colour; they claim that South Indian
8 languages are so difficult to understand; mocking the
9 way they speak.

[a clip of SRK 'mocking' another man who is presumably 'south Indian'.]

12 → On the other hand, South Indians mock North Indians by
13 claiming that the latter are so misbehaved and reckless;
14 that they use foul language in each sentence.

[a clip of comedian Rahul Subramanian mocking 'north Indians' for drinking and driving. Quote from the clip: "People in Gurgaon drive as if they are playing NFS; they think that if they crash here, a new life will start from back there. *Laugh sequence*.]

In this video, the narrator Dhruv Rathee presents his "analysis" of the regions of India typically referred to as "north India" and "south India." His analysis is a comparison between these two regions based on parameters such as "folk dances, languages, development, per capita net state domestic product, to foreign invasions, religious contact etc" (as stated in the video's description). The above excerpt begins at 0:16 and is until 0:53. Here, Dhruv Rathee is setting up the context for the categories which are the focus of his upcoming analysis. He begins by stating that the relationship between "north Indians" and "south Indians" is highly debated and discussed. He sets out two conversational contexts in which these debates occur: political discourse and stand-up comedy. He also outlines a few identifiable stereotypes attributed by members of these groups to each other. On lines 6-9, the attributes of "south Indians" according to north Indians are identified: as speaking languages that are difficult to comprehend and as having a peculiar way of speaking. They are also identified as having recognisably different physical features like darker skin. On lines 12-14, "north Indians" are identified by "south Indians" as having erratic driving habits, using foul language, and being misbehaved.

These two excerpts show that north Indians and south Indians are attributed various types of characteristics: they are described as speaking distinct languages, scripts, accents, dispositions, and mannerisms, etc. The full videos extend this discussion to include other differences; they were ruled by different kings and dynasties, that their languages belonged to different language

families, that they are descendants of different races, and so on. North and south Indians are also said to have different cultures (different dance styles, foods that they eat, clothing styles, etc.) Several such videos can be found on YouTube which “describe” north and south Indians in similar terms (*Delhi On South Indians*, 2019; *South Indian vs Hindi*, 2019; K. Kumar, 2016; Subramanian, 2018).

These excerpts also show that there is a complex and shared history between members of these two categories. To my knowledge, there is no scholarship that has explored the use of “north Indian” or “south Indian” explicitly. However, academic scholarship has investigated the history of peoples of north India and south India. Summarising some of this work is the primary objective of this chapter, and I hope to use this account to contextualise the meanings historically attributed to “north Indians” and “south Indians.” Therefore, in this chapter, I will trace this history from the late 19th century to 20th and 21st centuries. I will begin by accounts that have described which regions of India typically represent north India and south India. Some of these different accounts were previously mentioned in the Introduction, and I will elaborate on them here.

The geographical profile of north Indians describes them as the people who occupy the states of Punjab, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand (*India Facts*, n.d.; Prabhat, n.d.). Similarly, south Indians are described as those who reside in the states Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu (Subrahmanyam, 2006). In addition to these geographical differences, north Indians and south Indians also speak a variety of languages which fall into two dominant language families. The census of India (2011) shows that people of the north predominantly speak Hindi (or one of its many dialects), but also Urdu, Kashmiri, Maithili, Punjabi, Santali, Sindhi, Oriya and so on. Hindi was reportedly spoken by the largest number of residents in north India (approximately 528 million people speak it) (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). These languages of north India are broadly categorized as Indo-Aryan languages (*Indo-Aryan Languages*, n.d.). On the other hand, there are four major languages of south India; Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam (Subrahmanyam, 2006). South Indian languages have been broadly categorized as ‘Dravidian languages’ (Subrahmanyam, 2006) since the mid nineteenth century. The census of 2011 reveals that almost 69 million people speak Tamil, almost 81 million people speak Telugu, almost 34 million people speak Malayalam, and almost 43 million people speak Kannada

(Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). Following table represents the numbers of people who speak each of the above-mentioned languages:

Language	Number of speakers
Hindi	52,83,47,193
Tamil	6,90,26,881
Telugu	8,11,27,740
Malayalam	3,48,38,819
Kannada	4,37,06,512
Urdu	5,07,72,631
Kashmiri	67,97,587
Maithili	1,35,83,464
Punjabi	3,31,24,726
Santali	73,68,192
Sindhi	27,72,264

Table 1: Some languages and the number of speakers (from north and south India).
Source: (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011)

Additionally, some colonial records also differentiate between north Indian and south Indian people based on their racial origins. Iyengar (1914) wrote about the north Indians as belonging to the Aryan Race (more specifically Indo-Aryans), who occupied the area known today as India after infiltrating the land from the north-west. They were described in some records as the superior race, and the argument presented was that most of the north Indians belong to the Aryan Race. On the other hand, Iyengar (1914) describes south Indians as belonging to the Dravidian Race (or the Aryo-Dravidian race); as the first settlers of India; or as the aboriginal tribes of India (Iyengar, 1914).

Historical accounts have seemingly focused most widely on describing the peoples of north and south India by race, language, caste, and geography as markers of identity. However, other work in literary and cultural studies, history, and anthropology has shown that ‘north Indian and south Indian’ are not *fixed* historical categories and people belonging to them are not easily classified merely in these terms. The categories were constructed and ascribed meanings that changed and evolved over decades, allowing these categories to be mobilised for various, but particular purposes during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Historians and culture studies scholars have predominantly focused on how languages were a marker of identity for people of India during the 19th and 20th century. Therefore, among north Indian languages, I will summarise scholarly work that discusses the constructions of Hindi and Urdu identities, because the speakers of this language have shared history in the region, and because they constitute the highest speaker population. According to the last Linguistic Survey of India, almost 43.63% of the Indian population reported Hindi as their mother tongue (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). Hindi is an Indo-Aryan language which shares ancestry with Indo-European languages such as English, Greek, and Russian (Brown & Ogilvie, 2009). Both Hindi and Urdu were also greatly influenced by the classical language Sanskrit, one of the oldest languages in the Indo-Aryan language family (Aryan, n.d.). Urdu has also drawn on Arabic and Persian as it developed in South Asia. Hindi is spoken in several north Indian states including Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Himachal Pradesh (Shukla, 2006). According to the Census of India (2011), the number of Hindi speakers also included speakers of several dialects namely Awadhi, Bundeli, Bhojpuri, Chhattisgarhi, Garhwali, Haryanvi, Khari Boli, Jaunpuri, Magadhi, and many more (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). The language was also proposed to be the country's national language after 1947 by leaders of India. The above statistics seem to suggest that Hindi is an extremely popular, widely spoken language in India, especially in north India. Hindi is usually written in the Nagari script and Urdu in a modified Arabic script. Due to the popularity of Hindi, I will predominantly discuss the history of how Hindi language identity came to be forged during the 19th and 20th centuries. However, Hindi and Urdu share an intertwined and complex history that I will explore in some detail here as well.

Among south Indian languages, I will discuss scholarly work that summarises the constructions of Tamil and Telugu language categories because they are two prominent southern Indian languages. Language scholars classify Tamil and Telugu as members of the Dravidian Language family (*Dravidian Languages*, 2023) along with other languages such as Kannada, Malayalam, and Tulu (Subrahmanyam, 2006). These languages are spoken mainly in the south Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana wherein they are listed as the *official* state languages (*The Constitution of India, Part XVII*, n.d.). The Indian constitution lists 22 *scheduled* official languages (The Constitution of India, 1950, Schedule VIII, n.d.) and includes the two languages being discussed. In the 2011 census, 7.9 percent people returned their mother tongue as Telugu (third largest language group), and 5.91 percent returned Tamil

(fifth largest language group) as theirs (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). These percentages are in relation to the total population of India in 2011. Tamil and Telugu language speakers were also at the frontlines of an anti-Hindi agitation (political movement) in the years leading up to 1956, which opposed the “national language” status that central government was proposing for Hindi. The agitations spearheaded by Tamil and Telugu politicians and activists also demanded the linguistic reorganisation of Indian states and the resulted in a subsequent appointment of “official” state languages to the newly formed states in India in and after 1956.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, I will only be focusing on Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu language identities’ histories because recounting a detailed history of every north Indian and south Indian language is beyond the scope of this thesis. This summary will also touch on some of the broad social and political influences that shaped language identities in the 19th and 20th centuries. I also show that the major turning points that implicated speakers of Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu languages in the 20th century conflicts that shaped the relationship between north Indians and south Indians as social groups.

The subsequent sections of this chapter will examine how the complex historical relationships between languages, geographies, and race were constructed, through the historical accounts and socio-political contexts of 19th and 20th century India. I will also discuss some of the social and political processes that scholars argue have contributed to constructing these identities over time. As previously mentioned, in late 19th and early 20th centuries, the identities of people in north and south India were marked predominantly by the languages they spoke. The next two sections will summarise how language identities were constructed in north and south India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I will discuss this in the first two sections below. However, a shift occurred in the late 20th century when race, caste, and religion became intertwined with language. The construction of north Indian and south Indian categories as marked by race, caste, and religion will therefore be the focus of the third section. In the same section, I will also illustrate that the representation of north Indians and south Indians was prominent and relevant in films and popular culture. At the end, I will discuss how the complex histories of people of north India and south India in late 19th, early 20th, and late 20th centuries have contributed to my understanding of the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian.”

The next section looks at the construction and discourse on Hindi and Urdu languages during the 19th and 20th centuries. The primary focus of this account will be on constructions of Hindi language identity.

2.1 Late 19th and early 20th Century: Hindi and Urdu Constructions

In this section, my primary goal is to trace the evolution of Hindi and Urdu language-identities in 19th and 20th century India. I will be focusing on three primary sources that contributed to the construction of these identities: the literary public sphere, the discourses on sacred cities in north India, and the language use and vocabulary in India at the time. I will underline the influence of political leaders, British administration, religious traditions, and literary leaders of the 19th and 20th century on how Hindi language was constructed and identified as ‘north Indian.’ In this section, I rely primarily on the scholarly works of three scholars, who were chosen because of their expertise and extensive research on the subject. The first is Francesca Orsini (Orsini, 2009), a literary historian who has studied the construction of Hindi and Urdu identities in literature and the literary public sphere and whose work focused primarily on the history of north India (*Professor Francesca Orsini*, n.d.). The second scholar is Harish Trivedi (Trivedi, 2003), of translation studies and literature and focusing on the history of Hindi (*Harish Trivedi*, 2013). Third scholar is Vasudha Dalmia (Dalmia, 1997) who studied cultural formations, particularly the politics of religious discourse, transitional cultural phenomena of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and the politics of the literature of the new nation-state (*Vasudha Dalmia*, n.d.).

2.1.1 Hindi and Urdu language identities in the public sphere

The first important source through which a Hindi identity was forged was the literature published in the *public sphere* (Orsini, 2009). Through the late 19th century and well into the 20th century, this endeavour was undertaken by many writers who were composing prose and poetry in Hindi, namely Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1864-1938), Munshi Premchand (1880-1936), and Bhartendu Harischandra (1850-1885). Forging a Hindi identity served important purposes for political leaders and freedom fighters at this time, because the country was governed by the colonial British administration whose primary language of communication was English. The primary purpose was therefore to construct an identity grounded in an Indian language that would unite the country against the colonial rule and that would become a symbol

for national unity and independence (Orsini, 2009). This was achieved for Hindi through three key processes: creation of literary traditions, standardization of Hindi (in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), and the introduction and expansion of print media in north India (in the early 20th century).

The first key process was the creation and assimilation of literary traditions in Hindi. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, a series of writers and publishers in Hindi developed distinct literary styles to offer a range of interesting and superior quality literature to the readers of Hindi (Trivedi, 2003). While the literary movements themselves are quite fascinating, I was more intrigued by how these movements created spaces for publication of new literature that would tie language and identities of people together. These included spaces such as education institutions, publishing markets, and kavi-sammelans (poetry-recitation gatherings); they incorporated writings by budding poets and writers and literature that was composed specifically in Hindi (Orsini, 2009). The literature produced by nascent writers and poets began to be visible to readers, which encouraged them to gather and exchange ideas, and use Hindi as their means of communication. This, in turn, fostered a sense of community and identity among the people of northern India. Trivedi also discusses how a poetry movement named Chayavad (translated as mysticism) and the introduction of 'novel' as a literary genre contributed to creating a strong nationalist, pro-independence, anti-colonialism literary discourse among audiences (Trivedi, 2003). The introduction of a nationalist Hindi identity was facilitated by well-liked and respected authority figures from different institutions such as publishing houses (like publishers and editors), popular writers, and universities (designers of course curricula, heads of literary departments, and professors of language) (Orsini, 2009).

The second key process was a rigorous standardization of Hindi in its written and spoken forms, and its construction as a formidable candidate for the status of India's national language. Orsini (2002) explains that writers like Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi played a key role in promoting writers who adhered to a strictly standardized Hindi script by providing them a platform to publish in his popular journal *Sarasvati* (Orsini, 2009). The process of standardization had contributed to the forging of the Hindi identity (Orsini, 2009) and was therefore an important turning point for Hindi identity construction. I suggest that writers, publishers, and promoters of Hindi anticipated and expected that standardizing Hindi would promote the construction of a language which would present its speakers as a unified, homogenous society.

The third key process was the introduction of print media, and the expansion of publishing businesses across north India (Orsini, 2009). In the early 20th century, the two processes outlined above, and the availability of new publishing technologies led to a boom in print dissemination of literature among audiences. A burgeoning of print technology helped writers to publish new forms of literature and challenge existing literary traditions within the Hindi literary domain (Orsini, 2009). Print media also created a supplementary source of income for writers and made them look at writing in Hindi as a source of reputation, respect among readers, and of financial stability. The possibility of financial stability from publishing in Hindi language not only encouraged authors to write in the language, but also incentivised readers to consume Hindi literature because a wider selection of works was now available to choose from. Becoming readers and consumers of Hindi literature gave “ordinary” Hindi readers and speakers a voice in the project of the Hindi’s construction as the national language. This was because, as consumers, audiences would be able to choose which literary works (novels, poems, magazines, and periodicals) were appealing to them, and actively participating in Hindi-identity construction by creating demand for works highlighting patriotic themes.

These three processes of Hindi identity construction were thus forging a symbol of national unity and homogeneity for the nation as a whole. However, the spread and popularity of Hindi language was limited by the geographical spread of Hindi-speaking people, which was concentrated largely in northern parts of India. Moreover, the influence of literary work was limited by how much of the audience was literate in Hindi.

The public sphere was therefore a key source of influence towards the formulation of a strong, unified, dominant Hindi-identity in north India in the late 19th and early 20th century. While Orsini (2009), Dalmia (1997), and Trivedi (2003) offer excellent insight into the role of colonial administration and Indian leaders in this process, it is important to note that the role of the masses (readers and consumers of the literature) is largely unexplored.

2.1.2 Hindi-identity and Language in Use

An important factor that influenced constructions of a Hindi language identity was the construction of the language itself. Dalmia (1997) contends that two important processes were involved in formulating Hindi as a linguistic identity. The first was achieving internal homogeneity for the language by standardizing Hindi grammar and syntax, and the second was

demarcating it from external differences (Dalmia, 1997). In the previous section, I discussed the first process at length, and I will explore the second process below.

Dalmia (1997) argues that the origins of Hindi/Hindui in India began as vernacular languages and date back to before the Mughal rulers came to India in the early 16th century. During the Mughal rule, Persian writers constructed a variant of Hindui (old Hindi) by merging its vocabulary with Persian and constructing a language she refers to as Hindustani (Orsini, 2009; Trivedi, 2003). This created a differentiation between Hindi-speaking subjects and Urdu speaking rulers, which were later mobilised by colonial British rulers in the late 19th century to create tension and conflict based on religion. However, the differences between Hindi and other languages (like Braj, Awadhi, and Hindui) were also consolidated during the late 19th century, in an attempt to construct Hindi as a unified symbol of national unity.

The process of incorporating dialects and grammatical structures into Hindi language was a challenging task. In the early 20th century, the proponents of Hindi also reformed the Hindi curricula through revision of university courses and by encouraging new and upcoming authors with financial incentives to revive Hindi literature using the standardised and modernised language (Orsini, 2009). Taking these various steps to standardize Hindi as a language demarcated it internally from other languages some of which were then deemed dialects, including Braj and Awadhi. Additionally, forging new curriculum and encouraging the use of standardized Hindi to publish new literatures created a perception of the language as popular and widely used.

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Hindi identity was also demarcated externally from the Urdu language-identity. Scholars have been divided in their arguments about whether Hindi and Urdu are the same or different languages. There have also been several debates about the origins of these two languages (by extension, as categories) as distinct with their own script and literary traditions. On the one hand, some have argued that Hindi and Urdu are the same languages, with different “scripts” and small differences in “vocabularies.” On the other hand, some have argued that they are distinct languages (Snell & Shackle, 1990). The debate surrounding similarities and differences between Hindi and Urdu was constructed by editors, publishers, writers, and those who designed curricula at universities. They were at the forefront of claims that Urdu and Hindi are in fact two separate languages with different scripts, vocabularies, and even literary traditions (Orsini, 2009). The differences between these languages were also influenced by the colonial British government’s interest in studying and

classifying Indian languages (Orsini, 2009; Yadav, 2021). However, it is important to note that such constructed differences were later mobilised and promoted by India's foremost political leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). Consequently, colonial policies for the classification of Indian languages introduced differences between language speakers (Hindi and Urdu speakers, here) that legitimised associations between religious affiliations and language in a way that had not existed in previous centuries. For instance, Hindi speakers came to be synonymous with Hinduism, and Urdu speakers came to be synonymous with followers of Islam (Dalmia, 1997; Orsini, 2009). The evolution of these religio-linguistic identities in the 20th century hindered the efforts of the same political leaders creating a Hindi-language identity because of rising communal tensions between Hindi and Urdu speakers during the early 20th century.

The religio-linguistic differences between Hindi and Urdu were cemented by the process of purifying the Hindi vocabulary (Orsini, 2009; Snell & Shackle, 1990; Yadav, 2021). Scholars of Hindi language encouraged the replacement of Persian or Urdu words from Hindi's vocabulary by designating them as 'foreign' or 'impure' and systematically replaced them with sanskritised versions (Dalmia, 1997).

Another contribution to cementing differences between these religious-linguistic groups was by writers and publishers who were tracing the history of the Indian continent before the 19th century and writing it in Hindi. The writing of this history focused on narratives about traditions, rituals, and stories that linked the Hindi language's literary traditions and its people's legacies back to the ancient Vedic civilization (approximately dated to 1500 BCE – 800 BCE). The linking of new literature to ancient traditions solidified the influential position held by history and historians in Hindi identity construction. The history recounted as a part of this project was that of a 'golden Aryan age' (dated approximately to 800 BCE – 500 BCE) predominantly that of the Hindus and its subsequent destruction by the Urdu-speaking Muslim invaders of the 16th century (Orsini, 2009). The historical accounts of this period (late 19th century) reinforced the religious-linguistic differences between Hindi and Urdu speaking people. This was because the invasion by Islamic rulers was seen as having broken the glory of the Vedic civilization, and this supported the argument to 'go back' to older traditions and culture to restore the glory of the Hindi-speaking people of India (Dalmia, 1997). Such arguments were important because they established the cultural, historical, and discursive superiority of Hindi-speaking Hindus over Urdu-speaking Muslims, a narrative that resonated

strongly in north Indian states through the 19th and 20th century. Along with the themes of nationalism and unity, narratives declaring the superiority of Hindi speakers over Urdu speakers contributed to the construction of a dominating north Indian Hindi-language identity, which clashed with the regional linguistic identities, especially from the southern parts of India in the 20th century.

There was a third factor contributing to demarcating Hindi from other languages in the 19th century, namely the colonial British Administration and their classification policies for Indian languages. By applying European measures of classification to the Indian social context, the colonial policymakers encouraged the classification of Indian social groups by differentiating between them (in their institutional capacity) using language-based category labels (Dalmia, 1997). For instance, in early 19th century, Fort William College (FWC) was set up and headed by a British linguist Gilchrist to study Indian languages. Through the study of languages, FWC became an important colonial British contributor to the institutionalizing “vernaculars” by commissioning the production of translated works, grammars, and dictionaries. Yadav (2021) argues that the decisions around translation and classification at FWC were greatly responsible for the subsequent split between Hindi and Urdu as language categories in the late 19th century. These policies resulted in the differentiation between Hindi and Urdu speakers as two discrete, homogenous religio-linguistic groups, primarily identified by language and religion (Hindi-speaking people became aligned with Hinduism and Urdu-speaking people with Islam) (Dalmia, 1997). This divided the people of north India into religious groups and cemented the construction and influence of the religious-linguistic identities of Hindi and Urdu speakers in north India. Supporting this argument, Orsini (2002) stated that the previously discussed standardization of dialects of Hindi was also crucial to the project of nationalization where the goal was to construct a unified, dominant Hindi-speaking identity. I conclude from these arguments that a nationalised and standardised Hindi language identity was therefore being constructed as a formidable opposition to the colonial administration, as well as to the influence of the colonial language (English) in the early 20th century.

Therefore, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, internal demarcations between Hindi and Urdu, or Hindi and its dialects were shaped by religious differences between Hindus and Muslims, and by the processes of standardization of vocabulary and script. Moreover, external demarcations between Hindi and English were influenced by the standardization and subsuming of dialects in order to construct a national language category that could pose a

formidable opposition to the colonial British administration while unifying the country under the banner of a national language with a rich history. In the next section, I discuss how descriptions of a *sacred* geography in north India were important contributors to the construction of the Hindi-identity.

2.1.3 Hindi-identity and North India's sacred geography

The third key influence on the Hindi language-identity constructions was that of descriptions of geographical places in north India produced in the late 19th century Hindi literature. As mentioned previously, historians of the late 19th century were attempting to recreate and resurrect the 'glorious' history of Hindi-speaking people to forge a unified identity for India's anti-colonial struggle. Two sources primarily expressed a strong need for the revival of traditions associated with a Hindi identity. First was the colonial government, which sought to understand the Indian social diversities to profit from it. This included the government's set up of a network of scholars who would travel to interior regions of north India, in order to talk to local people and learn about the history of their cultures, rituals, and traditions (Orsini, 2009). This knowledge was collected to train colonial government officers in local languages, customs, and traditions, in order to be able to dictate policies and make laws for better administration over these regions. The second source was the Hindu communities who were beginning to align with a growing community of Hindi-speaking people (Dalmia, 1997). The convergence of these interests from these religious and language communities becomes visible when we read the descriptions of one particularly important city from north India: Benares (Dalmia, 1997). The description of Benares' geographical layout contains a clear indication of the city's importance and its sacred relationship to the traditions of Hindi-speaking Hindus of India. For instance, there were references to the city being ruled by Hindu kings and the diverse spread of temples across the city. Benares was also mentioned in many scriptures written originally in Sanskrit; for instance, in the Vedas and Puranas (*Varanasi/Benares*, 2016). The links to the 'old and classical' language Sanskrit and consequent links to the Hindi language through descriptions of traditions and rituals are important. This is because they ensure a continuation of links to the old, *glorious* Aryan, north Indian civilization (previously discussed). The need to maintain historical continuity in literary traditions elevated the importance of cities like Benares by emphasising its role as a cradle in the constructions of the unifying Hindi identity (Dalmia, 1997).

Benares city subsequently became a source of knowledge about traditions associated with the religio-linguistic Hindi-identity for both the colonial government and the consolidators of a nationalist Hindi-speaking Hindu population. Universities, publishing houses, and Hindi societies were based in cities like Benares, Allahabad, and Kanpur and promoted the emerging standardised and modernised Hindi literature (Orsini, 2009). Thus, the location of these cities created a cradle for the Hindi-speaking Hindu population of north India; these cities were arguably the main source of authority and knowledge because of revival of ancient universities and the establishment of new ones teaching literature and history in Hindi. The description and location of these cities therefore contributed to the construction of the Hindi-speaking identity in north India. Later, when the Hindus aligned themselves with a Hindi identity in north India, this link with past knowledge and traditions translated into a source of authority for writers, publishers, and proponents of the Hindi language in most of north India, extending beyond Benares city. Dalmia (1997) argued that the above-mentioned practices constructed a narrative that the Hindi literature developed by contributions from writers and publishers of this time was representing a large section of India's society. Descriptions of sacred cities like Benares in Hindi constructed an association between the religious-linguistic identity of Hindi speakers and the region of north India; this association was deemed sacred and ancient.

2.1.4 Language identities in north India: A Summary

In this section, I explored three key influences on the constructions of Hindi and Urdu language identities in north India through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first was building a Hindi public sphere and the role of Hindi speakers, or speakers of northern Indian languages within this public sphere. The second was construction of Hindi identity through the language's relationship with other languages like Urdu and dialects like Braj and Awadhi. The third was an association between the geography of north India, and the religious-linguistic identity of Hindi speakers (of cities Benares and Allahabad). I show through the above analysis that the category of language was influenced by various socio-political circumstances existing at the same time: emerging literary genres, traditions embedded within religious categories such as 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', the goals of the 'unification' project of freedom fighters, and the policies of the colonial British administration. Importantly, the influence of these circumstances was concentrated within the region of north India.

Exploring this complex history is an important exercise. It provides me with a valuable understanding of how language identities in north India were constructed by the coming together of social and political processes, and a variety of language, caste, and religious markers of identity. Moreover, this history demonstrates the importance of considering socio-political contexts in the process of identity formation and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the north Indian category and its members. Lastly, this exercise allowed me to propose that the construction of a Hindi identity served multiple purposes. This language was and continues to be the mode of communication for a significant portion of the Indian population. However, it also came to be closely related to religious, regional, and nationalist categories in northern India. Depending on the socio-political context of the time-period, this identity was made available for mobilisation to achieve political goals and not merely permitting communication between its speakers. I will end this conclusion by reiterating my observation that scholarly work summarised here examined the role of largely institutional stakeholders like writers, publishers, editors, university-syllabus writers, political leaders, and freedom fighters. The role of the masses, consumers of literature in Hindi and Urdu, and the ordinary citizens, was largely unexplored. I will return to this observation at the end of this chapter.

In the next section, I will explore the language identities were constructed in south India, with a focus on the histories of two languages: Tamil and Telugu. I will outline key influences for construction of these identities through the 19th and 20th century India.

2.2 Late 19th and early 20th century: Tamil and Telugu Constructions

On December 15, 1952, a Telugu activist Potti Sriramulu led a protest and succumbed to a fast unto death, to demand the formation of a separate linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh for the speakers of the Telugu language (Wangchuk, 2019). The news of his death was followed by massive protests and violence in and around the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh (Wangchuk, 2019). Around the same time, a similar movement took place in Tamil Nadu, where Tamil speakers were consolidating their identity by self-immolating in protest Hindi's status as India's national language. In 1965, the state of Tamil Nadu witnessed a mass anti-Hindi movement led by the Tamil-speaking political leaders, a movement that originated with college student-led protests to observe a 'day of mourning' for their mother tongue (Forrester, 1966).

These incidents were among a series of language-identity-led movements in states like Tamil Nadu, Punjab, West Bengal in the 20th century. The speakers of these languages consolidated an emotional and passionate attachment to their *mother tongues*. They sacrificed their lives for various collective political goals and movements (Mitchell, 2009) which culminated in a linguistic reorganization of Indian states in the 20th century. At the same time, Tamil and Telugu language categories were also mobilised by politicians in south India to resist the influence of north Indian languages, especially Hindi, and the imposition of Hindi as a national language. However, the seeds of this conflict between Hindi, Tamil and Telugu language speakers were sown in the late 19th century. My goal in this section is to establish that various literary trends, historical processes, and socio-political circumstances of the 19th and early 20th century south India contributed to the construction of Tamil and Telugu language identities which the political leaders eventually mobilised in the mid and late 20th century.

I will rely on the scholarship of three scholars to explore the Tamil and Telugu language identity constructions in South India. The first is Lisa Mitchell (Mitchell, 2009) whose research interests are language as a category and its constructions in Telugu-speaking regions of south India (*Lisa Mitchell*, 2015). The second is Sumathi Ramaswamy and her analysis of *Tamilparru* or *Tamil devotion* (Ramaswamy, 1997). She is a historian and scholar interested in the colonial and modern history of India and Tamil studies among others (*Sumathi Ramaswamy*, n.d.). The third is Thomas R Trautmann (Trautmann, 2007) who is an anthropologist interested in the history of ancient India (*Thomas R. Trautmann*, n.d.).

2.2.1 Tamil and Telugu language-identity constructions in 19th century

One of the earliest pieces of evidence of the shift in the relationship between Telugu as a language and its speakers was in the late 19th century when literature about the lives of Telugu poets was first published (Mitchell, 2009). Prior to this, language was treated as merely a mode of communication and was not a marker of its speakers' identities (Rao, 1995). The geographical region of south India was multilingual; speakers communicated using several languages such as Arabic, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam. In the early 19th century, there was an early effort to forge a relationship between territory and languages made in south India. In 1827 and 1829, an author named Kavali Venkata Ramaswami attempted to mobilise a *Dekkan* (south-Indian) identity by appealing to a regional sense of unity. He attempted to forge this regional unity by publishing books titled *Biographical Sketches of*

Dekkan Poets, *A New Map of Cities and Places in the Dekkan*, and *Descriptive and Historical Sketches of Cities and Places in the Dekkan* (Mitchell, 2009). The publication of these books demonstrated that new relationships were being forged between territories, people, history, literature, and its production. However, Ramaswami's attempt to mobilise regional identity as 'south Indian' was unsuccessful.

In the mid-19th century, the colonial British administration introduced new European methods of classifying and categorizing south-Indian people (Mitchell, 2009) and their policies influenced the creation of the first geographical borders that associated the Telugu language with its corresponding 'Andhra' region. Most importantly, in late 19th century, the new categories emerging through colonial administration's classification and author Ramaswami's literary contributions were discussed by a popular literary figure Gurujada Sriramamurti (Sriramamurthy & SRIRAMAMURTY, 1974) in his work on *Lives of Poets*. Sriramamurti attempted to consolidate a Telugu identity by exploring the relationship between the Telugu language and the region (today referred to as Andhra Pradesh) where it is spoken. The new classification policies introduced the writers and poets in south India to new technologies like maps, language censuses, and new regional-language categories with which identities grounded in language, geography, and regional history could be forged. Around the mid-19th century, a new literary device was also being introduced in south India's literary public sphere: narrating the lives of literary subjects as chronological events, personifying language being *alive* or *dead* (Bose, 2010). These narrations were also widely circulated among audiences, owing to availability of printing press (Mitchell, 2009, p. 68). Therefore, the literary public sphere and emergence of new literary genres greatly influenced the construction of language-identities in south India in the late 19th century; a similar observation was discussed in the previous section regarding Hindi identity in north India.

As in the case of Telugu, the language category 'Tamil' also underwent a transformation from being merely a speaker's language for communication, to being an object of their devotion (Ramaswamy, 1997) in the early 20th century. Tamil speakers were mobilised as devotees of the mother language or goddess Tamil (referred to as *Tayamoli*; Ramaswamy, 1997). As devotees, they were encouraged to practice *Tamilparru* translated as Tamil devotion in Ramaswamy (1997), and this was at the core of the Tamil identity that politicians in the 20th century mobilised for various socio-political purposes.

Prior to the 19th century, the language itself was rarely the subject of literary writings, and most of the literature in Tamil was devoted to praising Hindu gods (Ramaswamy, 1997). In the 19th century, Tamil speakers had begun to employ colonial technologies like the printing press to realise modern interpretations for their language. They began publishing grammars and prose-translations, and encouraged public speeches, which contributed to making the language visible among the masses (Ramaswamy, 1997). This was important for many reasons. As I previously discussed with regards to Hindi-identity constructions, the colonial technology and classification tools played an instrumental role in bringing about homogenization, standardization, and classification Indian languages and led to the construction of (colonial) linguistic hierarchies. As a consequence of these policies, administrators and language scholars placed Tamil on a lower level of hierarchy than Sanskrit (and its descendant Hindi). With these *new* policies of language classification, the status of Tamil language was reduced to that of *vernacular* (Ramaswamy, 1997). However, Sanskrit and its descendant language Hindi were elevated to higher statuses, that of *classical* and *national* languages respectively.

Until the 19th century, the origins of the Indian language families in north and south India were not known well, and it was speculated that they shared a common ancestor, Sanskrit (Nair, 2006). However, colonial language scholars and Christian missionaries in 19th century south India such as Francis Ellis Whyte and Rev. Robert Caldwell proposed that a separate lineage for south Indian languages could be traced (Trautmann, 2009). According to them, Telugu and Tamil were not descendants of Sanskrit but rather belonged to a distinct and an even older language family, which they named *Dravidian* (Trautmann, 2009). Tamil speakers accepted many of these claims about the lineage of Tamil being older than that of Sanskrit, and thus, felt that the status of their language was being downgraded by the 19th century language classification systems introduced by the colonial language scholars. The downgrading of their status was felt particularly strongly in comparison to the elevated status of Hindi because Tamil was shown to have an equally rich and ancient history (Forrester, 1966).

In the next section, I will contend that this downgrading of status created a sense of dissatisfaction and anger with the status of *Tayamoli* (Mother Tamil) and was at the core of the 20th century conflict between north and south Indians. I will also subsequently explore how distinctions between southern Indian languages were also influenced by the distinctions between Aryan and Dravidian race connotations that aligned with these language identities.

2.2.2 20th century Tamil and Telugu constructions: until 1947

As discussed above, in the early 20th century, the use of printing press and introduction of new literary devices (like biographies of poets) contributed to the construction of Tamil and Telugu language identities (Mitchell, 2009). I also stated that the narration of lives of Telugu's poets followed a unique literary style that presented the history of languages as a chronological narrative, with its own past and independent of its speakers. In other words, the Telugu was set up as a personification, with the possibility of birth, evolution, and death, and as such used as the subject of literature (Mitchell, 2009).

Tamil was similarly personified by its speakers and literary writers (Ramaswamy, 1997). The literary device *praise poetry* was being employed towards a similar goal of creating 'divine', 'mother' Tamil who was the subject of its speakers' devotion (Ramaswamy, 1997), developing from the notion of *mother tongue* which was popularised in that period. *Tamilttay* (Mother Tamil) was a singular figure, with her own unique life-story, and was repeatedly invoked among Tamil speakers to reformulate the history of the language and to personify it as having a life with a beginning, a period of glory, degeneration, and possible death (Ramaswamy, 1997).

Personifying languages was an important practice because it set forth possibilities for new political relationships to be forged with the language identity. I discussed one such important relationship in the previous section, between territory, language, and speakers. Another was forged in the years after India's independence (1947), between 'regional' languages (Tamil and Telugu) and the 'national' language (Hindi). In this context, the Telugu identity was mobilised in the 20th century to demand a separate Telugu linguistic state for Telugu-speaking people as well as to consolidate their right to employment and economic benefits, by safeguarding these within the boundaries of a Telugu-speaking state subsequently named Andhra Pradesh (Majeed, 2019). In the state of Tamil Nadu after 1947, political leaders mobilised the Tamil identity to invoke passion and an emotional attachment in consolidating the state of Tamil Nadu.

It is important to note here, that Tamil and Telugu identities of south India were therefore evolving category constructions, and not a fixed, natural, nor a biological category for its speakers. Moreover, the belief that language shared a close, personal relationship with the region and its inhabitants, who spoke the said language, was now strengthened, and established. Politicians were able to mobilise this deep emotional connection to and the passion for the language to spearhead political agitations demanding their 'mother' language be protected from

death, and to demand economic representation for their language in the central government's policymaking (Forrester, 1966; Mitchell, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1993). I will discuss these mobilisations in the following section.

2.2.3 Tamil and Telugu language identity constructions from 1947 to 1956

I introduced this section with the story of a Telugu activist Potti Sriramulu (Wangchuk, 2019) whose protest mobilised emotional attachment to Telugu identity to demand creation of a separate administrative unit for its speakers (Seshan, 2016). The state of Andhra Pradesh was formed as a consequence of this movement; this was the first of many such linguistic movements that took place in India after 1947. I have also previously mentioned that politicians in Tamil Nadu mobilised the Tamil identity for an *anti-Hindi agitation* (Forrester, 1966) to oppose the nomination of Hindi as a candidate to become India's national language. The latter of these two incidents demonstrated that there were tensions between Hindi speaking people of north India and the Tamil and Telugu speaking people of south India.

One reason for these tensions was construed by politicians as being that Hindi was *imposed* on peoples of south India, as the candidate for national language status (Forrester, 1966). Making Hindi the national language, would have entailed policy-level changes requiring the residents of India to adopt this language as the primary mode of all communication and education. This raised fears that the regional languages, particularly Tamil and Telugu would become secondary in importance and status and speakers would lose their language identities and their language may die. This linked back to the hierarchical classification of languages which resulted from colonial classification policies (previously discussed) and triggered political agitations. Tamil and Telugu speaking politicians and masses demanded equal treatment for their languages as was being given to Hindi by the central government of India (Forrester, 1966). To show support for this movement, many Tamil speakers willingly self-immolated in the streets of Madras city (now known as Chennai) (Ramaswamy, 1993).

Exploring these constructions of Tamil and Telugu identities in south India is an important project, because it contextualises the deep emotional attachment speakers have expressed towards the language deemed mother tongue. Scholars noted this attachment among masses from all classes and castes (Ramaswamy, 1997; Mitchell, 2009; Rao, 1995), and it served a function beyond merely being the mode of communication. Since language was closely tied to territory and its inhabitants, 'being Tamil' or 'being Telugu' encouraged speakers to mobilise

this identity for the purposes of protecting their rights and for demanding equal social status and access to economic resources (Annamalai, 2010; *The States Reorganisation Act, 1956*, 1956).

2.2.4 Languages as ‘mother-tongues’

In previous sections, I stated that colonial administration and scholars set up various institutions in order to understand and study the complex languages of India during the 19th and 20th century (Trautmann, 2009; Yadav, 2021). These institutions came up with a classification system and used to conduct the national census which categorised Indians by the languages they spoke. After India’s independence in 1947, the newly formed government set up a census committee which continued to maintain census records for the country. To collect language data, the census board used the concept of *mother tongue*, which introduced a new layer in how language categories were constructed. This is important for us to examine, because the data collected by the census board was crucial for the central government’s policymaking and allocation of social and economic resources, and for determining which social groups required governmental recognition and protection (Annamalai, 2010). Moreover, these definitions contextualise how the percentages of Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu speakers were calculated, in the introduction to this chapter.

The census of India defined the category *mother tongue* as follows:

Mother tongue is the language spoken in childhood by the person’s mother to the person. If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person’s home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded. In case of doubt, the language mainly spoken in the household may be recorded. (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011)

By this definition, one may allow the notion that a mother tongue is merely the language learnt since childhood and seems to be unconcerned with the languages that speakers might be fluent in by virtue of their schooling or residence in a different state (Seetharaman, 2019). However, Mitchell provides an alternative explanation which is interesting:

In practice, the language championed as a ‘mother tongue’ is almost always a regional variety associated with a socially and politically dominant group of people, albeit one that

sees itself as victimized by, yet another group of people perceived to be even more powerful or privileged. (Mitchell, 2009: 24)

Against the backdrop of my previous explanations (sections 2.1 and 2.2), this latter definition of *mother tongue* shows that there is an awareness of existence of multiple mother tongues in India, and the possibility that they are pitted against each other for equal socio-political representation. In the case of Telugu, activists mobilised this identity by invoking Telugu not only as a mother tongue but also as *Telugu Talli*, or goddess Telugu in their demands for the creation of a Telugu-speaking state Andhra Pradesh. Tamil speakers were similarly mobilised via the practice of *Tamilparru* (Tamil devotion) (Ramaswamy, 1997) as previously discussed, to demand a linguistic reorganization of states for an independent Tamil state. Ramaswamy provides us with an excellent observation that shows how devotion to Tamil was personified as devotion to *Tayamoli* (mother tongue):

Tamil is the *tāymoḷi* of the Tamil community. The newly born child calls the woman who gave birth to it, ‘*ammā*’ [mother]. She, too, coos over her child and calls it ‘*kannē*’ [precious one]. So, because Tamil is the language with which the mother is hailed, and it is the language which the mother herself uses, it is our *taymoḷi*” (Sivagnanam 1970: 2). (Ramaswamy, 1997, pp. 11–12)

The above two explanations of the *mother tongue* are different from the institutional definition as presented in the Census of India’s handbook. This demonstrates that the “mother tongue” as a category marking speakers’ identity can be understood as flexible and its meanings mobilizable for various socio-political or practical purposes (like gathering census data). Looking at the various definitions of mother tongue also establishes that the peoples of north and south India cannot be merely understood as speakers of a certain language. Rather, their categorisation as Hindi-speaking or Tamil-speaking is more complex. Therefore, it is important to understand that each of these categories were carefully crafted to represent various aspects of people’s identity and these various constructions came to be mobilised for historical and political purposes.

2.2.5 The Complications of Race

Until this point, I have traced the history and constructions of people of north and south India as members of language-categories. These constructions were influenced by various factors

over the 19th and 20th centuries, and close relationships were forged between language, religion, and territory through social and political processes in both north and south India. There is, however, another association to be discussed, namely that of race.

Competing theories of race, also referred to sometimes, as the Aryan versus Dravidian debates are quite important in any discussion about north Indians and south Indians. This is because race was introduced as a concept in understanding Indian history during the colonial British rule and was used by many scholars of that time to classify and understand the origins of the people of India (Iyengar, 1914; Jaiswal, 1969; Kennedy, 1920). Much of the research produced in the 19th century described *Aryans of north India* (also referred to as Indo-Aryans) as migrants, who occupy the geographical area spanning the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and parts of Rajasthan and West Bengal. They were also described broadly as fair skinned, tall, with an oval face and regular symmetric facial features, and with abundant body hair (Kennedy, 1920). More importantly, Aryans were described as the race of people who speak languages from the Indo-Aryan language family. This included languages such as Hindi, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Awadhi, Braj, etc, which are derived from Sanskrit (*Aryan*, n.d.; Guṇasékara, 1921). Contrasted against the Aryans, Dravidians of south India were described in many accounts as the aboriginal tribes inhabiting the Indian subcontinent spanning the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. They were often described as dark-skinned and as savages (Das, 1921; Iyengar, 1914). Most importantly, Dravidians were described as the race of people speaking Dravidian languages including Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada (Subrahmanyam, 2006).

The accuracy of these records describing Aryans and Dravidians as racial categories are widely debated (Iyengar, 1914; Trautmann, 2007; Thapar, 2014), and complicated by the absence of solid evidence. A historian Thomas Trautmann presented some of this controversial evidence that has fuelled the Aryan versus Dravidian debates. He argued that three discoveries during the 19th and 20th century are crucial to the Aryan and Dravidian discourse: the discovery of Indo-European Languages, the discovery of Dravidian Languages, and the discovery of the Indus-Valley civilisation.

First, the Indo-European language family comprises of the Indo-Aryan languages of North India (descending from Sanskrit), Iranian languages (from Old Persian), Romance languages (from Latin), Hellenic languages (from ancient Greek), Germanic languages (from Gothic), Celtic languages (from ancient Celtic) (Trautmann, 2007), and a few others (*Indo-European*

Languages, n.d.). The discovery of the link between Indian languages and the European language families was very crucial to the understanding of the Indian civilisation because it linked the history of Ancient Indian civilisations to that of Europe and Iran (Trautmann, 2007).

Second, the discovery of the Dravidian language family, proposed that this language family consisted of languages from southern India (Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada) and their linguistic roots were shown to be different from those of Sanskrit (*Dravidian Languages*, 2023). This discovery was particularly important for the history of ancient India because it implied that the Indian civilisation was an amalgamation of different linguistic groups, belonging to different language families, rather than having origins rooted in one classical language, Sanskrit (Trautmann, 2007) which was classified as an Indo-Aryan language. Thus, the languages spoken in south India were shown to belong to a different language family than those spoken in the north.

Third, the discovery of the Indus Valley civilisation, proposed that there was a relationship between the Indus Valley civilisation and the Vedas (sacred scriptures of Hindus and linked to the Aryan civilisation of, believed to be dated 1500-1800 BC) (Trautmann, 2007). There are two accepted views about the relationship between the Indus valley civilisation and Aryans of India. The first and more accepted view is that the Indus civilisation may have preceded the arrival and existence of Aryans in India, and that Sanskrit was introduced from outside the nation. The proponents of this view propose that a Dravidian language may have been the main language of the Indus civilisation. The second, alternative view rejects this claim and instead posits that the Vedic and Indus civilisations are one and the same, thus rejecting any differences between Aryans and Dravidians (Trautmann, 2007; Thapar, 2014).

As Trautmann rightly contends, tracing this history of language families was especially important in the project of tracing the history of the people of India. The interactions between people categorised as Aryans and Dravidians were seen as a clash of races; the fair-skinned harbingers of Sanskritic and Vedic civilisation (Aryans) at war with the dark-skinned savages (Dravidians) (Iyengar, 1914). In the 20th century, these two views on the origins of Aryans and Dravidians came to be associated with language identities which were in-turn associated with territory. The association between race, language, and territory was politicised, in that Tamil and Telugu speakers invoked their Dravidian roots and contributed to the resurgence of the political history of *Dravidians* in their anti-Hindi imposition agitations (*End of Dravidian Era in Tamil Nadu*, n.d.). The agitations called for purification of Dravidian languages (Mitchell,

2009) which encouraged Tamil and Telugu speakers to rid their language of words that could be traced back as originating from Sanskrit. Importantly, Dravidian languages (like Tamil) were also shown to be equally, if not more, ancient than Sanskrit and its descendant (Hindi), and this was mobilised to demand equality of status for Tamil and Sanskrit (Annamalai, 2010; Forrester, 1966).

In conclusion, tensions emerged in the 20th century between north and south Indian people, marked by politicisation of a racial-linguistic category. These tensions gave rise to the political movement, namely the anti-Hindi agitation. Alongside other demands for linguistically organised states in India, the anti-Hindi agitation compelled the central government of India into rescinding their nomination of Hindi as the national language. Instead, they created the eighth schedule of languages, where regional languages were given official recognition as well as constitutional rights to the country's economic and social resources (The Constitution of India, 1950, Schedule VIII, n.d.).

2.2.6 Language Category Constructions: A Summary

Following are some important takeaways from the tracing of Tamil and Telugu identity constructions in south India. Firstly, I have shown that language identities, particularly in relation to their construction as mother tongues, are socially constructed. Over the 19th and 20th century, these two languages categories underwent a perceptual transformation; they went from being merely tools of communication in any given geographical area, to becoming symbols of passion and social categories which speakers could mobilise for political and practical purposes. Moreover, various stakeholders like writers, poets, publishers, readers, and the colonial British administration contributed to the forging of a complex association between language, territory, race, and the speakers. Categories thus forged could be mobilised whenever any of these aspects of the speakers' identity were perceived to be under a socio-political threat. This idea that these language-identities are constructed resonates with my prior discussion of Hindi and Urdu language identity constructions in north India.

There are also some observations worth discussing that differentiate between why politicians mobilised the Telugu and Tamil language categories in south India, versus why politicians mobilised Hindi and Urdu language categories in north India. One reason was that Hindi and Urdu identities was being forged for the purpose of creating nationalist identities, conceived as powerful enough to unite the entire population of India (in the case of Hindi) and Pakistan (in

the case of Urdu) (Orsini, 2009). On the contrary, the Tamil and Telugu identities were mobilised by politicians to specifically resist the nationalist agenda and to demand equal status for all regional languages. However, the movements mobilising Tamil and Telugu identities were not secessionist in nature. In the following section, I will situate this within the context of the federalist nature of India, drawing on scholarly work from political science.

Another reason for constructing language categories seems to have been to forge deep devotion and emotion for a particular cause. The processes of standardisation, classification, and homogenization aided this project differently in both north and south India. In north India, Hindi writers, publishers, and colonial scholars consolidated literary resources (such as literary genres) and standardisation to build Hindi as a symbol of unity to invoke emotions of nationalism and patriotism among Indians. In south India, Telugu and Tamil writers and publishers developed personification as a literary resource and reinvented their mother tongues as a symbol that has a life of its own (with the potential of death and loss) (Mitchell, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1997). The symbol in this latter case was that of *mother* or *goddess*, worthy of the worshipper's (speaker's) undying and eternal devotion.

I will now discuss the evolution of categories describing peoples of north and south India in the late 20th and 21st centuries, around and after India's independence from the British colonial rule in 1947.

2.3 Late 20th and 21st Century: North Indian and South Indian categories

This section will focus on two important points of discussion regarding the category constructions of north Indians and south Indians in the late 20th and 21st century in India. My first discussion is about the agitations and political movements between north Indians and south Indians, and their consequences for people in the decades after 1947. As mentioned previously, Hindi in north India had emerged as a symbol of nationalism and unity in India by early 20th century. At the same time, Tamil, and Telugu, along with other languages in south India were categorised as 'regional' languages. The political leaders of this time mobilised the perception of hierarchy between national and regional languages to resist Hindi's nomination as the national language, and to demand linguistic reorganization of Indian states. I will discuss in this section what these movements were and how they influenced the construction of 'north Indian' and 'south Indian' categories in the mid-late 20th century.

The second discussion in this section follows from my prior analysis of the religious-linguistic categories Hindi/Hindus and Urdu/Muslims in north India that emerged through literary and socio-political processes of the 19th century. These language categories had been constructed as different and extreme opposites, and with closely forged associations between language and religion and were mobilised to incite conflict between the religious-linguistic groups of ‘Hindi/Hindus’ and ‘Urdu/Muslims.’ The communal nature of these categories contradicted the ground-reality that people of north India used a mixed-tongue colloquially. Many people inhabiting the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, and Western Pakistan colloquially spoke a mix of Hindi and Urdu and they were forced to navigate their way through linguistic standardisation that categorised people as speaking either exclusively Hindi or exclusively Urdu. Some scholars contended that, consequently, the category *Hindustani speakers* emerged as a referent to this colloquial tongue and the identity of its speakers (Lahiri, 2016; Lunn, 2015). I will discuss in the following sections how this mixed-tongue served important purposes in every-day life and through its use in films as a medium of communication.

I will begin with my first observation about the 20th century political movements mobilising language categories and their consequences for people of north and south India.

2.3.1 Political Mobilisation of south India in the 20th and 21st centuries

After 1947, there were political demands for separate states to be created based on language (as previously discussed) (Wangchuk, 2019). Such demands for linguistically defined statehood were met with hesitation and resistance from the central government (particularly under leadership of the Prime Minister (PM) Jawaharlal Nehru). Under the PM’s leadership, the central government wanted to consolidate the country internally and the leaders were attempting to do so with Hindi as the linguistic symbol of the unified, country (Tillin, 2013c). Demands for separate statehood along linguistic lines were therefore deemed as a threat to internal peace and unity as is pointed out by Tillin (2013). Moreover, the proposal to promote Hindi as the national language was met with anti-Hindi sentiments (Annamalai, 2010) and resistance from within the newly formed linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh. These protests strengthened similar sentiments from within the Tamil, anti-Hindi movement growing in Tamil Nadu.

The anti-Hindi agitation in Tamil Nadu was triggered in opposition to the central government’s campaign for promoting Hindi as India’s official language. Leaders of political parties such as

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the latter breakaway (in 1972) party All India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) who were at the forefront of the agitations demanded retention of the official language status of English (Choudhry, 2016; Kumar, 2020). They also rejected Hindi and Sanskrit specifically as symbols of India's unity and as symbols of the nationalism project of the Indian government. As previously discussed, one reason for this rejection was that these languages came to be seen as an imposition, and an oppression that denied legitimacy to Tamil-speaking people and other minority identities: women, lower castes, and labour-classes (Kumar, 2020). As Choudhry contends, the nomination of Hindi as the official language would have potentially displaced political power away from the speakers of languages other than Hindi and towards Hindi-speaking people (Choudhry, 2016). Moreover, it would force speakers of other languages to learn an additional language (Hindi) in order to be competent enough for the same opportunities and rights as Hindi speaking people of India. This was perceived as an imposition and an unfair advantage for Hindi-speaking people (Annamalai, 2010). Another reason for the anti-Hindi agitation was the economic competition between regional groups that was gaining momentum after independence, for urban, well-paying, white-collar employment (Choudhry, 2016). For instance, public-sector employment was becoming an intensely competitive space, and making Hindi the sole official language was seen as an impediment to equal access to employment opportunities for non-Hindi speaking populations (Choudhry, 2016). As a result, economic competition underlined the politics of language in the 1960s. Non-Hindi speakers demanded the continuation of English as an official language because to ensure equal competition for the limited employment opportunities available for all Indians.

However, Tamil language was now seen as a site for formulating a new category with nationalist undertones, within a political discourse of imposed Hindi-nationalism introduced by north Indian political leaders (Pinto, 1999). In the late 20th century, therefore, language categories came to be mobilised as political categories, representing pursuit of economic advancement and equal social status (Brass in Tillin, 2013c). In addition to the construction of a strong linguistically defined political category, the demand for the linguistic reorganisation of states in 1956 was also motivated by a shift in the political structure of India because of the rise in regional political influence (through increasing influence of state-level political parties and leaders) and the incorporation of regional diversity (identities of caste and class) into India's federal politics (Tillin, 2013).

Alongside the anti-Hindi agitations, Tamil Nadu was also witnessing the mobilisation of a Dravidian national identity (Forrester, 1966). The origins of a *Dravidian identity* can be traced back to before the 20th century (Pinto, 1999; Trautmann, 2009), but it was mobilised as a political category by political leaders at the forefront of the anti-Hindi agitations in the 20th century. At the core of the Dravidian movement were anti-Hindi, anti-Brahminical, and anti-Aryan sentiments which defined *being Dravidian* as a political category cutting across differences of language, caste, and race, and instead fostered a Tamil speaking and a Tamil nationalist identity (Pinto, 1999). Dravidian nationalists launched a movement to oppose the Sanskritised languages of north India (especially Hindi), and to purify Tamil heritage of its Sanskritic elements. Pinto proposes that the Tamil-speaking agitators perceived Hindi and the national political leaders as representing a Hindu-Sanskrit social hierarchy including its oppressive caste systems (Annamalai, 2010; Pinto, 1999). Tamil speakers elected the political party DMK to represent their anti-Hindi, anti-Sanskrit, anti-Brahminical sentiments and to lead their movement on the political front (Forrester, 1966). The Dravidian movement foregrounded resistance and dislike for people of north India, particularly Hindi speakers, and their oppressive hegemony (Kumar, 2020; Pinto, 1999). The political agitations culminated when the central government of India passed legislation announcing the linguistic reorganisation of Indian states in 1956 (*The States Reorganisation Act, 1956*, 1956). This was subsequently followed by the addition of the Eighth Schedule of languages wherein 18 regional languages including Tamil and Telugu were made official state languages and were recognised as languages in which official governmental business can be carried out (The Constitution of India, 1950, Schedule VIII, n.d.). Even in the 21st century, this anti-Hindi, anti-Brahminical Tamil identity is mobilised as a relevant category against the central government in the event of a political or policy decision that is interpreted as an ‘imposition’ of the north over south India (Annamalai, 2010).

2.3.2 Politics of Identity in north India during the 20th century

While the people of south India were demanding separate statehood for themselves based on languages spoken, religion and caste emerged as dominant political categories in north India after the 1950s (Tillin, 2013c). While the central government granted statehood based on language to states in south India, similar demands by states in north India (particularly, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh) were not granted. The erstwhile political parties Congress and Bhartiya Jana Sangh (India’s then right-leaning political party)

were hesitant to even consider dividing this region into smaller states (Tillin, 2013c). One of the most prominent reasons for this hesitation was the relevance of non-linguistic category (religion). The upper-caste Hindu elites were extremely influential voters in this region of north India (Tillin, 2013c) and the political leaders of the region wanted to ensure their support in elections. This region of north India was also commonly referred to as the *Hindi Heartland* and political influence in this area was considered by scholars as being at the core of India's unity in the 1950s and 1960s. Following is a quote representing the sentiment of unity of the Hindi Heartland: "Our culture dates to the times of the Vedas. We have been the soul of Aryavarta. Our culture and language (p. 44) envelop Bharat" (Pant in Tillin, 2013a, p. 12). The Hindi Heartland was therefore defined by the importance of its geography (mountains, rivers, cities, shrines, and forests) to the religion of Hinduism, such that maintaining cohesion of this region represented India's long-term unity (Tillin, 2013a). This unity was also represented through the social order prevalent throughout this region, namely the hierarchy of castes or the Hindu varna system (Tillin, 2013c).

The heartland also comprised of several large states which were densely populated, thus making it crucial to the country's political stability. Dividing this region into independent states would have diminished its leaders' national influence (Tillin, 2013a). Altogether, the government's denial to divide these provinces into smaller states was consequential in sustaining the political dominance of a religious and upper-caste elite (Hindu, upper-caste politicians) who also represented a Hindi-speaking majority.

However, the symbolism and the hesitation to create new states in the region had political implications. Firstly, the perception of the Hindi heartland as at the core of India's unity significantly glossed over the history of the Hindu-Muslim heritage, prevalent in the region up to the 19th century (Tillin, 2013c). This included the rich literary history of Hindi and Urdu (apart from Persian and Arabic) discussed in previous sections. Secondly, the symbolism of a Hindi heartland further bolstered the religious-linguistic conflict between the Hindi-speaking Hindus and the Urdu-speaking Muslims. For instance, several communal riots took place in various parts of north India (Tillin, 2013a). Thirdly, the dominance of Hindi in and outside this region (as the national language candidate) was perceived negatively, sparking anti-Hindi agitations among non-Hindi speaking (and dominantly south Indian) linguistic groups. These protests hinged on the perception that Hindi as the national language would give its speakers (predominantly residents of the Hindi heartland) undue political and economic advantages,

creating a situation of hegemony and linguistic imperialism (Choudhry, 2016). Lastly, the narrative about Hindu unity was fragmented by caste-driven protests (Ambedkar in Tillin, 2013c). Scholars of caste politics like B.R. Ambedkar argued that the maintenance of large state boundaries in north India was propagating the dominance of upper-caste Hindus and maintaining the hegemony of a conservative hierarchical Hindu society (Ambedkar in Tillin, 2013c, p. 14). Therefore, people in north India belonging to lower castes and other religious communities began feeling distrustful and agitated by the idea of maintaining unity within the Hindi heartland (Tillin, 2013).

The feeling of mistrust had several important implications on the politics of both north and south India from 1960s to 1990s. The first was that regional identities were now being mobilised to demand statehood for associations of other social categories than language (Choudhry, 2016; Tillin, 2013c). In 1987, the leader of BJP demanded the formation of new states by arguing that administrative efficiency would increase if state sizes were reduced (Advani in Tillin, 2013c, p. 29). In north India, other demands for statehood were made within the Hindi heartland itself (Jharkhand and Uttarakhand) by Adivasi groups who claimed to have been marginalised from economic development. In south India, a demand was made for splitting Telangana region from the state of Andhra Pradesh. The demand was not based upon a linguistic category but based on economic inequalities faced by the residents of Telangana (Tillin, 2013). My key conclusion here is that new categories were being made politically more relevant in the late 20th century than language (tribal identity, caste, religion, and class). Consequently, language categories began to be side-lined, as relationships between the different regions of India became more complex and multidimensional.

The new categories became more relevant possibly because of the increased participation of regional political parties and local leaders in the central government. The reasons for a shift in India's political arena were manifold; they were influenced by the rise of a conservative, right-wing political party (Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP) and the decline of the influence of the more liberal, centre-leaning Congress party. The BJP, under the leadership of a politician L.K. Advani, emphasised religion as a marker of identity by relying on explicitly communal modes of political mobilisation (Tillin, 2013). In its initial years, the BJP produced a carefully constructed political discourse that centred an ethno-religious identity to rebuild Hindu unity in India (Jaffrelot and Brass in Tillin, 2013c, p. 27). The party also formed regional alliances with other political leaders demanding separate statehood for other identity-groups than

language. Forming alliances permitted the BJP to bolster their regional influence and protected their electoral interests by grounding their influence in the Indian politics from the 1980s. In north India, these changes were a major driving force behind new demands for separate statehood within the Hindi heartland and they culminated in the formation of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, and Jharkhand in the year 2000.

Therefore, the association between region and language was being slowly replaced by associations between region and religion, or caste, particularly in north India. These ‘new’ associations were being mobilised for political purposes and were interesting to political scientists and sociologists. More importantly, the conflicts discussed were ‘regional’ in nature, that is, concentrated within the regional bounds of either north or south India.

In the following section, I will discuss that at the same time, a different context was emerging wherein the people of north India and south India were being mobilised to represent more ‘mundane’ aspects of these people’s lives. This was the context of films and popular culture.

2.3.3 Symbolism in Films with Hindustani

Following the period of intense political mobilisation (1947-1956), little to no scholarly research investigated why and how the people of north India and south Indian were being mobilised based on the language categories (to my knowledge). There are, however, examples from films, popular culture, and songs from the late 20th century onwards, where they have been depicted. I will discuss some scholarly work from media and cultural studies which has examined how these depictions were done, in these contexts.

As mentioned earlier, in the 19th and early 20th century, Hindi and Urdu languages in north India had undergone standardization of script and vocabulary. On 15th August 1947, India became free from the colonial British empire. Immediately after independence, Indian political leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) were advocating for Hindi to be the official national language of India (Mishra and Nehru in Lahiri, 2016). The appointment of ‘Hindi’ as the national language was a decision made at an ‘institutional’ level. However, many speakers used a more mixed, colloquial tongue that seemingly existed solely as a verbal language and did not have a standardised script. The speakers used this colloquial language to converse in more mundane settings like in marketplaces where people negotiated with vendors (Lahiri, 2016, p. 72). The language also consisted of a vocabulary that was on a spectrum of registers that ranged

from distinctively Hindi to distinctively Urdu (Lunn, 2015). This language was referred to, by many scholars, as *Hindustani* (Lahiri, 2016). Hindustani was, by no means, a newly formed language (Rai, 2005; Mishra, 2012, 2020), however, it was a colloquially used language without a script and not stated in official institutional records.

In the mid-20th century, Hindustani became the primary language of Indian films, wherein screenwriters and playwrights used this language to entertain audiences through relatable movies, dialogues, song lyrics, and advertisements (Lunn, 2015). Screenwriters employed varied registers of Hindustani, alongside oral and visual markers, and indexed differences of socio-economic class, education, and religion between characters in a story (Sundar, 2016). Additionally, film songs were composed with a mixture of ‘high’ literary register as well as more ‘filmic’ Hindustani. The use of a variety of registers linked together the ‘old and high’ literary traditions documented in the history of India, and the “new and oral” filmic traditions represented in the films (Lunn, 2015). This made the films relatable to their audience by writing songs in ‘colloquial’ Hindustani, while also using the high registers of Hindi and Urdu to tell stories from Indian history to a massive audience. Consequently, Hindustani in the 20th century represented not a language identity but became an idiom for a community that existed between the extremes of exclusively Hindi or Urdu-speaking people (Lahiri, 2016). This language was also useful in depicting the mundane lives of people since it was used to narrate and depict stories of the Indian society and relationships through films.

Indian films, or specifically Bollywood films, had therefore emerged as a new context for producing an idiom attempting to bridge differences between Hindi/Hindus and Urdu/Muslims (Lahiri, 2016). Bollywood was a film industry that catered to diverse Indian audiences, spanning religions, castes, classes, regions, and literacy levels (Dwyer, 2010; Sundar, 2016). By using various tools of film making including predictable storylines, melodrama, ‘filmi’ dialogue, catchy songs, and Hindustani vocabulary (Lahiri, 2016), Bollywood films engaged the attention of its diverse audience. The language used in Bollywood films was a mix of standardized Hindi, Urdu, and the colloquial Hindustani, making it understandable to literate as well as illiterate audiences. Bollywood films have shaped Indian society and relationships of people with each other in the real world and have told stories of the life and the history of Indian people (Dwyer, 2010; Ganti, 2013). Dialogues, scripts, and songs were often initially composed in Hindustani (Lunn, 2015) and later distributed with dubbed prints or subtitled in various ‘vernacular languages’ across India. This maximised the audiences reached and went

beyond the literate audiences (Lunn, 2015, p. 13) to the semi-literate and illiterate communities. Lahiri contends that Bollywood's use of Hindustani made it "a flexible, miscible, endlessly expanding collage, using the syntactical structure common to Hindi and Urdu, but throwing in words from other languages at will: Persian, Sanskrit, Punjabi, and, especially lately, English." (Lahiri, 2016, p. 78).

Analysing this construction of a new *idiom* allows me to draw important conclusions. Firstly, it shows that language identity constructions served twofold purposes; it permitted the communication of ideas and stories, and it symbolised bridging of differences to a community that was being classified as either speaking Hindi or Urdu. Secondly, the Hindustani category was also mobilised by film directors or producers to represent everyday aspects (attributes) that described what being 'north Indian' or 'south Indian' was. Thirdly, we learn of a previously unexplored context in which depictions of peoples of north and south India were being done, namely films. Filmmakers used narratives, costumes, and dialogues written in Hindustani, to tell stories that would resonate with audiences in across the country, making the language Hindustani an idiom of the 'mundane.' In the following section, I will rely on some scholarly work by Rachel Dwyer (2010), Balachander (1981), and Ravi Vasudevan (1996) to explore how 'north Indians' and 'south Indians' were depicted in films.

2.3.4 Modern Cinema's Depiction of a north Indian identity

In the latter half of the 20th century, cinema became a significant new site for discussing identities and relationships between north Indians and south Indians as social groups. Several films since the 1950's have explored class differences, nationalistic themes, the importance of family values and morals, loving relationships, and romance, and even mythology (Dwyer, 2010) through their narrative plots, and other cinematic tools as listed above. One of these themes, is that of *warring* north Indians and south Indians, with conflicts caused by cultural, linguistic, and regional differences. Here, I present a brief analysis of three films with this theme: *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (For each other), *2 States*, and *Roja*. Through my analysis, I will explore the different cinematic tools that directors, screenwriters, and producers utilised to present stories narrating a complicated, conflictual relationship between these two social groups.

The first film '*Ek Duuje Ke Liye*' was released in 1981 and depicted a cross cultural romance between a south Indian boy (Vaasu) and a north Indian girl (Sapna) (Sundar, 2016). When their

romance was discovered by their parents, it was opposed by both families who put the couple through numerous obstacles trying to break them up. Vaasu's parents arrange a marriage for him to another girl (south Indian) and Sapna's arrange one for her to another man. At one point in the film, Vaasu learns Hindi in order to communicate his love to Sapna in a language she speaks. Tragically, despite their best efforts, Sapna and Vaasu's love story ends without reconciliation (Balachander, 1981). The film therefore explores a conflictual relationship between north Indians and south Indians through a romantic story plot. The film depicts stereotypical differences of food habits (such as eating meat everyday versus being purely vegetarian; this could also be depicting caste differences), languages spoken (Hindi in Sapna's family which is north Indian, and Tamil in Vaasu's family which is south Indian), interiors of the respective family homes (the furniture and seating arrangements, maintenance of gardens), habits (morning prayers), etc. Conflict between the families is also depicted through dialogues where families are shown as shouting at each other over their fences; Vaasu and his family had dialogues in Tamil while Sapna and her family have dialogues in Hindi. These depictions use language, song lyrics, background music, and visual representations to convey the differences between the two families as being almost irreconcilable and extreme. The plot of the film is focused on resolving the conflict between the families, but the film ends with no satisfactory resolution. This indicated that the cultural and social differences between families were constructed as far greater than what love can reconcile, and therefore the love story ends in heart-breaking tragedy for cross-cultural couple (Balachander, 1981).

The second film '2 States' which was released in 2014 is also based in the context of romantic relationships and family conflict. The plot of this film was also reconciling conflict between a north Indian and a south Indian family so that a cross-cultural couple can marry each other, but this film was released decades after *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (For each other). *2 States* is the story of a north Indian boy (Krish) and a south Indian girl (Ananya) who fall in love in college (Varman, 2014). Ananya and Krish decide to get married and with parents' blessings, but the families strongly resist this match based on cultural differences that they deem irreconcilable. The film then depicts the various ways in which the modern, cross-cultural couple convince their respective families to bless their relationship. Unlike Sapna and Vaasu's tragic ending, Krish and Ananya succeed and are married at the end of the film. However, the cultural differences between the two families are depicted using similar cinematic tool. For instance, dialogues were used to describe typical behaviours and characteristics of north Indian and south Indian families, and visual representations were used to show what a typical Punjabi wedding looks

like and what the furniture is set up in north Indian and south Indian homes. Moreover, the movie depicts that both families speak different languages (Punjabi is spoken by Krish's family and Tamil by Ananya's), and costumes were used to depict difference in appearances (hair, makeup, clothing, and food serving styles).

The plot of this film progresses in multiple stages. First, Krish and Ananya convince their families, one at a time, to agree to the marriage proposal and to accept their love. To do this, Krish moves to Ananya's city Chennai which is in south India. He 'helps' Ananya's family with various day-to-day problems and this convinces her parents that he is more than 'just another north Indian.' He is portrayed as capable of loving and providing Ananya with a happy marriage, convincing her parents to give their blessing to the couple. The second stage is when Ananya accompanies Krish to attend a north Indian wedding in north India. The goal is for them to convince Krish's mother to give her blessings. Ananya tries to win over Krish's mother by trying to cook a meal for her but fails because she does not do so very well. However, the mother is ultimately impressed with Ananya when she resolves an issue at the wedding and 'saves the day' with her charm and wit. Now that both families have given their approval to the couple, the third and final stage presents when both families come face-to-face to discuss wedding plans. At this stage, the conflict is again ignited because Krish's mother makes prejudiced insults towards Ananya and her family. Krish's father resolves this conflict by apologising for her behaviour. The apology concludes the film and leads to a happy ending, and Krish and Ananya are married. Therefore, that conflicts between Krish's north Indian and Ananya's south Indian families were established and negotiated in this film using resources like narrative plots and plot-twists, visual depictions of social and cultural differences, and conversations with stereotypical descriptions.

The third film *Roja* (released in 1992), explores through narrative content, a relationship between a 'south Indian' protagonist and the 'national' conceptualised as a 'Hindi speaking' space. It is a Tamil film, also later dubbed in Hindi. It is a story about Roja (a Tamil girl) who marries Rishi (also Tamil), who move to the state of Kashmir for Rishi's work. The film then depicts Roja's struggle to free her husband when he is kidnapped by militants in Kashmir (Ratnam, 1992). Ravi Vasudevan (1996) presents an excellent analysis of the film's form and content, and how thematic discourses may be broken into narrative segments going through a cycle of crisis and resolution. The film begins with the story of a girl from a small remote village in Tamil Nadu (pastoral world that demands recognition despite being subordinate to

the State or Nation), and transitions into a story about the Government (state) rescuing Rishi (saviour, authoritative, fulfilling Roja's hysteric demands, neutral) from militants (Vasudevan, 2011). The story captures the complex relationship between dialectic identities; national vs regional; Tamil-speaking woman vs the Hindi-speaking national government, and the state vs the militants. In this film, the depictions of north Indians and south Indians are through visual representations as well, showing the rural scenic beauty of Tamil Nadu, and the militant occupied, but scenically beautiful Kashmir.

Through the three films, it is noteworthy that north Indians and south Indians were depicted through representations of their mundane lives, embedded in varied cinematic contexts such as interactions between and within families, and between seemingly neutral, authoritative institutions (State) and individual subjects (citizens). These films also employed a multitude of tools such as dialogues, song lyrics, visuals, and aesthetics to demarcate differences between 'north Indians' and 'south Indians.' The depictions are significant to audiences as well (*2 States* (2014), n.d.; *Roja* (1992), n.d.) evident in their criticism of the films for containing clichéd, exaggerated, or stereotypical descriptions of north Indians and south Indians. This demonstrates my argument that analyses of films and popular culture illustrates how people belonging to the categories 'north Indian' and 'south Indian' are depicted. I also argue that within this new context, the categories are not used for political purposes, but rather more often to represent aspects of mundane life, such as love, family, and relationship conflicts. This links back to the examples from online sources (YouTube) presented at the beginning of this chapter and shows that the categories 'north Indian' and 'south Indian' are meaningful and relevant to people's mundane lives, and as such are observable and analysable.

2.3.5 The 20th century Category Constructions: A Summary

In this section, I traced the constructions of north Indian and south Indian categories in the latter half of the 20th century and the 21st century. Until 1956, the peoples of north and south India were mobilised for political movements, to demand reorganisation of Indian states along linguistic lines. In the latter half of the 20th century, other aspects of identity like caste and religion became more prominent and interest in language as a category marker significantly reduced.

At the same time, a new context was emerging where the categories 'north Indian' and 'south Indian' were being depicted, namely films and popular culture. I show, through analysis of

three films and the idiom of Hindustani, that they were used to illustrate aspects of peoples' mundane lives. This does not imply that 'older' constructions of north Indians and south Indians by language have become irrelevant. Rather, the categories are being re-fashioned to suit newer contexts, to serve different purposes, and the knowledge of their history serves as a historical backdrop shaping and moulding the meanings ascribed to the categories. However, the use of these categories has not been systematically examined by academic scholars, and this has created a gap in our understanding of how and when categories 'north Indian' and 'south Indian' are now used by people.

2.4 Key Conclusions this Chapter

Exploring the rich and complex history of the people of north India and south India was a particularly important exercise. There are several conclusions I can draw from it which are relevant for this thesis. Following are some key ones.

Firstly, I demonstrated that the categories north Indian and south Indian are not fixed categories that have existed in India. They were carefully constructed over several years, during the 19th and 20th century. Several key stakeholders were involved in this complex process of category construction, like literary scholars, writers, publishers, colonial British administrators, and colonial language scholars. I also show that these categories were constructed through the forging of associations between language, race, religion, territory, and caste. Therefore, the differences between members of these categories were not 'natural' or 'biological', but rather constructed and mobilised to inspire deep emotional attachment, and to consolidate political power.

Secondly, I show that language was a dominant attribute by which peoples of the north and south India were identified in late 19th and early 20th century. This identity served various functions and was mobilised for predominantly political purposes until the mid-20th century. For instance, I show that Tamil and Telugu identities served dual purposes; being the medium of communication, and being symbolised as mother or Goddess, and mobilized by politicians and activists to spearhead political agitations.

I also contended that most of the scholars whose expertise I have relied on, have studied the role of institutional stakeholders, like writers, publishers, political leaders, and freedom fighters, in shaping the constructions of these categories. They have also demonstrated the

important role of institutions like the government, universities, publishing houses, etc in shaping constructions of categories in north India and south India. However, the role of ordinary people and ordinary everyday contexts was largely unexplored. The discussion on films and popular culture, and my analysis of YouTube videos in the beginning of this chapter, shows that these categories were also mobilised to in mundane contexts, and to depict ‘mundane’ aspects of people’s lives such as how they dress, what they eat, and their habits and dispositions, and their relationships with others. This is therefore identified as a gap in the current literature on north Indians and south Indians. This thesis will attempt to address this gap and make a novel contribution to the same.

To this end, I am interested in systematically exploring how and when these categories are used by people and for what purposes these categories are invoked. The conceptual framework and methodology that will help me answer these questions are Discursive Psychology and Conversation Analysis. The next section explores in more detail, how and why this approach is appropriate for my interests. Following that, I will discuss my data-collection strategies, the dataset used, and outline four key analytic findings.

Chapter 3: Concepts and Methodology

In Chapter 1, I stated that my interest in the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ began with personal experience; I observed that these categories are invoked in conversations between friends, family relatives, peers, colleagues, etc at dinnertime, tea-time and on other seemingly mundane occasions on social media.

In Chapter 2, I traced some of the history of how these categories were used during 19th and 20th centuries. My review of scholarship on this time-period showed that people of north and south India were mobilised as members of various categories, and for various socio-political purposes. However, I also concluded by identifying a gap in scholarship that explores how people use these specific categories in interactions, especially in mundane online interactions on social media. I propose that there is a conceptual framework and methodologies called Discursive Psychology (DP) and Conversation Analysis (CA), and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA), which can assist my attempt to address this gap in literature on the use of these categories in mundane interactions.

I will reiterate my two research questions here: Where, when, and how are these categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ used in interactions on social media sites? What meanings do people ascribe to them?

The goal of the first section of this chapter is to explain these, and why they are appropriate for exploring my research interests.

3.1 Discursive Psychology as an Approach

In this section, I will present the principles of Discursive Psychology (DP) and summarise some key research that has explored membership categories, and categorisation practices within this framework. Discursive Psychology (DP) is a theoretical framework designed to explore how people make identities, categories, or emotions of others relevant in interaction (Wiggins, 2017). DP treats psychological concepts such as identity, and categorisation, not as a priori facts but rather as actions that are invoked and described in interactions (Wiggins, 2017).

DP has three core principles: discourse is both constructed and constructive; discourse is situated within social contexts; and discourse is action orientated. The approach also embraces

the epistemology of ‘social constructionism’ and proposes that there is no single ‘objective’ reality, since the objects of our study cannot be separated from our representations of them. Social constructionism treats knowledge of reality as constructed by social practices, cultural practices, and common-sensical knowledge possessed by people (Wiggins, 2017). The principles align with my previously discussed argument that the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ were not representing people as merely speaking a certain language, or belonging to a certain race, but as constructed and mobilised for political or social purposes relevant to the events of 19th and 20th centuries.

Most of DP/CA work on categories and categorisation builds on the lectures (Sacks, 1995b) of Harvey Sacks. His seminal lecture on the topic is titled *‘Hotrodders’ as a revolutionary category* (Sacks, 1979). In this lecture, Sacks examined the category *hotrodder* and how it is applied by teenagers to *do* rebellion. His analysis of this category demonstrated that people understand the world by organizing it into categories, and that categories can have one or more features that are conventionally associated with them (Sacks, 1979). Sacks’ explanation of categories can be studied as not ‘mental’ representations of the social world, but as deployed in talk to accomplish specific and locally relevant discursive actions (Edwards, 1998). Edwards (1998) also states that given a wide range of possible category descriptions, describing someone in terms of a specific category is done in order to accomplish the goals of that interaction (Edwards, 1998). Using examples of demographic categories like age, gender, and nationality used in couples counselling sessions, Edwards (1998) showed that descriptions like “girl” and “woman” are not merely used to identify the people involved in the session. They are also used to “do” other things like undermining the seriousness of Connie’s accusation that her husband Jimmy had an affair and not “merely a fling” (p. 26). The category “girls” was also shown to have, in one extract, been used to question the kinds of things that constitute a “girls” night, and “married women”, allowing the interactant (Jimmy) to differently describe the same incident than another (Connie) did (Edwards, 1998). Categorisation practices can therefore be understood as indexical, which means that the meanings ascribed to a particular category are based on the context and goals of the given conversation (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009). Analysts using DP/CA have also therefore contended that category memberships are not fixed mental constructs nor are they cognitive models about the real world, but rather tools that interactants deploy in ongoing conversations to accomplish social actions (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017).

Antaki and Widdicombe (1998) outline some principles (also discussed by Sacks) of taking a conversation analytic approach to studying identity and categories. Firstly, “being the member of a social category” implies that any of the attributes that are conventionally associated with that category can be ascribed to that member (see: Sacks, 1995a). Secondly, the categorisation of a person is indexical and occasioned (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998, p. 4). Within a segment of talk, the use of category memberships can be understood as occurring in the here and now and its use should be examined as such. This principle echoes my findings (in chapter 2) about the constructions of ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ categories as situated within the socio-political contexts of 19th and 20th centuries and mobilised for relevant purposes of that time-period. Thirdly, a category ascription can only become an analyst’s concern when that category is made relevant and oriented to by interactants in an interaction (p. 4). Fourthly, being attributed a category can only become an analyst’s concern if it becomes consequential to the unfolding interaction (p. 5). Lastly, the above four principles can be understood as an analyst, upon close examination of the structure of conversations (using Conversation Analysis as a methodology) (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998). Analysts using DP as the approach therefore explore how people use language to *do* specific actions, like arguing or blaming a part of an “interactional sequence” (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

DP/CA studies contend that various interactional resources, also called discursive devices are used by interactants to accomplish various interactional goals (Wiggins, 2017). Some of these are pronoun use and footing shifts, assessments and second assessments (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Pomerantz, 1984), silences and pauses or hesitations, hedging, extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), minimisation, lists and contrasts, affect displays, consensus and corroborations, disclaimers, details versus vagueness, and metaphors (Wiggins, 2017), and fact-construction (Edwards & Potter, 1992). For instance, Edwards and Potter (1992) show that using various discursive devices, interactants accomplished the actions of “attributing blame” and “producing accountability”. They show this by closely examining an event description: “John kicked his opponent” (pp. 89-90) can demonstrate that in the context of a football match, given the rules of the game regarding foul play and penalties, this is not merely a neutral description. Rather, it can be seen as *doing* other things like blaming, categorising the action of “kicking” as intentional, warranting a reaction from another player, and so on (Edwards & Potter, 1992, pp. 89–90). Using one or many such discursive devices therefore allows people to manage issues of accountability, attribution of blame or responsibility, legitimacy of an

account or claims, hesitation, and uncertainty of claims, treating the previous utterance as significant or insignificant, etc (Wiggins, 2017).

People can accomplish various psychological projects using discursive devices such as *doing* identity work, producing, and resisting prejudiced claims, stereotyping, or resisting stereotyped descriptions, etc. Therefore, the study of conversations or talk-in-interaction, encourages a much more active, constructive notion of the relationship between words and the social reality that they describe. Also, psychological topics such as personality or identity, or the self, can be invoked (Edwards & Potter, 1992) as resources which people draw upon to *do* certain bits of interaction. For instance, Edwards and Potter (1992) illustrated that in the case of a news interview, the category of “interviewer” permits production of an account as “neutral” and a “mere report” of an incident, rather than a personal opinion-piece (pp. 136-137). Such neutral descriptions could then allow an interviewer to produce ‘blame’ as a report of someone else’s stance, rather than be expressing themselves as interested and having stake in the matter (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 137). Edwards (1991) therefore argued that categories can serve as a discursive device used by people to *do* talking and accomplish other interactional projects. The kinds of things category use can accomplish that have been examined are persuading, blaming, denying, refuting, accusing (Edwards, 1991).

It is important to note that the discursive analytic approach was first developed as a critical response to some ‘traditional’ approaches within social psychology. For instance, several arguments challenging traditional cognitivist approaches to the study of social categories suggested that the use of experiments, surveys, and questionnaires, were removing people from their social contexts and removing their agency by putting people into *boxes*, or rigid categories to study their thinking and behaviour (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017). This allowed researchers to make a strong case for using naturally occurring interactions instead of ‘cleaned’ versions of social reality for analysis of social lives and psychological concepts (Humă et al., 2020).

Moreover, in traditional social psychological studies that centred a cognitivist approach, the concept of semantic categorisation is often found (Billig, 1985). This approach assumes categorisation as a process to be automatic, schema-driven, and unconsciously ‘switched on’ by participants (Turner et. al. in Edwards, 1998). Cognitive models of categorisation of this nature have been criticised in early work by discourse and rhetoric scholars. For instance, Billig (1985) argues that cognitive notions about categorisation assume this to be a fundamental and

inevitable feature that is deployed to make people's perception of their social realities easier. Consequently, he argues that such assumptions treat actions such as stereotyping and prejudice as inevitable outcomes of "normal" thinking. In his critique, Billig provides an alternative explanation, which stated that just as people categorise, they also particularise things and differentiate between one and the other (Billig, 1985). He argued that a person's deployment of either categorisation or particularization is occasioned and dependent on the context of the interaction, thereby serving a locally relevant purpose. In other words, one interactant categorising the other is not merely describing the other, but also "talking about it in ways that are adaptable to the situated requirements of the description, and to differences of perspective..." (Edwards, 1991). The rhetorical nature of categorisation extends my understanding from chapter 2, of "north Indian" and "south Indian" categories, which showed these categories as being flexible and contextually sensitive, rather than having pre-determined and rigid meanings.

DP argues that what we think or how we feel should not be the primary focus for studying and making claims about discourse and social interactions (Wiggins, 2017). Within this framework, language is treated as more than merely a "mode of communication". Instead, language should be the subject of analysis, since mental states (thoughts, intentions, feelings) of others cannot be accessed, only how they express themselves (Wiggins, 2017). Foregrounding the voices of participants with a focus on how they use language makes this method and its findings empirically sound (Wiggins, 2017). In conclusion, DP is the conceptual framework which would allow me to examine psychological concepts like how people ascribe categories to accomplish various interactional goals, in interactions that are mundane and naturally occurring.

There are two methodologies that discursive psychologists have often used when studying categories and categorisation practices, namely Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). Since my interest is in understanding how people use categories in interactions, I will be using these methodologies for my analysis. I will now summarise some key tenets of CA and MCA below.

3.2 Conversation Analysis (CA)

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a methodology that systematically investigates the structure of talk that takes place between people, in various contexts, including mundane and everyday

interactions (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). The kinds of interactions studied by CA are largely naturally occurring conversations that may be recorded or produced independently of the researcher. Sacks' work on conversation analysis was influenced by his background in Sociology, and his proposition that naturalistic observation be at the core of sociological science (Sacks, 1992, Vol 1: 28, in Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Within social psychology, the proposition of using naturalistic conversations was an alternative to the "traditional" approaches to the study of categories, which relied on survey questionnaires and vignettes, and testing to generate inferences about psychological concepts such as prejudice and categorisation that were oftentimes simulating real-world scenarios but were removed from the reality of every-day, and ordinary talk (Edwards & Potter, 1992). What is then the focus of CA study is interactions people have with each other, without the researcher being directly involved in them (Golato, 2017; Potter, 2002). These interactions are available to researchers for 'observation' via audio and video recordings. If interactions are textual in nature (for instance, Twitter posts), they are available via screenshots or software that allows scraping of the website to download the posts.

At the core of CA is the understanding that conversations are orderly accomplishments that are orientated to by the interactants (Sacks, 1995b). Therefore, the focus of analysis is on a sequential organisation of "talk" such that the "next turn" can be analysed to show understanding of what was accomplished in the "previous turn" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Such a turn-by-turn structure not only serves as proof for what the analysis is concerned with (what's going on in the interaction) but will also influence the responder's construction of their next turn (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson in Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). However, this is not to say that CA scholars aim to produce a list of predetermined, fixed rules wherein one utterance always would predict that the next one would follow one of many fixed replies. The same previous turn (A) can lead to any number of different responses (B or C) depending on the context of the interaction. This then makes what was indeed said in the next turn analysable.

An important tenet of CA is that talk-in-interaction itself should be studied as the object of analysis, rather than as a way of saying something about the internal states of mind, intentions, or as an access point for behind-the-scenes social processes (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Sacks in his work has also proposed that any resources used in talk-in-interaction are both context-free and context-sensitive (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson in Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). What this means is that the tools used by conversationalists to accomplish something in interaction

are not bounded by the context of the interaction and are widely available. However, the use of any given resource in any given interaction is sensitive to the context of what was said and before. This relates to my earlier discussion of one of the core principles of DP being indexicality and occasionedness. With regards to my thesis, this method is useful and relates to my discussion in chapter 2, about the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” because I am interested in how, when, and for what the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” are used in interactions. This means that I want to examine why a particular category was used in the given interaction, and how this is dependent on the prior utterance while also influencing the utterance that comes next.

I will now discuss membership categorisation analysis as the second methodology which will be used to examine how categories are used and what that accomplishes in the interactions.

3.3 Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA)

The second method for analysing category use and categorisation practices is Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). MCA analysts are more interested in categorial (race, gender, ethnicity, identity) practices (Stokoe, 2012) than CA analysts, who are more interested in the sequential organisation of talk. The focus of MCA analysis is on exploring how participants describe the world around them in terms of categories (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015). Moreover, MCA analysts are interested in answering when and for what purposes members make categories or categorial descriptions relevant in an ongoing interaction (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009; Jayyusi, 1984; Stokoe, 2012).

MCA was also (like CA) inspired by Sacks’ work on categories. In his lecture, “The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.” (Sacks, 1995a), he illustrated some concepts that are useful for analysing category use in “talk.” These were listed in her paper *Moving forward with Membership Categorisation Analysis*, by Stokoe (2012) while discussing MCA as a methodology. One of these was the concept of Membership Categorisation Devices (MCDs) which was an “apparatus” that allows categories to be understood as belonging to one or more collective categories (Stokoe, 2012). For instance, the categories mother, father, son, can be understood as belonging to an MCD called “family” (Sacks, 1995b). Another was the concept of “category-bound activities”, which suggests that there can be a set of activities that are expected from members because of their category membership in the context of that interaction. For instance, crying is attributed to the category “baby” in the sentence, “the baby

cried.” Sacks (1995) also argued that “category-tied predicates” are attributes or characteristics that are tied to the category which are made relevant *in situ*. For instance, a baby is expected, by virtue of her membership of this category, to cry when hungry (Stokoe, 2012). Another concept is that of *category-activity puzzle*, wherein particular actions can be paired with particular (un)expected categories to do things like produce humour (Stokoe, 2012). For instance, saying “male nurses” (Stokoe, 2012) is used to build a joke by implying a juxtaposition between gender and occupation.

Sacks (1995) also proposed that there are two rules of application when talking about categories and categorisation practices. First is the economy rule, which states that one category may sometimes be sufficient to describe a person. He gave the example that if a person is referred to as “baby”, other categories are available to describe the person, but even if no other categorisation is used, enough information has been conveyed to make the interaction possible and complete. The second is the consistency rule, which states that in case two categories are used next to each other (like mother and son, and father and daughter), and if they belong to the same standard collective category (like family), then the members of those categories may be referring to the same “family.”

It is important to remember that these concepts and rules are not merely a discrete list that can stand on its own as decontextualised. Instead, these concepts can be understood as a resource for accomplishing members’ goals in interaction and are a starting point for analysts looking to learn more about MCA. Stokoe (2012) presents an analysis of how MCA can be used to analyse interactants’ accomplishment of three types of activities: advice-giving, account-giving, and question-answering. More examples are presented in Stokoe (2006), of MCA analysis of how people do ‘gendering’ and what kinds of things are accomplished by holding each other accountable in terms of gendered categories. She argues that categories and attributes tied to categories are a part of the cultural resources that are available to members, to draw on, when doing something within ordinary interactions (Stokoe, 2006, p. 478). For instance, in an example from the paper, gender and occupation categories are invoked and ascribed to a team member “Kay.” The juxtaposition between these categories is used to invoke the “normative” expectation that the female team member “Kay” be the scribe for the group project (Stokoe, 2006, p. 481). Stokoe (2006) thus proposes that the gendered categories of being a male or a female employee were occasioned and made relevant in conversations to accomplish tasks such as nominating someone for a task. This links back to the argument that

categories are not merely a set of flexible, cognitive labels containing members and with fuzzy boundaries with other categories (Edwards, 1991). Rather, categories are something people *do* in specific contexts, and to achieve specific actions (like blaming, complaining, making assessments, denying something, persuading others, etc) (Edwards, 1991).

If we approach categorisation from this perspective, Edwards (1991) presents some implications of which three are pertinent to this thesis. Firstly, categorisation is crucial in accomplishing some social actions through interactions. These actions can include blaming, accusing, persuading, assessing, etc. Secondly, we can assume that the social actions are what linguistic categories are designed for. Thirdly, categories should be analysed through analysis of the discursive functions they are designed for, rather than how they may be mental representations of the social reality.

With the above overview of DP, CA, and MCA, I will now explain how these approaches will be applied to answering my research questions. I will be using interactions collected from social media sites for studying the use of the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian.’ Therefore, in the following section, I will outline the reasons for making this choice. I will also examine the scholarship within the DP, CA, and MCA traditions that has explored categories and categorisation with digital data as the material for analysis.

3.4 Rationale for using Digital Interactions from Social Media Sites

It has been estimated that globally, almost 4.22 billion people were recorded as being regular users of social media, although real numbers could be slightly lower because of bots and multiple accounts owned by same users (*Digital 2022*, n.d.). Also, almost 58.4 percent of the world’s population in 2022 was recorded as the user of at least one social media platform. Specifically in India, almost 47 percent people are said to be active internet users, and almost 33.4 percent of the total population was estimated to be active users of various social media platforms (*The Latest Twitter Statistics*, n.d.). These numbers show that social media platforms are very popular among people and are an ingrained part of a very large number of people’s ordinary and everyday lives.

Social media are an immensely popular site for mundane interactions (Gibson, 2009; Giles et al., 2015; Meredith, 2017; Meredith et al., 2021; Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). They are massive repositories of interactions often set in mundane interactional contexts. Importantly, these

interactions are often between public account holders, and therefore publicly accessible for analysis (*Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research.*, 2021). Some social media sites like Twitter provide their own APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) that allow researchers to collect large sets of such publicly accessible data to be used for research analyses. The datasets obtained using APIs are organised into tables, and record information about the tweets and their posters, like the number of retweets and favourites, mentions, replies, emojis, hashtags, URLs, media (photos or videos), location, language, and the content itself.

DP/CA/MCA studies on categories have extensively analysed audio or video recordings of *face-to-face* interactions as data (Edwards, 1991, 1998; Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009; Sacks, 1995b; Stokoe, 2006, 2009, 2012). This data has allowed researchers to rely on non-verbal features of talk like gestures, body positioning and orientation, pauses, pitch, gaze, and so on, in addition to language to explore how identity work and categorisation is accomplished in interactions. However, online interactions may not be of this nature, are often textual, and of several different types (Housley et al., 2018, 2023; Meredith et al., 2021; Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). For instance, blogs are a form of one-way interactions where the writer posts a blog to an open audience who may or may not respond to the blogs with comments. Social Media are another type of interactions, where tweets are posted generally with two kinds of audiences in mind, recipients who can be tagged or mentioned, and the broader audience who may see the tweets on their ‘feed’ and may choose to respond.

When analysing face-to-face or verbal “talk”, a standardised transcription can be used (Jefferson, 2004) which allows analysts to look at details of how the interaction sequentially unfolds through turn-taking in talk (Schegloff, 2007) and to pinpoint how and where categories are deployed. Analysts can also rely on two aspects of “turn-taking”, namely *Turn Constructional Units* (TCU) and *Transition Relevance Places* (TRP) to make sense of interactions as orderly accomplishments. TCUs are described as sentences, phrases, or words, which form a *turn* incrementally (Clayman, 2012, p. 152). TRPs occur at the end of a TCU, which can be marked by a change of speakership (like pausing to take a breath) (Clayman, 2012, p. 152; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Looking at such detail of an interaction would allow analysts to pinpoint the various practices and implications of category use in interactions. These will become relevant later. The Jefferson transcription system also captures other details of verbal interactions like pauses, high and low pitches, gaze, and gestures, allowing analysts to

make visible, the conversation in extreme detail (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Jefferson, 1986, 2004). In verbal ‘talk’, these resources are highly ordered, occur at specific instances, and serve various purposes (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). For instance, Jefferson (1986) has shown that overlaps in talk have occurred in highly ordered places such as when the next speaker treats the next occurrence as recognisable and uses the overlap to continue the utterance in the previous speaker’s turn. Another example of overlapping talk is when the next speaker suggests a completion for the previous speaker because they recognise some disfluency. Another instance where overlap can be identified is when the next speaker identifies that the previous turn is about to end and begins taking the next turn (Jefferson, 1986).

However, the textual social media interactions pose challenges to this traditional understanding of how ‘talk’ is structured. Chat forums and social media sites, such as Twitter, Reddit, Quora, and Facebook are designed as more “asynchronous” (Antaki et al., 2005; Meredith et al., 2021) and do not capture non-verbal features of interactions like pauses and silences, because these do not exist in textual chat. Overlapping talk, as discussed in Jefferson (1986), is not a feature of online talk, because each poster can only posts a complete turn and the responder is not privy to the content of this prior turn until it has been posted (Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). However, this is not to say that the quality of digital interactions is lacking, or not rich enough for analytic interest. For instance, analysts can look at emojis, punctuations (Meredith et al., 2021, p. 6), URLs, media attachments, and whether features of a platform (likes, retweets, sharing, hashtags, upvoting/downvoting, mentions, etc) are used. These “features” can be analysed as para-linguistic features that “do” things like agreeing, liking, disliking, supporting with evidence, expressing anger or happiness, etc. These can be useful in enriching analysis of the textual part of an interaction.

Despite the challenges, social media interactions have been of some interest to DP/CA/MCA analysts, especially their “asynchronous” nature (Reed, 2001). Some studies have proposed that online interactions have a “disrupted turn adjacency”, which meant that users employ explicit addressing, lexical repetition, or grammatical structures, in order to maintain coherence between two turns of an interaction (Berglund, 2009). Recent research has also noted that some features of face-to-face interactions such as “turn constructional unit (TCU)”, and “transition relevance place (TRP)” do not directly apply or remain relevant to digital interactions. This could be because online interactions are asynchronous and one user has to post a full turn before another can respond with the next turn (Meredith, 2017; Meredith et al., 2021). Unlike face-to-

face talk, interactions on social media have proven to be difficult to reconstruct as coherent or sequential. For instance, when looking at “historical” and “popular” tweets on Twitter, it is a challenge to reconstruct the order of tweets that replying to the original tweet. This is because the order in which the threads show up on one user’s timeline are often different from how they are displayed on another user’s browser.

The above discussion addresses some of the reasons why I chose social media as the appropriate site for my examination of the use of the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian.” Another important reason is that social media are a large repository of naturally occurring, and publicly accessible interactions. Analysing digital interactions using DP/CA/MCA is a growing body of work (Giles et al., 2015; Housley et al., 2018; Meredith et al., 2021). Data from various social media sites has been analysed, like Twitter, Facebook messengers, forums like Mumsnet, and blogs (Antaki et al., 2005; Giles, 2021; Housley et al., 2018; Meredith et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2021). However, how and for what purposes the categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ categories are used has not been previously studied in such contexts of mundane social media interactions (to my knowledge), making this a novel study. In the following section, I will discuss which platforms I have chosen for data-collection and give my rationale for the same.

3.5 The Choice of Platforms

The data was collected from two social media sites: Twitter and Quora. These platforms were chosen because they are extremely popular and widely used in India. According to a report published in April 2022, Twitter was one of the top 5 social networks in India, following YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, and with a user share of 49% (*Social Media*, n.d.-b). Quora was the seventh most used social network in India, with a user share of almost 35% (*Social Media*, n.d.-a). On average, Twitter users were also more likely to belong to middle-high income groups rather than low-income groups and were likely to be based more often in mega/metro cities than in rural/ smaller ones, although a small minority who occupy the latter were known to use the platform (*Social Media*, n.d.-b). Quora users were less likely to belong to low-income groups in comparison to the middle- and high-income groups and they were also more likely to be living in mega/metro cities in comparison with rural towns and villages. The information about Twitter and Quora users was collected using online surveys and questionnaires. More than 24000 users of each platform submitted responses to the

questionnaires and were between 18 and 64 years of age (*Social Media*, n.d.-a; *Social Media*, n.d.-b).

I previously argued that posts on social media can be addressed to two types of audiences, ones who are addressed explicitly in a post, and more broadly to anyone who sees the post on their ‘feed.’ Meredith and Stokoe (2014) argue that the nature of digital platforms is designed to be interactional, and therefore, any messages posted on such platforms are aimed at audiences who are recipients (Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). On Twitter, for instance, users can arguably ‘address’ anyone who can see their tweets or use features such as hashtags and mentions to specifically address other users, who can then be tasked with taking the next turn. This means that either tweets spark off several responses or remain standalone and do not receive any responses. Similarly, on Quora, questions are typically addressed to either users subscribed to certain forums, or broadly to any user on the platform. If questions are posed, they will either receive answers (which form the next turn) and comments (which become subsequent turns) or remain unanswered (standalone). This means that posts collected from both Twitter and Quora are recipient-designed, with a target audience in mind (Meredith et al., 2021). Recipient-design is also an important focus in CA because the analysis focuses not only on what is said in any given turn, but also what a responder orients to from the previous turn (Sacks et al., 1974). This is pertinent to my data-collection process because, I will only be analysing posts that either received replies or were embedded within ongoing ‘threads’. This is for two reasons, first because my interest is in users’ use of *reply-to*, *answer*, or *comment* functions. Second is to manage feasibility and space constraints that are raised by social media’s data collection.

In the above section, I have discussed some of the key principles of the DP/CA/MCA approach and some research which will inform my analysis. I also discussed some reasons why this is a suitable approach for addressing my research questions, which I will reiterate here: When, and for what purposes do individuals use the categories ‘north Indian/south Indian’ in conversations with each other? What meanings do people ascribe to the categories ‘north Indian/ south Indian’ in these interactions?

In the next section, I will outline my data collection process and how I managed ethical implications associated with analysing digital data.

3.6 Data Collection

Data was collected from Twitter and Quora between 9th October 2020 and 16th October 2020 (inclusive). The keywords “north Indian” and “south Indian” were used. This time 9th October 2020 to 16th October 2020 was chosen because it excluded any pre-planned social or political events, such as elections, festivals, politicians’ birthdays, award ceremonies, etc. Excluding pre-planned events was important because I wanted to examine the uses of these categories in mundane interactions.

From Twitter, I collected the tweets by running an R-script in RStudio (see [Appendix: R Script for Collecting Twitter Data](#)) which accessed a Twitter through a developer app by accessing the site via the official Twitter API. The script was run three times a day at regular intervals, to collect a maximum of 1000 tweets with the keywords each time. Quora does not have an official API to automate data collection and hence I collected questions, answers, and comments manually using the same keywords “north Indian” “south Indian.” Search was done once at the end of each day between 9th and 16th October 2020 (inclusive). The questions and answers were stored in an excel spreadsheet. Every day, the top 5 questions and their top 5 answers were recorded, from the search results. At the end of the collection period, a total of 40 questions and 200 answers were recorded. The limit of top 5 hits per day was implemented to manage feasibility of the dataset to be transcribed and analysed. All questions posted between the time-range were included as data, along with all subsequent answers posted within the same timeframe. Additionally, I included any question-answer sequences wherein the questions may have been posted before 9th October 2020, but an answer to that question was posted within the 8-day time-period and contained the keywords. At this stage, the number of tweets and posts collected were only individual posts, without the context of their interaction. This dataset was then ‘cleaned’, and interactional sequences were extracted and transcribed. After cleaning the data and transcribing it, the final dataset consisted of 80 Twitter threads and 20 Quora posts.

Each platform has different interfaces and display their posts as ‘interactions’ differently. This impacted how the data was transcribed for the purpose of analysis (Giles et al., 2015). I therefore adopted different procedures for cleaning and transcribing posts from the sites. There is no standard transcription system available on how to transcribe online textual data (Meredith, 2015). As stated by Meredith (2015), transcriptions should be readable and should include

sufficient information necessary for an analyst and a reader, to be able to understand the data and produce a coherent analysis. Importantly, the transcript should be accessible to others within the field so that the transcription practices can be shared and understood (Meredith, 2015). Keeping these arguments in mind, the following templates of Twitter and Quora transcripts were created (see also McVittie et al., 2021; Sambaraju, 2021 for some examples of Twitter transcripts).

A typical *thread* was either a standalone tweet, or a collection of tweets which were replying to each other. The latter kind of threads were recorded as such when one original tweet was replied to (using the reply feature) by one or more tweets, and each reply was directly replying to the original tweet using the *reply to* feature. Following is an illustration of the template.

Twitter Thread: Template 1

Opening Post

1 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

2 Enter Tweet text here.

3

Quote Tweet (If any)

4 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

5 Enter Tweet Text Here.

6 (**) Replies** (**) Retweets** (**) Likes**

Reply 1

7 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

8 *Replying to @Username*

9 Enter Tweet text here.

10 (**) Replies** (**) Retweets** (**) Likes**

In the above template, there is an opening post, which is the first post in the thread, and this is the tweet to which all subsequent replies are produced. In some cases, the opening post contained a quote-tweet, which can be characterised as an “attachment” from which some information is being shared with the opening poster’s audience but with extra content from the Opening Poster (OP) (*How to Retweet*, n.d.). There were some threads where some responses were indirectly addressing the OP but directly responding to one of the reply-tweets. I recorded these with an indent after the relevant reply tweet. Following is a template for the same.

Twitter Thread: Template 2

Opening Post

1 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

2 Enter Tweet text here.

3

Quote Tweet (If any)

4 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

5 Enter Tweet Text Here.

6 **() Replies () Retweets () Likes**

Reply 1

7 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

8 *Replying to @Username*

9 Enter Tweet text here.

10 **() Replies () Retweets () Likes**

Reply to 1

11 **Username (abbr.) @Username . Date**

12 Enter Tweet text here.

13 **() Replies () Retweets () Likes**

Therefore, the reply-to feature was used to demonstrate the sequential organisation of Twitter threads. Additionally, following information was recorded about each tweet:

1. **Replies** - number of replies to this tweet.
2. **Retweets** - number of retweets on this tweet.
3. **Likes** - number of likes/ favourites on this tweet.

A thread was defined as any opening post, a subsequent reply tweet, and any subsequent *reply-to-reply* tweets. One opening post could have multiple direct replies and so could consist of multiple ‘threads.’ These threads were collected into one file which was called the ‘transcript.’ My final dataset consists of 88 transcripts containing either ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian’ used in either the original post, a reply-tweet, or a reply-to-reply tweet.

Following is how questions and answers from Quora were ‘cleaned’ and transcribed.

I defined a ‘post’ on Quora as a question with all answers and all comments to any of the answers that were posted in response to the question. This followed the platform’s organization of questions, answers, and comments. For each question, I collected additional information, such as the date that the answer was posted, and the number of upvotes and the number of comments posted in response to each answer. All the questions and answers were then transcribed to note details of the interaction and each ‘transcript’ contains one question as well as all answers that were recorded as replies to that question. Each ‘transcript’ was thus, a ‘thread’, with a maximum 1 question and 5 answers. Following is the illustration of a Quora transcript.

Quora “thread”: A template

```

Question:
1  Enter question text here.
2
Answer by: Username (abbr.) . Date
3  Enter contents of the answer here.
4  () views          () upvote          () comments

Comment 1 by: Username (abbr.) . Date
5  Enter comment text here.

```

The post above depicts the original question, which serves as the opening post, with an answer to the question, and a comment on the answer. A total of 20 Quora ‘transcripts’ were annotated, each with one question and a maximum of 5 answers. Either the question or the answer contained the keyword “north Indian” or “south Indian.”

3.7 Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations that are raised when studying interactions on social media. These are related to two considerations, those of privacy and consent. Addressing some of these considerations is essential, because DP/CA/MCA analysis relies on reproducing the data verbatim to ensure rigor of analysis and empirical nature of findings. Most of the ethical considerations were addressed referring to the BPS guide for internet-mediated-data, the Twitter API documentation, and Quora’s data privacy policy (*Ethics Guidelines for Internet-*

Mediated Research., 2021; *Quora - About*, n.d.; *Twitter API Documentation*, n.d.). The concerns that were not discussed in these guides were addressed on a case-by-case basis. While transcribing the data, care was taken to anonymise all identifiable information (names, bios, locations), in line with the BPS guide (2021).

Related to privacy is the concern of maintaining users' anonymity. Twitter and Quora allow users to create *public* profiles, which stipulates that the posts from these users are visible to anyone who may or may not have an account on the platform. Additionally, the user creating a public account does not need to provide explicit consent for their 'publicly accessible' content to be used for research purposes (*Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research.*, 2021). In the case of Twitter, the official API only provides access to such 'public' posts and accounts, and as a result, collecting tweets for research does not require explicit consent from the users (*Twitter API Documentation*, n.d.). Quora on the other hand, does not have an official API. Therefore, data was collected using screen capture, and from public accounts and public forums.

Having collected the data, some further privacy concerns are raised. If a public account or a public post is deleted, can the data already collected from that account still be used for research? Moreover, if the public account is subsequently made private by the user, can their data be used for research given they were collected when the account was public? These questions are continually debated within wider literature (Ahmed et al., 2017; Takats et al., 2022; Webb et al., 2017) and there are no resolved answers to them. I will thus briefly discuss how I have addressed some of these concerns during the process of data cleaning, for this thesis.

Whether data was publicly accessible or not was regularly checked for 8 weeks after the data-collection process since this was the time-period when the data were transcribed for analysis. If any threads were deleted during this period, this data was excluded from analysis, and treated like if experimental or survey participants had withdrawn consent within a time-period after data collection. However, any data that was still publicly accessible at the end of transcription period was included in analysis. The same rule was also applied to any data from accounts that were publicly accessible at the time of data collection but were made private any time after 8 weeks from data collection. If accounts were subsequently suspended or deleted, any tweets from that account were also retained, if it had been 8 weeks or more since data-collection. The reason this was done was because any deleted or suspended accounts would not be reverse-searchable, and thus their privacy would be protected. The exception to this was if an account

was privatised after 8 weeks post-data collection, since the accounts were still active, but the posts were not visible anymore. However, this case was treated similarly to when participants are given a stipulated amount of time to withdraw from an experimental study or a survey, after participation and since the stipulated time-period had passed, it would be unnecessary to regularly verify the public status of the posts or tweets. Lastly, any posts that were from private accounts, even if embedded within an ongoing conversation, are not included in analysis, and were not collected. The study has been approved by the University of Edinburgh's PPLS Ethics Committee; the reference number is: 171-2021/1.

Addressing the above-mentioned ethical considerations, I transcribed all the Twitter and Quora data, and then began my preliminary analysis. I will discuss my initial noticings now.

3.8 Reflexivity Statement

As outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter, this study combines various methodologies (DP/CA/MCA), and it is therefore important to explicate the relationship of the researcher vis-à-vis the topic of study. Sacks (1992) said the following on subjectivity:

It may well be that you could build a social science which a Chinese sociologist could examine to see that it's cogent and doesn't at some point for the analysis rely on Members' knowledge, but where he could never do another case and could never see why you came to pose the problems you did, or how you decided that you thought that some activity was going on which you then could show was going on. And of course, that's not such a strange conception for many sorts of researchers in which persons can understand a finding that they can't themselves have constructed and can't construct another. (Sacks, 1992: p.487)

My role as a researcher in this study has been aligned with this idea, that my questions are inspired and informed by my position as a member of the Indian society, where I am exposed to others' use of the categories "north Indian" and "south Indian", and as a member who has often been ascribed these categories as well. However, the analysis itself has been done with the motive for being objective and only presents members' knowledge of culture that allows the analysis to seem cogent to a reader and aligns with the facts about culture made relevant by the members (posters whose data has been reported).

A second point to be made here is that of how the categories "north Indian" and "south Indian" map onto social groups with regards to the considerations of this study. As outlined in Chapters

1 and 2, these labels were used to invoke complex relationships between various markers of identity: religion, language, race, caste, and geography were particularly significant. However, a review of where these categories get used, and personal knowledge as a member of the society where they are frequently invoked, there are colloquial variations available and used, such as “southies” or “northies”. Due to concerns of space and scope for the thesis, this study has limited its exploration to the use of specifically “north Indian” and “south Indian.” These categories are nevertheless treated as mapping on social groups panning differences of religion, language, geography, and race, but only as and when members make particular markers of identity relevant in their use of the categories.

3.9 Preliminary Analysis

Once all the data was transcribed, I began analysing each ‘thread’ in detail and recording some initial observations, or ‘noticings.’ I then created collections based on my observations by creating collections of threads based on the interactional contexts in which the categories were invoked. I will be discussing four interactional contexts in this thesis, which are as follows:

1. The first context is in responding to an assessment about a food item (idli). The categories are not used in the assessment, but in the several replies to the assessment. The threads wherein this was observed were taken from Twitter. I will examine what these categories are used for, in these reply-tweets in chapter 4.
2. The second context is in complaint sequences. The complaints are about another user’s use of the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian.” I will examine how these complaints can be identified as such, and how they are replied to. These complaints were also taken from Twitter. I will examine how and for what these categories are used in complaint sequences in chapter 5.
3. The third context is in asking or answering questions. I noticed that one of two questions invoked the category “north Indian politicians”, and the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” were invoked in the answer to the second question. The examples used in this chapter were taken from Twitter. The use of these categories in these two questions and their answers will be discussed in chapter 6.
4. The fourth context is also question-answers, but the data used in this chapter is from Quora. Three questions will be examined, and several answers to each of these

questions, where the categories were first invoked in the question. I will examine what they were invoked for, and what was accomplished, in chapter 7.

The interactional contexts, namely assessing, complaining, and question-answering have been studied previously in DP/CA/MCA literature. I will use this past research as the basis for my analysis and situate my findings within this literature. In addition to answering my questions about use of categories “north Indian” and “south Indian”, I will discuss how my findings contribute to the literature on assessing, complaining, and question-answering. The next chapter will look at the first of the above-mentioned interactional contexts, namely assessments and how they are responded to.

Chapter 4: Responding to Assessments

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the first interactional context in which the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” are invoked: in responding to an assessment of a food item called idlis. By looking at several responses to the same assessment of a food item, I will attempt to answer the following questions: How and when are the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” used in these assessment sequences? What do users accomplish by using these categories? While analysing the use of these categories, I also hope to learn something about assessment sequences and extend the current literature on them. I thus propose the following additional questions: how are first assessments of a specific food item responded to? What implications does this have for our understanding of assessments as an interactive social activity?

The food item assessed in this chapter is called idlis, which are a staple breakfast item consumed by people residing in many states of south India like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Kerala (Madur, 2018). They are traditionally made from fermented rice, shaped as cakes, steamed, and accompanied by a spicy chutney or sambar (Madur, 2018). Chutney is made by mixing freshly grated coconut, green chillies, coriander, and mint (*Idli Sambar*, 2012). Sambar is a spicy lentil blend, prepared by cooking lentils, vegetables like onions, carrots, tomatoes, drumsticks, and tempering it with spices such as mustard seeds, cumin, red-chillies, curry leaves (Swasthi, 2015). While there are regional variations to how these accompaniments are prepared, some of the above-mentioned ingredients are common across the various recipes.

My analysis will demonstrate that in responding to an assessment about idlis, posters rely on a range of discursive resources, particularly membership categories like “north Indian” or “south Indian.” By analysing the responses to the assessment, I will show that users routinely respond with an agreement or a disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984) through which they highlight issues of epistemic authority of the assessor and demonstrate their own right to produce second assessments. In some examples, posters neither agree nor disagree (Pomerantz, 1984; Wiggins & Potter, 2003) with the assessment. Instead, they question the very production of the assessment in the first place. There has been extensive interest in how assessments are proffered and responded to in past literature from DP/CA. I will summarise some of this below; this will

be useful to situate my findings about the use of categories in this context and to learn something more about assessment sequences.

4.2 Literature Review

Assessments are described by Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) as an activity performed by speakers or recipients which evaluate some person or some event while talking to one another. Most commonly, assessments are done by using adjectives such as “beautiful” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992). In the context of everyday and institutional interactions, assessments are also described as sequences which allow the speakers (assessors) to claim access to, experience of, or the knowledge of, that which they are assessing (the assessable object, person, place, event) (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992; Pomerantz, 1984). In some cases, assessments can be understood as products of social interactions, as shown in the following illustration from (Pomerantz, 1984):

J: Let's feel the water. Oh, it...

R: It's wonderful. It's just right. It's like bathtub water.

(Pomerantz, 1984: 57)

J invites R to participate in feeling the water, and R participates by not only feeling the water, but also assessing it as “wonderful”, “just right”, and comparing it to bathtub water. By producing the assessment, R demonstrates their experience with the water and claims access to the assessable object which is the water. Therefore, assessments are constructed in this example as the product of a social interaction and constitutes the social activity of ‘feeling the water’ (Pomerantz, 1984).

Being products of interaction, assessments are often co-produced by participants. Products of social interaction would mean that assessments are the outcome of an interaction. When they are co-produced, assessments may not be the end goal of the interaction as a whole and instead be produced while doing something else. One type of accomplishment that makes assessments interactional, is responding to first assessments with second assessments (Pomerantz, 1984). First assessments are constructed routinely in ways that allow the assessor to accomplish one or more actions such as complaining, complimenting, insulting, bragging, self-deprecating, etc (Pomerantz, 1984). Second assessments are then produced by a responder in the turn immediately following the first assessment, and often refer to the same object as assessed by

the first assessor (Pomerantz, 1984). The way an assessment is proffered by the first assessor is relevant to those who are responding to such first assessments and can therefore be structured in ways that invite either an agreement or a disagreement.

Pomerantz (1984) examined preference organisation in some assessment sequences and showed that first assessments proffered in every-day interactional contexts can routinely invite recipients to proffer second assessments that are agreements. This is done by constructing assessment turns with marked agreement components. See the following illustration:

1 J: T's- tsuh beautiful day out isn't it?
 2 → L: Yeh it's just gorgeous . . .

(Pomerantz, 1984, p. 61)

The assessment is denoted by “beautiful”, and the object being assessed is “day.” In this example, the assessment invites an agreement marked at the end of line 2 by a tag question “isn't it?” The question mark indicates that J is inviting a response from L and “isn't it” constructs the question as marked by a preferred and expected next-turn response, which is an agreement with J's evaluation of the day as beautiful. If agreements are the preferred response, the next turn was shown to have one or more of three features. Firstly, they were upgrades, marked using stronger evaluative terms than first assessment did. Secondly, agreements were *same evaluations*, in that they repeat the first evaluation with markers of agreement as a second-in-turn, like using “too”. Lastly, they can be downgrades when the evaluative terms in the agreement turn are weaker than those in the first assessment (Pomerantz, 1984). Despite an agreement being the preferred turn, responders sometimes still disagree with the first assessment and produce a dispreferred turn (Pomerantz, 1984). This disagreement is marked by “disagreement components” such as disclaimers, hedging, silences, delays, repair initiators, or weak agreements with contrast indicators like “however” or “but” (Pomerantz, 1984).

Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) showed that assessments are actions that can be accomplished interactionally, within one sequential turn unit or spanning over multiple turns and collaboratively accomplished by multiple interactants. They demonstrated that participants use interactional turns to coordinate their perspectives on the assessable object, and negotiate any proffered agreements or disagreements on the assessment of the object (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992).

The study of assessments has revealed that there is a close relationship between an assessor's proffering of an assessment and their claim to knowledge about the assessed object (Pomerantz, 1984). This becomes recognisable if an assessor refuses to evaluate something or someone by claiming that they lack sufficient knowledge of or access to, the assessable object (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 57). Therefore, the epistemic authority of an assessor is a critical part of the assessment and is an inherent feature of the production of that assessment. Heritage and Raymond (2005) showed that participants assert and negotiate epistemic access and rights to assess in first and second position assessments. They demonstrated that a first position assessment implies that by default, the first assessor has primary epistemic rights to the referent (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). It follows then, that the second position assessor has secondary epistemic access to that referent. This hierarchical arrangement is not fixed, but rather negotiated routinely in assessment-agreement sequences by using combination of interactional features like 'oh' prefaces, upgraded or downgraded second assessments in response to first assessments (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). Heritage and Raymond (2005) also argued that interactants often work up their agreement as independent of the first assessment. Doing so was a way of showing independent epistemic access to the referent whose assessment was being agreed with. Hayano (2011) also demonstrated, through an analysis of the use of Japanese 'yo' final particle, that strong second assessments (agreements or disagreements) are often contingent upon the speaker's own epistemic stance (Hayano, 2011).

There are several contexts in which assessments have been studied. Pomerantz (1984) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) examined assessments that were proffered in everyday interactions. Assessments have also been studied in languages other than English in the same contexts of everyday interactions. For instance, Hayano (2016) studied assessments proffered in ordinary interactions in Japanese and how epistemic rights and subjective experience of the assessed object is managed by assessors. She showed that interactants who experience the assessed object first-hand and independently of other interactants may proffer "subjective assessments" (Hayano, 2016). Seuren (2018) studied the production of evaluative and deontic assessments as they are proffered and responded to in interactions in Dutch. He analysed telephonic conversations between friends and family concerning mundane everyday topics within which assessments were produced in response to inquiries and often were one of two types (Seuren, 2018). First were called *evaluative assessment*, which were similarly structured to those examined in Pomerantz (1984) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1992); assessors expressed an evaluative stance towards the assessed object. The second were *deontic*

assessments, which were proffered by the assessor to secure acceptance of and commitment to an action proposed to be done in the future, that involves both interactants (Seuren, 2018). The difference between evaluative and deontic assessments was then that both are stances articulated towards an answer, but the former treated the answer as news or information and the latter treated it as a proposal. Seuren (2018) also examined assessments that were a part of various other actions such as story narration, or proposal and acceptance, that took place over multiple turns of interactions.

Lindström and Mondada (2009) reviewed literature that has analysed the use of assessments in institutional settings. They argue that assessments produced and negotiated in institutional settings seemed to contribute to, and be shaped by, the local specificities of the institutional contexts (Lindström & Mondada, 2009). For instance, in a counselling setting, the epistemic authority of the assessor (counsellor) may be related to their expertise (as knowledgeable about counselling related matters), the membership category ascribed to them in that context, or to any category-tied attributes or expectations (Lindström & Mondada, 2009; Sacks, 1995b). One such institutional setting was that of news reporting, examined by Clayman and Reisner (1998). By analysing audio recordings of editorial conferences at newspaper offices in United States, they demonstrated that assessments are proffered by editorial staff members, about the newsworthiness of a piece of news article. These assessments were used to gatekeep which news articles go on the front page. They show that in their examples from this context, mildly favourable assessments are more common and followed by little to no follow-up discussion. On the contrary, strongly favourable or unfavourable assessments can lead to follow-up discussions on the newsworthiness or content of the newspaper article (Clayman & Reisner, 1998).

While the language used can tell us a lot about assessments, there is also a lot to be learnt from analysis of non-verbal features of talk. There is indeed a body of research that has focused on multimodal practices that interactants can utilise while proffering assessments and upgrading, downgrading, or responding to them (Lindström & Mondada, 2009). Wiggins (2002) also examined the expression of gustatory pleasure using sounds like ‘mms’ in evaluations of eating and food produced in dinnertime conversations. The use of gustatory ‘mms’ was observed in study of food assessments with infants and children (Wiggins, 2002). Haddington (2006) showed that in addition to the use of language, interactants use gaze patterns as a resource to take a stance in everyday interactions (Haddington, 2006).

This study is interested in how assessments about a food item are proffered and responded to. I will now summarise past literature examining food assessments. Wiggins et al., (2001) explored the performance of eating in everyday life as an interactive activity. They demonstrated that descriptions and evaluations of food (food assessments) are actions that can be accomplished while eating. They also showed that assessments can be studied *in situ* as proffered to accomplish actions, like building accountability, refusing food, and invoke ‘norms’ (Wiggins et al., 2001). Research on assessments has revealed that two main types of assessments have typically been observed in interactions, namely subjective and objective assessments (Hayano, 2016; Wiggins & Potter, 2003) and accomplish different interactional goals. For instance, subjective assessments were shown to have been used in accounting for a future course of action (like refusing a second serving), or in constructing an assessment as an opinion (Edwards & Potter, 2017). They were also (in some cases) used to request for more food to be served.

Wiggins et al., (2001) also argued that evaluating food is a socially achieved activity and has consequences for the conversation within which such evaluations are embedded. This was illustrated in the study of item versus category assessments. Wiggins and Potter (2003) showed that item evaluations, like disliking the carrots served at a specific dinner are different from category evaluations, like disliking “carrots” as a general category of food (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). This distinction exists because proffering one or the other type of evaluation can accomplish specific things for the evaluator. For instance, item evaluations can be used to refuse second servings, and category evaluations can be used to establish preference for a different type of food, like white wine over red wine (Wiggins & Potter, 2003). Therefore, food and eating were shown to be inherently social accomplishments. Moreover, taking part in eating as an activity and assessing food was shown to shape how our relationships with others are constructed (Wiggins, 2002; Wiggins et al., 2001; Wiggins & Potter, 2003). This research on food assessments therefore demonstrates that assessing food is functional and serves specific purposes for the interactants doing the assessment and even for those receiving it.

Apart from category and item evaluations, there were also subject-side and object-side assessments (Edwards & Potter, 2017) that were examined, in dinnertime interactional contexts. Edwards and Potter (2017) showed that object-side assessments occurred more frequently and were used to assess something as an inherent feature of the assessed objects (Edwards & Potter, 2017). Meanwhile, subject-side assessments were often invoked to

establish personal experience of the referent object, or to establish epistemic rights to assess, or even to frame the assessment as a subjective matter of opinion rather than an inherent property of an assessed object (Edwards & Potter, 2017). Assessments were thus shown as used not only for producing affiliation and upgrading an agreement, but also potentially to disaffiliate, and contend the epistemic authorities of assessors, and in some cases, to establish distinct rights to assess the specified object (Edwards & Potter, 2017).

Despite extensive interest in assessments, there are some notable avenues unexplored by the past literature. Firstly, most of the research on assessments in mundane contexts has used face-to-face or synchronous interactions for analysis. This is also true of the research on food assessments, which have primarily used video recordings of face-to-face conversations between family members at mealtimes. What has not received much, if any, attention is the context of social media interactions and food assessments online. The proffering of food assessments in a context that is not a mealtime conversation raises interesting questions about functions that such assessments are proffered to fulfil, when the goal is not to engage in the social activity of ‘eating.’ The food assessment literature summarised above has focused on family mealtimes, and therefore the set of purposes for which assessments may be used would be different from an online context. For instance, positively assessing a dish at mealtime may be useful to ask for second helpings, or to compliment the chef. Similarly, criticising a food item in these contexts can be used to refuse second or third servings or to justify leaving food on the plate, etc. In online interactions, assessments do not serve these purposes, but they can be used to do other sorts of things, as I will show through my analysis. Another unexplored avenue is the use of categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” in assessment sequences, which is the primary objective of this chapter. The use of these specific categories, and particularly in responses to assessments in online social media contexts has not been previously explored and is a novel aim of this chapter.

4.3 Methodology

The data analysed in this chapter was taken from Twitter and consists of several direct responses to one food assessment about one food item, idlis. This first (initial) assessment was proffered as an answer to a question posed by Zomato India (ZI), a food-delivery service in India. The assessment was posted by the user EA and received more than 1500 replies since it was posted on 6th October 2020. Out of these, 60 replies were posted between 9th and 16th

October 2020, which is my data collection period. Of these 60 responses, 8 invoked the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” and are included in my analysis. The number of instances may be small, but they are being analysed closely to show how assessments are responded to in various ways, and when the categories are invoked in the sequences. The thread being analysed only includes direct response to one specific food assessment. The responses analysed were tweeted between 9th and 16th Oct 2020.

Preliminary analysis of the assessment and responses showed that there are three ways in which posters respond to the first assessment. The first is by agreeing with the assessment of idlis, indicated using “agree.” The second kind of response was disagreeing with the assessment. The third kind of responses neither agree nor disagree, but rather question the reasonableness or very proffering of the assessment in the first place. I will organise my analysis in this way.

4.4 Analysis

The thread presented below was started as a response to a question from ZI. The use of quote-tweet as the feature to reply to ZI makes EA’s post becomes an Opening Post (OP), since the reply to ZI is indirect (*How to Retweet*, n.d.). The response to the question comes from user EA, which is an assessment about a food item called idli. This question-answer pair is common to all responses analysed in this chapter, because they all respond directly to the assessment from EA. I will therefore begin by looking at the question and EA’s assessment.

First Assessment: Idli are the most boring things

Opening Post
 1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
 2 *Replying to @User_ZI*
 3 Idli are the most boring things in the world
 4
 5 **Quote Tweet**
 6 **ZI** @User_ZI . Oct 4, 2020
 7 What’s the one dish you could never understand
 8 why people like soo Much
 9 **Replies 1.5K** **Retweets 1.1K** **Likes 2.4K**

The question is presented on line 7, “What’s the one dish you could never understand why people like soo much” by ZI. ZI is the official Twitter page of the food delivery service Zomato

India. ZI creates a distinction between ‘people’s’ opinions and that of an individual (the potential responders). People is used as a category to whose general assessment towards idlis is contrasted with an individual’s (the responder’s) assessment. By using “you could never understand why”, ZI constructs the opinion about food as incomprehensible to the prospective responder. ZI thus invites Twitter users to name one food item that, in their opinion, is exaggerated and people’s opinion of which is incomprehensible to the responder.

This question resembles what the newspaper Daily Beast referred to as a “whimsical viral” question, commonly inviting Twitter users to provide controversial opinions or judgments, but on issues that are not polarising or political (Sommer, 2019). These kinds of questions are posted to invite people to engage with it and this is done by EA, who proffers the food ‘idli’ as his answer with an evaluation of this food (line 3).

On line 3, EA responds to this question by naming the food ‘idli’ as the assessed referent, and by producing an assessment of it using the descriptive word “boring”. EA uses an extreme-case formulation, “most boring things in the world”, which allows him to make this a strongly negative assessment. Using the extreme-case formulations (Wiggins, 2017) allows EA to mitigate ‘going next’, since the assessment is framed as a declarative stance not in need of an account or an explanation. The strong negative description nevertheless orients to the question’s invitation for an exaggerated opinion (“you could never understand”, “soo much”; line 3). It is also an objective assessment, because the evaluation of idlis as “boring” is characterised as an inherent feature of the food rather than a matter of merely the assessor’s opinion about the food (Pomerantz, 1984).

As noted above, I will now examine 8 responses to EA’s assessment of idlis, starting with the first type of response, namely the agreements.

4.4.2 Responding with Agreements

The first type of responses to EA’s assessment is an agreement. Extracts 1, 2, and 3 below are instances of these. Agreeing with a first assessment is a recognised feature of assessment sequences (Pomerantz, 1984). The first extract presented below is an instance from my data that is similar to the assessment–agreement sequence identified by Pomerantz (1984) in everyday verbal interactions. Note that this extract does not invoke the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” and has only been included for the purpose of illustrating the

similarity between these agreements and those observed by Pomerantz (1984). Following this, I will present the two agreements which invoke the category “south Indian.”

Extract 1: I agree with this take.

Opening Post

- 1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
- 2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

- 3 **SK** @User_SK . Oct 10, 2020
- 4 *Replying to @User_EA*
- 5 I agree w/ this take.

Here, SK produces a straightforward agreement with the initial assessment on line 5. The poster SK produces this agreement as subjectively constructed. The use of “this take” also indicates that EA’s assessment of idlis is treated by SK as an opinion rather than as an inherent feature of the food, and it is this opinion that SK is agreeing with. This extract is like the agreements observed by Pomerantz (1984) in some of her data, because they include an agreement component (“agree”) and are second assessments. SK thus produces a subject-side second assessment of the same referent (idlis) in response to EA’s object-side assessment.

In the following two extracts, users do more than just agree with EA’s assessment. The responses from NV and KI have two notable observations. Firstly, they produce an agreement (Pomerantz, 1984) in their response. Secondly, they provide an account for the basis for their agreement by invoking the category “south Indian.”

Extract 2: In spite of being South Indian

Opening Post

- 1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
- 2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

- 3 **RB** @User_RB . Oct 9, 2020
- 4 *Replying to @User_EA*
- 5 In spite of being a South Indian who cannot have any

6 north Indian food for breakfast.. I have to say I agree
7 with Mr. EA.. idlis and Puttus are boring

Extract 3: As an Indian married in a south Indian family

Opening Post

1 **EA @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020**
2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

4 **NV @User_NV . Oct 9, 2020**
5 *Replying to @User_EA*
6 as an Indian married in a South Indian family I am
7 going to agree with you. Idlis are strictly OK. I
8 had them once a week past two months and I feel I
9 am done with idlis for good.

In extract 2, RB agrees with EA's assessment by saying, "I have to say I agree" on line 6. In extract 3, NV also agrees with EA's assessment saying, "I am going to agree with you" on lines 6-7. Therefore, both replies are explicitly agreeing with EA's assessment. However, both RB and NV do more than merely produce an agreement.

Looking at the terms of agreement in both extracts 2 and 3, it can be seen that the agreements are reluctantly proffered in both cases. RB's assessment is constructed as reluctant because of lack of alternative food options, such as "north Indian food" (line 6) which hedges the agreement. The lack of alternatives is indicated using "cannot" and "any" on line 5; "any" is also an extreme-case formulation indicating that there is not even one item from the "north Indian" food category that would work for RB's eating requirements. NV's reluctance is evident through the production of the agreement as an ongoing commentary using present continuous tense. Producing an agreement with reluctance marks this as a dispreferred opinion, and as the result of a certain lack of choice rather than ready and willing agreement with EA's assessment of idlis. In both extracts, the reluctance is also implied by the stating of the basis for agreement.

Both RB and NV describe the basis for their agreement as being based in the category "south Indian." In extract 2 on lines 5-6, RB says, "in spite of being a south Indian who cannot have any north Indian food for breakfast." RB categorises himself as a "south Indian" and invokes

first-hand knowledge of what members can and cannot eat, which makes his agreement credible. The use of membership category “south Indian” implicitly states that eating idlis is a regular category-bounded experience for RB and is constructed as the basis upon which RB agrees with EA. Using “cannot” RB also indicates that he has no other alternative breakfast choices, than idlis. RB also orients to the category-bound expectation that, as a member of the category “south Indian” he is expected to like idlis. Thus, his own assessment of idlis as boring is constructed as not normative, and therefore reluctant, but credible based on his membership of “south Indian” category. RB’s self-categorisation as ‘south Indian’ allows him to establish independent access to the assessable object. Idlis are a staple breakfast item for south Indians, and by constructing himself as a typical member of this category, he constructs his access to idlis as based on regular consumption of the dish because of his category membership. In extract 3 on lines 6-7, NV describes the basis for her agreement by saying, “as an Indian married in a South Indian family I am going to agree with you.” She self-categorises as “an Indian married in a South Indian family” and uses this category membership as the basis for agreeing with EA’s assessment. The category “south Indian family” is implicitly ascribed the expectation that members of this category eat idlis regularly and like them. By stating her relationship to one instance of the category “south Indian family” (as that of marriage), NV invokes this category-bound expectation as being her experience of the assessed food (idlis). She therefore constructs her experience of the assessed referent as first-hand and credible, through her membership of the “family” device (Sacks, 1995a).

Furthermore, both RB and NV extend their agreement by establishing independence of their stance towards the referent. In extract 2, RB does this by extending the description of idlis as boring to include Puttus. Puttus are another staple breakfast item eaten regularly by people in the southern Indian state of Kerala, and is prepared as a steamed rice and coconut log served with kadala kari (black chickpeas curry) (Amit, 2017). Including another food in the agreement constructs Puttus and Idlis as being similar foods. By extending the assessment to include a similar food item, RB also establishes his agreement as being independent of EA’s assessment. In extract 3, NV establishes independence of her stance towards idli by using personal subjective experience with idlis. She says that she has regularly consumed idlis over a period of 2 months. The regular consumption of idlis implies that NV’s assessment is not based on one-off experiences but has been formed through repeated exposure to the food. This constructs NV’s assessment as credible based on her experience. NV then says, “I feel I am done with idlis for good” on lines 8-9 to indicate that the number of times she has consumed idlis was

regular enough to make her evaluation of them an informed one. This construction of a credible, informed agreement makes her stance independent, and an extension of EA's assessment.

RB also proffers his agreement as an objective construction, "idlis and Puttus are boring", making boring an inherent and objective characteristic of the food, rather than merely a matter of opinion. The object-side construction strengthens the agreement as not a subjective opinion held by RB, but as an inherent feature of the referent. Similarly, in extract 3, NV states her agreement as, "idlis are strictly OK", which is also an object-side assessment and names the referent being assessed. Calling idlis "strictly ok" neither upgrades nor downgrades the initial assessment as boring. The word "strictly" used here implies that idlis are no more and no less than merely "ok". In response to EA's extremely negative assessment (most boring), NV's reformulation of idlis assessment is mild, and still negative.

To summarise, the assessment of idlis proffered by EA was agreed with by RB and NV. In both extracts, the agreement was explicitly stated and both users extended their agreement by describing the bases of their assessment by invoking the category "south Indian". By using this category, both RB and NV invoked regularity of consuming idlis as a category-bound attribute and use the attribute to make their agreements credible. Both agreements were constructed as reluctant, implying that the agreement was not readily proffered, but rather was a held due to lack of alternative choices. Lastly, both RB and NV extended their agreement and established their independent epistemic access to the referent "idlis."

In the next 4 extracts, I will examine replies to EA's assessment that disagree with his assessment of idlis. However, posters do more than merely disagree with the assessment; they invoke the categories "north Indian" or "south Indian", as a resource in these disagreements. What these categories are invoked for and how, is the focus of the following section.

4.4.3 Responding with Disagreements

The users in the following extracts respond by disagreeing with EA's assessment of idlis. However, the disagreement is not produced explicitly using "disagree". Users raise issues of epistemic authority and entitlement as the basis for disagreeing, as shown below. In extracts 4 and 5, we see that respondents invoke self-categorisations in disagreeing with EA's assessment of idlis. They also use knowledge about idlis and how to eat them to as the basis to dismiss EA's assessment.

Extract 4: I am not south Indian but Idli is one of my favourite

Opening Post

1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

3 **YV** @User_YV . Oct 10, 2020
4 *Replying to @User_EA*
5 Do you know how to consume this dish? Just like you
6 should not have cooked rice by itself, the same
7 applies to Idli too. May be, Chutney and Sambar is
8 too spicy for you and that makes your tweet as boring
9 as you are.
10 PS: I am not South Indian but Idli is one of my
11 favourite dish

Extract 5: Enraged South Indian here

Opening Post

1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

3 **KK** @User_KK . Oct 9, 2020
4 *Replying to @User_EA*
5 Enraged South Indian here 😏 It's like saying burger
6 without veggies/meat and sauce is bland. The real
7 taste is when you eat it with sambar or chutney 😊

In extracts 4 and 5, posters YV and KK disagree with EA's assessment by challenging his credibility to assess idlis. This challenge is posed by indicating that his method of eating them is questionable and by stating that he does not have the knowledge needed to eat them correctly.

In extract 4, YV disagrees with EA by questioning his method of eating idlis. On line 5, this is done through a question, "Do you know how to consume this dish?" The question is posed as a rhetorical one, as it implicitly constructs the assessor as not familiar with how to "correctly" consuming idlis. The question is also rhetorical because YV follows this up with an answer that

describes the ‘correct’ way to eat idlis. He begins by comparing the consumption of idlis and rice, “Just like you should not have cooked rice by itself, the same applies to Idli too.” Here, comparisons between how idlis and rice should be consumed implies advice giving and that the same method of consumption applies to both food items. By grouping rice and idlis, they are treated as belonging to the same category, that is, as dishes that are ‘supposed to’ be consumed with accompaniments or sides. Posing the question (line 5) also assumes that there is a correct way to eat idlis and the assessment of idlis should be based upon this knowledge. Following this, YV says, “May be, Chutney and Sambar is too spicy for you and that makes your tweet as boring as you are” on lines 7-8. He hypothesises, that the accompaniments chutney and sambar may be too spicy for EA and therefore that he may have consumed idlis incorrectly, that is, without chutney and sambar. Having grouped rice and idlis into a category of foods that are not supposed to be eaten without accompaniments, YV makes available the understanding that Chutney and Sambar may be the ‘known’ or ‘typical’ accompaniments for idli. YV therefore demonstrates that he has access to this knowledge and assumes that EA does not and that this led to the latter’s assessment of idlis as boring. Finally, this assumption is used to criticise the assessor and his assessment, “That makes your tweet as boring as you are.” The use of “and that makes you...” indicates that the basis for criticising and assessing EA as boring is his lack of knowledge of how to correctly consume idlis (with chutney or sambar).

In extract 5, KK disagrees with EA’s assessment by dismissing it. KK does this by self-categorising as south Indian and using this category membership as the basis for dismissing EA’s assessment. In doing so, KK invokes epistemic knowledge of the “real taste” of idlis by explaining that idlis taste good with accompaniments like chutney or sambar. KK begins by invoking his category-membership “enraged south Indian here” and indicating that he is speaking as not only a member of the category ‘south Indian’ but also because he is enraged by EA’s assessment of idlis. The use of an emoji depicting “relief experienced after narrowly avoiding disaster” (‘What Does Grinning Face With Sweat Emoji 😓 Mean?’, 2018) constructs this also as a po-faced remark, used to indicate KK’s response as disapproving. KK then produces an assessment of another food, that is a burger, and draws a comparison between idlis and burger. They are both foods which come with accompaniments. In case of the burger, he states that these are vegetables (“veggies”) or meat, and sauce (lines 5-6). In case of idlis, he mentions that these are sambar or chutney (line 7). He uses the comparison between these two foods to make the point that idlis or burgers can only be correctly consumed by including their accompaniments. With this, KK implies that EA’s assessment of ‘idlis’ alone is incorrect

because it is incomplete without sides or accompaniments. This comparison justifies him being enraged at EA's assessment and dismisses it by constructing the assessment as incomplete, or inappropriate.

Both KK and YV also demonstrate their own knowledge of idlis and use this to construct themselves as credible sources to be disagreeing with and dismissing EA's assessment. KK ends his disagreement with, "the real taste is when you eat it with sambar or chutney" on line 6-7. Here, he demonstrates his knowledge of how to eat idlis by framing it as objective or factual knowledge. This is done by invoking the side dishes sambar and chutney, and by characterising eating idlis with sambar and chutney as the 'real' taste. Producing this information allows KK to construct himself as credible and someone who knows what idlis really taste like when consumed with accompaniments. KK's self-categorisation as a "south Indian" on line 5 also implicitly constructs him as a credible source to know about how to eat idlis, since it invokes the category-bound expectation that KK regularly consumes this food for breakfast. On line 10-11 YV produces the source of his credibility and knowledge about idlis with a postscript, "I am not south Indian but idli is my favourite dish." This postscript allows YV to state the basis for his disagreement with EA and the basis for his knowledge about idlis. YV positively assesses idlis by saying, "idli is my favourite dish" and constructs the basis of his knowledge of idlis in personal experience and choice. He also states that he is not a member of "south Indian" category. This invokes the category-bound expectation attributable to "south Indian" category that idlis are regularly eaten by members for breakfast. This experience tied to category membership is rejected, and the personal experience from idlis being his "favourite" is used as the basis for his knowledge about the dish. Grounding his knowledge in personal choice implies that he has not only consumed the dish multiple times, but also that he would know more about idlis and how they are to be eaten than about other dishes. The postscript therefore serves to provide YV the epistemic knowledge about idlis, which makes him a credible and knowledgeable source to be questioning and challenging EA's knowledge or assessment of idlis.

The disagreements presented in the following 2 extracts also does not explicitly use disagree and are produced by undermining or dismissing EA's assessment. However, these ascribe a category membership to EA and use this to construct his assessment as uncharacteristic, or unnatural for a member of that category.

Extract 6: Thank God you're not South Indian

Opening Post

1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
 2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

3 **JC** @User_JC . Oct 10, 2020
 4 *Replying to @User_EA*
 5 Thank God you are not a South Indian other wise you
 6 would have had to go through in sufferable mornings
 7 everyday, Now what delicious healthy meal do you use
 8 to have in morning greecy (*greasy*) bacon or cereals
 9 with milk ?

Extract 7: Not only south Indian, over half of India might attack you

Opening Post

1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
 2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

3 **YR** @User_YR . Oct 9, 2020
 4 *Replying to @User_EA*
 5 For someone who's food tastes like tears, you
 6 folks talk alot. Not only South Indian, over half
 7 of India might attack you.

In extract 6, JC undermines EA's assessment by invoking category-memberships as a resource. JC characterises EA as "not south Indian" on line 5 and claims that being south Indian would mean that EA would have to eat idlis every day for breakfast, invoking the category bound expectation that idlis are regularly consumed by members of this category. JC therefore implies that if EA was a "south Indian", his assessment of idlis as boring would imply that he would not enjoy eating them regularly. JC therefore builds a hypothetical scenario that would be "insufferable" to a member of the category "south Indian" and juxtaposes this with EA's reality of not being a member. This scenario states that being a member would invoke the category-bound attribute of eating them every day, which would be "insufferable" for someone who described idlis as boring. Therefore, consuming idlis is treated as category-bound to being

“south Indian”, and so not being a member of this category constructs EA’s ‘situation’ as a relief, which YR expresses by saying ‘Thank God’ on line 5.

In extract 7, YR disagrees with EA’s assessment by invoking category-bound attributes and uses these to dismiss his assessment. YR categorises EA as “you folks” and claiming that the food consumed by members of this category tastes like tears. EA is categorised as a member of this category using “someone”. The phrase “tastes like tears” is an idiomatic expression that implies that the food is salty and bland, like tears are. This expression therefore assesses the food as lacking any taste, and as not containing spices besides salt. Categorising EA as “you folks”, YR constructs his assessment as produced by a member of this category, and not as his subjective assessment. The food described using “tastes like tears” is also category-bound to EA’s membership category (of English) “you folks” using “who’s food” on line 5. Ascribing EA this category and describing his food as salty and bland is used as the basis upon which EA’s assessment of idlis as boring is dismissed. YR does this by constructing EA as a hypocrite, whose own food (belonging to the category he is a member of) is bland. EA’s assessment of idlis as boring is thus constructed as contradictory to his food preference. The hypocrisy is indicated using “talk a lot”, which is an idiomatic expression used by YR to categorise EA’s assessment as gibberish, or babble. This allows YR to dismiss the assessment as being merely chatter and not serious.

JC extends his disagreement by undermining of EA’s assessment with a question about his breakfast preference. He produces two options: bacon, and cereal with milk, which are accompanied by the adjectives, greasy, delicious, and healthy. Bacon is described as greasy which implies that the food is fatty or oily, and cereal with milk is described as delicious and healthy. Description of bacon contradicts its assessment as healthy, and milk is implicitly characterised as “bland”, since it does not contain any spices or other flavours. The two options are thus constructed as unhealthy and bland, implying that JC’s question is actually sarcastic. JC thus constructs EA’s alternatives (to idlis) as bland and unhealthy which allows him to undermine the assessor as someone with questionable food preferences.

YR also extends his disagreement and dismissal of EA’s assessment by claiming that members of two categories, “south Indian” and “over half of India” will attack him for his assessment. He uses the ‘not only-but also’ construction to claim that at the very least, members of the ‘south Indian’ category might attack EA. Using “over half of India” after “south Indian” allows YR to upgrade the assertion of who might attack EA because it indicates that the number of

members in the category “south Indian” is less than “India.” This construction also implies that “south Indian” members will most definitely “attack” EA, and invokes category bound expectations that “south Indians” regularly eat idlis and like them, and hence would be offended if someone assesses them as boring. The assessment is constructed by YR as offensive and reactive, using “attack”. However, this reaction is constructed as not definite, but rather as a possibility (“might”). Saying that south Indians might attack EA invokes some shared cultural knowledge that idlis are a “south Indian food” and because of this attribution, south Indians may be justified in attacking someone who is criticising “their” foods. Dismissing EA’s assessment and constructing it as offensive also implies that EA does not have the appropriate epistemic entitlement to be assessing idlis. This is potentially because the category ascribed using “you folks” is constructed as not having the correct category-bound knowledge and entitlement to know about idlis. Therefore, YR implicitly disagrees with EA’s assessment by dismissing the assessor’s knowledge of them.

Through extracts 3-6, I have shown instances in which indirect disagreements are proffered in response to EA’s assessment. These disagreements were shown to invoke category memberships or epistemic knowledge as resources to support the stance taken. In extracts 4 and 5, the disagreement is produced by self-categorising as someone who has the correct epistemic knowledge required to correctly eat and assess the referent (idlis). In extracts 6 and 7, the assessor EA is constructed as member of categories without such epistemic authority and knowledge of idlis; this is used to undermine or dismiss his assessment as unserious or incorrect.

In the next section, I will look at two examples in which a different type of response is produced to EA’s assessment. In these extracts 8 and 9, users neither agree nor disagree with EA. Instead, they discuss the very proffering of assessment in the first place.

4.4.4 Neither Agreeing nor Disagreeing with the Assessment

In extracts 8 and 9, users SR and EM employ humour and category-memberships to discuss the very production of an assessment of idlis. In Extract 8, SR expresses disbelief at EA’s assessment, indicating that he is not permitted to assess idlis because his assessment was offensive to some people.

Extract 8: Am not even a south and am hurt

Opening Post

- 1 **EA** @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020
 2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

- 3 **SR** @User_SR . Oct 9, 2020
 4 Reply to @User_EA
 5 😁😁😁 beg for forgiveness before the idli fatwa!!
 6 BTW how could you ?? Seriously!! No sympathy... am
 7 not even a southie and am hurt

SR uses humour to question EA's right to criticise or to negatively assess the food item idlis and then expresses disbelief at EA's assessment, constructed as an offending evaluation. In doing so, however, SR does not actually respond to the assessment itself with an agreement or a disagreement. He instead questions the very production of the assessment by EA and formulates the assessment as hurtful.

SR replies to EA's initial assessment on lines 5-6 with a humorous construction that anticipates a negative reaction from users reading the assessment. He tweets, "beg for forgiveness before idli fatwa!!" and uses three grinning smile emojis. The use of the three grinning emojis (Twitter Emoji List, n.d.) indicates that the upcoming response is going to be humorous or should be read as such. Asking EA to beg forgiveness constructs the assessment of idlis as wrong or offensive to those who like idlis. SR then talks about the consequence of the assessment and of not apologising namely, invoking idli fatwa. In Islam, a fatwa is a legal ruling that is made by a legal scholar on matters brought to the Islamic courts by individuals (Fatwa | Definition & Facts | Britannica, 2023). A fatwa is also seen as prescribing a punishment for something said by an individual that is blasphemous. An idli fatwa is treated here as ruling to ban or impose restrictions on idli consumption by EA and treats his assessment of idlis as blasphemous. The consequence of fatwa is constructed as ridiculous and extreme due to the preceding grinning emojis and by the two exclamation points at the end of the sentence (line 5), treating the consequence as comical, ridiculous, and therefore, humorous. The ridiculousness of possibly imposing a fatwa on EA is implied also because the punishment of imposing an authoritative ruling on one individual is constructed as extreme and not justified by the offense committed

namely, not liking a particular food. The use of emojis, and humorous construction of consequences also offsets the seriousness of SR's response.

SR's reprimand of EA for his assessment is explicitly stated on line 6-7. SR tweets, "BTW how could you ?? Seriously!! No sympathy... am not even a southie and am hurt." Tweeting "how could you" expresses disbelief at EA's assessment and characterises it as unthinkable. With "no sympathy", SR treats EA's statement as being very harsh, and offensive, orienting to his use of extreme-case formulations ("most boring", line 2) in assessing idlis. If the assessment was merely that idlis are boring, that is recognisably less strong than "most boring things in the world." The exaggeration in EA's assessment is therefore treated by SR as intentional and hurtful. Following this, SR produces a relationship between food assessments and category membership of "southie." He invokes "southie" as a category that would naturally be hurt or offended by EA's assessment. By categorising himself as "not even southie", SR claims that while EA's assessment is offensive to him, it likely more so for members of the category "southie." Southie is a colloquial synonym for "south Indians", indicating that the very assessment of idlis as boring is likely offensive to members of this category. The reprimand of EA treats the very proffering of the assessment as consequential.

The following extract 9 is a response from user EM who again does not agree nor disagree and treats the assessment as consequential. EM dismisses the consequences, however, to reassure EA that his assessment is permitted.

Extract 9: Don't worry about South Indian Twitter

Opening Post

1 **EA @User_EA . Oct 6, 2020**
2 Idli are the most boring things in the world

Reply Tweet

4 **EM @User_EM . Oct 9, 2020**
5 Don't worry about the backlash from "South Indian
6 Twitter". These people are known to be hyper
7 emotional. They will immolate themselves because
8 some political leader or some south Indian movie
9 "star" got arrested. Crazy clan if u ask me.

EM begins by commenting on reactions from a specific category, “south Indian Twitter” on line 5-6 and characterises it as backlash; which are reprimands or sanctions in response to something offensive that was said by someone. “South Indian Twitter” is invoked as an online community of ‘south Indian’ users of Twitter, who have reacted to EA’s assessment of idlis by taking offense. On lines 6-8, EM attributes several category-bound attributes to this category. Firstly, he claims that they are hyper-emotional, implying that their reactions to EA’s assessment of idlis are driven by their emotional state rather than their rationality. Secondly, EM claims that members of the category “south Indian Twitter” would set themselves on fire for political causes that they are passionate about (“immolate themselves”, line 7). He lists one such cause as the arrest of, “some political leader” or some “south Indian movie “star””. The use of “some” alongside the categories “political leader” and “movie star” implies that it does not matter which specific individual member gets arrested, but any member’s arrest is likely to elicit the reaction of self-immolation. Discussing the reaction of the members of “south Indian Twitter”, to an “arrest”, constructs the incident as consequential for members of this category, and by extension, implicitly constructs EA’s assessment also as such. However, EM also minimises the seriousness of the causes or incidents for which members of ‘south Indian Twitter’ would self-immolate. These instances and the downplaying of seriousness serves as a justification for describing members of this category as irrational or “crazy” as EM does on line 9. This justification is used as the basis upon which reactions by ‘south Indian Twitter’ to EA’s assessment are undermined; namely by characterising their actions as consequential, but actions of a crazy clan (line 4) and dismissible.

Having undermined reactions to EA’s assessment from this category “south Indian Twitter”, EM reassures EA that his assessment should not be worrisome and is thereby permitted. He also uses “if you ask me” on line 9 to construct his evaluation of “south Indian Twitter” as subjective rather than an inherent feature or attribution.

EM’s dismissal of reactions from ‘south Indian Twitter’ also orients to the cultural significance of the food, as something that they are passionate about and emotionally involved in. Their defence of idlis is treated as motivated by this emotional attachment and dismissed on the basis of this emotionality.

In the above two extracts, I show that EA’s assessment is neither agreed with, nor disagreed with. Instead, the assessment is treated as consequential in both extracts, and as having resulted in sentiments of offense for members of various categories (“southie” and “south Indian

Twitter”). While SR extends the reaction of hurt to include himself, EM dismisses the reaction by constructing it as ‘backlash’ from an irrational (crazy) category.

4.5 Discussion on Responding to Assessments

A few observations can be made from the above analysis, about what is accomplished by the invocation of categories ‘north Indian’ and ‘south Indian’ and about the sequential organisation of assessments.

There are 3 ways in which the assessment of idlis is responded to; with an agreement, with a disagreement, or with neither. While producing agreement or disagreement, the category ‘south Indian’ was invoked and used as the basis upon which agreements or disagreements were proffered. The analysis showed that users negotiated a range of epistemic rights or entitlements available to the respondent. Using epistemics as a resource allowed users to do more than just agree or disagree, like construct them as credible. When agreeing with EA’s assessment, the user invoked the category “south Indian” to construct themselves as a credible source to be agreeing with EA. When disagreeing, the category “south Indian” was a resource to invoke knowledge of idlis could be used to undermine assessor’s credibility to assess idlis and dismiss the assessment based on this. In the extracts 8 and 9 however, the category ‘south Indian’ is invoked to construct EA’s assessment as consequential; as offensive and hurtful. The replies in these extracts therefore neither agreed nor disagreed with EA’s assessment, but rather discussed the production of the assessment of idlis in the first place. Therefore, epistemic authority, categories, category-memberships, and assessed objects are made invoked in the assessment sequences in different ways to support an agreement, a disagreement, or discussing the very production of an assessment on Twitter.

In my review of past literature on food assessments, I discussed that evaluations served social functions, like refusing a second serving, or complimenting the chef, or feeding the baby (Edwards & Potter, 2017; Wiggins, 2001; Wiggins et al., 2001; Wiggins & Potter, 2003). However, the food assessment here was not to serve these kinds of functions. Instead, the food assessment in my data served the purpose of responding to a “whimsical question” (Sommer, 2019) and generate discussions and opinions on a food item in a mundane context. Responses to such an assessment of food allowed users to express their “identity” and discuss various epistemic rights or entitlements, and even demonstrate categorial knowledge while defending or expressing their stance on one specific referent. The function of the assessment, then, could

have been to contribute to a very “Twitter” kind of question, and to generate controversy (as is the function of “whimsical” questions on this platform) (Sommer, 2019).

India as a country is home to a vast diversity of cuisines and ways of preparing foods (Srinivas, 2011). Food has therefore, over centuries, evolved as a domain for marking people’s identities, of caste, religion, class, region, and so on (Srinivas, 2011). This chapter shows how such cultural knowledge is invoked through category memberships (“south Indian” particularly) and used to accomplish actions like agreeing and disagreeing with a food assessment. “Being south Indian” therefore becomes meaningful and relevant in providing the basis for a credible and knowledgeable stance to be expressed, about idlis.

I therefore show that the category “south Indian” in this context of responding to an unfavourable food assessment was used by posters to negotiate who can and cannot assess the referent dish (idlis). They did so by drawing on epistemic resources tied to being “south Indian”, such as “regular eaters of idlis” or entitlements to knowledge of how to correctly prepare idlis.” Being “south Indian” in some instances was also a source of normative expectations like, liking idlis, and therefore being granted the rights to assess them. Consequently, not being “south Indian” was oriented to as the incorrect position, and members of other categories (like Englishman) were constructed as “not permitted” to assess this dish.

In this chapter therefore, I presented my first context in which the categories “south Indian” or “north Indian” were invoked, namely in assessment sequences. In the next chapter, I will present the second context in which they are invoked: formulating complaints and responding to them.

Chapter 5: Category Uses in Complaint Formulations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I want to explore how Twitter users invoke the categories “south Indian” or “north Indian” while complaining about something or responding to complaints. In addition to learning about category-use, past literature from CA/DP has looked at complaint sequences in various contexts, and I also hope to contribute to this by learning more about complaint sequences on Twitter. Keeping these twofold interests in mind, I am posing three research questions for this chapter: What are the features of a complaint in these Twitter interactions? How are complaints responded to? When, how, and for what purposes are the categories “south Indian” or “north Indian” invoked in these complaint sequences?

5.2 Literature on Complaints

Complaining and complaint formulations have been extensively studied in past DP/CA literature. Drew (1998) describes a complaint as a speaker’s way of morally condemning another person’s conduct by finding fault with it and by treating this as a transgression of normative behaviour. Some have also described complaints as a stated description of an implicitly perceived ‘harm’ sustained by a complainant. This was a feature of complaints examined through analysis of written complaints made to the National Health Services (NHS) in the context of care and treatment or administrative issues. Complaints about care and treatment included description of perceived ‘harm’ by often stating an account of grievances as a narrated chronology of events that occurred, and their repeated occurrence (McCreddie et al., 2018). Complaining has therefore been described as the process of transforming the nature of an initially privately experienced and sustained personal trouble into openly acknowledged interpersonal difficulties (Emerson & Messinger, 1977).

Drew (1998) discussed some general features of complaints. First was that they are bounded sequences, which began generally as an announcement or a story introduction and ended by moving to a different or unconnected topic. Second feature was that complainants often explicitly referred to a transgression or misconduct that another person has enacted (the breach of a normative action which is indicated and used as the complainable matter). The third feature of complaints was that on occasion, the complainant displayed overt moral indignation about

what the other person has done. This was done by describing an emotional reaction to how the complained-about conduct made the complainant feel, as well as the degree of seriousness of offense or of the transgression (Drew, 1998). The fourth feature of complaints was that they describe the complained-about behaviour as a deliberate, purposeful, or intentional conduct; this construction was used to justify the action of complaining about it. The deliberate nature of the conduct was what made it reprehensible, more offensive, and thus more complainable. The fifth and final feature of complaints is that they are represented as a report of what was said or done by the person about whom the complaint is made (Drew, 1998). Complaints can be recognised as reporting what was said or done through analysts' identification of discursive devices, such as reported speech and chronological narration of the complainable incident (Drew, 1998; McCreddie et al., 2018).

Producing complaints can have moral implications for the one complaining (also called complainer) (Pino, 2018). Complainers may therefore display their appropriateness and credibility to complain. Alternatively, the complaints may not be explicitly marked as such, and instead be characterised as covert complaints (Schegloff, 2005, p. 465). In such covert complaints, the “guilty party” may pre-empt the possibility of a complaint occurring, and mitigate this by issuing an apology, as Schegloff (2005) demonstrates in the following example:

1 ((telephone rings))
 2 Ms. W.: Hello-o? ((sleepy voice))
 3 Mr. W.:-> Yeh did I wake yih up?
 4 Ms. W.:-> Yea:h.
 5 Mr. W.:-> Sorry gal.
 6 Ms. W.: That's- [(O.K. Doll),

(Schegloff, 2005, p. 465)

In the above extract, Schegloff (2005) shows that the possibility of complaining was pre-empted by Mr. W on line 3, possibly from the sleepy voice of Ms. W (line 2). Upon confirmation that the conduct (waking up Ms. W) was complainable (line 4), it is remedied on line 5 with an apology.

Complaints have also been studied as interactional sequences which can take the form of two-part pairs; the complaint itself, and a response to the complaint (Drew & Walker, 2009). The complaint itself was identified as such because of any of the above-mentioned features (Drew, 1998; McCreddie et al., 2018) that describe a complainable event, person, object, or conduct. The second part was then described as a response to such a complaint; and as a turn that may

either affiliate or disaffiliate with it (Drew & Walker, 2009). For instance, Drew and Walker (2009) showed that complaints were affiliated with, by explicitly confirming an covert complaint, when the recipient shared similar experiences about the complainees or their conduct, or when they expressed empathy for the complainers (Drew & Walker, 2009). They also examined the interactional organisation of complaints in verbal everyday talk and showed that when complaints were not overtly stated, their recipient might affiliate with it and escalate the complaint by making it explicit. This explicit stating of a complaint in the response turn could then be disaffiliated with, by the one on whose behalf this explicit complaint was stated, characterising its explicit statement as “going too far” (Drew & Walker, 2009).

In most of the complaints discussed above the parties complained above were a part of the interaction in which the complaint is made. However, Traverso (2009) examined the structures of complaint-sequences where two interactants complained about something external to the ongoing interaction (a third-party object, person, or event). She shows that in complaints about third parties, complainants invited the other interactants to either affiliate or disaffiliate with the complaint. In those turns that affiliated with the complaint, there was not always an agreement with the complaint, but an acceptance of the complainer’s justification that particular matter is complaint-worthy (Traverso, 2009).

Traverso (2009) also showed that the complaints about third parties were not always placed at the start of a conversation, and the interaction leading up to a complaint was significant in contextualising the upcoming complaint. She presented the following interactional sequence as an identifiable complaint sequence in her data on every-day interactions between friends: initiation, core part, complaint development, and closing. Initiation was the stage at which a complaint was recognised as such. In some instances, this was preceded by potential complaint indicators or “preliminary cues” (a sigh or other non-verbal cues). These cues were often located close to the complaint and indicated the troublesome nature of the upcoming talk; signalling that the subject matter of the interaction was potentially complainable. The core part of the sequence was the stated complaint by the complainer. The core part also contained turns that either affiliated or disaffiliated with the complaint (Traverso, 2009). The complaint development was following an affiliative stance taken immediately after the complaint has been made (Traverso, 2009). At this stage, the complainer and complaint’s recipient worked out the consequences of complaining. The complaint development phase was also marked by using several strategies that advanced complaining, such as negotiations, arguments, or

disagreements, changing an affiliative stance, indication of repetition of a behaviour as a justification for the complaint by complainer, or a topic shift (Traverso, 2009). The closing phase of the complaint was the final part, and would contain closure markers, like a topic shift. These phases of complaints were demonstrated through a sequential analysis of verbal data from everyday interactions between friends. Therefore, complaints were shown to have an ordered and observable interactional structure, wherein the complainant and the responders participated in reporting a transgression, an untoward event, or moral condemnation of a person or conduct.

Past literature has also examined the role of categories and category-indicative attributes in complaint-sequences. For instance, Alexander and Stokoe (2020) showed that in calls to neighbourhood mediation services, characterological descriptions of neighbours and callers were deployed to formulate complaints that construct the caller as having reasonable cause to be complaining to the service. They showed that a negative characterological formulation about the neighbour was sometimes used to construct them as inherently bad, therefore reporting the complaint as justified; for instance, “she is not a very reasonable person”; (see: Alexander & Stokoe, 2020, p. 424). Stokoe (2009) showed that categories and category-implicative descriptions could also be invoked in making complaints and denying them. For instance, categories were invoked to complain about and implicate the moral characters of those who were being complained about; for instance, to construct perpetrators as insensitive to their victims’ category memberships which makes the latter unequal in competence and fitness, etc; (see: Stokoe, 2009, p. 88). Sterphone (2022) also examined wargame interactions (video and verbal data) to show that categories were invoked in making sense of actions that are being done, such as characterising a complaint as such because of the complainant’s membership of a particular category (character in the game). They showed that complaints and use of category memberships and attributes, the complainant and the target of the complaint are a part of the ongoing conversation (are characters participating in the game, or players playing the game) (Sterphone, 2022). Therefore, the complaints or affiliation and disaffiliation with a complaint, or complaint (re)phrasing is negotiated by the interactants by ascribing categories (like real world categories of player and game-world categories of characters) to each other.

Past literature has investigated complaint sequences in data from various institutional interactional contexts, such as calls with mediation and environmental health services (Alexander & Stokoe, 2019), NHS complaint services (McCreddie et al., 2018, 2021),

therapeutic communities for people recovering from drug addiction (Pino, 2018), calls to neighbour mediation services, local council antisocial behaviour units, and recordings of police interrogations (Stokoe, 2009). Complaints were also examined extensively using verbal, naturally occurring data such as telephone calls or recordings of calls to mediation services, or police interrogation recordings (Alexander & Stokoe, 2019; Drew, 1998; Drew & Walker, 2009; Pino, 2018; Stokoe, 2009; Traverso, 2009). McCreddie et. al. (2018) and McCreddie et. al. (2021) used textual data (letters to the NHS) to study complaint sequences. Complaints have also been examined using some interview data (audio and video recordings) which asked about people's social media use (Robles & Parks, 2019; Wilkes & Speer, 2022). However, complaint sequences “on” social media, using textual data, in naturally occurring and mundane interactional contexts has not been studied previously (to my knowledge). The use of categories and categorisation practices in complaint-sequences has been previously examined in institutional contexts (Alexander & Stokoe, 2019; Stokoe, 2009).

I have summarised above, some key features of complaint sequences and their interactional nature, as examined within the CA/DP literature. Predominantly, the above-described observations have been from verbal interactions. Past literature has therefore not examined (to my knowledge) complaints in the context of asynchronous, textual, social media interactions. Furthermore, categories or category-implicative formulations and particularly the use of “north Indian” or “south Indian” categories has not been previously studied (to my knowledge) and is the key focus of the analysis presented in this chapter.

I will present some instances from Twitter (from my data) and examine the general features of complaint sequences as they occur on this social media site. Secondly, I will discuss how, when, and for what the users invoke the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” are used in these complaints. I will first discuss how and why these extracts were chosen.

5.3 Methodology

Data in this chapter was collected from Twitter and consists of 10 threads which were identified as complaint sequences invoking the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian”. I will present 6 of these due to space constraints. These 6 were chosen because the complaints in all these extracts are about the user's use of the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian.”

The analysis will be presented one extract at a time. For each extract, I will begin by showing how the complaints can be identified as such, relying on insights from past literature discussed above. I will then discuss how these complaints are responded to. I will establish that complaints are not produced as standalone tweets but are rather embedded within the sequential structure of ongoing interactions. I will also show that this can be accomplished by users when a complaint is replied to by an affiliation or a disaffiliation (as seen; Traverso, 2009). After establishing the features of complaint sequences for each extract, I will discuss when, how, and for what the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” were invoked in these data.

5.4 Analysis

The first extract (extract 1 below) begins with a tweet from user NJS who is criticising a news agency “IT_News” and their news report. The news report is about a “UK professor” who tweeted that idlis are the most boring thing in the world. The report stated that the professor’s assessment of idlis was criticised on Twitter by “netizens” (see lines 6-11 and the attached video screenshot). Note that the tweet about idlis and some of its responses were analysed in the previous chapter ([Chapter 2: A Brief History of north Indians and south Indians](#) in this thesis. NJS posted her criticism of IT_News and their report on lines 2-4. STN produces an agreement in response to this criticism and formulates her complaint on lines 15-23. I will now analyse in detail how this is done.

Extract 1: Always dividing people between north and south!

Opening Post

1 **NJS** @User_NJS · Oct 11, 2020
 2 Finally, IT_News has figured out their niche and something
 3 they can actually be good at. Looking pretty and talking
 4 about food. Journalism is really not their cup of tea

Quote Tweet

5 **IT_News** @User_IT_News · Oct 9, 2020
 6 A tweet by a UK professor invoked the wrath of netizens
 7 after he called the famous South India dish Idli- one
 8 of the most ‘boring’ and ‘insufferable’ things in the
 9 world. Do you feel the same?
 10
 11 #NewsMo #UnitedKingdom #SouthIndia #Idli | @User_A_N



12

Figure 5: News report of A_N

[Description: she talks about the UK professor’s tweet about idlis being boring. The video also describes the responses of “netizens” to this assessment. The report ends with A_N agreeing with the idlis’ assessment, and then asking a question inviting viewers to state their opinions.]

Reply 1

13 **STN** @User_STN · Oct 11, 2020
 14 *Replying to @User_NJS*
 15 They always get away in dividing people between
 16 North and South!!
 17
 18 Why should she call SOUTH INDIAN! Can't it be said
 19 "south of India" or "southern part of India"
 20
 21 Boring dish, Well! As you said, they're best at
 22 nonsense anchoring nothing more @User_A_N
 23 @User_IT_News 🤔 🤔

The complaint is stated by the user STN on lines 15-23 and is about the use of “south Indian” by a news report from an agency IT_News. Their report is quoted and criticised by the user NJS. The report is presented on lines 6-12, and the criticism is on lines 2-4. The complainer STN identified the complainable conduct in NJS’s tweet, whose tweet is replied to with the complaint-tweet. Below is the description of what preceded the complaint.

On lines 6-11 is a tweet from IT_News reporting on the reactions (wrath) of “netizens” to “UK professor’s” assessment of idlis. The assessment is reported as being about idlis and calling them the most boring and insufferable things in the world (lines 7-8). On line 7, the food item (idlis) is categorised as “famous south India dish” by IT_News, which treats idlis as an instance of the category “south India.” Moreover, in the video attachment (line 12), the journalist A_N describes idlis as “the soul-food, go-to south Indian breakfast, lunch, or dinner...” Here, the

food is attributed membership of the “south Indian food” category and attributes that construct it as such, namely “eaten for breakfast, lunch, or dinner” and “soul food”, which point to its regular consumption and members’ preference for the dish as staple and loved. On line 6, the assessor is categorised as “UK professor.” The assessor is thus as a member of a different category than the food he assessed as “boring”. By using these different categories to ascribe the assessor and the assessed object, IT_News constructs the assessment as a matter of troublesome nature. Being categorised as a “UK professor” invokes category-bound attributes such as not regularly eating idlis, and not treating this assessed dish as staple and “soul-food”. The UK professor’s assessment of idlis is thus constructed as unusual for his category-membership. This nature of assessment is confirmed by the ‘reaction’ of ‘netizens’ (internet citizens) described as “wrath.” Thus, IT_News is reporting the reactions of some online communities (netizens) to an assessment that is troublesome.

The video attachment on line 12 contains animations, dramatic music, and special effects, which work to establish the incident as sensational. Moreover, A_N uses the phrases, “the number 1 debate that is raging in the country” and “it’s a burning issue that all of us need to be concerned about” and “it matters to you and me the most.” These contain extreme-case formulations that allow the reporter to dramatize the issue, sensationalise the incident, and highlight its newsworthiness. A_N also describes idlis in the video as “the soul food, go-to south Indian breakfast, lunch, or dinner, or whenever you want to eat it.” By categorising this food as “south Indian”, “soul food” and “go-to”, A_N constructs the food (idlis) as a staple, comforting food, for members of the category “south Indian”. In the video, the reporter also agrees with the “UK professor’s” assessment of idlis. The agreement is prefaced by a disclaimer that A_N’s stance on idlis may be controversial and she self-categorises as a member of the category “south Indian”, while works to make her agreement credible. She then concludes her report by inviting the viewers to comment and express their opinion on the issue. This invitation is not only included in the video clip attached but also posted in the tweet-text (lines 9).

The above-described tweet from IT_News is quoted by NJS who then criticises it on lines 2-4. IT_News’ report ended with an invitation to agree or disagree with the idli assessment from the UK professor that was agreed with by the reporter A_N. However, NJS produces neither and instead undermines the news reported by IT_News to criticise it as merely sensational, and as lacking depth or substance. She does this by employing several strategies. On line 2, NJS uses the phrase “figured out their niche”, which implies that a specific incident is being

sensationalised for the purpose of news reporting and undermines the report. By implying finality using “finally figured out”, NJS constructs the process of finding reportable news as being a potentially difficult task for the news agency which has now concluded. The difficulty of the task is also implied in “actually be good at” which constructs most of IT_News’ other reports as not good. Thus, NJS is constructing the agency news reporting to be in general not good. There is a contradiction between the general reporting by IT_News being constructed as not good and, on this occasion, their reporting being assessed as “finally good”, which makes this assessment by NJS sarcastic. She also implies that IT_News’ reporting is frivolous, and shallow by using the phrase “looking pretty and talking about food” on line 3. These two attributes, “looking pretty and talking about food”, are constructed as not typically category-bound to the category journalists, who may be, as members of “journalists” category, expected to report on serious issues such as political unrest or conflict. Therefore, this news report is used as evidence to construct IT_News as not a “real” news agency. This is reinforced through, “Journalism is not their cup of tea” on lines 4. By implying a set of contradictions between IT_News’ reporting and assessing their reporting on this occasion as positive (“finally good”), NJS’s tweet can be read as sarcastic, and undermines IT_News by questioning their credibility and criticises them for reporting on the idlis assessment. Quoting the tweet from IT_News (the news report) serves as evidence quoted to support NJS’s criticism that IT_News has not done a good job of reporting on the incident.

STN formulates her complaint and states it in her reply to NJS’s tweet (lines 15-23). STN’s complaint can be identified as such because the following features of complaints can be noted in the complaint-turn. These were also identified within complaint literature and were discussed in earlier (Drew, 1998; Drew & Holt, 1988; Drew & Walker, 2009; McCreddie et al., 2018; Traverso, 2009). STN begins by identifying the complaint-worthy conduct by constructing it as criticisable and problematic. The complaint is identified from IT_News’ report as being their use of the category “south Indian” (lines 15-16). STN says, “They always get away in dividing people between north and south!!” She first claims that IT_News (addressed as “they”) divides “people” based on geographical regions of “north” and “south”. STN emphasises the problematic nature of this conduct by claiming that IT_News has never faced consequences for this conduct using “always get away.” IT_News’ categorising of people in this way is therefore constructed as unfair and morally transgressive because of the lack of consequences for the doer (here, A_N and IT_News). The use of extreme-case formulation “always” indicates that the lack of consequences for IT_News has not been a one-off occurrence but is the norm. The

extreme-case formulation also treats the conduct (dividing) as recurring (using “always” on line 15) and a pattern. This construction of “dividing based on geography” as problematic makes it criticisable, and its recurring nature makes STN’s tweet a complaint, because it cannot be excused as merely a one-off behaviour. The criticism and the recurrence of conduct marks the conduct of divisiveness complainable.

STN then explicitly states the complaint, “Why should she call SOUTH INDIAN!” on line 18. The complaint is formulated as a rhetorical question (Koshik, 2005) using, “Why should she”, which uses the pronoun “she” to identify who is being complained about (the reporter A_N). The complainable conduct is stated as the use of “south Indian”, and the consequence of using this category is implied to be creating division. STN’s earlier problematization of the use of “south Indian” is further supported on lines 19 when she provides two alternatives: “south of India” and “southern part of India” to the category “south Indian”, which are treated as more appropriate (“can’t it be said...”) by her. These alternative categories may be deemed less problematic since they invoke geographical regions as the category-bounded attribute. Meanwhile, using “south Indian” may invoke references to people and other category-bound attributes than geography. STN’s earlier criticism of IT_News as being divisive in their report followed by objecting to A_N’s use of “south Indian” marks IT_News’ reporting and use of the category “south Indian” as a moral transgression against members of that category, thereby marking the tweet as a complaint. The use of the modal verb “should” on line 18 also constructs the complainable conduct as a moral transgression. This is another feature of complaints identified in this chapter; that the complainable conduct is framed as a moral transgression against someone, in this case, against members of the “south Indian” category.

On lines 21-22, STN extends the complaint by agreeing with NJS’s criticism, “as you said”, and then reformulating her criticism of IT_News’ reporting as “nonsense anchoring.” The use of the adjective “nonsense” implies that the report is not only inappropriate but is also not coherent nor meaningful. Describing the report as such undermines IT_News’ and A_N’s reporting and characterises their journalism as bad. The use of ‘nothing more’ is an extreme case formulation that expresses that the agency is not good at journalism at all, and this characterisation is constructed as expected from the agency; STN orients to NJS’s criticism of IT_News’ reporting as ridiculous, and shallow using “as you said.” This allows STN to formulate an agreement with NJS.

At the end of her complaint, STN tags both A_N and IT_News on lines 23-24, which addresses the complaint to them, in addition to NJS who is addressed using “reply to”. This is interesting, because NJS does not reply to IT_News nor A_N and so they were not directly addressed in the complaint sequence until this point. Had STN not mentioned them, IT_News and A_N would have been third-party complaint subjects (Traverso, 2009). Mentioning them invites them to respond to the complaint by taking up the next turn, which they do not do in this instance. STN’s complaint therefore addresses NJS directly as well as IT_News and A_N indirectly.

To summarise the findings in this extract, I identified the following as features that make STN’s tweet a complaint: she identified the complainable conduct and problematized it; the conduct is constructed as a moral transgression (“south Indian”) due to its divisive nature; and the conduct is constructed as recurring feature of IT_News’ reporting. In the above extract, the complaint was produced as a reply to the opening poster NJS, who criticised IT_News’ reporting in her opening tweet. Furthermore, the very use of the category “south Indian” is constructed by the complainer as problematic, morally condemnable, and recurring, thus making this complaint-worthy conduct by IT_News.

The next extract is a complaint from J and about a user Nene’s use of “north Indian armys” category. Like the previous extract, J uses the “quote-tweet” feature to identify and reproduce the content (from user Nene) which he identifies as complainable conduct. The quote-tweet is by the user H who has attached a screenshot as evidence. This screenshot is the complainable conduct and is a tweet from user Nene.

Extract 2: North Indian Armys do not Deserve any Right

Opening Post

1 **J** @User_J · Oct 10, 2020
 2 “north indian armys don’t deserve rights”
 3
 4 Damn ma you desimys will be rude to people based on the
 5 fuvking state they belong to?
 6
 7 I am sure they are the same person who will hate me cause I
 8 belong to UP

Quote Tweet

8 **Hiya** **@User_Hiya** · Oct 10, 2020
 9 Who are you to say that?



10 Figure 6: Screenshot of Nene’s tweet

11 **Nene** **@User_Nene** · Oct 10, 2020
 12 north indian armys do not deserve any right
 13 **13 replies** **11 retweets** **50 likes**

Reply 1

14 **U** **@User_U** · Oct 10, 2020
 15 *Replying to @User_J*
 16 im a north indian and i live in south india and there wasnt
 17 a single day when i wasnt treated as an outcast back in my
 18 school...
 19 **4 replies** **0 retweets** **4 likes**

The complaint is produced by user J on lines 2-8, who quotes a tweet from Hiya (lines 9-12). The complaint is about the tweet from user Nene (line 12) which Hiya posted as a screenshot. Hiya questions Nene’s credibility and legitimacy in producing the claim, “north Indian armys do not deserve any right” (line 12). User J identifies Nene’s use of “north Indian” as the complainable conduct and complains about it on lines 2-8.

The complainable matter was tweeted by user Nene, who claimed that members of the category “north Indian armys” do not deserve “any right” (line 12). Using an extreme-case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986), Nene works up his claim as applicable to all members, without any exceptions. The acronym “armys” refers to fans of a south Korean boyband group BTS and stands for “Adorable Representative M.C for Youth” (ARMY) (Kaito, n.d.). The prefix “north

Indian” makes relevant the geographical region of the fans who are being denied these “rights.” This specifically targets a set of ‘fans’ and denies them rights. Altogether, the user Nene claims that fans of BTS who are from the north Indian region are undeserving of any rights.

Nene’s claim about “north Indian armys” is identified by J as the complainable matter on line 2. She does this by using reported speech to reproduce the complainable matter. On lines 4-5, J states his complaint, “Damn ma you desimys will be rude to people based on the fvking state they belong to?” As in extract 1, this complaint has some features that makes it recognisably so (lines 4-8). Using “damn ma”, J expresses dismay at Nene’s claim. He addresses Nene using “ma” (a term of endearment, colloquially translates as “dear”). The juxtaposition between dismay and endearment allows J to orient to Nene’s utterance as potentially problematic, rude, or condemnable. He then addresses Nene as “you desimys”, categorising him as a member of this category. The category “desimys” refers to “desi ARMYs” who are fans of the band BTS from the region of the Indian subcontinent (Zeta~, n.d.). Nene’s complainable conduct is characterised as tied to his membership of the “desimys” category rather than as merely an individual’s actions; this also constructs the conduct as potentially commonplace, rather than a one-off incident.

The complaint is about Nene’s claim that members of the category “north Indian armys” are undeserving of any right, which is inferred as unfair and discriminatory. Using “based on the fvking state they belong to” on lines 4-5, the basis for Nene’s claim is identified as being the particular region “north Indian” to which the fans belong. J’s use of the strong intensifier “fvking” indicates anger and offense, and constructs Nene’s claim as being morally transgressive. Nene’s claim is therefore characterised by J as rude and targeted at a specific group of fans based on their regional category, constructing it as discriminatory, and hence, complainable.

Attributing the category “desimys” to Nene may also allow J to imply that this discrimination is potentially shocking because both ‘desimys’ and ‘north Indian’ armys are fans of the same music band BTS but who belong to different regions with the Indian subcontinent, wherein the target (“north Indian armys”) members are from “north Indian” region. Therefore, Nene’s claim about rights of “north Indian armys” is constructed as discriminatory towards fellow fans but solely based on their region. This is used by J to criticise Nene’s conduct as rude, condemnable, or criticisable. J then adds, “I am sure they are the same person who will hate me cause I belong to UP” on lines 7-8. Here, he extends the complaint to emphasise geography as the basis of

Nene's claim and treats it as discriminatory on this basis. The complaint is also extended to imply that Nene's claim targeting "north Indian armys" is discriminatory, by providing a relevant example from personal experience of the complainer (J). Using "cause I belong to UP", J makes relevant his own state category and asserts a prediction (I am sure) that Nene would hate him too because of his membership of a state category. By self-categorising as "from UP", J relies on shared knowledge that Uttar Pradesh is a north Indian state, and therefore, categorises himself as someone who is also potentially "north Indian." J also uses future tense "will hate" to indicate that he is making a prediction about Nene's possible future actions. The prediction of discriminatory behaviour also establishes a future course of action which is constructed as definite (using "I am sure", line 7), thereby treating Nene's claim as not one-off, but rather a recurring pattern of behaviour.

Nene's claim about "north Indian armys" being undeserving is reformulated as "hate" and its definite nature is constructed using "I am sure" and "who will hate me" (lines 7). The use of "they" on line 7 references the target of J's complaint (Nene) marking this as an extension of the complaint (also evidenced using "the same person who", line 7). The use of modal verbs indicates that Nene's reaction to J's state-category membership is an expectable, normative outcome. The personal example allows J to construct his complaint as being not about a one-off instance of discriminatory claims, but about a recurring pattern of behaviour, which makes Nene's conduct complaint worthy. J's tweet is therefore a complaint, because it constructs Nene's conduct as complainable based on its implicit criticizability, recurring nature, and its potentially morally transgressive implication. These features were also observed in the complaint in extract 1 and discussed in the review of past literature.

U then responds to J's complaint by affiliating with it on lines 16-18 with a description of personal experience from her childhood. She tweets, "im a north indian and i live in south india and there wasnt a single day when i wasnt treated as an outcast back in my school..." U self-categorises as "north Indian" and "living in south India" to establish her residence as being geographically in a different region that her category membership would indicate, potentially framing herself as an outsider. This information is set up as the background for the upcoming claim, and the category ascription to herself constructs her as entitled to proffer her upcoming affiliation. U states her experience of being treated as an outsider, and as someone who was discriminated against because of her membership of the state or region category "north Indian." The construction of her treatment as discriminatory is evidenced using the category "outcast",

implying that she was alienated from other schoolmates who are stated as being members of a different category than “north Indian”. U also uses personal experience to affiliate with J, orienting to his complaint’s extension using “I am sure...” (line 7), thereby extending the complaint.

The use of “every single day” emphasises the recurring nature of her discriminatory experience and is an extreme-case formulation that characterises her experience as having occurred all the time. By characterising her experience as recurring, U’s affiliation can be seen also as a complaint about discriminatory treatment based on her region or state category’s membership. U’s extension is an affiliation because it identifies the complainable conduct as being the same as identified by J, namely discrimination based on state or region category (“north Indian”) and the complaint is established as independent with personal experience as evidence.

The following extracts 3 and 4 will look at two different responses to the same complaint produced on lines 2-6. The complaint is by user KS and is about another user (KA). These are third-party complaints, because KA has not been addressed directly in the complaint sequence. KS’s opening post (OP) begins by identifying the complainable conduct and attributing it to the subject of the complaint (KA).


Extract 3: He’s another woke ambi from TN who takes a jibe at north

Indians

Opening Post

1 **KS** @User_KS · Oct 11, 2020
 2 This KA who works in @TCS is a racist bigot
 3 who often makes bigoted jibes against north Indians.
 4 Don't know how people working with him could stand
 5 this bigot. <https://t.co/3GCbJFqRPp>
 6 This Tweet is unavailable.
 7 **4 Replies** **2 Retweets** **9 Likes**

Reply Tweet

8  **SRA** @User_SRA · Oct 11, 2020
 9 *Replying to @User_KS and @TCS*
 10 What did he do now that old tweets are resurfacing?
 11 **1 Reply** **0 Retweets** **1 Like**

Reply Tweet

12 **KS** @User_KS · Oct 11, 2020
 13 *Replying to @User_SRA*
 14 He's another woke ambi from TN who takes a jibe at north
 15 Indians..Mocking them..
 16 **0 Replies** **0 Retweets** **3 Likes**

The user KS formulates a complaint on lines 2-6, about the conduct of another user KA, who is identified on line 2 using “this KA.” KA is categorised by his occupation (“who works in TCS”, line 2) which provides some background information about him. TCS stands for Tata Consultancy Services, which is an Indian multinational information technology (IT) services and consulting firm (‘Tata Consultancy Services’, 2022). This information about his occupation allows KS to identify who is being talked about. It also establishes KS’s credibility as a complainer by showing himself as someone who knows KA either personally, professionally, or through some other form of social network. The company TCS is mentioned by KS using the “@”; this invites employees of the company as the audience targeted for KS’s complaint, particularly those who have access to the “@TCS” account. Therefore, providing background information about KA sets him up as known to the complainer, and invites other users who know him too, to engage with the upcoming complaint.

KS then identifies KA’s conduct that is constructed as complainable on lines 3 by saying, “who often makes bigoted jibes against north Indians”. He categorises KA as a “racist bigot”, which describes members as holding prejudiced opinions about members of other social groups. Moreover, KA’s categorisation as a member of this category implies that his conduct is as a member of this category, rather than as an individual. KA’s conduct is described as “jibes”, which constructs his actions as biased and unfairly targeted towards a specific group of people, namely “north Indians”. The categorisation of KA as “racist bigot” and his actions targeting a group of people based on their membership of “north Indian” category makes this conduct criticisable.

KA’s action of taking jibes is constructed as targeting generally the members of “north Indians” category, thus implying his targeting is based on the category membership rather than of individuals. Categorisation of KA as a “racist bigot” also constructs his own conduct of taking jibes as normative and tied to this category. His conduct of taking jibes is also constructed as a recurring pattern of behaviour using “often makes” on line 3. In these ways, his criticisable

conduct becomes a complaint, since constructing it as a recurring feature is a previously recognised feature of complaints (extracts 1 and 2).

KS then says, “Don’t know how people working with him could stand this bigot” on lines 4-5. Here, KS constructs KA’s complainable conduct as intolerable to co-workers. The use of “people working with him” invokes the category co-workers or colleagues, and the category-bound expectations that members of these categories would be engaging in conversation with the KA at their workplace and would be hearing his “jibes” at “north Indians.” The use of “don’t know how” and “could stand” indicates KS’s lack of understanding of the co-workers’ tolerance when hearing KA’s jibes as a “racist bigot”. This emphasises that KA’s conduct of taking jibes at “north Indians” is not merely a one-off occurrence, but possibly regularly occurring and it would be intolerable to his co-workers. Commenting on the co-workers’ tolerance also indicates the possibility that KA’s jibes are morally condemnable, since they are targeting members of one category. Constructing complainable conduct as morally condemnable is another feature of complaints that has been previously discussed.

The tweet on line 5 was not available when data was collected. However, from the context of the thread, it could have been a tweet from KA. Linking to a tweet here could have been done to show evidence of the instance where KA took a jibe at “north Indians.” Providing evidence would lend credibility to KS’s complaint about KA’s conduct. However, this can only be speculated in the absence of the tweet (the tweet linked was deleted before data was collected).

The features of complaints identifiable here are that the complainable conduct is deemed criticisable, and as recurring instead of being one-off. This complainable conduct is also constructed as a moral transgression, which warrants the complaint from KS. As in the previous extract, the complaint is an interactional sequence, and in this case too, it is responded to. The identifying information about KA on line 2 may have invited respondents who know KA to respond to the complaint.

The user SRA responds to the complaint on line 10. SRA asks, “What did he do now that old tweets are resurfacing?” His question is framed as seeking information about KA’s activities. However, the information sought is about his recent actions, that have triggered the complainer to refer to some of KA’s old tweets as evidence supporting KS’s complaint. The formulation of “What did he do now” asks about present-day conduct but also tacitly constructs the complainable conduct (taking jibes) as a recurring pattern of behaviour; by asking about “now”,

SRA implies that there have been instances in the past when KA has taken jibes at ‘north Indians.’ Asking about old tweets allows SRA to also imply that because KA has in the past made prejudiced remarks about ‘north Indians’, it is expectable that he has done so in the present-day context. Therefore, asking this question allows SRA to subtly affiliate with KS’s complaint about KA’s conduct, by constructing the conduct as possible due to old evidence. SRA also uses this knowledge of KA’s past actions to construct himself as knowledgeable about KA and his conduct.

The question about present-day conduct invites KS to elaborate on his complaint, which KS does on lines 14-15. KS begins by ascribing a category membership “woke ambi from TN” to KA. This provides more information about KA, like where he is from (from TN, which is the state Tamil Nadu in south India). Using “woke” invokes implicit attributes, like being politically left and liberal. ‘Ambi’ is a Tamil word that roughly translates to ‘brother.’ The use of ‘another’ implies that KA is being constructed as just another member of the category “woke ambi from TN”, who would be politically left, liberal, and from the state of Tamil Nadu. It also implies that there are potentially other members of this category, who can also (expectably) be attributed these characteristics. KA’s conduct was previously described as “taking jibes”, which is reproduced here and extended to “mocking them (line 15). By ascribing to KA the category “woke ambi from TN” constructs his behaviour as normative (common/ expectable) for members of this category (using present tense, “takes”). Therefore, KA’s conduct of “mocking” and “taking jibes” targeted at members of “north Indians” is treated as an extension of his earlier complaint, through reformulation of the category ascribed to the target of the complaint and adding to the description of his complainable conduct.

The following extract presents another reply to the same complaint about KA and his conduct of taking jibes at ‘north Indians.’ The reply is from user BS who affiliates with KS’s complaint and upgrades it.

Extract 4: He takes glee in putting down naarth Indians

Opening Post

- 1 **KS** @User_KS · Oct 11, 2020
- 2 This KA who works in @TCS is a racist bigot
- 3 who often makes bigoted jibes against north Indians.
- 4 Don't know how people working with him could stand
- 5 this bigot. <https://t.co/3GCbJFqRPp>

6 This Tweet is unavailable.
 7 **0 Replies** **4 Retweets** **15 Likes**

Reply Tweet

8 **BS** **@User_BS · Oct 11, 2020**
 9 *Replying to @User_KS and @TCS*
 10 This is not the first time. He takes glee in putting down
 11 Naarth Indians time and again. Another of those pseudos who
 12 have no idea of what anything Naarth of Arakkonam
 13 represents. Yes, a techie illiterate to the core
 14 **0 Replies** **0 Retweets** **0 Likes**

BS affiliates with KS's complaint by constructing the complainable conduct ("taking jibes") as not a one-off occurrence, but a recurring pattern of behaviour. On lines 10-11, BS does this by saying, "this is not the first time" and "time and again". Stating the conduct as recurring while complaining about it was also identified as a feature of complaints in previous extracts. However, in this example, the respondent uses this construction to affiliate and upgrade KS's complaint. The complainable conduct is reformulated as "putting down naarth Indians", which describes KA's conduct as condescending and enjoyable ("takes glee", line 10). Using an active voice, "he takes glee..." KA's conduct is constructed as intentional towards the "north Indians" category members. Describing KA's conduct as condescending and enjoyable allows BS to show independent knowledge of KA and his actions, constructing the complaint as not only an affiliation but also an upgraded complaint. BS therefore affiliates with KS's complaint by independently identifying the complainable conduct and the target of that conduct "north Indians".

BS then categorises KA as "another one of those pseudos" on lines 11-12. Using the category "pseudos" allows BS to invoke the attribute of being phony, implying that KA is not a genuine person. "pseudos" could alternatively be referring to the category "pseudo-secular" invoking category memberships of being secular in their political views, but displaying unconscious or implicit biases towards members of selected religious groups. Using "another one" implies that this attribute is not ascribed to KA as an individual but as a member of a category. Another attribute category-bound to being "pseudos" is produced as having "no idea of what anything Naarth (north) of Arakkonam represents" on lines 12-13. Arakkonam refers to the region of India that lies to the north of Arakkonam mountain range in the state Tamil Nadu. By saying that KA does not know anything north of Arakkonam, BS implies that KA is ignorant about people who are from any geographical areas north of Arakkonam mountain range, which can

be inferred as being his residence. In my prior analysis of KS's complaint, I established that KA is from Tamil Nadu. I also presented the possibility that responders to the opening post are either orienting to this, or independently know about who KA is and where he is from, since the complaint presents identifying information that invites responses from such users. KA's ignorance is constructed using 'anything' which is an extreme-case formulation. Therefore, KA being from Tamil Nadu, and also potentially ignorant about anything north of a mountain range in Tamil Nadu together implies that he is ignorant about people from 'north of India'. Thus, KA's complainable conduct is constructed as that of someone extremely ignorant. This construction allows BS to affiliate with KS's complaint by identifying the same complainable conduct independently (north Indians are reformulated as "anyone north of Arakkonam") and upgrade it by through description of KA's conduct as tied to a category membership "another pseudo" by describing category-bound attributes like not being genuine and holding unconscious biases towards members of another category ("naarth of Arakkonam" here). Constructing KA's conduct as intentional contributes to its characterisation as complaint-worthy and supports BS's affiliation.

BS then tweets, "Yes, a techie illiterate to the core" on line 13. Here, another category membership is ascribed to the complaine, "techie" with the attribute "illiterate". BS refers to KA's background and occupation of being an IT professional using the category "techie", invoking category-bound attributes as potentially relevant, like being able to read and write, and being educated. This can be seen as contradictory to the adjective "illiterate", which implies a lack of the very same attributes. Therefore, categorising KA as a "techie illiterate", BS is on the one hand describing KA as being educated on paper, through his occupation category that requires more than elementary knowledge of how to read and write. On the other hand, KA is described as uneducated in reality, by characterising his conduct of taking jibes at members of the category "north Indians" as "illiterate". Together, (Sacks on the economy rule, Stokoe, 2012) this categorisation constructs KA as a hypocrite and his conduct as criticisable. Doing this allows BS to identify the complainable matter independently and allows him to affiliate with KS's complaint. Moreover, the conduct being criticised is constructed as done by a category member ("techie illiterate") and therefore is tied to his membership of that category, which makes it implicitly a common or expectable behaviour from other members, making it not only criticisable, but also recurring.

In both extracts 3 and 4 complaints are affiliated with by responders, which was a type of response previously observed in everyday verbal interactions between friends (Traverso, 2009). I show, however, that while the latter example (extract 4) is more explicitly producing this affiliation, the former (extract 3) does so more tacitly by asking an information-seeking question and allowing the complainer to expand on their own complaint. I also show that in both extracts, affiliation is done by reiterating the complaint through independently identifying the same complainable conduct (“taking jibes”) as done by the same user (KA), then constructing it as criticisable, and recurring.

The next example is that of a complaint produced by user GOB. GOB identifies the subject of the complaint as Mehmood (full name is Mehmood Ali) who was a film actor, producer, and director and worked in more than 300 Bollywood films during 1940s – 1970s (‘Mehmood (Actor)’, 2022). Bollywood is one of India’s biggest film industries (Dwyer, 2010). GOB is complaining about Mehmood’s conduct, and his complaint can be identified as such because it demonstrates similar features to those discussed in previous extracts.

Also note that the first two tweets in this thread are unavailable, and I therefore have a limited view of the context in which the following two tweets were posted. Nevertheless, the complaint can be identified as being formulated by the user GOB on lines 5-9 and following is an analysis of how we know this.

Extract 5: Mehmood did not study South Indian culture

Opening Post

1 This Tweet was deleted by the Tweet author. [Learn more](#)

Reply 1

2 This Tweet is from a suspended account. [Learn more](#)

Reply 2

3 **GOB** @User_GOB · Oct 12, 2020

4 *Replying to Opening Post*

5 Mehmood didn't study south indian culture to create such a
6 character in film. He mocked get up of a Brahmin and gave a
7 random surname which he knew came from below Vindhya. To
8 most bollywood idiots, everyone below Vindhya is a 'Madras

9 dancer pandit'. Same in all films.
 10 **2 replies** **25 retweets** **100 likes**

Reply to Reply 2

11 **GGnerd** **@User_GGnerd · Oct 12, 2020**
 12 *Replying to @GOB and @AAB*
 13 Not just North Indian Thakur, Pandit, Baniyas, South
 14 Indians (as a whole), Bollywood has also caricatured
 15 many other identities like Sikhs, Gujaratis and Nepalis
 16 (they rightfully have a lot of resentment for that).
 17 We should bring them all out.
 18 **4 replies** **18 retweets** **0 likes**

GOB identifies the complainable conduct on lines 6-8 as not doing relevant research about “south Indian culture”, before creating a character for a film. Using “didn’t study” on line 5, he indicates that Mehmood did not research “south Indian culture” before creating a character representing members of that category. Not doing sufficient research is taken to imply that Mehmood’ portrayed character is uninformed by reality and is potentially not a true representation of the actual members of this cultural category. GOB therefore treats Mehmood’s conduct of creating a character with insufficient research on its category-bound attributes as criticisable.

GOB then mentions what Mehmood did on lines 6-7. GOB states that what Mehmood actually did was “mocked get up of a Brahmin.” The appearance of “Brahmins” can be described as priests who wear white fabric with a holy thread on the person’s torso. “Brahmins” also typically wear vermillion powder on their forehead. By saying, “mocked a get-up” GOB claims that the character Mehmood was creating was resembling the appearance of a typical member of the category “Brahmin.” GOB states another thing that Mehmood did, which was “gave a random surname which he knew came from below Vindhya.” Vindhya are mountain range in central India that spread horizontally through the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, etc (*Vindhya Ranges*, n.d.). They are often described as the border dividing the northern and peninsular India from south India (*Vindhya Ranges*, n.d.). The reference to “south of Vindhya” allows GOB to make relevant the geographical category relevant for the character that Mehmood was creating. Giving the character a “random” surname allows GOB to claim that the name used does not have any other significance than identifying the region where the character is from. This description therefore supports GOB’s claim that Mehmood created a character that was “generally” a stereotype of someone who may be residing in south of India.

By providing an account of what Mehmood did and did not do, GOB establishes that Mehmood's conduct is prejudiced and targeted towards members of the category "south Indian" and is thereby criticisable.

The implicit category here, attributed to Mehmood, is that of either "director" or "writer". This is because GOB states the category-bound expectation that directors and writers of film characters typically research the culture of the characters so that their costumes, dialogues, and appearance can be an authentic representation of the social group they are members of. What Mehmood did not do can be seen as worked up instance of unusual and uncommon conduct for a "writer" or "director". Thus, his conduct of creating a poorly researched character representing 'south Indians' is constructed as inauthentic for a member, therefore criticisable, and complaint worthy.

However, the complaint is completed when GOB states on lines 8-9, "To most Bollywood idiots, everyone below Vindhya is a 'Madrasi dancer pandit.' Same in all films." GOB generalises the criticism to being about members of the category "Bollywood idiots." Mehmood was a director and actor working in Bollywood during the 1940s – 1970s, so by invoking this category, GOB constructs his criticism of Mehmood's conduct as not merely a one-off conduct faulting an individual, but as generally or normally attributable to members of the 'Bollywood' category. With "same in all films", GOB claims that the complainable conduct of stereotyping people from south India through depictions of appearance and use of random surnames is not a one-off complaint, but rather a pattern that can be generally observed across all films. Using extreme-case formulation at "all films" emphasises this generalisable nature. Establishing that this is a pattern allows GOB to support the complaint-worthiness of Mehmood's and Bollywood idiots' conducts by constructing them as intentional.

In response to GOB's complaint, GGnerd affiliates with and upgrades the complaint. On lines 13-14 GGnerd begins with "not just" and produces a list of groups or categories whose members have been similarly depicted in terms of appearances deemed stereotypical, by members of the category "Bollywood". This list extends the categories already stated by GOB in the prior turn, thereby affiliating with GOB by agreeing with his complaint. "Not just" indicates this upcoming affiliation. The list is produced with a 'not just' and 'but also' structure (Wiggins, 2017). The first list includes the categories North Indian Thakur, Pandit, Baniyas, and South Indians. 'Thakur' is a feudal title, typically referring to a group of upper-caste people who often owned significant pieces of land and wielded social power and a high social status

(‘Thakur (Title)’, 2023). ‘Pandit’ refers to a group of learned, wise men of Hinduism, who have studied the religious scriptures and perform rituals and teach the values of the religion, and who are also typically of a higher caste (‘Pandit’, 2023). ‘Baniyas’ refers to a caste of India, typically from the northern part of the country, who are traders, merchants, or moneylenders (‘Bania (Caste)’, 2023), and are often known as worshippers of the Hindu God Vishnu. This list encompasses a variety of caste and religious markers and is followed by “south Indians as a whole”, which hints that similar caste and religious markers are included in the umbrella category invoked. Producing the list therefore allows GGnerd to extend the complaint about “Bollywood”, by claiming that creating stereotypical characters depicted in films is a widespread and common occurrence in Bollywood films. This practice is also constructed as intentional thereby potentially a moral transgression against members of these various categories because it is not merely a one-off incident, but instead is widespread and extends beyond merely targeted at ‘south Indians.’ With this, GGnerd is aligning with GOB’s complaint by constructing the complainable or criticisable conduct as commonplace and recurring.

GGnerd then produces another 3-part list (Wiggins, 2017), namely Sikhs, Gujaratis, and Nepalis who are grouped together as “identities” caricatured in Bollywood films. Sikhs are a category of people who follow the religion Sikhism (‘Sikhs’, 2023), Gujaratis are a category of people belonging to the western Indian state of Gujrat, speaking the language Gujarati (‘Gujarati People’, 2023), and Nepalis are the category of people from Nepal. This list further extends the diversity of categories and their members who have been stereotypically depicted by Bollywood, and upgrades GOB’s complaint that members of the “Bollywood” category have repeatedly written or directed films with characters that are based on stereotypical depictions of several social groups. GGnerd therefore constructs the creation of stereotyped characters as a recurring, pervasive, and problematic conduct and establishes Bollywood as the complaint-worthy subject independently of GOB. The targets of stereotypical characters are referred to using the pronoun “they”, indicating that GGnerd is complaining on behalf of these members. Moreover, the target category members (“Sikhs, Gujaratis, Nepalis”) are described as resentful towards members of “Bollywood.” The groups which have been stereotyped are deemed as appropriately resentful (line 16) because depictions of their appearances and surnames were possibly misrepresented.

GGnerd’s complaint is also produced ‘on the behalf of’ (Drew & Walker, 2009) these aggrieved groups. “They rightfully” indicates (line 16) that the reaction of resentment is not GGnerd’s

own but of members of these categories “Sikhs, Gujaratis, and Nepalis”. GGnerd is therefore orienting to the claim that members’ reactions to the portrayal of characters by Bollywood was resentful. “Their resentment” indicates that the character portrayals of members of these categories have been claimed as unfair, and morally condemnable, and therefore complaint worthy. Since GGnerd uses the pronoun “they”, he constructs himself not as a member of these categories but merely as speaking of their reaction, making his complaint as “on the behalf of.”

Using “We should bring them all out”, GGnerd invites readers (possibly of the post) to orient to the unfair portrayals of these various categories and calls for “Bollywood” to be held accountable for their condemnable (complainable) conduct. The use of pronouns “we” and “them” creates a distinction between those who have been unfairly and stereotypically depicted and those who did the depiction. Using “we should”, GGnerd invites the aggrieved parties to affiliate with his complaint. The use of the modal verb “should” indicates that the invitation to “call them out” is on moral grounds, since the complainable conduct was constructed as morally condemnable. GGnerd’s turn is an affiliation because it extends GOB’s complaint about unfair portrayals of characters representing various category members. GGnerd’s turn is also an upgrade of GOB’s complaint because GGnerd independently identifies the same target of complaint using “call them out”, and “Bollywood.”

To summarise this extract, I thus show that a complaint about the depiction of members of “south Indians” in Bollywood films is formulated by GOB. This complaint also consists of similar features as identified in previous extracts that makes it a complaint, such as identifying criticisable conduct, showing the recurring occurrence of that conduct, and indicating that this conduct is morally condemnable. Like in previous extracts, the complaint-worthy conduct was directed at members of the category ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian’ which is therefore the subject of the complaint. GGnerd then replies to GOB’s complaint by extending it and affiliating with it. He does this by listing other categories whose members have also been similarly stereotypically depicted and asks for a morally appropriate action to be taken against the creators of these characters.

The above extracts 1-5 was an example of a complaint about third parties not engaged in the complaint sequence; the structure of complaint sequences followed by an (dis)affiliation was also previously observed in the context of everyday verbal conversations among friends (Traverso, 2009; Drew 1998; Drew and Walker, 2009). The structure of complaints being followed by an affiliative turn was also observed by Traverso (2009). However, I will now

present a different case, wherein the complaint is about a user who is an interactant in the ongoing conversational thread and tweeted in the prior turn and is therefore not third party conversant. His conduct is oriented to as complainable, and he is addressed directly in the formulated complaint. He also returns to the conversation following the complaint, to respond to it.

The complaint in the following extract is produced by user AH_ITG and is about the user ST. ST pointed out a mistake in NI's tweet earlier in the extract, and this is identified by AH_ITG as a complainable matter. He takes the next turn after ST and NI have seemingly resolved their conversation. The conversation is about a "heart-warming" story narrated by a flight captain SS, which is being reposted on Twitter by user NI.

Extract 6: A common error that South Indians make

Opening Post

1 **NI** @User_NI · Oct 8, 2020
 2 A message from Capt. SH ex IAF, who was the captain of the
 3 Indigo flight in which a premature baby was delivered
 4 yesterday—such a heartwarming read!
 5
 6 Via AV_User/FB
 7 *(Images that narrate the story)*
 8 **28 replies** **480 retweets** **1.3K Likes**

Reply 1

9 **ST** @User_ST · Oct 9, 2020
 10 *Replying to @User_NI*
 11 You got his name wrong in your tweet. A common error that
 12 South Indians make with North Indian names.
 13 Thanks for sharing the beautiful story though. Faith in
 14 goodness of this world gets reinforced with this story. I
 15 am sure the newborn will fly high all his life. God bless.
 16 **2 Replies** **1 Retweet** **3 Likes**

Reply to Reply 1

17 **NI** @User_NI · Oct 8, 2020
 18 *Replying to @User_ST*
 19 Oh gosh! Thank you for pointing this out.
 20 **0 replies** **0 retweets** **0 likes**

Reply 3

21 **AH_ITG** @User_AH_ITG · Oct 9, 2020
 22 *Replying to @User_ST and @User_NI*
 23 STji, North Indians toh kabhi bhi south Indians ka naam
 24 galat karte hi nhi hain .. right? 100% accuracy.
 25 (Translation - STji, you say this like North Indians never
 26 make a mistake spelling the names of South Indians, right?)
 27
 28 She made a genuine mistake and she is ready ti accept. How
 29 can u be so crude to make this into a South Indian
 30 generalization?
 31 **1 Reply** **0 Retweets** **3 Likes**

Reply to Reply 3

31 **ST** @User_ST · Oct 9, 2020
 32 *Replying to @User_AH_ITG*
 33 It's an observation that I have experienced all my life,
 34 hence the generalisation. In a diverse country like ours
 35 many of us get names,pronunciation etc of other regions
 36 wrong. There's nothing personal or derogatory intended
 37 in my comment. Pls don't take it in the wrong spirit.
 38 **1 reply** **0 Retweets** **2 Likes**

Reply to Reply 3

39 **NI** @User_NI · Oct 8, 2020
 40 I rarely ever make a mistake with names - must be the
 41 emotional moment after reading this post that I erred
 42 with the name 🙏 no offense taken
 43 **0 replies** **0 retweets** **1 like**

On lines 2-7 the opening post (OP) from user NI reposted a message from the captain (SH) of a flight on which a premature baby was safely delivered. She assesses the message as a “heart-warming read” and posts screenshots with the captain’s (SH’s) message. The first screenshot shows that the captain’s name is SM instead of SS, and that NI has misspelled the captain’s last name (line 2). To this, ST replies with an observation that points out NI’s mistake (line 11). ST addresses NI using “you” and the reply-to feature (lines 10-11) and states that NI has mistaken the last name of the captain in her tweet. This mistake is also described as “common” for members of the category “south Indians”. Stating this as an observation, the mistake is treated as category-bound for members of the category “south Indians” and NI is implicitly attributed

membership of this category. While the pointing out of the mistake is constructed as holding NI personally responsible, this categorisation of NI as “south Indian” shifts the blame and treats her conduct as merely a consequence of her membership of “south Indians” category. The use of “common error” also constructs the observation as not deliberate nor intentional criticism but merely a noteworthy thing.

ST follows this by commenting on the story and responds to the rest of NI’s reposted content on lines 13-15. ST changes the topic and positively assesses the news by saying that it is a ‘beautiful story’ on line 13). The positive assessment of the story is upgraded on lines 14-15 when ST characterises it as “restoring faith in the goodness of the world”. ST continues on lines 14-15 and produces a prediction that the baby has a bright future and ends with “God Bless”, which brings his turn to a close. “The baby will fly high all his life” is an idiomatic expression, that allows ST to express his conviction (“I am sure”) in the baby’s successful life. The sequence of positive assessment (beautiful story) and expressing conviction in the baby’s successful future allows ST to agree with NI’s assessment of the captain SS’s message as heart-warming (line 4). It also hedges the possibility that his pointing out of NI’s mistake will be taken as offensive by her, by constructing it as an observation about common oversight and not characterising it as an intentional misspelling. Pointing out someone’s mistake is therefore treated as sensitive business.

NI responds to this observation by acknowledging the mistake (on line 19). Using “Oh Gosh” which marks realisation and saying, “thank you”, NI orients to ST pointing out the mistake. Normally, this would close the sequence, since the matter of the mistake was acknowledged and apologised for, and the assessment of the story was agreed with and upgraded. *Assessments + agreements* were a sequential organisation observed by Pomerantz (1984). She also contended that agreements can often be used to close a topic or to shift the topic to accomplish the next action).

However, pointing out the mistake is oriented to by AH_ITG who replies on line 23, even though he was not addressed directly by ST. AH_ITG in his turn formulates a complaint that is directly addressed to ST using the “@” feature. The complaint is about ST’s observation about “south Indians” commonly misspelling “north Indian” names.

On lines 23-24, AH_ITG begins his complaint formulation with, “STji, north Indians toh kabhi bhi south Indians ka naam galat karte nhi hain... right?” (*Translation*: STji, north Indians never

misspell the names of south Indians, right?). AH_ITG begins by addressing the target of his complaint directly using “STji”; where “ji” is a suffix that denotes a respectful way of addressing a person. He poses a rhetorical question that implies that misspelling names is not a category-bound action only done by south Indians and targeting north Indians, but that north Indians also commonly misspell “south Indians” names. By swapping the category that is being misspelled with the category that is doing the misspelling, AH_ITG implies that misspelling names is not a category-bounded conduct, which works to make ST’s generalisation as unfair and one-sided, and therefore criticisable. The question’s rhetorical nature is worked up by including an answer into the question as an implicit assumption, that there are “north Indians” who misspell “south Indian” names, making this action category bound. AH_ITG uses “100% accuracy” and the extreme case formulation of “kabhi nahi” (Translation: never) to imply that ST’s generalisation is hypocritical and based on one-sided claims about “south Indians” misspelling. The hypocrisy is worked up through AH_ITG’s counter-question, indicated using “?” and “right”, and implies that ST did not consider the possibility of the reverse (“north Indians” misspelling “south Indians” names) also being true. AH_ITG thus establishes that ST’s conduct of attributing “misspelling” as a category-tied action to “south Indians” as worthy of criticism and complaint-worthy.

He then constructs ST’s actions as intentional and morally transgressive (or insensitive) on lines 28-30 and formulates the complaint on the behalf of NI (whose mistake ST had pointed out). AH_ITG tweets, “She made a genuine mistake and she is ready to accept. How can you be so crude to make this into a south Indian generalisation?” Here, AH_ITG characterises NI’s mistake as “genuine” and not an intentional misspelling of the captain’s name. This allows AH_ITG to attribute the conduct solely to NI and as a mistake, and not tied to the category “south Indians”. Using “she made”, AH_ITG places the blame upon NI as an individual. Using “how can you be so crude”, AH_ITG questions ST’s production of a generalised claim that misspelling names is category-tied to being a member of “south Indians” category. Moreover, the category-boundedness of misspelling attributed by ST is constructed here as intentional because he is directly addressed by AH_ITG in his tweet and his conduct is stated using active voice, “how can you be”. Deliberate generalisation is constructed as morally condemnable (“crude”) and therefore complaint worthy. ST’s observation about NI’s mistake is thus separated from his generalising as category-tied to “south Indians”, constructing the latter as unnecessary and morally transgressive. Therefore, by constructing ST’s observations about

“south Indians” as criticisable and morally condemnable, AH_ITG’s tweet can be recognised as a complaint formulation, based on features previously identified as those of a complaint.

The complaint from AH_ITG has similar features to the ones I have examined in previous extracts, namely criticism of the identified complainable conduct (towards members of the ‘north Indian’ or ‘south Indian’ category), conduct being constructed as a recurring pattern of action, and the conduct being a morally condemnable one by the complainer.

ST responds to AH_ITG’s complaint, on lines 33-37, with a justification about his conduct. The basis for this justification is provided as ST’s personal experience (“I have experienced” on line 33). It is also constructed as not merely a one-off experience, but a regular occurrence, with the extreme-case formulation (“all my life”, line 33) which makes the basis of producing this complaint stronger and more difficult to undermine. ST then extends this justification, “In a diverse country like ours many of us get names, pronunciations, etc of other regions wrong” on lines 35. ST generalises his claim about people misspelling names to “many of us” and restates its common occurrence. However, he replaces the category “south Indians” with “other regions”, generalising the mistake and as not targeting “south Indians” in particular. ST therefore implicitly accepts AH_ITG’s argument that north Indians misspell south Indian names. However, he does not accept the attribution of blame placed on him in AH_ITG’s complaint. Moreover, ST extends his earlier observation (lines 11-15) to include mispronunciation and adds “etc” to indicate that there are more observable mistakes to note as a list construction (Jefferson, 1990). This allows ST to use the generalisable nature of this mistake to distance himself from AH_ITG’s accusation that his observation was intentional or targeted at “south Indians”. He also reformulates AH_ITG’s addressing of him to “many of us”, which works to remove accusation from him and places it on a collective group. This allows ST to resist the construction of his action as morally transgressive (observing misspelling as category-tied) and mitigates the offensive nature of his action that was inferred by AH_ITG.

ST then works to dismiss the basis of AH_ITG’s complaint by denying intentionality of his conduct on lines 36-37 using, “nothing personal or derogatory intended”. By stating that NI’s mistake was not personal or prejudiced, ST orients to AH_ITG’s construction of his conduct as “crude” and constructs his conduct as a “mere observation”. Explicating it as an observation dismisses AH_ITG’s claim that his comment was intentionally offensive, making ST’s claim more defensible and less complaint worthy. ST also constructs his comment as not personally targeted at “south Indians” using “nothing personal”. The dismissal of ulterior motives and

intentional targeting of people based on category membership of “south Indian” is further emphasised through a request addressed to AH_ITG, “please don’t take it in the wrong spirit” on lines 37. Therefore, ST orients to AH_ITG’s complaint and justifies his actions as not being complaint worthy. ST does this by dismissing the basis of the complaint as a ‘mere observation’ and not as intentional or deliberate.

The complaint was produced by AH_ITG on behalf of NI, however, who takes the next turn in this sequence, acknowledges ST’s justification, and subsequently disaffiliates with AH_ITG’s complaint. This is an observation previously in the literature on complaints (Drew & Walker, 2009). NI had previously responded to ST’s observation (line 19), and the conversation was seemingly resolved, closing the topic of misspelling (lines 11-15). However, when AH_ITG extended the conversation and produced a complaint, NI produces another response seemingly closing the topic again, on lines 40-42. NI says, “I rarely ever make a mistake with names – must be the emotional moment after reading this post that I erred with the name...no offense taken.” NI first acknowledges her mistake (which ST points out) as an exception, prompted by an emotional reaction to the report about Capt. SS. This mistake is also characterised as a rare occurrence, which indicates that even if it happened more than once, it would not be often enough to be tied to category-membership, nor would it be often enough to warrant AH_ITG’s complaint. By characterising her misspelling as the consequence of an emotional reaction, NI distances herself from being blamed and constructs the mistake as accidental instead of intentional. NI deletes any reference to ST’s categorisation of herself as “south Indian” and does not respond to the implicit link that ST draws between misspelling the captain’s name and being “south Indian.” Furthermore, NI accepts ST’s plea to not take his observation as being deliberate or intentionally targeted at “south Indians”, which allows her to disaffiliate with AH_ITG’s complaint about ST. The disaffiliation constructs AH_ITG’s complaint as perhaps, “going too far” (Drew & Walker, 2009) with presuming that ST was being deliberate in his generalisation committing a morally condemnable action. This brings the complaint sequence to a close since all issues raised by ST and AH_ITG were seemingly “resolved” by NI’s response.

5.5 Discussion on Category Use in Complaint Formulations

In this chapter, I presented some instances of complaints produced on Twitter which are about the very use of categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” by the poster being complained

about. The use of these categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” by the complained-about poster was treated as constructed as problematic, criticisable, and morally condemnable by the complainer. The categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” were treated in these complaints as implying differences beyond those of mere geography. The “something more” meaning ascribed was not explicitly stated but was recognisable because the complainer identified it as problematic, and offensive to the complainer (whether as the target of the conduct, or on behalf of someone who was a target). Therefore, the very use of either of these categories was presented as warranting a complaint. Criticising the use of these categories was a recurring feature of the complaints in this collection. The complaints in this collection also illustrated that the use of the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” was constructed as the complaint-worthy conduct, and supported with evidence from subjective, childhood experience, and from reference to the target of the complaint’s past moral transgressions.

In addition to learning about the use of these categories, the following observations were made about complaints as an interactional phenomenon. For instance, the complaints on Twitter were also marked by some features which past literature showed as present in verbal interactions with complaint sequences (Drew, 1998; Drew & Holt, 1988; Drew & Walker, 2009; Traverso, 2009). For instance, the complaints were made up of the complainable matter deemed by complainers as morally condemnable. This made the matter worthy of criticism, and a strong criticism of the complainable matter was produced with evidence that reinforced the credibility of the complainer. Another recognizable feature of complaints was that they constructed the complainable conduct as intentional or deliberately produced. Moreover, in some extracts, the complainer generalised the complainable conduct as category-bound to a category ascribed to the complaine. This also allowed the complainer to characterise the complainable conduct as commonplace and possibly recurring (extracts 3 and 4). Construction of the complainable conduct as occurring more than once and as a pattern of behaviour was another recognizable feature of complaints in this collection.

An important observation regarding complaint sequences in this chapter was that they were interactional accomplishments with a recognisable next-turn pattern. I found that most complaints presented in this chapter were affiliated with (extracts 4 and 5), an interactional pattern previously noted in verbal data with complaints (Traverso, 2009). In some instances of affiliations, the complaints were also upgraded, through independent identification of the same complaint-worthy conduct, by both interactants. Extract 5 is an example of this, because the

complaint is made by user GOB is extended, generalised, and affiliated with by the user GGnerd. However, in extract 6, the complaint was disaffiliated with by the target of the complaint, as well as the user on whose behalf the complaint was formulated. This particular type of disaffiliation was previously discussed in the context of verbal complaints as well (Drew & Walker, 2009).

Another feature of the “interactional” nature of these complaint formulations was the role played by the target of a complaint. In extracts 1-5, the target of the complaints did not engage with the complaint and did not respond to it, even though they are addressed using various features of Twitter (“@”, “quote-tweet”, or by name). The users who engage with the complaints do so with an affiliation and extension of the complaints. However, in extract 6, the target (ST) responded and justified his “observation.” Looking at these threads in such detail was therefore crucial to examining the interactional nature of complaining, since it showed that users invoked various sources of entitlement and relied on different platform-specific and linguistic resources to respond to complaints. Users relied on such resources to also show that their complaint is independent of the complainer, which allowed them to not only affiliate or disaffiliate with the complaint, but also to extend or reiterate it.

Complaining was thus, the second context, in which the use of categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” was examined. In the next chapter, I will present the third context, namely asking and answering *ambiguous* questions on Twitter.

Chapter 6: *Ambiguous Questions and their Answers*

6.1 Introduction

Thus far, I have looked at how categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” are invoked in the contexts of responding to a food assessment, and in complaining about someone or something. The food assessment examined in chapter 4 was introduced the idea that the assessment was proffered in response to a “whimsical question”, which indicated that asking or answering questions was a context to explore. In this chapter, I will look at another kind of question, which are constructed as information-seeking, but can be seen as doing “more than” merely doing so. I offer an analytic account of two such questions that are treated as ambiguous and potentially “loaded” with category-tied inferences about “north Indian” or “south Indian” categories. I pose the following research questions: How, when, and for what are the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” used in two questions on Twitter? How are the two questions received and answered by responders?

6.2 Literature Review

Asking questions is one of the core interactive activities undertaken by people and has long been of interest to conversation analysts and researchers of interaction. De Ruiter (2012) illustrated that there are many ways by which questions can be identified as such, and these were described as an interplay between form and function of questions. For instance, questions could have a syntactic form, like a question mark at the end, or ending a declarative sentence with a rising intonation. Some also identified forms of questions like tag questions, pre-positioned interrogatives like wh-questions, yes/no questions, and so on (Koshik, 2005; Steensig & Drew, 2008).

In terms of function, following has been the question asked in past literature on questions: what are people trying to accomplish by asking questions in any given interaction? (Goody (1978b) in Steensig & Drew, 2008). In some CA traditions, questions have often been described as a resource used in eliciting knowledge about something sought by the interactant asking the question and “known” to the interactant answering it (de Ruiter, 2012; Steensig & Drew, 2008). However, this has been shown to not always be the case; for instance, de Ruiter (2012) argued that questions can be multi-functional and sometimes do more than eliciting information.

Steensig and Drew (2008) also showed that questions more often “do more”, and can be used to accomplish other actions, like inviting, requesting, and complaining. An example of this was the study of “rhetorical” questions, which were shown to be seemingly seeking information that the speaker may claim they do not have, but the structure of the question and its subsequent answers indicated otherwise (de Ruiter, 2012; Koshik, 2005, p. 74; Steensig & Drew, 2008). For instance, Koshik (2005) presented various examples from naturally occurring interactions to illustrate that rhetorical questions (particularly, Reverse-Polarity-Questions) were used in conversation to accomplish a variety of actions like accusing, complaining, challenging utterances from a prior turn, and so on. Examining the functions of asking questions, therefore, shows that asking questions is not an innocent or neutral thing that people do (Steensig & Drew, 2008).

Past literature on questions has also argued that asking questions is an interactional accomplishment, in that questions are not merely asked, but also answered. Some have argued that questions are often a part of adjacency pairs, and form the first pair-part, with an answer being normatively expected as the second pair-part (Steensig & Drew, 2008, p. 7). To produce an answer, recipients of a question have been shown to infer the purpose of asking the question (Pomerantz, 2021a). Pomerantz (2021) also suggests that some questions may be constructed in ways that indicate the type of preferred responses. For instance, a study of type-conformity in yes/no questions (in institutional interactional data) specified that an appropriate response to such questions would either begin with or consist of “yes” or “no” (Raymond, 2000 and 2003). An examination of “wh-” questions also demonstrated while they do not specify the exact terms to be included in a type-conforming answer, such questions are built to project what type of formulation should be contained in an appropriate answer. For instance, “who” questions would expect person references, “where” questions would expect location formulations, and so on (Schegloff & Lerner, 2009).

It is not necessary, however, that such type-conforming questions will be responded to with the appropriate answer. When recipients of such questions produce a type non-conforming response, or an indirect answer, it is because they are not replying to the question. Instead, they are orienting to the other, implicit, and often problematic purposes raised in the asking of that question. That responders are orienting to such motives can be recognised by examining contextual cues that frame the question (Pomerantz, 2021b). In the context of news interviews, questions were perceived by recipients as potentially problematic for the interviewee’s

reputation, and were thus met with an evasive or avoidant answer (Clayman, 2001). A variety of resources may be deployed by the interviewee in such cases, to avoid answering or to deflect the question (such as minimally answering, marking the question as confrontational, or even explicitly declining to answer the question as a form of resistance) (Clayman, 2001). In conclusion, analysis of answers and what they do, can indicate the recipients' understanding of the purpose of a question (Walker et. al. in Pomerantz, 2021b; Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson in Stivers & Rossano, 2012).

Asking of questions has been examined in many different interactional contexts. Some of these contexts are institutional, for instance, televised or radio news interviews, research interviews, political debates, police interrogations, and classroom interactions (Clayman, 1993, 2001; Drake, 2021; Pomerantz, 2021b, 2021c; Steensig & Larsen, 2008; Stokoe & Edwards, 2008; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006). The purposes of asking questions have also been examined in various languages other than English, such as German, Danish, etc (Drake, 2021; Steensig & Drew, 2008), Korean (Yoon, 2010) and others. However, it is important to note that the primary focus of much literature has been on question-answering as actions done in institutional settings, and face-to-face interactions. Therefore, data used in the studies discussed above have predominantly been verbal (audio/ video recordings). To my knowledge, how questions are asked on Twitter and in mundane interactional contexts has not been previously examined.

Past CA literature on questions and answers has therefore looked at a variety of question types, purposes, functions and forms, language-structures and their meanings, and the interactional pair parts of a question and an answer. There is a dearth of research on question-answer sequences found in mundane interactions on social media, like Twitter and Quora. This chapter aims to examine two questions and some of their answers on Twitter. My analysis will demonstrate how information-seeking questions are treated as “ambiguous” in recognisable ways in the responses to such questions.

6.3 Methodology

The question-answer sequences analysed in this chapter were from Twitter. There are two questions analysed in this chapter. The first is a question by the user S, which received 128 responses since it was posted. Of these, 127 answers were posted between 9th and 16th October 2020. 9 of these answers have been analysed below (extracts 2-10) because they were posted between the time-period and represent most clearly the phenomena being described. While

extracts 2-9 are all direct responses to S's question, extract 10 is a longer thread, and the question poster (user S) participates in the interaction following some answers from the other users. The second question is examined in extract 10 and was posted by user NI. He did not invoke the categories "north Indian" or "south Indian" in his question. Instead, these categories are made relevant in the answer, by the user DSR.

The preliminary analysis of these question-answer sequences showed that both questions were framed as eliciting information (examples of members of certain categories). Analysis of the answers, however, demonstrated that these questions were treated as doing more than merely eliciting information, in that they were "loaded" or "ambiguous". I will show how this was recognisable from the answers, and what strategies were used by those answering to manage this ambiguity. Lastly but importantly, I will examine the uses of categories "north Indian" or "south Indian" in these questions, and what meanings were ascribed to them.

6.4 Analysis

The following analysis will explore how questions invoking the categories "north Indian" or "south Indian" are posed and answered. Two questions will be analysed which are framed as eliciting information about members of a particular category. Extract 1 presents the first question seeking examples of "north Indian politicians." The question was posed by S.

Extract 1: The Question

Opening Post (the question)

1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
 2 Great that @TS has learnt Hindi. Can we have
 3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
 4 to speak Kannada properly?

Quote Tweet

5 **VB** @User_VB (Oct 9, 2020)
 6 Bengaluru South MP, Tejasvi Soorya has passed out in
 7 the Hindi Speaking Test with distinction. @TS

8 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

On line 2, S applauds learning of the language Hindi, accomplished by TS. Tejasvi Surya (TS) is a politician from the state of Karnataka in south India. This background information (formulated as tokenistic) about him is also presented in the quoted tweet on lines 6-7. TS is categorised in the quoted tweet as being the “Bengaluru South MP.” Bengaluru South is a constituency in the city of Bangalore, which is the capital city of the state Karnataka. He is also categorised as a Member of Parliament (MP), which means that he is working as a politician, with the central government of India, and is based in Delhi, which is a city in the north of India. The quote tweet thus contextualises TS’s background as a politician from south India, working in a city in north India. On lines 2-3, TS is praised for learning Hindi, which is a language predominantly spoken in the north of India (as shown in [Chapter 2: A Brief History of north Indians and south Indians](#)). Thus, TS learning a language spoken in the north of India is assessed as praiseworthy, while information about his background as being from a city in south India, is made relevant.

The positive assessment of TS’s learning of Hindi is immediately followed by S’s question, “Can we have some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt to speak Kannada properly?” on lines 2-4. The question is seeking examples of members of the category ‘north Indian politicians’ who have learnt the language Kannada. Having made TS’s background as a “politician” from Karnataka relevant, and seeking examples of “north Indian politicians”, S frames the question as seeking if there are examples of the opposite of what was praised as “great”. The category “north Indian politicians” is presented as contrasting the category of TS as being from a city in south India, thereby implying differences of region and languages spoken. However, the question is phrased in neutral terms as merely seeking information about “north Indian politicians.” One potential way to answer this question is to name or list members of that category who have done so. This can be seen by looking at some answers to the question, which satisfied the requirement by producing name(s) as an answer, shown below:

Examples: Answers supplying the asked for information

Opening Post (the question)

```
1  S      @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
2  Great that @TS has learnt Hindi. Can we have
3  some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
4  to speak Kannada properly? @TS
```

Reply 1

5 **BR** @User_BR (Oct 9, 2020)
 6 *Replying to @User_S*
 7 Late Sushma Swaraj.

Reply 2

12 **ITT** @User_ITT (Oct 9, 2020)
 13 *Reply to @User_S*
 14 Sushma Swaraj

Both replies supply the name, “Sushma Swaraj.” Both are proffered as minimal answers, with only information fulfilling the question’s information seeking request. The Late Sushma Swaraj was a politician from Ambala, India, which is a city in north India. She was also the Minister of External Affairs in the central government of India from 2014-2019, which means that she was a politician from north India (*Sushma Swaraj | Biography, Education, & Family | Britannica, 2023*). Providing her name invokes this shared knowledge of her background, thereby satisfying S’s conditions and being an answer to his question.

However, several responses to this question indicate that S’s question does not always receive a response of this nature, namely with examples of “north Indian politicians”. Instead, the question is treated as doing more than that and as “loaded” with some ambiguity. That the responders produce different kinds of replies indicates that the question is understood as constructing the question as ambiguous. In the next extract (2), I will show how this ambiguity is dealt with by response from the user VS. In extract 2, VS constructs the question as not merely seeking information, but also expecting something from members of the category “north Indian politicians.”

Extract 2: Same goes to any south Indian languages

Opening Post

1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
 2 Great that @TS has learnt Hindi. Can we have
 3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
 4 to speak Kannada properly? @TS
 5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **VS** @User_VS (Oct 10, 2020)

7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*
 8 What expectations is this? What did Karnataka govt do from
 9 time it was formed all these years to spread Kannada outside
 10 Karnataka? Same goes to any south indian languages.
 11 Greatness of language doesn't fade away by writing Hindi or
 12 speaking it. But by those don't read it's richness
 13 **0 Comments 0 Retweets 1 Like**

In response to the question, VS poses a counter question and comments on it. VS infers that answering S's question is either not possible, or extremely difficult. Through his answer, VS then resists this inference by describing it as an expectation placed on "north Indian politicians."

VS responds with a question on line 8, "what expectation is this?" This works up S's question as expecting something from members of the "north Indian politicians" category. VS challenges this expectation by countering a question and treats S's question as doing more than merely eliciting examples of "north Indian politicians" who can speak Kannada.

VS poses another question on lines 8-10, "What did Karnataka govt do from time it was formed all these years to spread Kannada outside Karnataka?" Here, VS indicates that a considerable time ("all these years", line 9) has passed since Karnataka state was formed and questions the efforts by the state's government to promote Kannada outside the state. This question is rhetorical (Koshik, 2005) because implicitly, it constructs the government as having done almost nothing to promote their official language. The lack of efforts by Karnataka government to promote their language outside the state is used to imply that members of "north Indian politician" category would not have had opportunities to learn this language, since they would have been living outside state where Karnataka government did not promote the language's learning. "Karnataka government" is also characterised as an institution, with the category-tied expectation that part of members' job would be promoting the state's language Kannada to people living outside the state. Therefore, questioning responsibility of Karnataka government in getting people "outside Karnataka" to learn the state's language allows VS to undermine S's expectation from "north Indian politicians." VS therefore treats the question as ambiguous and misplaced, because in addition to seeking examples, his question is also treated as expecting language learning (of Kannada) from members of "north Indian politicians." By posing a counter-question and blaming Karnataka government for not promoting the language, VS infers the question as being difficult to answer, because of a lack of examples explained by the government's inability to promote the language outside the state.

VS then generalises to “any South Indian languages” on lines 10. With this category, VS categorises the language Kannada as an instance of this general category. VS generalises the responsibility to other states than Karnataka, which speak a language categorised as “south Indian languages”, as failing to promote the languages outside their states. With this generalisation, VS constructs S’s question as unfair and absolving “north Indian politicians” of the expectation to learn a south Indian language. The generalisation also treats learning Kannada as an instance of the learning a language from a generalised category.

VS tweets, “Greatness of language doesn't fade away by writing Hindi or speaking it. But by those don't read its richness” on lines 11-12. From context, it can be inferred that VS is referring to greatness of the language Kannada and claiming that the greatness of this language is not affected by a speaker of that one learning a different language. VS also claims that what can negatively impact Kannada’s greatness the actions of those speakers who don’t understand it. This is an idiomatic expression that VS uses to imply that the greatness of Kannada will not be negatively impacted by TS learning Hindi, nor will it be impacted by “north Indians politicians” not learning Kannada. Instead, the greatness of this language is claimed to be affected negatively by Karnataka government’s lack of efforts to promote the language and the lack of their ability to perceive the language’s greatness, thereby relocating the blame for learning language from north Indian politicians to members of the categories “Karnataka government” and “south Indian languages”.

Therefore, the answer by VS treats the question as loaded with an ambiguity, with expectations of language learning, from “north Indian politicians” whose examples are being sought. The answer also indicates that an answer to S’s question may be difficult to produce. VS undermines the question by counter-questioning S and providing an account of why members of the target category (“north Indian politicians”) may not have learnt Kannada and blaming a different party instead (“Karnataka government”) for not promoting the language outside their state.

In the next extract, the user PG responds to S’s question and treats the question as ambiguous, responding with another counter-question.

Extract 3: Why do north Indian politicians need to learn Kannada?

Opening Post

1 S @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)

2 Great that @TS has learnt Hindi. Can we have
 3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
 4 to speak Kannada properly? @TS
 5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **PG** **@User_PG (Oct 10, 2020)**
 7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*
 8 Why do North Indian politicians need to learn Kannada?

In response to S’s question, PG poses a counter-question, “Why do north Indian politicians need to learn Kannada?” on line 8. Using “need to learn Kannada”, PG constructs language learning as a ‘need-based’ action. Asking “why” allows PG to seek an account from S for asking about “north Indian politicians” learning Kannada. PG’s question therefore challenges S’s question by treating it as ambiguous for not stating the purpose for “north Indian politicians” to learn Kannada. As a result of this ambiguity, the purpose of S’s question is treated as unclear, and therefore potentially challengeable as doing something “more”. However, PG could also merely be seeking an explanation for S’s question asking for examples of “north Indian politicians” who have learnt Kannada. This allows PG to either seek further explanation from S or side-step the question by treating it as unclear, or ambiguous.

PG’s answer is therefore indirect, because he produces a counter-question instead of fulfilling the request for examples in S’s question. This allows PG to construct S’s question as difficult to answer, either because more information is needed, or because it is implying something sensitive about ‘north Indian politicians.’

As in the previous example, the user AJ in the following extract treats S’s question as irrelevant. AJ works up learning Kannada as only required if it serves practical purposes to members of “north Indian politicians” category. He also uses counter-questioning as a resource to therefore construct S’s question as irrelevant.

Extract 4: Otherwise, why would he?

Opening Post

1 **S** **@User_S (Oct 9, 2020)**
 2 Great that @TS has learnt Hindi. Can we have
 3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt

4 to speak Kannada properly? @TS
 5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **AJ** @User_AJ (Oct 10, 2020)
 7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*
 8 A north Indian politician will learn kannada if he has to
 9 make Karnataka his karmabhoomi. Otherwise why would he/she?
 10 *(Translation of karmabhoomi: land of work)*

In his answer, AJ works up that there is a practical criterion required for a member of “north Indian politicians” category to learn Kannada and uses this as a justification to dismiss S’s question as irrelevant. On lines 8-9, he states, “A north Indian politician will learn Kannada if he has to make Karnataka his karmabhoomi.” The justification is produced by saying, “has to” make Karnataka his karmabhoomi (land of work), which constructs language-learning as an obligation to be fulfilled. Category-bound attributes of being a “north Indian politician in Karnataka” are invoked here, which are that your land of work will be Kannada speaking constituencies in Karnataka state, and your responsibilities would include interacting with constituents who speak the language and working closely with them in their constituencies. He relies on shared knowledge about languages to imply that Kannada is not a north Indian language, and therefore will not be commonly spoken by members of “north Indian politicians” category. Therefore, AJ constructs having to learn this language as a requirement for “north Indian politicians” to be able to fulfil the requirements of being a politician working in Karnataka.

AJ also questions the motivations for a member of “north Indian politician” category to learn Kannada other than the practical purpose of work. This is done by posing the counter-question, “Otherwise why would he/she?” on line 9. This question is “rhetorical” (Koshik, 2005, p. 64), with the underlying implication that there are no alternative advantages, since the question is preceded by AJ stating one benefit, which is invoked as category tied. The preceding information about when members would learn a language also demonstrates AJ as knowledgeable about the topic, and thus may not be eliciting new information (alternative criteria) but rather implying that there is only one criterion (practical advantage provided by language-learning) for members to learn the given language.

In the next two extracts (5 and 6), the users MR and SH respond to S’s question by posing a counter-question that constructs S’s question as doing “more than” information-seeking. MR

extends his counter-question by working up the claim that learning Kannada is an unfair expectation from “north Indian politicians”. He also constructs S’s question as based on unfair or biased example, undermining the context of the question to then treat it as an irrelevant one to ask.

Extract 5: Hindi is not the main language of north Indians

Opening Post

1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
2 Great that @Tejasvi_Surya has learnt Hindi. Can we have
3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
4 to speak Kannada properly?
5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **MR** @User_MR (Oct 11, 2020)
7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*
8 How many Kannadiga politicians have learnt to speak
9 Bangla/Oriya/Punjabi/Rajasthani/Assamese/Gujarati/
10 Kashmiri, etc.? Hindi is NOT the main state language of most
11 north Indian states.

Extract 6: How many south Indian politicians...

Opening Post

1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
2 Great that @Tejasvi_Surya has learnt Hindi. Can we have
3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
4 to speak Kannada properly?
5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **SH** @User_SH (Oct 9, 2020)
7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*
8 How many south indian politicians can speak dogri or
9 kashmiri ...

In extract 5, MR begins by posing a counter-question. On lines 8-9, he asks, “How many Kannadiga politicians have learnt to speak...” The counter-question is framed as seeking

examples from the category “Kannadiga politicians” indicated by, “how many”. Instead of responding with an answer, posing a counter-question allows MR to treat S’s question as difficult to answer and perhaps unanswerable. This is done by constructing the counter-question as similar in structure to S’s question, and as a rhetorical question (Koshik, 2005). The counter-question is rhetorical, because MR orients to the possibility that S’s question is unanswerable, and the same difficulty may be inferred from MR’s own question. Just as MR, SH also responds to S’s question with a counter-question that begins with “how many...” and treats the question as being ambiguous and potentially unanswerable. However, in extract 6 and unlike MR, SH invokes the category “south Indian politicians” and seeks examples of members who can speak two languages “Dogri” or “Kashmiri.” Both Dogri and Kashmiri are spoken in north India. SH generalises to “south Indian politicians”, implicitly categorising Kannada as an instance of “south Indian languages.” This constructs TS as an instance of “south Indian politicians” category by orienting to his background of being a Kannada speaking politician from the city of Bangalore in south India. This also treats the category “north Indian politicians” as making relevant the other, “south Indian politicians.” Moreover, Hindi is replaced with two other languages spoken in north India, “Dogri” and “Kashmiri”, which implies a link between the two languages, possibly the similar category (regional Indian languages). What this does is construct TS and his learning of Hindi as not exceptional or “great”, but learning a regional or local language such as Kannada would be exceptional. This allows SH to undermine the context that immediately preceded S’s question, and therefore undermines S’s question by constructing it as unfair in expecting “north Indian politicians” learn Kannada. As in the previous extract, the counter-question indicates that few or 0 examples can be presented (from “south Indian politicians”).

Next, MR’s question is seeking examples of “Kannadiga Politicians”, who speak one of 7 languages. These are the official state-languages for West Bengal, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Assam, Gujrat, and Jammu Kashmir (*The Constitution of India, Part XVII*, n.d.) respectively. All these states are in the north of India, potentially implying ‘north India’ or ‘north Indian states.’ The counter-question from MR is therefore seeking examples of Kannada speaking politicians who have learnt to speak one of the 7 languages that are presumably “north Indian languages”. Note that S’s question is asking for examples of “north Indian politicians” speaking the state-language of a state in south India (Karnataka). Therefore, MR’s question is seeking examples of the reverse of what is asked for by S’s question. The rhetorical nature of this question is thus indicated by an implicit negative assertion (Koshik, 2005) that if S’s question

implies that there are very few or no examples of “north Indian politicians” who know Kannada, the reverse (Kannada politicians who learnt north Indian languages) will also possibly yield very few or no examples. This implicit assertion allows MR to construct S’s question as either irrelevant or potentially problematic.

The problematic nature of S’s question is recognisable on lines 10-11 where MR says, “Hindi is NOT the main state language of most north Indian states.” Here, MR undermines the appreciation that Tejasvi Surya has learnt Hindi, and works up the irrelevance of S’s question. TS is categorised by MR as a “Kannadiga Politician”, orienting to the background information available about him (being from Karnataka). By saying that Hindi is not the main state language of “north Indian states” and producing a list of 7 other state languages spoken in north India, MR rejects the greatness of TS’s language-learning, and its contextualisation of S’s question. The list of 7 other languages allows MR to categorise Hindi as just a member of the “north Indian languages” category, and neither representative, nor an exception. “north Indian politicians” is thus shown as being a broader category than “Kannadiga politicians”. This allows MR to argue that the expectation of learning one language from a broader category’s members is an unfair or imbalanced expectation. Moreover, TS’s learning of Hindi is undermined through its construction as not great. This undermines the basis of S’s question and constructs the question as unfair and biased.

In the following extract (7), the user SK responds to S with an indirect answer. He invokes an alternative category “north Indians with businesses here” as the more appropriate category from which examples can be provided that will answer S’s question. SK also states a claim that learning a language is for practical reasons and needs incentives. In extract 8, another indirect answer is produced to S’s question. The user KD introduces an alternative category (like in extract 7) from which examples can be produced of members learning the language Kannada, namely “RSS Pracharaks”. However, unlike the previous extract, KD extends his answer by criticising “north Indians” for not having learnt the language. With criticism, KD treats S’s question as doing more, as implying biased expectations about ‘north Indian politicians.’

Extract 7: North Indians with businesses here

Opening Post

- 1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
- 2 Great that @Tejasvi_Surya (TS) has learnt Hindi. Can we have

3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
4 to speak Kannada properly?

5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **SK** **@User_SK (Oct 10, 2020)**

7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*

8 North Indians with businesses here speak our languages very
9 fluently. Its just impractical to expect from politicians
10 who don't contest from here. There's no incentive and when
11 Tejaswi Surya knows Hindi, why will Amit Shah (AS) learn
12 Kannada.

Extract 8: North Indians can't see beyond their pigeonhole

Opening Post

1 **S** **@User_S (Oct 9, 2020)**

2 Great that @Tejasvi_Surya has learnt Hindi. Can we have
3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
4 to speak Kannada properly?

5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **KD** **@User_KD (Oct 9, 2020)**

7 *Replying to S and TS*

8 Many RSS pracharaks are multi lingual. However, I admit that
9 North Indians can't see beyond their pigeon hole. They think
10 Hindi is inferior only to English and other Indian languages
11 are inferior . Hindi is not even their Mother Tongue, the
12 one which is, is considered dehati

SK says on line 8, “North Indians with businesses here speak our languages very fluently.” By separating “north Indians” from “politicians” and invoking “with businesses here”, SK presents an alternative category “north Indians with businesses here” to imply that S’s question seeking examples is inappropriate, due to the category he asks about. The language Kannada is treated as non-native for members of the “north Indian politicians” category and therefore as needing practical reasons for a member to learn. Producing the alternative category makes relevant some category-bound attributes. The practical need for learning a native language of a specific south Indian state (here Kannada) is indicated by SK’s use of “here.” For instance, owning a

business in Kannada speaking cities but being “north Indian” could entail the need to learn the specific language spoken in the state where they conduct their business. SK implies that a similar rule would apply to north Indian politicians. In other words, if a member of the category “north Indian politicians” is not working in Karnataka, then there would be no category-tied expectation for him to learn Kannada, thus constructing S’s question as impractical. Invoking business owners as an alternative category allows SK to treat S’s question as doing more than merely eliciting examples of “north Indian politicians” who can speak Kannada. SK treats S’s question as unanswerable because the category being asked about is inappropriate.

On line 8, KD tweets, “Many RSS pracharaks are multilingual” which makes relevant an alternative category, namely “RSS pracharaks.” RSS is the ideological wing of the ruling political party BJP, and “RSS pracharaks” are the workers who engage with people at grassroots across India, to recruit workers to support and promote the party ideology (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, n.d.). By invoking this category, KD states that learning a language that is not a native tongue for those workers, is a category-bound attribute for members of this category. By providing this alternative category, KD separates “north Indians” from “politicians”. This is because RSS pracharaks can be from any geographical region of India (north, south, east, and west) since RSS is a national organisation and despite being from diverse regions of the country, KD stresses that they learn the local languages of the regions of India that they are working in. It is also important to note that TS is from the political party BJP which is affiliated with the organisation RSS. Attributing multilingualism to the category RSS pracharaks and KD subsequent use of “however” to imply an upcoming contradiction together downplay Tejasvi Surya’s ability to speak Hindi as an individual accomplishment, and rather makes it an attribute of him being a political party member. As a result, Tejasvi Surya is treated as not an exceptional case, this undermines the praise S attributes to him.

In extract 7 on lines 9-10, SK characterises the reason for the inappropriateness of “north Indian politicians” as impractical tweeting, “Its just impractical to expect from politicians who don’t contest from here.” Thus, SK rejects the relevance of “north Indian politicians” through the comparison of implicit category-bound practical benefits of learning Kannada to businessmen versus the category “north Indian politicians” used by S. By constructing language learning for the latter as driven by practical needs, and by saying that members of this particular category would not practically need to learn Kannada (if they are not contesting from Kannada speaking areas,) SK constructs S’s question and its foundation as impractical and inappropriate.

Impracticality is also indicated as a lack of motivation to learn a language using, “there’s no incentive” on line 10.

In extract 8, KD orients to the question by tweeting, “however I admit that north Indians can’t see beyond their pigeonhole” on lines 8-9. Here, he criticises “north Indians” as being narrow-minded for not learning other languages. The use of “can’t” indicates the lack of ability. Pigeonhole is narrow and restrictive and is therefore used as an idiomatic expression to invoke narrowmindedness as an attribute of “north Indians”. This attribution of narrowmindedness is, however, hedged with “However, I admit”, constructing the attribution as hesitantly produced. The criticism is also presented as a contrast to the attribution of multilingualism “RSS pracharaks” indicated using “however.” KD further claims that “They think that Hindi is inferior only to English and other Indian languages are inferior” on lines 9-10. By using the adjective “inferior”, KD invokes a hierarchy of languages, with English being at the top then followed by Hindi and then all other Indian languages placed lower in status. He constructs this hierarchy as a belief held by members of “north Indians”, and recognisable through their behaviour (not learning other Indian languages) and other category-bound attributes (narrow-mindedness). This criticism allows KD to acknowledge the information-seeking project of S’s question, while treating it as doing something more like being unanswerable. This twofold possibility constructs the question as ambiguous. KD also agrees with this implicit assumption built into S’s question and states an explanation for it, that members of this category are narrowminded.

In extract 7, SK extends his claim that “north Indian politicians” is the inappropriate category to be asking about, on lines 10-12 with an example that orients to S’s praise of Tejasvi Surya. He states, “There’s no incentive and when Tejasvi Surya knows Hindi, why will Amit Shah learn Kannada.” Here, SK provides an example to emphasise the lack of incentive or need for “north Indian politicians” to learn Kannada, namely that of politician Amit Shah. Amit Shah and TS are treated as instances of the category “politicians”. Amit Shah is a politician from north India, and based in Delhi whose native language is Gujarati (*Amit Shah*, n.d.), a language spoken in the state of Gujarat. This background information about Amit Shah and TS and SK’s statement that he knows the language Hindi, becomes relevant when SK claims that TS’s learning of Hindi language resolves the communication issues between him and Amit Shah. Needing to communicate with other politicians, particularly senior members of the same political party as TS himself, or other members of parliament is a category-bound expectations

attributed to being a politician that is oriented to in this example. Since the practical purpose of communication between politicians is resolved by TS learning Hindi, Amit Shah’s learning of Kannada is constructed as unnecessary. With this example, SK establishes a logical connection between one politician knowing Hindi and another politician not needing to learn the same. This example therefore emphasises the practical need for learning a language as the basis for SK’s construction of S’s question as irrelevant.

Extract 9 below treats S as assuming moral superiority while asking the question and uses a personal example to demonstrate that learning a language is a fair expectation from ‘north Indians’ only if it serves practical purposes. The user RD also produces an indirect answer, by not providing the information asked, and instead treating the question as “doing more than” information-seeking.

Extract 9: Same with North Indians in Other States

Opening Post

1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
 2 Great that @Tejasvi_Surya has learnt Hindi. Can we have
 3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
 4 to speak Kannada properly?
 5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply Tweet

6 **RD** @User_RD (Oct 10, 2020)
 7 *Replying to S and TS*
 8 I live in Maharashtra and can speak Marathi. Its the same
 9 with north Indians in other states.
 10 Drop the complex.

On lines 8, RD responds with, “I live in Maharashtra and can speak Marathi.” Here, he begins by invoking the state of his residence (Maharashtra) and that he is able to speak the official language of this state, namely Marathi. RD produces this as background or biographical information about himself, and thereby constructs himself as a credible source to be answering S’s question. He also presents himself as an example to illustrate his argument. Through personal example, RD establishes a link between his state of residence and learning of that state’s official language. Ascribing a residential category, he invokes the category-bound expectation that residents would be expected to know the local language in order to interact

with other native residents in their day-to-day life. This logic allows him to claim that a resident of Maharashtra would learn Marathi because learning this language would fulfil a category-tied expectation that residents in Maharashtra would need to interact with other residents. Therefore, RD uses an example to imply that language-learning is “done” when it serves practical purposes, potentially tied to category memberships (like resident status of a state whose official language is different than the learner’s native tongue).

This relationship between residential category of a person and their language-learning behaviour constructed as normative by extending and generalising to “north Indians” in other states on lines 8-9. RD says, “It’s the same with north Indians in other states.” Using this logic, RD also downplays that Mr Surya’s learning of Hindi is “great” and thereby undermines the question as unfounded. By downplaying the achievement of Mr Surya’s learning of Hindi, RD establishes that learning a south Indian language is a practical and normative action rather than exceptional or great, for “north Indians.”

RD then says, “Drop the complex” on line 10. Here, he characterises the question as condescending, and resists it on this basis. RD treats S as having a superiority complex in asking the question, using “complex”, and the question as presuming implicitly that there are no examples from “north Indian politicians.” RD addresses S with an assertion “drop” his superiority complex, and therefore orients to S as having asked an unanswerable question whose purpose is not genuine information-seeking, but making a condescending, implicit argument about “north Indian politicians”. As such, S’s question is constructed as doing something else than the seemingly information-seeking purposes and is thereby “ambiguous.”

So far, I have examined only direct responses to S’s initial question. In the following extract, I will examine an interaction which takes place over several turns and responds to S’s initial question. The users (A, DU, and MB) in this interaction co-construct the understanding that language learning is driven by practical, necessary motivation. Moreover, the poster of the question (User S) is also actively participating in this thread, unlike the previously presented examples, wherein the answers do not receive a response from him. As a result, they together infer S’s question as being unfair, illogical, and biased. Some of the responses even do so by personally attacking the questioner for being illogical.

Extract 10: How many Indian languages can you read

Opening Post

1 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
2 Great that @TS has learnt Hindi. Can we have
3 some examples of north Indian politicians who have learnt
4 to speak Kannada properly? @TS
5 **128 Replies** **103 Retweets** **515 Likes**

Reply 1

6 **A** @User_A (Oct 9, 2020)
7 *Replying to @User_S and @User_TS*
8 With Hindi he will be able to cover 70% population, no other
9 languages can do that. It's a must for a successful political
10 career at National level.

Reply 2

11 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
12 *Replying to @User_A*
13 I am not overly concerned with @Tejasvi_Surya-ji's
14 career development schemes for himself. I am interested
15 in a specific answer to a specific question - which
16 north Indian politician can speak Kannada fluently.

Reply 3

17 **A** @User_A (Oct 9, 2020)
18 *Replying to @User_DU*
19 Language is a skill, you acquire when it's needed.
20 I am sure many bjp karyakartas would have learnt
21 during their time in Karnataka. It not a thing to
22 keep record of.
23 FYI, CM khattar can speak tamil, Devdhar when
24 prabhari of tripura learnt Bengali & now has learnt
25 Telugu.

Reply 4

26 **S** @User_S (Oct 9, 2020)
27 *Replying to @User_A*
28 They may have, but I am hoping for a specific
29 answer as to which north Indian politician knows
30 Kannada. People are claiming Sushma Swaraj, but

31 she didn't know Kannada. Just a few phrases.
32 We had to translate for her and her Delhi based
33 crew in Bellary.

Reply 5

37 **MB** @User_MB (Oct 10, 2020)
38 *Replying to @User_S*
39 Sir how many Indian languages can you read
40 and write just curious

The users in this extract, like several previous users, treat the question as ambiguous by engaging in discussions about the appropriateness or the relevance of S's question.

The user A, like other users in previous extracts, responds with an indirect answer. He constructs S's question as irrelevant, based on the characterisation of language-learning as underlined by need, or practical purposes. A says on lines 8-9, "With Hindi he will be able to cover 70% population, no other language can do that." A uses quantification (70% population), and extreme case formulation ("no other language") to demonstrate that learning to speak Hindi serves practical benefits to Tejasvi Surya. The extreme-case formulation of "no other language" constructs learning Hindi as solely superior to learning any other language. The benefits here are stated as necessary for Tejasvi Surya's political career, and thus, tied to Mr Surya's categorisation and success as a politician. There are some category-bounded expectations made relevant here, such as needing to communicate with or be understood by constituents and other 'politicians' who speak or know Hindi. The quantification (70%) states that speaking Hindi is widespread in India, and therefore, learning this language would allow TS (as the speaker) to engage with a large part of the population. Learning Hindi would also enable TS to accomplish category-bound activities of politicians, like campaigning in various regions of India and interacting with a large part of the voting population. A therefore constructs the argument that as a member of "politician", learning Hindi serves more practical benefits than learning any other language which are tied to TS's membership of the category "politicians."

A emphasises this by saying, "It's a must for a successful political career at National level" on lines 9-10. Using the modal form 'must' emphasises a necessity of learning Hindi. Using "political career at National level", A states the purpose necessitating learning of Hindi for TS. A orients to his earlier claim about Hindi being spoken widely in India and characterisation of TS being a successful politician at the national level. Therefore, learning Hindi is treated as fulfilling the category-bound attributes of a politician, namely fulfilling the ability to

communicate with other politicians and with constituents who are Hindi speakers. A therefore accounts for Tejasvi Surya learning Hindi by stating its practical purpose for a member of the “politician” category. This account of TS learning Hindi orients to the first part of S’s tweet (“great that...”) and treats learning Hindi as merely fulfilling a category-bound practical purpose for politicians aspiring for a national career, undermining its assessment by S as “great”. A therefore does not provide the information asked for by S. However, the question can be seen as ambiguous, for it could be implying that there are few or 0 examples of “north Indian politicians” who have learnt Hindi because learning it serves practical purposes to only few or 0 politicians.

S however disambiguates this by rejecting A’s answer in the next turn, “I am not overly concerned with @Tejasvi_Surya-ji’s career advancement schemes” on lines 13-14. Being unconcerned about TS’s career development schemes allows S to reject the relevance of practical and category-bound reasons (such as career prospects) for learning a language. A’s account of TS’s political aspirations and language learning was constructed to make a general argument used to tie the practical purpose of learning Hindi to the membership of “politician” category. However, S’s lack of concern towards TS’s political aspirations individualises A’s account as being about one person, allowing him to dismiss it as a relevant reason for not learning the language S is asking about (Kannada). He then re-specifies the initial question, “I am interested in a specific answer to a specific question – which north Indian politician can speak Kannada fluently” on lines 14-15. Reiterating the question disambiguates the purpose of asking the question by confirming the purpose being seeking examples from the category “north Indian politicians.” The disambiguation is extended using “fluently” and constructs the question as having a specific criterion, being described by the fluency of language speaking, rather than merely knowing a few phrases. Restating the question therefore allows S to reject A’s indirect answer as irrelevant, and respecifying the question disambiguates its purpose.

A replies to S’s rejection by reiterating language-learning as a practical or need-driven skill. He tweets, “Language is a skill, you acquire when it's needed” on lines 19. A begins by explicitly stating that language learning is a need-based skill and re-emphasises that ‘north Indian politicians’ do not need to learn Kannada. A therefore rejects ‘learning Kannada’ as a valid expectation from “north Indian politicians” by claiming that it has no practical benefits for members of this category. Furthermore, A says, “I am sure many bjp karyakartas (party workers) would have learnt during their time in Karnataka” on lines 20-21. He invokes the

category BJP Karyakartas (party workers) here, as an alternative group from which examples can be produced stating this as the more ‘appropriate’ category to be asking about. The appropriateness is implicitly tied to category-bound attributes of “BJP Karyakartas”, which would include needing to work and interact with people at grassroots (speaking Kannada) when working and implementing the party’s policies and promote the party’s electoral campaigns. In this context, BJP karyakartas (party workers) working in Karnataka would be expected to learn Kannada as members of this category, particularly if their native language is not Kannada. “During their time in Karnataka” demonstrates this learning based on practical purposes. On lines 21-22, A tweets, “It not a thing to keep record of”, making the learning of Kannada as not extraordinary and notable enough to warrant a question seeking examples, thereby reiterating his earlier construction of S’s question as irrelevant and his own argument that language learning serves practical (category-tied) purposes. This again indirectly answer’s S’s question since there are no examples proffered but invokes “BJP Karyakartas” as the more appropriate category from which such information can be provided. This was seen in previously analysed extracts as well (extracts 7 and 8).

Having established that the question is irrelevant, A then produces two names on lines 23-24, “FYI, CM Khattar can speak Tamil, Devdhar (*spelled: Deodhar*) when prabhari of Tripura learnt Bengali & now has learnt Telugu.” The two examples of individuals who are politicians from India (CM Khattar and Deodhar) are provided as additional information (using “FYI”), supplementing the main argument about practical purposes of language learning. CM Khattar is the Chief Minister of a state in north India (Haryana) and Tamil is the official state language of a state in south India (Tamil Nadu). Similarly, Deodhar is not a native of the Bengali-speaking state Tripura, nor of the Telugu-speaking states Andhra Pradesh or Telangana. Despite this, they are both stated to have learnt these non-native languages (Tamil, Bengali, and Telugu), the reason for which is constructed as practical and necessary for carrying out category-bound activities. In the case of Deodhar’s example, this is done by saying, “when he was prabhari” on line 24, referring to him being in charge of Tripura state’s governance (Singh & Kumar, 2018). He would, as a working politician in this state, have needed to routinely communicate with residents of the state, who predominantly would be speakers of Bengali. CM Khattar is categorised as a “politician” by invoking a category-bounded activity of campaigning and needing to communicate with locals of a region while campaigning. This would have required him to learn Tamil to be campaigning in the state of Tamil Nadu. In other

words, they are both categorised as non-native language speaking politicians who learnt non-native languages for practical purposes that are category-bound.

However, neither of these examples are of “north Indian politicians” who have learnt S, that is they do not fulfil the criteria for answering S’s question. By presenting these examples, A orients to the possibility that answering S’s question is not possible, because his criteria is narrow or specific, and because learning a language (Kannada) would be driven by practical purposes or necessity tied to the membership of “politicians” category.

S again responds to A and partially accepts the answer but rejects it as a relevant answer to his question. The agreement is produced on line 28, “They may have”, which accepts the examples of CM Khattar and Deodhar. The agreement is hedged by ‘may’, indicating the partial acceptance orienting to only A’s justification that language learning is driven by need or a practical purpose. However, the answer is treated as incomplete, as indicated by “but”. S reformulates his initial question, “I am hoping for a specific answer as to which north Indian politician knows Kannada” on lines 28-29. He changes “have learnt” to “know” which is an upgrade. This is because ‘learning’ a language indicates the possibility of the speaker being an amateur, and as possessing limited understanding of writing, speaking, and listening a language. However, ‘knowing’ a language would be expert-level knowledge of writing, speaking, and listening. This difference is supported by producing an example on lines 30-33. S says “People are claiming Sushma Swaraj, but she didn’t know Kannada. We had to translate for her, and her Delhi based crew.” Here, invoking Sushma Swaraj as an example implicates the category “people” who have attempted to provide a valid answer. These are likely other responders in the thread whose answers are characterised as a “claim.” S characterises the example they produced, namely Sushma Swaraj, not a valid example because she did not “know” the language. This is demonstrated by characterising Sushma Swaraj speaking Kannada as her merely knowing a few sentences. but that she only ‘learnt’ the phrases which were translated for her by her political crew at the event, thereby disqualifying her as an example. He uses ‘we had to translate’ to show personal, first-hand involvement in the event described, to strengthen his assertion and knowledge.

Therefore, in subsequent turns where S participates in this interaction, he re-iterates the information-seeking purpose of his question and the specific categories from which he is seeking examples. He supports this by citing examples of incorrect or invalid answers (from ‘people’) and states that these do not meet the criteria of ‘knowing’ rather than ‘learning’

Kannada. This difference is used by S to clarify the criterion for an acceptable answer to his question and disambiguating the purposes of asking the question.

In response to this clarification, MB orients to S's use of personal experience to explain the purpose of his question and responds with a counter-question on line 39-40, "sir how many Indian languages do u know just curious." This question asks S to list the number of languages he personally "knows" and is structured in a similar manner to S's question (line 2-3). MB's question is, however, clarified as being for information-seeking, using "just curious." However, the question can also be seen as ambiguous in the same way as S's initial question, with another possibility being that it implicitly constructs S as "knowing" very few or no languages. By asking this as the counter question, MB questions S's personal knowledge of languages other than Kannada. This counter question allows MB to initiate a possible personal-attack strategy by questioning S's knowledge of languages, thereby discrediting his question as valid in asking for examples of "north Indian politicians."

Through the interaction between users A and S, and MB, it can be noted that users employ several similar strategies in treating S's question as ambiguous and doing more than seeking examples. A rejects the expectation that north Indian politicians would learn Kannada, without it (language learning) having practical purposes or necessity for them as members of "politicians' category. In other words, language-learning is constructed as need-based, and a very practical skill, and as not serving either of those functions for "north Indian politicians", thereby constructing the question as irrelevant or "void". MB poses a counter-question orienting to S's experience with "politicians" and questions his credibility to ask the question seeking examples. These strategies were also identified in previous extracts 2-9. A responds to S's question and then his follow-up reformulations with partial answers or examples from other categories who have learnt languages other than Kannada. However, these partial answers are rejected because they are treated as unsatisfactory. All of these are examples wherein S's question is unanswered, or indirectly answered, or actively resisted.

The last extract in this chapter (extract 11) presents the second question, also eliciting examples from a category. However, the question does not invoke "north Indian" nor "south Indian" categories. Instead, these are made relevant by the respondent (DSR). The question posed by NS is treated by this respondent (DSR) as doing more than merely seeking information and is therefore, constructed as ambiguous. In response to NS's question, DSR produces a 4-tweet-

turn answer, which does not answer the question directly (that is, does not provide the information asked for).

Extract 11: South Indians should take a lesson

Opening Post

1 **NS @User_NS (Oct 11, 2020)**
2 So it's great that a Kerala girl sings a Himachali song.
3 That becomes an example of "One India. Great India". Ok.
4 Give me one counter example. Any UP/Bihari/Himachal girl
5 sings a Malayalam song ? Still waiting

Reply 1

6 **DSR @User_DSR (Oct 11, 2020)**
7 *Replying to @User_NS*
8 Nothing great... there are numerous Famliles of
9 Rajasthani who stays in kerala and are more fluent than
10 Keralite. Pls don't make it north/ south... or this
11 would have been great if all Keralite would have known
12 hindi..or vice versa Love-you gesture

Reply 2

13 **DSR @User_DSR (Oct 11, 2020)**
14 *Replying to @User_DSR*
15 People don't understand the geography of the country and
16 they are trying to divide the country in North and South
17 in the name of languages. The South Indians should take
18 a lesson from Mr. Subramaniyan Swamy who is loved by the
19 every North Indian.

Reply 3

20 **DSR @User_DSR (Oct 11, 2020)**
21 *Replying to @User_DSR*
22 Do you want your children to remain in a particular
23 region only or to be free to live in any part of the
24 country ? The choice is yours...!!!

Reply 4

25 **DSR @User_DSR (Oct 11, 2020)**
26 *Replying to @User_DSR*

27 If South Indians are required to learn a North Indian
 28 language(Hindi), then North Indians should learn a South
 29 Indian language too as per ur need, But I have a
 30 question. Among 4 South- Indian languages, which one
 31 should North Indians learn? Tamil, Telugu, Kannada or
 32 Malayalam?

Reply 5

33 **NS @User_NS (Oct 11, 2020)**
 34 *Replying to @User_DSR*
 35 Please learn any one and show first. We aren't
 36 particular. Show any one.

NS begins by saying “It is great that a Kerala girl sings a Himachali song” on line 2. He categorises the girl singing the song as being from ‘Kerala’, a state in south India. The song she is singing is in the language “Himachali” called Pahari, which is spoken widely in Himachal Pradesh, a state in north India. The official state language of Kerala is Malayalam. Using the categories “Kerala girl” and “Himachali song”, NS implies that the girl is potentially a Malayali speaker, because of her state-category “Kerala”, and is stated as singing a song in a language from a different state. This makes her “singing” notable and is praised by NS for doing so (“it is great that...”) on line 2. The girl is categorised as “a Kerala girl”, and the song as “a Himachali song”, indicating that the specifics of who is singing and which song are not relevant details, but the categories they belong to is being orientated to. On line 3, NS describes the singing as an example of, “One India, Great India.” Phrased as a quote of an idiomatic expression, this describes the Kerala girl’s singing as an example of India’s unity and greatness. This adds to the event’s (singing’s) noteworthiness.

Having described the singing as notable and great, NS poses her question on lines 4-5, “Any UP/Bihari/Himachal girl sings a Malayalam song.” Producing this 3-item list is used to seek examples of ‘any’ girls from any of these three states (or perhaps by extension, a girl from north India) who has sung a Malayali song. Like the previous examples, this is framed as an ostensibly information seeking question, asking for examples. The examples are from the category “UP/Bihari/Himachal girls” singing a song in a language not spoken in any of these three states. The states UP (Uttar Pradesh), Bihar, and Himachal Pradesh are all in north India, and Malayalam is the language widely spoken in Kerala (a state in south India) (*Languages in India - Map, Scheduled Languages, States Official Languages and Dialects*, 2019). However, the category north India is not explicitly stated. The possibility that this may be the relevant

category here, is supported by the question seeking “counter” examples, which orients to shared knowledge of India’s geography wherein Kerala is a state in south India and the other three are states in the north. NS also constructs his own question as potentially unanswerable. This is using, “still waiting...” on lines 5 implying no examples have been produced thus far. Saying, “Ok. Give me one counter example” on line 4 also constructs the difficulty of producing an answer by stating that there are few girls from these states who singing a song that is not in the language spoken in their state. The use of 3-item list also expands the options available to responders, for groups from which a valid answer could be given. This further emphasises the impossibility of an answer. The question can therefore be seen as ambiguous because it is seeking information (examples), however it implicitly constructs that this sought after information is difficult to produce.

In response to this question, DSR produces a four-tweet answer. This answer treats the question as being ambiguous, and not merely seeking examples of UP/Bihari/Himachal girls singing Malayalam song. DSR therefore orientates to the difficulty of producing an answer in his responses. This is done by the answer not providing the examples sought. I will analyse in detail what he does in each of the tweets.

DSR begins by saying “nothing great” which has two possible interpretations. Firstly, DSR may be rejecting NS’s assessment of Kerala girl’s actions as being great (line 2), and rather as routine or mundane. Secondly, DSR NS’s rejection is of the description of Kerala girl’s singing as an example of One India, great India. On lines 8-9, DSR produces an alternative category from which examples can be produced of girls singing Malayali songs. DSR states, “there are numerous families of Rajasthani who stays in Kerala are more fluent than Keralite.” Rajasthan is a different state than Kerala, and Malayalam is spoken in Kerala. DSR is thus establishing that “Rajasthani families” who are residing in Kerala would be from a different state, but that they are fluent in the language spoken widely in Kerala (Malayalam). DSR also establishes that knowing how to speak Kerala is commonly category-tied to being from Kerala, using a comparison between the “Rajasthani families” and “Keralite.” The language-speaking of “Rajasthani families” is implicitly tied to practical purposes of being a resident of a state where the widely spoken language is Malayalam. This purpose could be needing to interact with other residents who speak this language, or conducting daily businesses like shopping for groceries, or even going to school with other Malayalam speaking kids. These category-bound purposes can also be tied to being a “family” residing in Kerala, and the everyday business of shopping

for groceries and going to school can be construed as ordinary, or routine, mundane category-bound purposes. This routineness is also signified by using ‘numerous’ to indicate that more than 1 such example exists. DSR’s claim is therefore that category “Rajasthani family” from which examples of Malayalam speakers can be found. Presenting an alternative, more appropriate category from which examples can be produced was also done in some answers (extracts 7, 8, and 10) to the first question by S.

DSR follows this by saying “Please don’t make it north/south...” on lines 10-11. By invoking the regional categories north and south, DSR orients to the previously implicit regional link between UP/Bihari/Himachal and Kerala (north Indian and south Indian) in NS’s question. Requesting NS to not ascribe these categories “north/ south...”, DSR challenges the impossibility of an answer by constructing that NS’s question is potentially divisive or biased, or ‘loaded’ and doing something more than merely asking for counterexamples.

Having earlier rejected the greatness of Kerala girl’s singing, on lines 10-11, DSR tweets that “this would have been great if all Keralite would have known Hindi.. or vice versa.” Here, he poses a hypothetical scenario to suggest what would be great, which is, “if all Keralite know Hindi.” Here, DSR invokes an extreme case formulation (all) to emphasise that each and every Keralite would need to know Hindi for “great” to be the valid assessment. DSR also says, “or vice versa” to imply that the situation of knowing a language would be great even if all “Hindi speakers” also knew Malayalam. Posing alternative hypothetical scenarios allows DSR to undermine the “greatness” of the Kerala girl’s singing.

In the next tweet, DSR treats the question by NS as an instance of a general phenomenon of category-based division. DSR tweets that, “people don’t understand the geography of the country and they are trying to divide the country in North and South in the name of languages” on lines 15-17. Here, he makes a generalised claim about “people” and constructs their actions as divisive, and ignorant. This allows DSR to orient to the ambiguity in the question and to treat the question as doing more than merely seeking examples. He draws a contrast between their understanding and their actions of dividing the country. DSR accuses “people” of dividing the country based on geographical-language categories (north Indian and south Indian) categories. Therefore, he challenges and condemns the link between languages of north and south Indian states and criticises the actions of “people” as divisive and ignorant. DSR constructs these actions as hypocritical and suggests that “south Indians should take a lesson from Mr. Subramanian Swamy who is loved by every north Indian” on lines 17-19. Use of

“should” suggests a moral recommendation or advice being given by DSR. He uses Mr. Subramanian Swamy as an example of the “south Indian” category members, who are being recommended this moral lesson. Mr Swamy is a politician from the southern state of Tamil Nadu who is a Member of Parliament representing the BJP party. Therefore, Mr Swamy is constructed as a prototypical, role-model member of the category “people” and is invoked as the moral example for members to learn from.

In the next tweet, DSR says, “do you want your children to remain in a particular region only or to be free to live in any part of the country? The choice is yours...!!” (lines 22-24). Here, he invokes the category “children” and poses two choices to the readers of this tweet. The first is for “children” to stay in one part of India. Using “remain” and “only”, this choice is constructed as limited and as restrictive. The other choice is “to live in any part of the country.” This choice is constructed as more open and less restrictive by referring to their life as “free” and by saying that the choice is widespread to “any” part of India. This allows DSR to claim that living in any part of the country is a choice that people would make, possibly with freedom to pursue opportunities across the country. Consequently, making this choice would require a person to be less divisive and more willing to learn languages that would increase access to such opportunities. This allows DSR to imply that there may be practical purposes for “children” to learn languages from different states within India, tied to their freedom.

DSR tweets on lines 27-28, “If south Indians are required to learn a north Indian language (Hindi), then north Indians should learn a south Indian language too as per your need.” The use of “required” indicates that NS’s question is implying a mandatory expectation from members of “south Indians” category. Using “a north Indian language (Hindi)”, DSR indicates that the requirement is fulfilled by learning of Hindi. The language Hindi is here implicitly treated as an instance of the category “north Indian languages.” DSR then extends his claim and places a requirement upon the category “north Indians”. The learning of a language from this category is constructed as a moral recommendation (“should”). With “as per your need”, DSR addresses the original poster NS and orients to a possible asymmetry in language-learning expectation built into NS’s question. NS’s question is therefore constructed as having asked about “south Indians” having learnt a north Indian language, but not about “north Indians” learning a south Indian language.

DSR then says, “But I have a question” on line 29. He shifts the topic and marks that a question is upcoming. He then proceeds to pose a counter-question on lines 29-30, “Among 4 south-

Indian languages, which one should North Indians learn? Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, or Malayalam?” The question poses another choice, picking one instance from the general “south Indian languages” category. Prior to this, DSR indicated Hindi as an example of “north Indian languages” and the perceived equality between north and south Indian languages is emphasised again with the counter-question. This question is therefore framed as an information-seeking question, an answer to which is expected to be choosing from among the 4 languages.

NS responds on lines 35-36, “Please learn any one and show first.” Here, NS only responds to the counter-question posed by DSR in his fourth turn-tweet and does not address his treatment of NS’s question in the opening post as ambiguous and divisive. NS says “any one” to emphasise all instances presented by DSR (Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil) are equally preferable. He also asks for evidence of learning (“show first”, line 35) and emphasises that learning “any” south Indian language is more important than the choice of the language itself. NS reiterates this when he says, “we aren’t particular.” He firstly self-categorises using “we” which allows him to affiliate with members of the category “south Indians” or “south Indian language speakers.” He therefore invokes consensus that he and his fellow members do not have a preference and are more interested in the learning, rather than the choice of language. He then reiterates his earlier demand for evidence of having learnt a south Indian language using, “Show any one” on lines 36. Notably, NS directly responds only to the question posed by DSR at the end of the fourth tweet. In doing so, NS resists DSR’s question’s request for a specific language to be chosen and iterates that all choices would be equally valid, because “north Indians” do not learn “south Indian” languages and it would therefore be a challenge regardless of which language is chosen for learning.

Therefore, the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” are inferred by DSR and not explicitly stated within NS’s initial question. Nevertheless, NS’s initial question is ambiguous and is treated as such by DSR in his responses. DSR’s answer is indirect and constructs NS’s question as unanswerable, divisive based on the geographical attributes of “north Indian” and “south Indian” categories and seeking examples from a category which is the incorrect one to ask about. He states these various inferences in a 4-tweet turn and concludes by posing a counter question addressed to NS. In his reply to this counter-question, NS does not orient to the various inferences drawn by DSR, but only responds to the counter-question.

6.5 Discussion on Ambiguous Questions

In this chapter, I have presented the third context in which the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” are invoked: asking and answering ‘ambiguous’ questions. Two questions were presented, and analysis showed that these questions are ambiguous. Both questions presented in this chapter were constructed as information-seeking and as simultaneously doing more than merely that.

In the first question (extract 1), the category “north Indian politician” was invoked in the question and information was being sought about members. Although in the second question, the categories “south Indian languages” were not invoked in the question they were stated at the end of the fourth response tweet. The answers to both questions treat the use of these categories or their relevance to the questions as “loaded” and as doing more than merely information-seeking. The category “north Indian politicians” is also ascribed various category bound attributes, such as members being from the geographical area of north India, speakers of one or many different languages (Hindi, Dogri, Kashmiri, Himachali (Pahari), Rajasthani; extracts 5 and 6). These various ascriptions were used by answer posters to respond indirectly, and account for why the questions were unanswerable.

The analysis presented above brings to attention two other important observations. First, it shows that the questions are ambiguous and treated in the answers as doing something more than merely seeking examples from the categories “north Indian politicians” or “UP/Bihari/Himachal girls”. Second, the recipients produce indirect answers orienting to this ambiguity in the questions. These answers address the difficulty of answering the question by constructing language-learning as a necessity or practical for members of specific categories (like politicians, or business owners living in a state different state). Some respondents in these answers produce alternative categories and invoked category-bound purposes (RSS pracharaks being multilingual or families of Rajasthani in Kerala) and claim that the category “north Indian politicians” or “UP/Bihari/Himachal girls” are inappropriate or irrelevant for the question to be seeking examples of.

In the subsequent extracts 2-10, two striking observations can be made. Firstly, none of these responses present a direct answer to the question, and secondly that they all pick up the implication that “north Indian politicians” do not or have not learnt Kannada language.

While doing so, most responses construct the learning of a non-native language as being based on necessity/ a practical purpose. To support this construction, respondents produce alternative categories as evidence (extracts 4, 6, and 7). Here, learning a non-native language is shown to be practically beneficial for a successful business, or a successful political career, or a successful interaction with locals as a party worker. Some other extracts show that the question has an unfair expectation from the categories “north Indian politicians” or “UP/Himachali/Bihar girls” (such as in extract 1, 2, and 5). The unfairness of asking the question was also pointed out by using counter-questions to indicate that language-learning is not only motivated by necessity, but also dependent on unequal social status of languages in India (such as in extract 5).

In both questions (extracts 1 and 11), the question is preceded by praise or appreciation of an example of someone learning a non-native language (TS in Extract 1 and Himachal Girl in Extract 11). This praise is then immediately followed by the question and can thus be seen as contributing to the question’s ambiguity. Several respondents orient to this by downplaying or undermining the “greatness” of learning non-native languages, and thereby construct the question as irrelevant. In extract 8, NS applauds Kerala girl’s ability to sing a Himachali song and uses this achievement to frame his question. In response, DSR downplays the greatness of this achievement, indicating “Kerala girl” as an exceptional case, and resists the implication that this is category bound to being “north Indian” or “south Indian”. Similarly, in extract 7, A downplays the greatness of Mr Surya’s achievements by using two counterexamples (CM Khattar and Deodhar) and by implying that learning to speak a non-native language is “nothing to keep track of” as it is a necessity in specific circumstances.

In almost all examples, the question expecting language-learning from a category (“north Indian politicians” or “UP/Bihar/Himachali girls”) is oriented to and resisted in the answers. One reason for this is that learning a language is seen by most respondents, as being practical, and motivated by necessity for political and social success. As such, the questions seeking examples of “north Indian” or “south Indian” category members learning non-native languages are inferred as unfair, biased by inequality of status of languages, or impractical and ridiculous.

This understanding of language learning from a mundane context is different from the historical review chapter’s discussion (chapter 2). Literature shows language-learning as contributing to building a language-identity and serving as an object of passion and political mobilisation.

However, the use of ‘north Indian’ here depicted that language-learning in mundane interactions, was treated as a relevant expectation only if it served practical purposes.

In the next chapter, I will present my fourth context and examine a different type of question, namely open-ended questions seeking descriptions or characteristics attributed to “north Indian” or “south Indian” categories. The data is also from a different platform (Quora).

Chapter 7: Questions and Answers from Quora

7.1 Introduction

In two of the previous chapters, I discussed two kinds of questions that were found in my Twitter data. In chapter 4, the question was identified as a “whimsical” question (Sommer, 2019), which I argued were designed for eliciting controversial sorts of responses. In chapter 6, I analysed two questions from Twitter seeking examples of “north Indian politicians” and “UP/Bihari/Himachal girl” respectively. The answers treated these questions as ambiguous and as “doing more than” merely eliciting information. In this chapter, I am going to present a third kind of question found in my dataset. These are most directly relevant to my interest in the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” because they are seeking descriptions, identifying characteristics, and attributes of members of these categories. Following is an example of such questions:

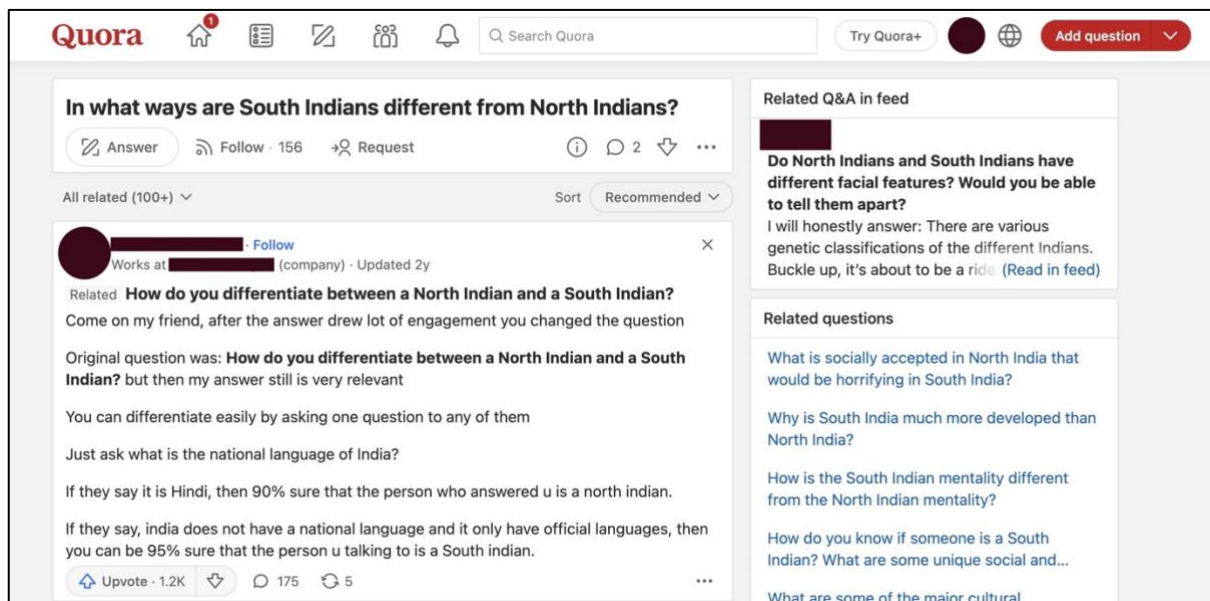


Figure 7: Quora Screenshot

The questions in this chapter are also not taken from Twitter but are from Quora. Quora is one of the most popular social media sites with almost 190 million active users of which almost 43% are based in India (Hlebowitsh, 2022). This platform is designed primarily as site for people to ask questions and seek information and advice from other users of the platform. Those responding to questions are required by the site to disclose information about their expertise on various topics (*Quora - About*, n.d.). While other platforms (like Twitter) are also used to

ask questions and seek advice, this is Quora's core function. Quora is an online question answering service and a social networking site (Mathew et al., 2019). These questions are often organized by the topic of interest (called spaces) and users can follow these spaces, or other users who are answering questions within such spaces (Mathew et al., 2019).

I am therefore interested in the kinds of questions that are seeking descriptions, or members' descriptions, and the kinds of answers they receive. Such questions were used by early social psychology researchers of stereotypes and prejudice, to explore how people describe and categorise each other. Before looking at such questions in my data and how they are answered, I will review some of past literature on such questions and on how descriptions of people are produced.

7.2 Literature Review

Social Psychologists, particularly early researchers of stereotypes, have been long interested in how people described and categorized each other. One kind of measure used in early work on stereotypes and prejudice was a free-response questionnaire (Katz and Braly (1933) in Schneider, 2004, pp. 34–63). For instance, Katz and Braly (1933) administered a questionnaire asking their participants to choose from among 84 traits, which would be typical of a group. Ten groups (Germans, Italians, Irish, English, and so on) were asked about in this study and those traits that had considerably high consensus among participants' ranking were treated by the researchers as stereotypic of the group. If the findings indicated that 70% participants thought Germans were scientific-minded, and 54% thought Turks were cruel, these traits were stereotypes about these groups. Later in 1954, the book on Prejudice (Allport, 1954) argued that it is a basic cognitive nature for people to place themselves and others into categories. He described categories as cognitive pots in which people store traits, physical features, expectations, and values (Allport, 1954; Schneider, 2004, pp. 1–33). Therefore, there has been longstanding social psychological interest in how people describe each other in terms of categories and category-bound traits, descriptions, attitudes, expectations, features, etc.

However, Billig (1985) contends that the traditional social psychological understanding of prejudice is that it is based on categorisation being understood as a basic and natural cognitive process that all humans engage in (Allport (1954) in Billig, 1985). The inevitable process of categorising people is identified as sometimes leading to errors in which traits, features, or attitudes are attributed to a person, and makes prejudice an almost inevitable consequence of

mere categorisation (Billig, 1985). This would then lead to stereotyping as a cognitive undertaking to make sense of reality. The studies of prejudice and stereotypes in social psychology have presumed categorisation as being a rigid, fundamental, cognitive process. Stereotypes are therefore often treated as “fixed” mental representations of characteristics, dispositions, attitudes, values, and even physical features that describe members of social categories. Billig (1985) therefore discussed an alternative approach to studying prejudice and criticised the traditional focus on categorisation as a cognitive process.

He contended that “traditional” models of prejudice and categorisation presuppose rigidity of thought processes and eliminate the role played by language used (to convey) and context-specific selection (in other words, the process of particularization). Therefore, if language can be used to express prejudiced thought, it can also be used to express tolerant thoughts (Billig, 1985). People may, for instance, use stereotyped category descriptions without implying that they apply to all members and may invoke exceptions, to inoculate themselves against being reprimanded for generalising a group in an interaction. In conclusion, Billig (1985) urged that psychological phenomena like prejudice and categorisation be examined rhetorically as a members’ phenomenon, and as something that is done in talk (Billig, 1985), rather than as the inevitable outcome of flaws in the cognitive process of categorisation.

Extending this understanding, DP/CA have examined categories as members phenomena, and as invoked in talk, to accomplish local interactional goals. I have previously (chapter 3, section 3.3) discussed seminal work on this topic as Membership Categorisation Analysis (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1979, 1995b; Stokoe, 2012). I will re-iterate some of their arguments on categories, category-use, and categorisation practices, which will inform my analysis of the kinds of questions asked in my data and the kinds of descriptions produced in the answers.

Sacks (1979) argued that any person categorised as an instance of a category can be seen as a member of that category, and what is known about that category (as category-bound attributes) is known about that member too. The interest in studying membership categories is not in that they are invoked in any given interaction, but in how categories and category-bound attributes are deployed to accomplish local interactional purposes. Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) is the approach that focuses on analysing how people display “a working social knowledge of social categories, and their actions, both in and about a setting” (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009). Sacks was interested in how people use categories for describing people, and

how these categories are used to account for, or explain, and even justify people's actions (Sacks (1979) in Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015). Jayyusi (1984) explained membership categories as “culturally available category-concepts (such as doctor, mother, infant, adult) that members may and routinely do, use in categorisation work and in accomplishing practical tasks.” She separates the understanding of *membership categories* from *membership categorisations*, which are described as the “work of members in categorising other members or using characterisations of them” (for instance particular descriptions like “dangerous drivers”, or “dropouts”) (p. 20). The latter are people's actions of attributing habits or descriptions to people (Jayyusi, 1984). To summarise, DP/MCA approach to categories and categorisation-practices contends that categories are not simply a random list of generally applicable attributes or descriptions ascribed to a person. Rather, those descriptions attributed to a person are contextually relevant, and allow the one ascribing those categories to accomplish various interactional goals.

Another thing to be said about “describing people” is how such “descriptions” may be produced. Antaki (2004) says that people may often use one of two kinds of extremities (or extreme-case formulations) in describing someone. One is the traditional extreme-case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) which expresses a stance that can be concluded as exceptionally conclusive. The second is a form of extremity that makes the description seem beyond extreme, to the point that it is humorous and ridiculous. This is interesting, because in this case, the descriptions are given a comical flavour which is potentially mobilised to downplay any potentially offensive inference that can be otherwise drawn (Antaki, 2004). These can be understood as absurd descriptions, can serve the function of protecting the producer from being challenged on their views, and be inoculated from accusations of being prejudiced because the descriptions produced are too extreme to be intentionally malicious (Antaki, 2004). Two conclusions can be drawn from this study of absurdity by Antaki (2004). First is that describing someone, or something is not a ‘neutral’ thing to do in an interaction. Secondly, describing people is not merely to ascribe them a pre-determined set of fixed characteristics or attributes, but rather is a rhetorically significant undertaking that accomplishes interactionally relevant ‘goals.’

Having briefly established that “describing” people is not a neutral undertaking, it is important to examine whether asking questions that elicit descriptions is treated as an acceptable undertaking. Many of the above-mentioned studies have used face-to-face interviews, or

cognitive experiments, as the source of data for learning more about categories and the content of categories. Questions asking for descriptions have therefore been asked primarily in research settings, with the presumption that they would allow participants to list objective attributes and characteristics of members of certain social categories (Allport, Katz and Braly in Schneider, 2004). However, several studies have later illustrated that asking such questions (even in institutional settings like interviews or questionnaires) is not a neutral or “objective” thing to do. Rather analysts were urged to pay attention to the questions and answers as an interactional pair, where the questions are capable of “setting an agenda” which is fulfilled in various ways by the answers proffered (Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006).

The data analysed in this chapter is not from an interview or a survey questionnaire, but from a naturally occurring and mundane setting, where asking open-ended questions is perhaps an odd sort of thing to do. To my knowledge asking such questions in mundane settings has not been previously examined, particularly for the sorts of answers they are capable of eliciting. The primary goal of this chapter is, therefore, to examine what these questions are, and how the elicited descriptions or characterisations of “north Indians” or “south Indians” are produced in response to them.

7.3 Methodology

The data used in this chapter was collected from Quora and is a collection of 3 questions and several answers. All posts in my dataset were publicly available and posted to public spaces on the platform. Identifiable information from the data has been anonymised such as all usernames, “user-bios” (biographies of the users), and “author information”, in line with the BPS guidelines for ethics of internet-mediated data (*Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research.*, 2021). Some of the posts from Quora were posted in spaces labelled “north Indians”, “south Indians”, or “Indian Ethnicity and People”, but these were not specifically targeted; a platform-wide search was run to capture as many relevant posts as possible. Some of the questions and answers in the dataset were not posed between 9th to 16th October 2020, but before or after the time-period. However, they have been included for analysis if at least one answer to the question was posted between the time-period, because the question and all its answers are considered as a thread and became a part of the collection if at least the question or one answer was posted within the time-range of 9th and 16th October 2020. However, questions with no answers were not included, since my core interest is in how questions are

received and responded to (that is, the interactional nature of question answer sequences). The dataset consisted at this point, of 20 question-answer threads.

In this chapter, however, my focus is on three questions, which were similarly structured, seeking answers that provide descriptions of “north Indians” or “south Indians.” While three questions form quite a small collection, there are other instances of such questions available on Quora. These were not included here because they were not asked or answered within the chosen time-period. Importantly, these three questions were chosen because they directly address the core interest of this thesis, which is to learn about how people use “north Indian” and “south Indian” and what meanings they ascribe to these categories. The analysis will also explore how category-constructions are done and responded to in replies to the answers.

7.4 Analysis

The analysis is organized into two sections. In the first section, I will examine closely the three questions which ask about the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian”. In the second section, I will explore how these questions are answered in various ways. Some of the answers further received comments, some of which I will also present in the second section.

7.4.1 Quora questions and making sense of them.

Following are the analyses of the three questions.

Question 1 (Transcript 11)

1.1 OR: How can you identify south Indians?

OR asks, “how can you identify” posing a brief question. OR is seeking information about the specified category members, “south Indians.” The question is designed like open-ended survey questions, which are often asked in instances where the one asking the question is seeking detailed information about someone, something (here, members of the category group “south Indians”). One potential purpose of such questions as the above may then be asking for identifiable features, attributes, or descriptions of members of the category “south Indians.”

Question 2 (Transcript 18)

2.1 AN: In what ways are south Indians different from north
2.2 Indians?

Unlike in OR's question, AN makes two categories relevant and seeks a comparison between their members. AN asks for the differences between members of these categories. The plural "ways" indicates that the question not only are there differences to be described, but also that a list is expected, containing multiple differences. The question is similar to the first one in that it is also seeking descriptions or attributes of members. Like the first question, this is also a survey-like open-ended question whose purpose is seeking more than one descriptions attributable to "south Indians" and "south Indians".

Question 3 (Transcript 17)

3.1 GM: What are the characteristics of a "Typical North Indian"
3.2 according to South Indians?

GM on lines 3.1-3.2 asks, "What are the characteristics", which is an information-seeking question. The category about whom the question is being asked is invoked as "north Indian." However, unlike the previous two questions, GM prefaces the category with "typical", stating that descriptions of not all members, but only some specific members are being sought. The use of double quotations emphasises this specificity. The question also says, "according to south Indians", which makes relevant that a specific perspective from which characteristics or descriptions of "north Indians" are being elicited. Therefore, this question indicates to potential responders that while answers may be from members or non-members of "south Indians" category, they will be appropriate only if the descriptions of "north Indians" are produced from the specific perspective of "south Indians."

All three questions are structured as information-seeking and are brief. They are all asking for observable traits, characteristics, or descriptions of members of "north Indian" or "south Indian" categories, which in social psychology literature are referred to as "stereotypes" (book on stereotyping). Since they are seeking lists, or multiple attributes as answers, these questions can be seen as open-ended in nature. The resemblance to questions asked in stereotype and prejudice research also make these questions seemingly "neutral" or "objective" ways of getting descriptions. Asking questions structured in this way constructs the question poster as "removed" from a position of bias by not asking for specifically positive or negative attributions. Moreover, asking these questions on Quora fulfils the platform's purpose, which is providing a platform for curious people to ask questions.

7.4.2 Category Descriptions in the responses

While all answers fulfil the requirement of information-seeking, several of them do so in ways that are not neutral. The answers will therefore be shown as providing a variety of descriptions, characteristics, dispositions, and adjectives in the answers in ways that are not always “neutral” or “objective”. I will begin with the first answer to Question 1 by user IV.

Extract 1 (Question 1): By their writing and pronunciation

Question: How can you identify south Indians?

Ans. By: IV (Oct 15, 2020)

1 1. By their writing in english: eg. Karthik instead of
 2 Kartik
 3 2. By pronunciation of english: "heich" for H instead
 4 "eich" for H
 5 **162 views** **1 upvote** **0 comments**

Here, two identifiable attributes based on which the poster IV identifies members of ‘south Indian’ category are: writing and pronunciation. “South Indians” are treated, therefore, as social categories with their own features or attributes.

On line 1, IV says, “by their writing in English.” Here, writing names in English is treated as an identifiable feature of “south Indians.” This is also illustrated with an example of spelling the name “Kartik”, which “south Indians” are characterised as spelling “Karthik.” The difference in the two spellings is the use of the letter ‘h’ in one, and this use is absent in the other. Therefore, IV’s first claim of how “south Indian” category members can be identified is by looking at their spelling. Using “instead of Kartik” indicates that there are alternative (unspecified here) ways of spelling which “south Indians” do not use in their spellings, but members of other categories may use (like Kartik). This makes spelling Karthik with an “h” a category-bound and identifiable attribute of “south Indians.”

Secondly, on line 3, IV says, “pronunciation in English”, and pronunciation is treated as an identifiable feature for “south Indians”. This is also accompanied by an example. The example builds on the previous spelling (inclusion of h) and shows that members of “south Indian” category pronounce the letter H differently than other people (non-members).

Both features mentioned as identifiable are presented objectively, as neutral, or even trivial observations, through the minimal form of the answer and stating one example for each feature.

The answer also does not contain any evaluative adjectives to describe south Indians, which constructs these features as neutral, almost factual. The neutrality or objectivity of these features is also recognizable through IV's use of a numbered list structure, with the attributes presented as inherent qualities of the members rather than the responder's (IV's) subjective opinions. There are no disclaimers or prefaces before or after the list of identifiable features, also indicating that IV treats these as merely objective or factual observations, which can be identified through examples of spelling and pronunciation.

Extract 2 (Question 2): South Indians have different facial features

Question: In what ways are south Indians different from north Indians?

Ans. By: DK · October 13, 2020

1 I think South Indians have different facial features
2 than North Indians. South Indians looks like africans.
3 They have curly hair big nose and big lips. But North
4 Indians have sharp facial features. North peoples have
5 also black colour but with sharp facial features. Then I
6 major difference in between their cultures and
7 languages. Both have rich culture and beautiful rituals.
8 **445 views** **1 upvote** **1 comment**

Com. By: GK · August 6, 2022

9 Utter bullshit, most south Indians look exactly like most
10 of you Hindi speakers. Just ask any foreigners who
11 visited south India and north India. Are you a troll or
12 something.

To answer the question, DK produces a list of physical features that are presented as attributable to members of “south Indian” as a category, “curly hair big nose and big lips.” The appearance of members of this category are compared to those of another, “Africans.” The comparison between looks (lines 1-2) highlights similarities between “south Indians” and “Africans”, in terms of physical appearance (facial features, line 1). This is contrasted on lines 2-3 with “North Indians” who are described as having “black colour but with sharp facial features” on lines 3-4. The comparison between members of “south Indian” and “north Indian” categories is presented as a list of differences orienting to the question's request. The comparison is based on physical appearance (“facial features”, line 5) and the contrast to south Indians' features is shown by beginning this sentence contrast clause “but” (line 3). The contrast is also done by

stating the similarity (have also, lines 4-5) of skin colour (black colour, line 5), and then contrasting this with the sharpness of facial features (line 4).

DK has therefore produced descriptions of external, physical features of “south Indians” and “north Indians” as the comparable features attributable to “south Indians” and “north Indians”, to answer the question. DK also constructs the features as factual and ‘out-there’ attributes using a multi-item list to state them. However, the objective nature of the answer is hedged by “I think” on line 1, which constructs these as the poster’s subjective opinion. Treating these attributes as the poster’s subjective opinion is a strategy to potentially inoculate him against any objections to the accuracy of the descriptions. Moreover, producing this as the subjective opinion, DK inoculates himself against accusations of stereotyping members of these categories, because they are defensible against generalising all members of a category as attributable in these terms.

On lines 6-7, DK produces another set of differences, “their cultures and languages”, and “rituals” (line 7). However, these differences are accompanied by using terms “rich” and “beautiful.” Even though the previous description of facial features is not negative (since they are objective constructions and presented as “factual” descriptions), the use of positive adjectives for the listing differences of culture, languages, and rituals indicates the possibility that descriptions of physical features could be perceived by readers as negative. The positively valenced description of the latter therefore balances the earlier potentially negative description.

To summarise the answer, DK therefore constructs his answer as describing potentially sensitive category-bound attributes of “south Indians” and “north Indians”, by producing the answer as a subjective opinion, and balancing the first set of neutral and factual descriptions with a positively described second set of descriptions.

The sensitive and problematic nature of these category-bound descriptions is oriented to by GK who responds to DK’s answer with a comment on lines 9-12. GK comments on the answer and responds to DK saying, “utter bullshit, most south Indians look exactly like you Hindi speakers” on lines 9-10. DK’s first list (of facial features and complexion) of differences between south Indians and north Indians is thus rejected. This rejection is characterised with an extreme case formulation (“utter”) as false and as rude and morally condemnable (“bullshit”). The rejection is also emphasised with a counterclaim that facial features are “exactly the same”, rather than different. This characterisation states that there is no difference

at all (extreme-case formulation with “exactly”) between north Indians and south Indians in terms of facial features. The use of “most” when referring to members of “south Indians” category makes this a highly probable claim, but not absolute.

However, the category to which “south Indians” are being compared (“north Indians”) is replaced with “Hindi speakers”, and DK is addressed and categorised as a member (“you”, line 10). GK’s comment is therefore not a generalised claim about similarities or differences between “south Indians” and “north Indians”, but one that is directed at a sub-set of “north Indians”, particularly members of the language-category “Hindi speakers” and DK as a member of this category. GK then provides evidence supporting his counterclaim on lines 10-11, “Just ask any foreigners who visited south India and north India.” “Foreigners” would be people who are not citizens or permanent residents of India, and who are visiting and observing or sight-seeing in the country. As such, they would be potentially uninvested in one or the other side of the argument of whether north Indians and south Indians have the same or different facial features. Foreigners’ answers are therefore produced as neutral and objective opinions. Therefore, DK’s answer is dismissed by being constructed as false and biased because of his membership of the “Hindi speakers” category. GK then discredits DK as the answerer by categorising him as a “troll”, implying that DK may be intentionally creating trouble or answering the question with biased and potentially problematic descriptions of features. Ascribing DK as a troll is posed as a question, which allows GK to question whether the purpose of DK’s answer is to list potentially prejudiced differences between north Indians and south Indians that are.

The next extract is another answer to the same question asking for differences between north Indians and south Indians. In this answer, the user AK states that the differences are four differences. However, these are not produced merely as a list or as objective facts.

Extract 3 (Question 2): My mom is a south Indian and my father is a north Indian

Question: In what ways are south Indians different from North Indians?

Ans. By: AK (May 11, 2020)

1 I can easily answer this question because my mom is a
2 south Indian and my father is a north Indian. Growing
3 up I was close with my cousins from both sides of the
4 family and the difference in the culture was mind-
5 blowing. Everything from the way they talk to the way

6 they eat if as different. The biggest difference that I
 7 notice is that my south Indian family is much more
 8 disciplined and my north Indian is a bit of a party
 9 enthusiast. Might sound stereotypical but this is the
 10 truth.

11 **5.3K views** **17 upvotes**

AK begins his answer by first establishing himself as a credible answerer. He says, “I can easily answer this question because my mom is a south Indian and my father is a north Indian.” He categorises his parents as members of the relevant target categories respectively. Categorising his parents in this way, he invokes his relationship to them as their child. The relationship device of “family” establishes AK’s experience with north Indians and south Indians as close, personal, and first-hand, as well as long-lasting (as a part of growing up). This allows AK to set himself up as a credible source of information, by implicitly establishing that his evidence is borne from his experience of growing up around members of the “south Indian” and “north Indian” categories. Moreover, he establishes himself as a neutral authority on this topic, with equal, observational access to members of both categories rather than only one. AK extends his credibility by saying, “Growing up I was close with my cousins from both sides of the family” on lines 2-3. He invokes childhood experience as the basis for his credibility. The adjective “growing up” also indicates that the poster’s contact with his cousins has not been a one-off meeting, but frequent and over a considerably long period of time, possibly years. The category “cousins” from the family device establishes a close familial relationship between the poster and his source of information about “south Indians” and “north Indians.” Establishing the closeness of relationship with his cousins, and the duration of his relationship as extensive allows AK to establish that the information (regarding differences between south and north Indians) is based on close, personal, first-hand contact with core members of both categories.

AK then provides an answer to the question, which is constructed as credible and reliable based on the preceding work to establish his own entitlement to answer. On lines 5-6, AK states two differences between north Indians and south Indians, “from the way they talk to the way they eat.” The form “from...to” is used to construct the differences between north Indians and south Indians as being on a wide range, with talking and eating styles being on either ends of the spectrum. In this context, this indicates that there are more than two differences between these two categories. Ways of talking and eating are externally observable, and as a cousin or a child, AK would be able to observe these differences as a member of these categories’ “cousin” and “child.” Describing observable behaviour as the difference therefore aligns with AK’s source

of epistemic access to the attributes being described (as the member of a family with “south Indian” and “north Indian” parents and cousins).

AK then produces the third difference on lines 6-9, “The biggest difference that I notice is that my south Indian family is much more disciplined, and my north Indian family is a bit of a party enthusiast.” “South Indian family” is characterised as following rules, or behaving in a controlled and habitual manner, while the “north Indian family” is characterised as people who enjoy spending a lot of time attending parties, potentially even staying out late at night. However, the characterisation of “north Indian family” is hedged with “a bit of a”, which makes it a weak attribution. The characterisation of “south Indian family” is accompanied by “much more”, which compares their disciplined nature to that of the “north Indian family” and ranks them higher. The difference of discipline and party enthusiasts are not produced as general category-bound attributes, but as particularly recognisable in the poster’s family, using the personal pronoun, “my” (lines 7 and 8). They are also produced as subjective, and applicable to the poster’s family using, “I notice”, which constructs these differences as noticeable to AK because of his category-bound relationship to his cousins or parents who he previously categorised as “south Indian” and “north Indian.”

AK ends his answer with, “Might sound stereotypical but this is the truth” on lines 9-10. Here, AK uses a disclaimer (Wiggins, 2017) to mitigate his answer against potentially negative interpretations (“stereotypical”, line 9). He also constructs his answer as “the truth”, which characterises the differences he has noted as more objective, and contrasts this with possibly prejudiced or oversimplified version.

In his answer, AK lists that the differences between “north Indians” and “south Indians” are in the way they eat and talk and that one is more disciplined than the other, and “north Indians” are party enthusiasts. Before producing these characterisations, AK extensively establishes the basis for his observations of the differences between north Indians and south Indians is his access to members of these categories through the category device “family.” Importantly, he does not present these characterisations as general category-bound attributes of “north Indians” and “south Indians”, but as particularly attributable to his family members. Moreover, he uses a disclaimer at the end, to mitigate any potential accusations that his answer is stereotypical.

In the next extract, I will examine an answer to question 3 presented above. The answerer Anon answers the question seeking characteristics of a “Typical North Indian.”

Extract 4 (Question 3): Wants to fill south with Hindi

Question: What are the characteristics of a “Typical North Indian” according to South Indians?

Ans. By: Anon · October 11, 2020

1 Ignorant arrogant insensitive, feels that he is superior
2 to South.

3

4 Looks down on south culture including eating with hand
5 habit, food, dressing, our style of movies etc

6

7 Wants to fill south with Hindi.

8

9 Wouldn't be a virgin.

10

11 Would be loud,

12

13 Would be religious..either pro muslim or pro Hindu..

14 Always fighting among each other.

15

16 Doesn't give freedom to women at their homes.

17

18 Doesn't want to work much..so will prefer govt jobs

19 instead of taking Pvt jobs and helping the country

20 grow..they will become liability for the country.

21

22 Racists..think that black ppl are inferior...And for no

23 reason shows racism towards NEast Indians..Basically they

24 don't leave anyone.

25

26 Though they say they like South..they won't mean it.

27

28 Rest south indians shouldn't fall in their trap..be

29 careful guys

30 **497 views** **4 upvotes** **0 comments**

The immediate observation that can be made about this answer is that it is a detailed response and contains several descriptions of the target category “typical north Indians.” The user Anon produces several lists in the process of describing “typical north Indians”. He uses several lists throughout lines 1-29 to describe “typical north Indian” category members and fulfils the request for information by the questioner.

He begins on line 1 immediately with the first list of attributes that he portrayed as associated with the category “typical north Indian.” This is produced as “ignorant, arrogant, and insensitive” and is a 3-part list (Jefferson, 1990) and it represents a dispositional characterisation of members. On the same line (1), Anon describes another disposition of “typical north Indians”, as feeling “superior” to south, indicating the disposition as being condescension. The second list can be found on lines 4-5 where Anon states that a typical north Indian “looks down on south culture including eating with hand habit, food, dressing, our style of movies, etc.” The use of a list here emphasises that multiple aspects of the “south culture” are treated by north Indians, as being inferior to (“looks down”, line 4) their own. This extends the dispositional characterisation as condescension to other aspects food, films, and culture. The question specified the perspective from which the descriptions are being sought, namely that of “south Indians.” Therefore, this condescension towards ‘south Indians’ is also implicitly constructed as a targeted action, constructing “a typical north Indian” as intentionally condescending (“to South”, line 1) towards south Indians. Anon self-categorises as a “south Indian” using “our” (line 3). This allows him to invoke his entitlement to produce this answer about “a typical north Indians.” The personal entitlement strengthens the notion of intentionality attributed to “north Indians” being condescending.

The third list is produced when Anon says on lines 9-13, “Wouldn’t be a virgin. Would be loud, Would be religious...” The list is readable as a unit, because of the use of modal verbs “would not, would, and would” at the start of each item. The use of these modal verbs indicates that the attributes being produced in these lines are beliefs about “typical north Indians”, being produced in hypothetical terms or as not definite. These attributes are also different from the other definitively and objectively constructed items on Anon’s list (“looks down on..., wants to..., doesn’t give...”, etc on lines 3, 7, and 16 respectively). Anon’s use of modal verbs alongside attributes “virgin, loud, and religious” also indicates that these characterisations are potentially sensitive, and this is managed by presenting them as hypothetical beliefs about “typical north Indians.” Using would and would not, therefore inoculates Anon against accusations of being prejudiced or stereotyping “typical North Indians” when stating potentially taboo or sensitive characteristics. Following the modal construction on line 13, Anon says “either pro Muslim or pro Hindu... Always fighting among each other.” As mentioned earlier, the modal verb is potentially inoculating Anon against an accusation of generalising the attribute of being “religious”. However, the use of an extreme-case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) here attributes fighting as category-bound to being “typical north Indian.”

The fighting is constructed as partisan on religious grounds. This is supported using an “either-or” construction which indicates that it does not matter which religion they support among two alternatives (Hindu and Muslim), “typical north Indians” would choose one to definitely side with. Therefore, being religious and fighting on religious grounds are attributed as category-bound to being “typical north Indians.”

On lines 16 and 18, a fourth list is identifiable as a unit, because both items on this list begin with “doesn’t.” Here, Anon attributes sexism and laziness as category bound attributes of “typical north Indians”, by describing the actions that they do not do. On line 16, this is described as not giving freedom to women at home, and on line 18, as not wanting to work much. The latter is explained with, “so will prefer govt jobs instead of taking Pvt jobs and helping the country grow...” Here, Anon invokes government and private jobs as two comparable categories, in terms of how much work they expect from their employees. Government jobs are implied as requiring less work than private ones. Preference for one sector (“will prefer...”) over another is constructed as demonstrative of their willingness to work, and thus of whether a person is lazy or not. Using this as the justification (“so”, line 18), Anon attributes laziness as a category-bound trait of “typical north Indians.”

While listing attributes, Anon also uses extreme-case-formulations to emphasise the extremity certain attributes. For instance, on line 22, he says, “Racists... think that black people are inferior... and for no reason shows racism towards NEast Indians... basically they don’t leave anyone.” The attribute “racist” is produced as a descriptor of the behaviour of “typical north Indians” as being prejudiced towards members of other groups, based on their memberships. Anon also states, “think that black people are inferior...” on line 22. Here, the claim of racist behaviour is constructed as a thought about another group (“black people”, line 22). This is produced as a descriptor of how ‘racists’ is characterised. This behaviour is described using two ECFs, first of which is “for no reason shows racism towards NEast Indians.” “For no reason” emphasises that being racist towards a group of people (“NEast Indians” or North-East Indians) is irrational because it lacks any basis. The second ECF is “they don’t leave anyone.” Here, Anon is emphasising that the racist behaviour towards North-East Indians is not addressed solely at them but is also directed (by north Indians as a category) towards members of other categories (people who are not north Indian). The use of “anyone” as an extreme-case formulation constructs this racist behaviour as a generalised behaviour, attributable to “typical north Indians.”

On line 26, Anon says, “Though they say they like South... they won’t mean it.” Anon uses a contrast structure by arguing that there is a difference between what’s said and what’s intended and constructs “typical north Indians” as hypocrites by indicating inconsistencies in their words and actions (“do not mean it”, line 26). Attributing hypocrisy to them also describes members of “typical north Indians” as unreliable and untrustworthy.

Overall, Anon uses several lists, category-bound attributes, and extreme-case formulations, to describe in comprehensive terms, “typical north Indians” from the perspective of “south Indians.” His descriptions cover a range of dispositions, behaviours, and attitudes that are treated as attributable to “typical north Indians.” Anon also makes his category membership of “south Indian” relevant on line 3 to show his entitlement to answering. He does this by using the collective pronoun “our” while talking about “typical north Indians” being condescending towards the films of “south Indians.” There is very little evidence of hedging around the production of descriptions, unlike the descriptions produced in the previous answer (extract 3). Nevertheless, this answer fulfils the inferred purpose of the question, which is to provide a comprehensive list of attributable characteristics of “typical north Indians” as a “south Indian.”

In the following extract, I present another answer to the same question (3) about characteristics of a “typical north Indian”. The two answers are similar in that they use listing to describe “typical north Indians”, but they are different in that AB begins by first establishing his entitlement to answer (as a member of “south Indian” category) and providing a disclaimer before listing characteristics.

Extract 5 (Question 3): I have observed many a South Indian’s opinion

Question: What are the characteristics of a “Typical North Indian” according to South Indians?

Ans. by: AB · January 31, 2019

1 Question: What are the characteristics of a "Typical
2 North Indian" according to South Indians?
3
4 I am a South Indian who has lived in western and eastern
5 parts of India. I have studied with a lot of North
6 Indians. I have a lot of North Indian friends. Above
7 all, what makes me qualified to answer this question is
8 the fact that I have observed many a South Indian's
9 opinion of the "Typical North Indian". I don't share
10 many of these opinions and characterizations, but here

11 comes the list.

12

13 1. Always ready to kill anyone who eats beef!

14

15 2. Wants to make Hindi the sole language in India. Has
16 a lot of contempt for other languages.

17

18 3. Have an idea that the areas where Hindi is not spoken
19 are the colonies under the ownership of Hindi speaking
20 areas.

21

22 4. Deeply distrustful of anyone who is not a Hindu.

23

24 5. Views females as sex objects.

25

26 6. Mostly uneducated.

27

28 7. Very poor personal hygiene - will be happy to bath
29 once in a week!!

30

31 Of course, these are idiotic prejudices. But the North
32 Indians may have similar ideas about those from the
33 North-East and the South, won't they (I know a number
34 of those prejudices as well).

35 **4.7K views** **24 upvotes** **1 comment**

Comm. 1 By: HS . January 31, 2019

36 The list is very harsh and I had to read your answer
37 again to think in what context it was written.

Comm. 2 By: PS . February 1, 2019

38 Aren't we Indians first

Comm. 3 By: SP . February 1, 2019

39 Idiot

AB begins by reiterating the question on lines 1-2, followed by production of three sources that are invoked to construct AB as a qualified source to answer the question. Following this, AB answers the question.

AB begins on lines 4-11 by presenting information about their background and establishing himself as qualified to answer the question. Three sources are used to establish this qualification. First, AB states on line 4, "I am a south Indian who has lived in western and

eastern parts of India” and self-categorises as ‘south Indian’. He also states that he has lived in “western” and “eastern” parts of India, to indicate that his experience is not merely geographically limited to living in south India, but also extends to residency in other places in India. The second source of qualification is produced on line 6, “I have a lot of north Indian friends.” The source is described as friendship with members of the target category “north Indians.” The use of friends as a category implies that the poster shares a personal, first-hand relationship with some “north Indians”, which is the basis upon which AB qualifies to answer. The third source of qualification is produced on lines 6-10, “Above all, what makes me qualified to answer this question is the fact that I have observed many a south Indian’s opinion of the “Typical North Indian.”” Here, AB lists additional second-hand experience, namely observing other south Indians’ opinions about “Typical North Indians.” The use of ‘many a south Indian’ indicates that AB has more than one sources, who are categorizable as “south Indian” and whose observations can be legitimately cited by AB. This orients to the request of the question that characteristics be from the perspective of “south Indians” and observing other members’ opinions is produced as a qualifying source of knowledge by AB. AB also distances themselves from these characteristics being subjective personal opinions by stating, “I don’t share many of these opinions and characterisations, but here comes the list.” Using a disclaimer, AB inoculates his answer from potentially being read as stereotypical or prejudiced and makes the answer defensible by stating that they do not agree with many of the items on the upcoming list of characteristics. Using three sources for qualifying his position to answer constructs AB’s answer as well-rounded and well-researched. Setting up such an extensive background is not a strategy seen in earlier extracts.

AB then produces a list of descriptions on lines 13-29. On line 13, he describes the first characteristic as “always ready to kill anyone who eats beef!” He uses an ECF indicate the extremity of action (“always ready...”). The action is constructed as being irrational and the behaviour of eating beef is implied as comparatively trivial, by discussing the consequence as extreme by describing it as homicide (“kill”) and applicable universally (“always”, “anyone”).

On line 15-16, AB states the second characteristic, “Wants to make Hindi the sole language in India. Has a lot of contempt for other languages.” The identifiable characteristic here is wanting Hindi to be the only language spoken in India, emphasised using an ECF when discussing the status (sole language, line 12). The historical context (chapter 2) showed that Hindi is spoken widely in north India. Therefore here, the implication may be that a “typical north Indian”

wants to make a north Indian language the only spoken language across the country. This is then followed by another attribution of a “typical north Indian” member’s attitude towards “other languages”, stated as disregarding or considering other languages as inferior. This attitude, however, is preceded by “a lot of”, which downplays the earlier ECF (“sole language”). The negative attitude held towards other languages is downplayed in comparison to beliefs about ingroup’s language (Hindi’s) status, constructing a “typical north Indian” as interested in promoting his own language as the only one, over others.

The third characteristic is produced on line 18-20, "have an idea that the areas were Hindi is not spoken are the colonies under the ownership of Hindi speaking areas." Here, AB characterises “typical north Indians” as having a perception of non-Hindi speaking regions as colonies of Hindi speaking regions of India. The category “colonies” invokes category-bound attributes of being imperialised by a politically powerful group. AB uses this category to characterise “typical north Indians” as having the perception that non-Hindi speaking regions are under political control, and inferior politically, to the Hindi-speaking regions of India. Therefore, “typical north Indians” are attributed the characteristic of thinking that they are politically dominant because of the language they speak, than other language speakers of India.

The fourth characteristic is produced on line 22, “deeply distrustful of anyone who is not a Hindu.” Here, the attitude of “typical north Indians” towards a religious category “not Hindus” is characterised as “deeply distrustful.” Hindus as a religious category are constructed as trustworthy, by contrasting the attitude of “typical north Indians” towards members of other religions (“not Hindu”). Using “deeply” intensifies the lack of trust. Moreover, the use of an ECF “anyone” extends and generalises the deep distrust towards all members of a non-Hindu religious category. The second, third, and fourth characteristics together construct “typical north Indians” as distrustful and strongly condescending towards members of other groups (religion and language).

The fifth characteristic is stated on line 24 as, “Views women as sex objects.” AB states sexual objectification of women as an attributable trait of a “typical north Indian”. The category “women” is invoked here as the group which is subjected to treatment as an inferior and derogatory treatment, constructing “typical north Indian” members as antagonistic and sexist. AB lists the sixth characteristic on line 26 as, “Mostly uneducated.” Here, the attribute uneducated is preceded by “mostly”, which downplays the attribution’s generalisability. The seventh characteristic is produced on lines 28-29, “very poor personal hygiene – will be happy

to bath once in a week!!” The attribution is that “typical north Indians” do not have good hygiene. Using “bath once in a week”, AB presents an illustration to support his attribution, by claiming that taking a bath is done infrequently.

After producing the list of 7 characteristics, AB downplays the generalisability of the characteristics on the list by assessing them as “idiotic prejudices”, which serves as a disclaimer against the possibility of these descriptions being potentially taken as offensive. He states on lines 31, “Of course, these are idiotic prejudices.” The descriptions are also constructed as not to be taken seriously, by characterising them as nonsensical, or foolish. AB then uses a contrast structure, “But the north Indians may have similar ideas about those from the north-east and the south, won’t they (I know a number of those prejudices as well).” AB claims that just as south Indians have opinions about north Indians, the reverse may also be true, and equates these two categories. Using “may hold”, this claim is constructed as a possibility. This is later upgraded as definitely known to AB using “I know a number of those prejudices as well”, for which AB invokes personal knowledge as the basis, which was one of the sources he previously invoked to support his qualification to answer this question (lines 4-11).

AB’s answer received three comments, from users HS, PS, and SP. In the first comment, HS assesses the list of characteristics as “very harsh”, implying that the characteristics are severe and cruel towards members of the category “typical north Indians”, and the cruelty of these attributions is intensified using “very.” HS then orients to the disclaimers constructed by AB, as idiotic prejudices, and claims that the disclaimers contextualise the list and make it possible to infer that they are not meant as cruel. In other words, HS’s comment is making sense of the answer by interpreting the purpose of describing typical north Indians as merely to answer the question, and not for a more offensive purpose, namely being cruel or severe on members of that category.

The next two comments do not orient to AB’s disclaimers and present some resistance to the list of generalised characteristics. On line 38, for instance, PS produces “aren’t we Indians first?” Invoking the categorisation “Indians”, PS resists the question and the answer by challenging the use of regional “north Indian” and “south Indian” categories instead of “Indians”. By suggesting Indian as the more relevant categorisation for “us”, PS constructs first the question and then the answer as irrelevant, unnecessary, and potentially biased or prejudiced. On line 39, SP comments using “idiot”, which merely constructs AB as nonsensical

or foolish, thereby undermining his answer, and not orienting to his disclaimer that the answer does not align with his personal beliefs about “typical north Indians.”

To summarise, the answer in this extract produced a list of 7 characteristics attributable to the category “typical north Indian” from the perspective of a “south Indian.” Before producing the list, AB established his category membership of “south Indian”, and the qualifications that entitle him to answer the question. At the end of the list, he downplayed the seriousness and generalisability of the attributes listed by assessing them as “idiotic prejudices.” The list of characteristics was treated by three commenters as harsh or prejudiced, but only one of the commenters oriented to AB’s disclaimer downplaying the offensive nature of the generalisations.

In the next extract, the user RB is answering Question 1, identifying “south Indians.” Unlike the other answer to this question (extract 1), RB begins by producing a disclaimer at the start, and a longer list of identifying attributes.

Extract 6 (Question 1): Generally I have strong objection with the word south Indians

Question: How can you identify south Indians?

Ans. By: RB Oct 15, 2020

1 Generally I have strong objection with the word
2
3 “South Indians , North Indians, North easts”.
4
5 The Thrill of India is “ Unity in Diversity” so nobody
6 can constrict anyone in particular group or herd.
7
8 When comes to indentification following seems to be
9 stereotyped thing
10
11 Simple ,educated,complexion,white dhotis, white mark on
12 forehead , jasmine on ladies , foods idilli and
13 Sambhar.Men with moustache and beard.
14
15 But each state has special character which I found ,when
16 come across.
17
18 Telegu_ Chandrababu Naidu typical telegu person and Roja
19 again typical telegu lady.Modern, strong,visionary.

20
 21 Karanataka_Modern thoughts with traditional ideology.
 22
 23 Kerala_I like the tone and style of Malayalam.Men with
 24 chadan.Girls have natural facial feature Best example _
 25 Keerthy Suresh
 26
 27 Tamil_Cultural , Traditional rooted ,with little space
 28 for Western supremacy. Girls are naturally beautiful
 29 without much effort with any complexion.
 30
 31 Very common in all this is food , healthy at the same
 32 time tasty . tamil nadu Chettinad, hyderbad
 33 briyani, kerala kappa, puttu, sweets of karanataka.
 34 **228 views 2 upvotes 0 Comments**

In this extract the poster engages in some disclaimer work to manage the potentially sensitive nature of category bounded descriptions produced for “south Indians”, like in extracts 2 and 3. For instance, on lines 1-3, RB states, “Generally I have strong objections with the words “south Indians, north Indians, north easts”. He begins the disclaimer work by objecting to the use of particular category labels and implying that using these particular categories could have implications of prejudice. The objections are emphasised by the 3-part list that extends and includes other categories than the one asked about in the question “south Indians” (north Indians and north-east Indians are included). This allows RB to distance himself from the upcoming descriptions. This is followed on lines 5-6, “The thrill of India is “Unity in Diversity” so nobody can constrict anyone in particular group or herd.” RB supports his objections to the use of categories by constructing this act as unusual and not expected “normatively” from members of the category “India.” The use of the idiomatic expression “Unity in Diversity” attributes unifying people in the face of internal differences as a category-bound feature of “India.” RB uses an extreme-case formulation “nobody can” to claim that being a member of “India” stops people from attributing other group categories to other members. Therefore, the use of “south Indians” is constructed as divisive, warranting the objection to its use. RB then follows this with disclaimer work, “When comes to identification following seems to be stereotyped thing” on line 8-9. Here, RB indicates that the subsequent portion of his answer may be read as stereotyped, which works as a disclaimer because it indicates the possibility that the characteristics, he is about to list can be treated by readers as stereotypical. By mentioning this before producing the answer, RB acknowledges the potentially problematic

status of the characteristics he is about to list as his answer to the question and constructs their use in answering the question as delicate or sensitive.

This then is followed on lines 11-12 by a list of identifications attributed to “south Indians.” The list includes physical (“complexion”, “white dhotis”, “white mark on forehead”, “jasmine on ladies”, “men with moustache and beard”) features, dispositional (“simple”, “educated”) characteristics, and cuisine (“idlis” and “sambhar”) items.

An observation can be made about the answer on lines 18-29. Here, RB produces another extensive list, but attributed to members of four different categories “Telugu”, “Karnataka”, “Kerala”, and “Tamil.” They are all states in south India, indicated using “each state.” By describing attributes of members of each state separately, RB claims that while there are general descriptors that can be attributed to members of the category “south Indians” (lines 11-13) there are also state-specific descriptions attributable. For instance, to members of “Tamil” category, he attributes “cultural, traditional rooted with little space for Western supremacy” (lines 27-29) and to “Telugu” members, he attributes “modern, strong, visionary” as identifiable traits (lines 18-19). For some state-categories, RB also provides examples of members, for instance, “Keerthy Suresh” is invoked as an example of being a member of the category “Kerala” and “Chandrababu Naidu” is invoked as an example of being “Telugu.” RB provides personal experience as the source of evidence for such detailed descriptions of members of these four categories (“I come across”, line 15). The description of each state in addition to “south Indian” emphasises that there are internal and particular differences between members of each state category, in addition to shared characteristics of members across all states.

On lines 31-33, RB produces another attribute that is treated as common to all “south indians”, namely food. The shared feature of food is described as healthy and tasty, and examples of different foods from each state are illustrated as examples (biryani, chettinad, kappa, puttu, and sweets). RB therefore claims that food is one of the ways of identifying “south Indians” but also further identifying the specific state they belong to.

RB therefore answers the question by listing identifiable attributes of “south Indians” as a general category, and as a category comprising of four states. He claims that while there are generalisable descriptors that are attributable to all members of “south Indians”, there are also specific descriptors which apply to specific or particular members (based on their state category

membership). These descriptors are not merely produced as lists (unlike extract 3) but are preceded by RB's objection to the use of "south Indians" as a category label in the first place.

In the next extract, I am presenting another answer to Question 1. Like RB in the previous extract, JC also produces an extensive list of identifying characteristics attributed to "south Indians" and precedes this with a disclaimer-construction. However, unlike the previous answer (extract 6), JC questions the purpose of asking the question in the first place.

Extract 7 (Question 1): Tells me they hardly know a south Indian

Question: How can you identify South Indians?

Ans. by: JC · October 13, 2020

1 I read many writing "complexion" tells me they hardly
2 know a South Indian. Our southern states have people of
3 all complexion same like northern states.

4

5 The basic here is; what difference on earth you will
6 make by identifying a South Indian. But still for your
7 crazy curiosity I will try hitting down few points.

8

9 If you are in Southern Part of India, then 99.9% people
10 around you should be South Indian.

11

12 If you find a sober and well mannered, composed and non
13 abusive person around in non South Indian state; very
14 likely the person is South Indian.

15

16 People wearing subtle color clothes with not much jazz
17 are highly likely to be South Indian.

18

19 if you find someone being very comfortable to eat their
20 meal with hands at a restaurant is highly likely to be
21 South Indian.

22

23 The representation of Indian Hindu culture they carry
24 is quite noticeable. They are not shy of culture and
25 follow it quite strictly. So if you find a person doing
26 proper Pooja (ritual) with no shortcuts is highly likely
27 to be a South Indian.

28

29 They are fond of curd rice and cannot survive without
30 eating for more than 48 hours in length.

31 **778 views** **11 upvotes** **4 comments**

Comm. 1 By: PS_1 · November 3, 2019

32 Wow you have the guts to write this - "If you find a
33 sober and well mannered, composed and non abusive person
34 around in non South Indian state; very likely the person
35 is South Indian."

Rep. to Comm. 1 By: JC · November 3, 2019

37 I appreciate your sarcasm. Must say, you are meeting
38 wrong set of people. And exceptions are all around.

39

40 PS: I'm a Delhi Punjabi, settled in southern India
41 since 2007.

JC begins his answer by orienting to and addressing the content of "other answers" to the question. He states that others have mentioned "complexion" as an identity marker attributable to "south Indians" (line 1). JC states personal observation ("I read", line 1) as his evidence for this being others' answer. He then rejects complexion as a correct attribute of "south Indians" by discrediting those who stated it as unknowledgeable ("tells me they hardly know a south Indian", lines 1-2). The rejection of complexion as the correct answer is supported by, "Our southern states have people of all complexions same like northern states." Here, JC treats the categories "south Indian" and "northern states" as equivalent, by stating that there is equal diversity between members of northern states and south Indians in terms of complexion. The equivalence between members of these two categories is used to reject the assertion that complexion is a marker of identity attributable to only "south Indians", thereby rejecting these "other answers." JC also self-categorises as a "south Indian" by using "our southern states" on line 2. With this, JC establishes himself as knowledgeable about the complexion of other members. Establishing this epistemic knowledge allows him to undermine other answers and their posters as knowledgeable. He also establishes himself as having read other answers, and therefore as a poster with "interest" in answering the question correctly.

JC then questions the purpose of asking for identifying attributes by saying, "The basic here is; what difference on earth you will make by identifying a South Indian. But still for your crazy curiosity I will try hitting down few points" on lines 6-7. Questioning the purpose of the query is characterised as a baseline ("the basic here is", line 5) seeking of explanation and allows JC to imply that asking the question may be "doing" something more than merely asking for a list of attributes. Using "what difference on earth you will make", JC treats identifying "south

Indians” as an action beyond understanding and having no rational consequence (“what difference” and “crazy”, lines 5 and 7). JC then constructs the upcoming answer as being provided despite irrational and unfathomable motivations (“but still for your crazy curiosity...”). Challenging the purpose of the question allows JC to show construct the possibility that his upcoming answer is sensitive and even problematic. JC also inoculates himself against potential accusations of producing descriptions of ‘south Indians’ that may be taken as stereotypical, by indicating that they are merely fulfilling an information-seeking purpose (“your crazy curiosity...”), even though other motivations are unfathomable to him.

The list of identifications is then produced between lines 9-30. On line 9, JC produces the first identifiable attribute, namely the region. He states, “If you are in Southern part of India, then 99.9% people around you should be South Indian.” JC uses probability (99.9%) to indicate that the likelihood of encountering “south Indians” in the region “southern part of India” is very high. He uses an “if...then” construction to imply that there is a link between “being in southern parts of India” and being around south Indian people. However, 99.9% is not 100% and makes this defensible against an absolute generalisability of the claim that all people in “southern part of India” are being identified as south Indian. Using “should be” instead of “are” further constructs JC’s description as only a very high probability and not absolute.

On lines 12-14, JC states the second identifiable attribute, “If you find a sober and well mannered, composed and non-abusive person around in non-south Indian state; very likely the person is south Indian.” He uses three adjectives to describe members of this category (“sober, composed, and non-abusive”) in terms of dispositions. As in the previous instance, JC uses an “if...then” construction to imply that there is a link between the attributes and the likelihood of them being members of “south Indian” category. JC also uses probabilistic language “very likely” to indicate that this is an objective description and highly likely. However, JC claims that these dispositions if attributed to people from “non-south Indian state” are categorising them as “south Indian.” From the historical context (chapter 2), we know that south Indian states are Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Kerala. Therefore, the list of dispositions is claimed by JC as identifying “south Indians” who are from other Indian states than these.

The third identifying attribute listed is dressing style on lines 16-17 described as “subtle colours and no jazz” (jazz here refers to glittery or shimmery fabric). JC again uses probabilistic language “highly likely” here to indicate that the identifiable attribute described on these lines

to “being south Indians” are attributable with a high probability. On lines 19-21, JC describes eating with hands at a restaurant as the fourth identifiable attribute and uses the probabilistic construction “highly likely” to state that this being an identifiable characteristic of “south Indians” has a high probability. In both of these cases, the attribution of identifiable traits is not absolute or generally applicable to all members, but only a high probability.

The fifth attribute is stated on lines 23-27. Here, representing Indian Hindu culture and performing rituals without shortcuts are identified here as attributable to “south Indians.” JC states, “the representation of Indian Hindu culture they carry is quite noticeable. They are not shy of culture and follow it quite strictly. So if you find a person doing proper Pooja (ritual) with no shortcuts is highly likely to be a South Indian.” JC constructs “south Indians” as following religious culture (of Hinduism) strictly and in overtly noticeable ways. Hindu culture is invoked as a category here, and from its followers, a category-bound expectation is stated, as performing religious rituals, which can often be long and tedious. Using an “if...then” construction and the probability “highly likely”, JC establishes that there is a strong association between someone performing Hindu rituals (“following religious culture”), particularly without shortcuts, and their membership of “south Indians” category. As before, the use of probabilistic language indicates that this is not an absolute, generalisable identifiable attribute, but a very highly likely one.

Thus far in his answer, JC describes various identifiable attributes of “south Indians” including the region they are found in, their dispositions, eating style, and dressing styles. However, none of these are produced as absolute or definite descriptions, but only probabilities. The use of probabilistic language ties these descriptions together as a list of attributes. The use of probabilistic language indicates that producing these attributes as the answer is a sensitive, and potentially problematic thing to do.

On lines 29-30, JC’s description of members of this category is slightly different. He claims that “south Indians” can be identified by one of their favourite food items: “curd rice” (or rice with yogurt). JC constructs “south Indians” liking of this dish as essential to them and a staple habit (“cannot survive 48 hours without it”, line 30). JC thus claims that eating rice with yogurt and liking it are identifiable attributes of “being south Indian.” Unlike the previous descriptions, liking rice with yogurt is produced as a definite and out-there or established attribute of being “south Indian” (“they are fond...”, line 29).

One observation about these descriptions is that they all describe behaviours and dispositions attributable to being “south Indians” as they go about in their daily and ordinary life (being “non-abusive”, “sober”, and well-mannered, liking rice with yogurt and eating it every day, performing religious rituals strictly, and eating meals with their hands).

Despite the various ways in which JC’s answer prefaces the sensitive nature of producing identifiable attributes of “south Indians”, the commenter User_PS1 produces a challenge to his answer on lines 32-33. He says, “Wow you have the guts to write this.” User_PS1 orients to lines 12-13 of this answer, where JC claims that the attributes of sober, well-mannered, and non-abusive are identifiable as highly likely attributes of “south Indians” in non-south Indian states. He questions the courage of the poster (JC) in producing this as an identifiable attribute. User_PS1 quotes verbatim from JC’s answer, however, does not elaborate on the inference drawn that is being resisted. The description of “south Indians” in non-south Indian states as sober, mild-mannered, and non-abusive can be read as saying something implicitly about others (non-south Indians) in those states. JC’s description implies that behaving in these three ways is tied to category membership of “south Indian”, which is implying that those who are not “south Indian” would then also be not mild-mannered, not sober, and would be abusive. This characterisation of others (not south Indians) is constructed as problematic, by the assessment “you have the guts to write this”, since it treats JC as courageous enough to have written it.

To summarise, the user JC produces a list of identifiable attributes of “south Indians”, supplying the information asked for in question 1. However, he precedes this list of attributes by first undermining “other answers” to this question which presented “complexion” as an attribute. He uses this to establish himself as knowledgeable on this topic, and as having a stake in answering this question correctly. The list of attributes he provides later in the answer are not produced as absolute generalisable attributes of “south Indians”, which displays that this production of list of identifying descriptions is sensitive business. Despite such observable ways of hedging the possibility that JC’s answer is listing stereotypical attributes, the commenter User_PS1 orients to one of the descriptions and challenges it as being a courageous move.

7.5 Discussion on Questions, Answers, and Category Use

In this chapter, I presented a detailed analysis of how the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” were used in asking and answering a particular type of information-seeking questions

on Quora. The nature of these questions was open-ended and brief. These questions were seeking attributes, characteristics, or descriptions of members of the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian.”

Seven answers were presented in this analysis, each of which provided the information requested, by describing and listing attributable, identifiable characteristics of the relevant category “north Indian” or “south Indian”. One of these answers, however, questioned the motivation for asking the question (extract 7). They produced attributable characteristics or descriptions, but in several instances, these were preceded by disclaimers or prefaces that allowed users to inoculate themselves against potential accusations of stereotyping or being prejudiced towards “north Indians” or “south Indians” (extracts 3, 5, 6, and 7). In some instances, the answers also contained extensive background of the posters themselves, which they used to establish credibility, entitlement, or qualification to answer the question (extracts 3, 5, and 7).

The employment of such varied strategies in addition to listing characteristics or attributes shows that the use of these categories was not necessarily neutral and asking for descriptions of members potentially invited stereotypical descriptions of members as answers. The answers also showed that the answers produced extremely detailed descriptions of the categories about which questions seek information. In the second analysis section, they were described as having different writing and pronunciation styles (extract 1), identified as having varied physical features and complexions (extract 2). They were also described through an extensive list of behaviours (loud, virgins, sexist, hypocritical, internally divisive, with a superiority complex, etc) (extract 3). What was noteworthy in extracts 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 was the use of list constructions. Listing features drew attention to the implication that there is more than one way of identifying category-members, and that all attributes could be then attributed to the relevant category.

In producing some of these answers, users worked to establish disclaimers, hedging, and accountability (Wiggins, 2017) before or after producing the list of attributes, characteristics, or descriptions. One example was extract 3, wherein the user firstly established himself as a credible source and as someone with authority to answer the question. He then distanced himself from the list and its potential interpretation as being problematic by stating that they disagree with it. This was used to acknowledge that the list may be stereotypical, and to disclaim any potential challenge to the list. A similar observation can be made about extract 5,

in which the user, before producing the list, worked up an account to distance themselves from it by acknowledging its potential stereotypical nature. However, in extract 6, this work of distancing from the list was performed differently. The answerer began by challenging the purpose of asking the question (Pomerantz, 2021a) instead of producing disclaimers. By questioning the motivation for asking this question, the answerer treated the question as not neutral (not warranted) and potentially doing more than just eliciting information. Therefore, in several instances, this listing of attributes or characteristics is oriented to as potentially problematic; by extension this treats the question as having a rather ‘odd’ purpose.

Some answers also manage the possibility of their lists being stereotypical by constructing the attributable nature of descriptions as only likely instead of absolute (extract 3 and 7). In extract 7, for instance, JC uses percentages and probabilistic language to tie the descriptions to a membership category but manage the possibility of exceptions by not describing these categories and tied attributions as being generally applicable to all members. In extract 3 the user uses modal verbs like ‘would be’ to state the characteristics as hypotheticals rather than definite. In extract 3, the poster manages the problem of generalisability by constructing his descriptions as subjective observations attributable to his family members, but maybe not generally to “south Indians” or “north Indians.” What this shows is that the answerers are managing the possibility that generalising these descriptions as category-bound may be problematic, and therefore are leaving room for instances to exist that cannot be identified with these “general” attributes. The problem of generalisation was identified by Billig (1985) and discussed in my literature review for this chapter. My findings from extract 3 illustrate Billig’s (1985) argument that particularising the descriptions to “family members” is used as a rhetorical strategy. Particularising descriptions of “north Indians” and “south Indians” inoculated the answer against possible accusations being stereotyped category descriptions, or accusations of not being produced from a credible epistemic access to category to be describing members of a category in generalised, category-bound terms.

The problem of generalising and potential stereotyping became evident also by looking at the comments replying to the answers. The comments on answers in extracts 2, 5, and 7 showed that some commenters reject the disclaimers built into the answers and question the prejudicial nature of describing and attributing. Commenters assessed the answers as “harsh” (extract 5) or “utter bullshit” (extract 2). One commenter constructed the answer poster as an “idiot” (extract 5) while another constructed the poster as having “guts” to describe “south Indians” a

particular way. All these commenters thereby oriented to the problematic nature of producing descriptions or characteristics as attributable to members of a category as category bound.

One noteworthy thing to be said about these question-answer sequences is that the purpose of the question (information-seeking) is fulfilled by answerers, regardless of whether they treat the production of this information as sensitive or problematic. The production of category-bounded descriptions/ characterisations is therefore a tool for the answerer to fulfil the information-seeking purpose of these questions. This makes production of stereotypical descriptions, generalisations, and extreme-case formulations in this case justifiable since they are treated as “mere descriptions” and not as prejudiced or stereotypical descriptions of members of “north Indian” or “south Indian” categories. The purpose of answering with lists of descriptions and characteristics in these instances is therefore treated as being for educational purposes which is in line with Quora’s core principles as a platform (*Quora - About*, n.d.).

When discussing the use of open-ended, survey like questions in research settings, I argued that these questions are a way of eliciting descriptions or categories or social groups in terms of “stereotypes” (Katz and Braly, Allport). I had also contended that these sorts of questions are somewhat “odd” in mundane contexts, since describing people is not a neutral thing to do.

To conclude my fourth analytic context, I showed instances of question-answer sequences where the posters asked for members of the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” to be described, and answer posters provided such descriptions. The answer posters ascribed various attributes, characteristics, or identifiable traits including references to languages spoken, writing and pronunciation styles, food preferences, clothing styles and appearances, dispositions, and behaviours, and so on. Importantly, these categories were constructed as having inherent qualities or attributes that can be “objectively” identified and listed in these interactions. Several of these attributes, such as language and clothing styles, or cuisines resonate with findings from Chapter 2 and with the ways in which films and popular media (described in chapter 2) depict members of these categories. Furthermore, the observations reported in this chapter resonate with past literature on categorisation practices and descriptions in DP/MCA, and show that producing these descriptions, attributes, and characteristics was treated in the answers as sensitive business and handled accordingly through use of various rhetorical strategies.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis was motivated by an interest in studying the use of categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” as they are used in online mundane interactions. These categories are somewhat “elusive” in nature, since their use could be seen and heard in ordinary, everyday conversations, but they have not historically been of much academic interest. I proposed two critical research questions: (1) “when and for what purpose are the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” used by people in interactions on social media?” and (2) “what meanings do they ascribe to these categories when using them in such conversations?” In addressing these questions identified four different interactional contexts, three on Twitter and one on Quora, wherein these categories were invoked. The following is a brief discussion of my findings.

8.2 Mobilisations of “north Indian” and “south Indian”

I first presented a brief history of north Indians and south Indians from the late 19th, the 20th, and the 21st century. The goal was to explore if and how “north Indians” and “south Indians” have been academically studied. Reviewing scholarly work by historians, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists demonstrated that in the late 19th and the 20th century, north Indians and south Indians were studied in terms of language, race, and religious identities. These differences were also mobilised for social, political, economic purposes (Aneesh, 2010; Forrester, 1966; Seshan, 2016; Wangchuk, 2019).

At the end of [Chapter 2: A Brief History of north Indians and south Indians](#), I showed that these categories were being used in films and people of north and south India were depicted in popular culture through language (i.e., dialogues, storylines, song lyrics), clothing styles, food habits and preferences, and so on. However, I note in this chapter that there has been virtually no scholarly research on how the specific terms “north Indian” and “south Indian” are used as categories and for what purposes, despite evidence presented from such media that they are a part of the stories and plotlines. I termed these, therefore, as rather “elusive” categories. At the end of chapter 2, I argued that “north Indians” and “south Indians” are however, routinely used in mundane conversations between friends, peers, colleagues, and strangers on social media, but this was largely known through personal experience. Despite this, systematic academic

investigations of how, when, and for what these categories are used for has tended to be of “latent” academic interest (A. K. Das, 2014). My thesis addressed to this gap in the literature by systematically examining the uses of these ‘elusive’ categories in naturally occurring, mundane, online interactions. From Twitter, three interactional contexts were presented that demonstrated the use of categories “north Indian” and “south Indian.” The following is a discussion of the findings from each interactional context.

The first context where these categories were used, was in responses to an unfavourable assessment of the food item ‘idli’, shown in [Chapter 4: Responding to Assessments](#). In proffering one of three response types (agreeing, disagreeing, or questioning the act of assessing), the users invoked “north Indian” or “south Indian” as an epistemic resource for negotiating the right to assess idlis. For instance, by attributing “south Indian” as a category membership to themselves, those who agreed with the food assessment presented themselves as a credible source to be agreeing with the initial assessment of idlis. When disagreeing with the assessment, they use the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” as a resource to question the assessor’s epistemic rights to assess idlis. By constructing the assessor as “not” “north Indian” or “south Indian” and ascribing other category memberships like “UK professor”, the assessor was constructed as an outsider and denied the rights to assess idlis. The category-bounded attributes of being south Indian were also invoked in some responses in doing agreements/disagreements. Some of these attributes were: members consume idlis for breakfast regularly, they would know how to properly prepare this food item, and a member would have strong credibility and the right to agree or disagree with assessments of idlis. Invoking these allowed the responder to show the basis for their stance on the assessment or the assessor (whether the responder was agreeing or disagreeing). Therefore, in this chapter, I showed that the category “south Indian” was used to negotiate who was and who was not “permitted” to assess idlis, on based on category-bound knowledge and entitlements.

The second context in which these categories were invoked was in complaint sequences, discussed in [Chapter 5: Category Uses in Complaint Formulations](#). I demonstrated that “north Indian” or “south Indian” were stated as the thing to complain about, by the complainer. The complainer treated another poster’s use of these categories as problematic, and as thereby warranting their complaint. The problematization of a complaine’s use of “north Indian” or “south Indian” was evidenced by the complainer criticising it or the complaine’s conduct, towards members of these categories. For instance, they were treated as meaning more than

just members belonging to different geographical areas of India. This resonated with arguments in chapter 2, wherein I argued that the descriptions of people of north and south India were complex, cutting across geography, language, religion, and race. Although the complaint did not explicitly state the meanings ascribed to these categories, complainers oriented to the meanings being potentially “problematic” and discriminatory or prejudiced, towards members of these categories.

The third context in which these categories were invoked was in asking and answering “ambiguous” questions (*Chapter 6: Ambiguous Questions and their Answers*). By examining two questions on Twitter, I showed that the questions were framed as information-seeking (eliciting examples of members of categories “north Indian politicians” or “UP/Bihar/Himachali girls”). However, analysis of the answers showed that the question was treated as ambiguous and doing more than merely seeking information (like implying that answering the questions may be difficult or impossible). Several answers do not provide the information sought and instead respond with indirect answers, demonstrating that the question was treated as ambiguous. In some cases, the answers treated “north Indian” or “south Indian” as inappropriate categories to be asking about. In some examples (chapter 6, extracts 7, 8, and 10) this was done by presenting alternative categories like businessmen, politicians, or RSS pracharaks as more appropriate targets to be asking about. In these interactions, the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” were used by posters to orient to the questions as potentially prejudiced, but ambiguous, because while they were framed as “neutral” and information-seeking, they were constructed as unanswerable.

One interesting observation also to be made in chapter 6 was that language-learning was constructed, in several answers to the questions, as motivated by practical advantages, or practical purposes, tied to categories like “politicians”, “businessmen”, or “residents of a state.” This is different from how language-learning was understood in the historical review chapter (chapter 2), where learning a language was underlined by the symbolism of learning a mother-tongue, and done for the purpose of nation-building, or protecting and worshipping one’s language (and associated identity). Nevertheless, in both chapters, learning a language was tied to some purpose, whether it was for political mobilisation, or for practical-mundane purposes like communication in every-day life.

In chapter 6, therefore, I showed that the question either invoked the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” or invoked descriptions of members in a way that implied these as relevant

categories. Regardless of which of these the poster did, the answers were indirect, and inferred underlying prejudiced assumptions about expectations of language-learning. This was evidenced by the answer posters' treatment of the question as unanswerable, and their provision of an account as to why that may be the case. These accounts constructed language-learning as a practical concern, rather than symbolic. Using this as the logic, the relevance of "north Indian" in the question was undermined, dismissed, or treated as irrelevant.

The fourth interactional context was the use of categories "north Indian" or "south Indian" in asking and answering questions on Quora ([Chapter 7: Questions and Answers from Quora](#)). Three questions were presented, seeking descriptions of characteristics or identifiable attributes of members of either "south Indians" or "north Indian" categories. Several answers produced extensive lists of such descriptions and characteristics, fulfilling the information-seeking purpose of such questions. Descriptions of these categories included reference to writing and speaking styles, food and eating preferences, clothing styles, dispositions, behaviours, attitudes, and attitudes towards members of other groups (e.g., north Indians' attitudes towards south Indians). Various category-bound attributes were ascribed to these categories: dispositions, food habits, clothing styles, languages spoken and speaking or writing styles, states or regions of India represented, and so on. I therefore showed that these categories were treated, by the very production of such detailed attributes and descriptions, as "alive", and as describable in tangible, objective, or factual terms. This resonated with arguments presented in chapter 2, about the "elusive" nature of these categories, wherein they are treated by people as objective, and "out-there" categories ready for use, but not examined as such in the academic literature.

Overall, the detailed analysis of these four interactional contexts showed that these categories are "alive", "functional", meaningful, and mobilised by people on social media sites to accomplish various interactional projects, like responding to assessments, complaining, and asking questions or answering them. In using the categories for such purposes, they allow posters to "do" culture as a practical concern and invoke cultural knowledge about members to negotiate potentially prejudiced or "loaded" meanings inferred from their use by other posters.

8.3 Interactional Analytic Phenomena

In addition to examining how categories "north Indian" and "south Indian" were used in these four contexts and what meanings were ascribed to them, this thesis also contributes to past

CA/DP literature on assessment and complaint sequences. I will summarise some of these contributions below.

An assessment and how it was responded to, was the focus of analysis in chapter 4. I showed that the food assessment of one food (idlis) was responded to with one of three reply-structures: (i) responders agreed with EA's initial assessment and invoked epistemics as a resource to support the agreement. (ii) responders disagreed with EA's initial assessment and challenged the assessor's rights or entitlements to assess 'idlis.' Some responders alternatively disagreed by invoking their own epistemic authority as the basis and followed this by offering alternative (deemed appropriate) ways of eating 'idlis'. This allowed these disagreeing respondents to reject the assessor's experience of eating 'idlis' as correct and thus undermined their assessment. (iii) responders neither agreed nor disagreed with the assessment. Instead, they worked to construct the assessor's assessment as not permitted and therefore unbelievable.

My investigation of assessments resonates with and extends the existing literature in several ways. Firstly, I presented examples of assessments produced in a different interactional context, namely Twitter. My analysis built on seminal work by Pomerantz (1984) who showed that assessments are often a part of ongoing conversations, and they are often responded to with an agreement or a disagreement. While Pomerantz (1984) studied assessments in verbal data (face-to-face talk that was recorded), I show that food assessments in my data were similarly responded to with agreements, or disagreements by several users.

Pomerantz (2021) also argued that epistemics in doing assessments is important to look at. She stated that proffering an assessment or agreeing/ disagreeing with one are ways for people to display understanding or experience of the matter at hand (Pomerantz, 2021a). However, the role of epistemics was examined by Heritage and Raymond (2005) who showed that when producing first or second position assessments, speakers often index the independence of their epistemic access to the referent and produce second assessments as independent (Heritage & Raymond, 2005). The agreements I examined in my data resonate with this, since the users agreeing with the idli assessment self-categorise as a "south Indian" or as "married into a south Indian family" as the basis for their independent epistemic access to the referent (idlis). Moreover, past research has also shown that responders use epistemics as a resource to establish credibility for their disagreements (Pomerantz, 1984). Analysing the disagreements in my data also shows this to be true, while also showing that epistemics as a resource in doing agreements. access to the referent (idlis) is also used by those questioning the very production of the

assessment to deny the assessor permission to assess idlis, which resonates with Heritage and Raymond (2005) in that assessments are social actions where the assessor and responders deal with issues of epistemic territories.

Furthermore, my chapter on responding to assessments (chapter 4) showed that ‘idlis’ are constructed as a cultural object, and it may be ‘owned’ by members of a certain category. This means that assessing these idlis made relevant the social categories and category-bound rights that could be attributed to the assessor and the responders. In other words, responders negotiated who was and who was not permitted to assess idlis based on category memberships that were ascribed to the assessor. While the idea of foods as cultural objects is not entirely novel (Srinivas, 2011), using this as a strategy to undermine food assessments was not analysed in the past DP/CA literature on food assessments that was reviewed. Most work on food assessments has been done on data collected at family mealtimes (Edwards & Potter, 2017; Wiggins, 2001, 2002; Wiggins & Potter, 2003), and therefore have examined the role of food assessments in accomplishing eating or feeding as a social action (requesting more food, rejecting second servings, complimenting the chef, feeding babies, and so on). My examination of how food assessments are responded to has been in a different context, where feeding or eating was not the central project of Twitter users. Instead, the assessment was posted in response to a *whimsical* question (Sommer, 2019), which prompted responders to talk about a food item rather than discuss the food in front of them at mealtimes. The central project in my collection, could have been participating in a mundane action, of taking a stance in response to a controversial assessment-response to the *whimsical* question.

The interactional phenomenon of complaining was examined in chapter 5. I showed that a complaint on Twitter was identified as such when a user criticises an action, a conduct, or a person and identified as a recurring behaviour or conduct. Another feature of complaints was that they were constructed as morally condemnable conduct by the complainers. These features of complaints were discussed in past literature on complaint formulations, but I showed that they were also recognisable in the novel context of naturally occurring, mundane, Twitter interactions.

Past literature on complaints in every-day conversations between friends had also shown that complaints can comprise of a recognisable interactional sequence where complaints are followed by an affiliative or disaffiliative next-turn (Traverso, 2009). Complaints were also previously examined in institutional contexts, like NHS complaint letters (McCreddie et al.,

2018, 2021), or direct complaints towards service sector companies via Twitter (Tereszkiewicz, 2020). My findings resonate with the understanding of these complaints discussed in the literature and showed that complaints on Twitter were also interactional accomplishment between multiple users. I present complaints produced in a naturally occurring, mundane context. Where my findings differ from the previous literature is that in all, but one extracts, those being complained about were not directly addressed in the complaint sequence. Moreover, their complainable conduct was identified using quote-tweets or image or video attachments, within the complaint post. The “complaint + affiliation/disaffiliation” structure was also similarly found in Twitter complaints as was identified in every-day conversations (Drew & Walker, 2009; Traverso, 2009) and institutional complaint letters (McCreddie et al., 2018, 2021). The construction of complainable conduct as recurring and morally transgressive was also a feature previously identified in complaints literature (Drew, 1998; Drew & Holt, 1988; Drew & Walker, 2009).

8.3.1 The different types of Questions: an interactional phenomenon

Asking questions and answering them has been understood within CA/DP literature as a core interactional process that interactants engage in, trying to acquire knowledge and participating in ongoing conversations (de Ruiter, 2012). Past literature from (Clayman, 2001; Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006) that has noted that questions asked in institutional contexts such as news and research interviews were not often neutral and could be potentially “leading” the respondents to respond in certain ways or with certain answers. It has been shown that interview questions tend to be neither neutral nor exclusively information-seeking. Rather, the framing of the questions and identities of the asker are resources used to accomplish “being interviewed” or “interviewing someone” (Speer, 2002; Widdicombe, 2015). For instance, Widdicombe (2015) showed that in interviews conducted by a British interviewer with Syrian interviewees, the identities of both were made relevant to accomplish *doing* being interviewed. The interviewer’s identities as sojourner, stranger, Scottish, Christian, Westerner, or unmarried woman, were invoked at various times and utilised by interviewees as an interactional resource. These allowed them to accomplish a variety of actions like warranting positive assessments of their national character, or to legitimise complaints and evoke an affiliation from the interviewer, etc (Widdicombe, 2015). Similarly, past CA literature on questions in everyday interactional contexts has also revealed that questions can be asked to accomplish a range of other actions, like assessing, complaining, requesting, and so on (Koshik,

2005; Steensig & Drew, 2008). Asking questions can also be a way for interactants to negotiate knowledge; it was shown that some questions are framed with a presupposition of what the answer could be (yes/no questions, or rhetorical questions) (Clayman, 1993; Koshik, 2005; Steensig & Drew, 2008). Therefore, a wide variety of literature on questions and questioning has demonstrated that asking a question is not a “neutral” sort of thing to do.

This understanding of questions was extended in this thesis because three different types of question-answer sequences were analysed (chapters 4, 6, and 7) from social media data. In chapter 6, two questions were examined, which were framed as information-seeking (eliciting knowledge), but they were shown as doing more than that, potentially implying that answering these questions was difficult or impossible. This made the questions rather ambiguous. The question’s ambiguity was recognisable because several answers treated the question as ‘doing more than’ information-seeking. Some answers were shown to have supplied an answer that fulfilled the information-seeking purpose (names of “north Indian politicians”), but several of the answers did not do so. Instead, they responded with “indirect answers”, which dismissed the question as relevant, or as asking about the wrong target category. This resonated with the above discussed literature on questions which argued that asking questions was not a neutral sort of thing to do, nor were most questions treated as “merely” information seeking (Steensig & Drew, 2008) even if they were disambiguated by the question poster in subsequent turns (chapter 6, extract 10). The novelty of my findings was that this was true in the context of mundane interactions in a previously unexplored context, that of social media.

In chapter 7, three questions were examined, which were all brief questions asking for descriptions, attributes, or characteristics. These were open-ended questions, similar to those found in early research on stereotypes (Schneider, 2004), which asked participants to list characteristics or attributes that they associated with various social groups like Germans, Jews, etc. However, the questions I presented (in chapter 7) were found in a mundane interactional context, rather than a research interview or experimental context. Analysing the various answers to these questions showed that people fulfilled the information-seeking purpose of such questions, that is they provided lists of attributes that they associated with a particular social category. However, producing such lists was not always done “neutrally” or “objectively.” The sensitivity of producing generalised descriptions of category members was dealt with by providing disclaimers, or particularising descriptions (extract 3, chapter 7). Analysis of these questions and their answers therefore showed that asking brief, open-ended

questions was not a neutral undertaking. Nevertheless, such questions are found on Quora, since the platform's purpose is to "create knowledge" about various topics, and as such, it was the member's concern to deal with anticipated interpretations of the answers they provide. Therefore, while the elicited information about "north Indians" and "south Indians" was provided in the answers which fulfilled Quora's information-generation goal (*Quora - About*, n.d.), the alternative possibility that the question's purpose was to stereotype social groups was managed in the answers.

The third type of question was found in chapter 4, which was called a "whimsical" question. According to the newspaper article by the Daily Beast, these questions are commonly asked on Twitter. These are the type of questions that allow users to engage in discussion about mundane things like foods they like, films they watch, or countries they want to travel to. Commonly used by content-creators and business accounts on Twitter, these questions are known for their ability to attract engagement, a valuable currency for accounts to disseminate their message across various social networks on Twitter (Sommer, 2019). While this question was not the focus of my analysis in chapter 4, it was the opening post that triggered EA's assessment of idlis. The purpose of asking such a *whimsical* question was thus shown to have been fulfilled by the idli assessment. In other words, responses treated the answer to the *whimsical* question as controversial, by responding with mundane displays of stance on the food assessment.

Asking and answering questions was therefore shown as serving social function for users, because it allowed posters to accomplish other interactional goals than "merely answering a question". Some of these goals were assessing a food item, treating the question as ambiguous, providing descriptions but managing the potentially stereotypical or prejudice inferences of describing people in terms of category-bound attributes. These findings were reported from examination of a novel context that has previously not been examined (to my knowledge). My findings therefore extend previous understandings of the phenomena of questioning and answering.

8.3.2 Category use and contributions to CA/DP/MCA literature

My interest in studying the uses of categories "north Indian" "south Indian" led me to Sacks' work on membership categories and Membership Categorisation Devices (MCDs) (Sacks, 1979, 1995b) and later work developing the Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015; Jayyusi, 1984; Stokoe, 2012). Literature on MCA and

membership categories has shown that categories are a social resource that allows members to access and use shared knowledge about the world to accomplish actions-in-interaction (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2015). I discussed this in more detail in Chapter 3: Concepts and Methodology, where I laid out my conceptual and methodological approaches.

Building on how past CA and MCA literature examined category-use, I will now discuss some of my findings. Firstly, the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” were used to “do” interactional business, like responding to an assessment (chapter 4), complaining (chapter 5), asking questions (chapter 6), seeking descriptions of people (chapter 7), and answering “ambiguous” questions in indirect ways (chapter 6).

In chapter 4, “being south Indian” was used as an epistemic resource to agree or disagree with the assessment of ‘idlis.’ Invoking membership of “south Indian” allowed users to invoke category-bound attributes like regularly consuming idlis and knowing how to correctly prepare and eat idlis. This allowed the responder to establish the basis of his agreement or disagreement, to establish his stance as credible or knowledgeable, or to demonstrate the independence of his second assessment of idlis. In chapter 5, the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” were used as the target of a complaint. Their use by another Twitter user was described as morally consequential, and transgressive enough to warrant the complaint.

In chapter 6, the categories “north Indian” or “south Indian” and some category-bound attributes were used to construct two questions posed on Twitter as “ambiguous”. In several instances, this was done by invoking alternative, more appropriate categories to show that examples are producible from the latter because they have the appropriate category-bounded attributes to satisfy the question’s expectation (chapter 6, extracts 7, 8, and 10). This use of categories and category-bound attributes, in this collection, therefore allowed various responders to undermine the question and to construct it as irrelevant or void.

In chapter 7, descriptions of categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” were produced by users, and attributes of clothing style, physical features, dispositions, recognisable behaviours, etc were produced as category bound. In most cases these could be read as general attributes applicable to members of the relevant category. However, describing people or members in such terms is a delicate and sensitive task, susceptible to accusations of incorrectly generalising, or stereotyping. When faced with a task of nevertheless describing members of a category (as asked for by a question, for instance) one strategy adopted was to particularise the

descriptions as applicable to only their immediate family (extract 3). This resonated with the arguments made by Billig (1985) who showed that categorisation and particularisation are rhetorical accomplishments, and people do not have “storehouses of prejudiced topics and are not so ready to talk unfavourably” about other people (Billig, 1985, p. 99). In examples from chapter 7, particularising the descriptions to one’s closest family members (parents and cousins) allowed the poster to inoculate their description of “south Indians” and “north Indians” credibly (through familial access to observing) while defending their description against accusations of stereotyping or generalising members of social groups who he does not have access to.

One notable feature of the descriptions produced in chapter 7, of categories “north Indian” and “south Indian”, was the extensive use of lists. Jayyusi (1984) discussed some features of lists that provided different ways of “describing”. She argued that lists can be understood as a collection or a unit of items that “fit” together (p. 76), either because the structure of the way those items are produced is the same, or because they are describing aspects of social world that are related to each other (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 76). In chapter 7, I illustrate this point through examples of similarly structured items on a list (using modal verbs “would”, extract 4), or similarity in what the items were describing (dispositions, externally observable habits or behaviours, extracts 4, 6, and 7). Using these various list types allowed the answer posters to manage the possibility that producing descriptions is a sensitive business, or to construct the list as an “objective” out-there description of persons instead of a subjective, personal opinion.

Therefore, various examples from the various chapters illustrated that categories are used in meaningful ways and to accomplish interactionally relevant goals. The various examples also showed that categories were flexible and came with several category-bound attributes, whose appropriateness and relevance was contextually sensitive and the members’ concern.

8.4 Methodological Issues: An evaluation

So far, I have discussed my findings, and various contributions to literature on assessments, complaints, question-answering, and category-use from a DP/CA/MCA perspective. However, another novel thing about this thesis is the use of social media as the source of data. Reflecting on the decision to use this, I will summarise my thoughts below.

8.4.1 Using social media as data

As I reflect on this project, I note several strengths and limitations which can pave way for future study and avenues for exploration. My initial interest was to understand and investigate how people use the categories “north Indian” and “south Indian” in every-day conversations, like at dinnertime while conversing with family members, or at tea-time, conversing with friends, peers, or colleagues, and such similar contexts. However, recording such mundane, everyday interactions posed a challenge, because it is difficult to capture the precise moment when the users invoke these categories in these kinds of interactions. This concern of how to collect and analyse naturally occurring interactions in mundane settings has been discussed in some past literature (Stokoe, 2006; Stokoe & Smithson, 2001; Whitehead, 2019, p. 252). Whitehead (2019) argued that the challenge of being able to record people’s use of categories in mundane contexts has tended to be why researchers have largely relied on data from interviews. However, in the last decade, social media has been emerging as a site for naturally occurring data that could potentially be used for research (Giles et al., 2015). This is because social media has become an ingrained part of peoples’ lives, and a way for friends, strangers, peers, and colleagues to connect with each other, share ideas, and acquire knowledge of the world. My solution to the concern of collecting naturally occurring instances of “north Indian” and “south Indian” categories in mundane instances was using social media as the source of data.

However, social media interactions are different in many ways than face-to-face talk. For one, they are not ‘talk’ in the traditional ‘CA-sense’, comprising of sequential turn-taking (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) where the utterance of a prior turn is followed and influences what is said in the next turn. Social media interactions are different from such understandings of the structure of ‘talk’, particularly the Twitter threads and Quora posts in my data were textual and asynchronous (Meredith et al., 2021). Threads, for instance did not present to other users of Twitter in a format that is ‘sequential’ in the same way as verbal interactions do. This raised the concern of how to best present these data as interactions for analysis. Meredith (2015) has also discussed issues of transcription in this regard, and (Giles, 2021) discussed the particular challenges posed by the sequentially ordered Twitter threads.

Here, I will discuss one such problem, namely that of “quote-tweets.” On Twitter, threads are initiated by opening posts. However, these posts may not necessarily have triggered the

conversation. For instance, the thread in chapter 4 had EA's assessment of Idlis as the opening post. However, the assessment was a response to ZI's question, which was quoted by EA.

While this would intuitively and temporally seem like the "correct way" of presenting the sequence of turn-taking, this is not how the tweets would present on twitter. Users are likely to come across EA's tweet rather than ZI first, since ZI was not directly responded to, but merely 'quoted.' Following is how the thread would present:

```
1 EA: Idlis are the most boring...
2 ZI: What is the dish...
3 AA: I agree w/ this take.
```

The decision was made to present data in the latter format, preserving the format in which threads would appear to audiences. Moreover, preserving this order allowed the treatment of quote-tweets as not actively involved in a thread, but as referring to another user's conversation, almost akin to overhearing something someone said, and then branching off into a side-conversation about it (addressed to your audience). If the former was the structure of transcription, EA would have been responding directly to ZI's tweet, which would make the function of 'quote-tweets' similar to function of 'reply-to' function on Twitter. This could also imply that EA's assessment was not oriented to his audience or followers, but rather users following ZI's tweet (the question). Since this was not the case, the transcript was designed to represent the "threads" as they would be visible to general users of the platform.

On Quora, the interactions are also textual and asynchronous, however, their structure resembled a more traditional CA understanding of question-answers being an adjacency pair (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). The transcript therefore depicted the question preceding the answer, which were followed by and responding comments. Following is an illustration of transcript:

```
1 Ques by EA: How can you identify...?
2 Ans. by AA: They are identified as...
3 Comm. by DA: Aren't we Indians first?
```

These posts are asynchronous, implying that each turn only becomes available to the next turn poster when it has been fully typed and posted. Interruptions are not a feature of this type of interactions (Housley et al., 2018; Meredith et al., 2021; Meredith & Stokoe, 2014). Understanding how interactions are structured on Twitter and Quora was therefore an important step in the analysis process, and was influenced by the design of each platform, including the effect of features like 'reply' or 'quote' that are available but platform specific.

The above discussion of how interactions are structured on different platforms allows me to extend the current examination of online interactions by presenting a possible template for transcribing ‘threads’ on Twitter and Quora. These build on the argument by Meredith (2015) that transcriptions play a crucial role in how interactions can be understood and represented for analysis, and that any representation is unlikely to be completely neutral or objective. Moreover, they are informed by Twitter and Quora’s official documentation about the various platform features, and their functionalities as described in these manuals.

Since I have been discussing differences between verbal face-to-face interactions and textual asynchronous interactions, I will also say something about the translatability of my findings across these domains (Housley et al., 2023). Since gestures, interruptions, silences, and several such features of face-to-face interactions are not available in online data, the question arises: whether the features of platforms are significantly influencing the actions accomplished (like how responses to assessments are produced, or complaints formulated, or questions asked). In chapter 5, I showed that several features of complaints observed in face-to-face interactions were also found in my complaint sequences. Similarly in chapter 4, I show that assessments are responded to with agreements and disagreements, which was previously identified and examined in face-to-face contexts. While I cannot conclude that there is transferability of findings between these two types of interactions (face-to-face and textual), I can present some empirical evidence that suggests that there are some similarities in the way complaints are recognised as such online and offline.

I also argue here that just as face-to-face conversations are afforded features like silences and gestures and interrupting another speaker, online interactions are also afforded features built into the platform. The users rely on such features to fully engage in the social actions of interacting with someone, taking a stance, complaining, or asking questions. It is therefore important for me, as an analyst to evaluate my analysis of such social-media features and features of textual interactions.

Textual data such as tweets and Quora posts provide a unique set of extra-linguistic features that can enrich analysis, such as, the use of emojis, exclamation points, ellipsis, hyperlinks, video/photo attachments, capitalisation, etc. These features can function as non-verbal expressions and can serve functions of emphasising, “shouting”, evidence-providing to strengthen credibility/ authority for claims, etc (See also: Giles, 2016). In my analysis, I show how users rely on some of these features. In chapter 5, I showed that users relied on media

attachments (videos) to provide evidence for identifying complainable conduct. In some examples (chapters 4 and 5), emojis were used in posts to emphasise emotion expression like anger or frustration or to establish a post as humorous through emojis of laughter, etc.

However, due to the constraint of space, these features and their role in the interaction was not fully investigated in this thesis. The content of media attachments, for instance, was merely summarised to provide context. This is an avenue of future research that can meaningfully add to this thesis' understanding of the use of "north Indian" and "south Indian" categories online. One reason for this is that emojis and media attachments or GIFs are visual and non-textual features that allow users to communicate their message effectively and succinctly. Memes and emojis are also a part of shared knowledge between users of the platform. Using a certain meme or a specific emoji succinctly conveys a shared message and allows posters to potentially accomplish a range of interactional actions (Gibson et al., 2018).

8.4.3 Pros and Cons of single-thread analyses

In chapters 4 and 6, analysis was largely focused on detailed analysis of several responses to one opening post or tweet. I will now reflect on this choice and present my arguments for this decision. Analysing a single thread with multiple replies to the opening post has its limitations and advantages. As a possible limitation, it might seem like too little data to draw any overarching conclusions from. However, looking at several responses to the same assessment (in chapter 4) allowed me to show that even when posters accomplish the same action (agreeing or disagreeing), they do so by using different interactional resources and in different ways. Each response establishes independent epistemic access to the referent, and independent entitlement to agree or disagree with the assessment, regardless of what other respondents have done in their tweets. A similar observation can be made in chapter 6, where several answers to the same question (about north Indian politicians) were examined. While several responses accomplished the same action (indirectly answering and treating the question as ambiguous), they used different resources to do so. Even the ones that used category-memberships invoked a wide range of categorisations to demonstrate the inappropriateness of asking about "north Indian politicians". I was therefore able to demonstrate that the responders oriented to different aspects of the question or the assessment, like the category invoked by the asker (chapter 6), or the entitlement of the assessor (chapter 4). And despite orienting to these various parts of the opening post, the responses accomplished similar goals (disagreeing with the assessor in

chapter 4 or treating the question as ambiguous in chapter 6). The strength of single-thread analysis was, therefore, that it served as the means to demonstrate the various unique findings of each assessment-response or question's answer (Clayman & Gill, 2004). Another strength of this choice was that it allowed me to analyse several responses to the same post or tweet also allowed me to build "collections" of findings (Whitehead, 2019, p. 256), which strengthen the empirical nature of this research's findings.

In chapter 7, only three questions were analysed, which can also be seen as a rather small dataset for analysis. The primary reason for this was that posts were collected within a strict time-period, limiting the scope of returning to Quora and including other similar questions in the analysis. Nevertheless, these three questions were analysed in detail to because they are interesting sort of questions to ask. Analysis of these three questions was directly relevant to the core interest of this thesis, which was how members of "north Indian" and "south Indian" categories are talked about and what meanings are ascribed to them. The small size of my dataset permitted me to investigate the asking of a certain type of questions in mundane settings, which were commonly found in "research settings." Their close analysis in a mundane institutional setting allowed me to illustrate how such questions were "odd" questions to ask and that those answering raise and deal with issues of sensitive nature, like stereotyping and generalisation of the nature of describing people.

8.5 Conclusions

This thesis was, therefore, a novel and systematic investigation of how the categories "north Indian" and "south Indian" are used in mundane interactions on social media sites like Twitter and Quora. The investigation began with the establishment of these categories as "elusive" in academic literature but used aplenty in everyday mundane interactions. In the process of showing this, I also discussed the various meanings ascribed to "being north Indian" or "being south Indian", which were flexible and locally relevant, but covered various domains of people's everyday life, like the food they ate, clothes they wear, films they watch, languages they speak, and ethnicities they belong to. Using Conversation Analysis and Discursive Psychology, this thesis demonstrated that these categories were indeed "meaningful", "alive", and "functional", and users invoked them in accomplishing various interactional goals.

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Appendix: R Script for Collecting Twitter Data

Following script was run in RStudio when data was collected from Twitter with the keywords “north Indian” and “south Indian.”

Data Scraping

- `Install.packages (“rtweet”)`
- `Library (“rtweet”)`
- `Install.packages (“reactable”)`
- `Library (“reactable”)`
- `Install.packages (“dplyr”)`
- `Library (“dplyr”)`
- `Install.packages (“ggplot2”)`
- `Library (“ggplot2”)`

- `Tweets_collected_ni <- search_tweets (“north Indian”, n = 1000, include_rts = TRUE)`
- `Tweets_collected_si <- search_tweets (“south Indian”, n = 1000, include_rts = TRUE)`

- `View (tweets_collected_ni)`
- `Head (tweets_collected_ni, n = 3)`

- `View (tweets_collected_si)`
- `Head (tweets_collected_si, n = 3)`

Viewing and plotting various cells from the dataset

- `Unique (tweets_collected_ni$screen_name)`
- `Unique (tweets_collected_si$screen_name)`

- `Length (tweets_collected_ni$location)`
- `Length (tweets_collected_si$location)`

- `Tweets_collected_ni %>%`
- `Count (location, sort = TRUE) %>%`
- `Mutate (location = reorder (location, n)) %>%`

- `Top_n (20) %>%`
- `Ggplot (aes (x = location, y = n)) +`
- `Geom_col () +`
- `Coord_flip () +`
- `Labs (x = "count", y = "Location", title = G1")`

- `Tweets_collected_si %>%`
- `Count (location, sort = TRUE) %>%`
- `Mutate (location = reorder (location, n)) %>%`
- `Top_n (20) %>%`
- `Ggplot (aes (x = location, y = n)) +`
- `Geom_col () +`
- `Coord_flip () +`
- `Labs (x = "count", y = "Location", title = G1")`