

Discourse Variation as a Symbolic Resource:  
Globalization, Indian Outsourcing Firms, and the Construction of Business Identity  
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The relevance of language variation and change to theories of globalization has been widely debated (e.g. Blommaert 2003; Coupland 2003; Johnstone 2004). Recent studies in variationist sociolinguistics (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 2003; Zhang 2005) reflect a movement within sociolinguistics to redefine notions of communities and territoriality in a globalizing era. Variation analyses under this rubric have privileged examinations of discrete linguistic features commodified by social agents.

Linguistic variants, however, are not just socially reified or created. Features can be constitutive of discourse varieties. They may also be constrained, owned, and created by institutional communities of practice which, in turn, ascribe symbolic value to features in local linguistic markets. In this view, specific languages are not globalized per se, but transnational discourses, registers, and speech styles. If variationist studies are to analyze sociolinguistic variables within a model of globalization as a multilayered process across communities and levels of interconnectedness (Meyerhoff and Niedzielski 2003: 539), they must also encompass the deterritorialized discourses of 'mediating institutions' (Blommaert 2003: 609): communities of practice with ownership of globalizing discourse varieties influencing local environments.

This paper addresses the gap in scholarship by examining discourse variation within globalizing contexts as a symbolic resource in processes that create and disseminate institutional ideologies. Focusing on the quantitative analysis of referring terms indexing interconnectedness and geographic place among internet websites of 50 outsourcing companies located in India, I demonstrate that such communities of practice commodify particular discourse varieties to construct globalized business identity as deterritorialized. These varieties disseminate an ideology of interconnectedness across a range of non-localized referents emphasizing development of knowledge (n=21; 42%), client partnerships (n=11; 22%), and people management/development (n=6; 12%) amongst others. As the overall distribution of these data among the websites indicate, marketing for investment opportunities entails the employment of supra-local discourse variables within the linguistic market, extending Bourdieu's (1977) notion of symbolic capital to discourse variants as linguistic products.

Analysis of geographical reference with these discourse varieties provides further evidence of the deterritorialized patterns of discourse variation. A great majority of the websites (n=39; 78%) show that discourses referring to general characteristics of India's

location (i.e. cost-effective advantages due to time zone) are valued over more locally specific variants referring to the Indian pool of labor as possessing an array of skills that have contributed to India becoming a premier destination for outsourcing (n=11; 22%). The downplaying of local agency demonstrates how deterritorialized linguistic markets constrain communities and could benefit or challenge members within them, as recent studies have addressed (Cameron 2000 and Heller 2003).

In summary, this study explores the discourse variation of interconnectedness within an institutional community of practice. A combination of discourse features reifies supra-local business identity and influences contexts locally. Studies of this type suggest that discourse variation can be examined as processes binding members in a community together while unequally constraining the linguistic variation of others.

## References

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