Interrogating linguistic diversity from the norms of multilingualism in the Global South

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In May 1905, a non-European Japanese fleet commanded by Admiral Togo Heihachiro annihilated much of the Russian navy which had sailed halfway round the world to reach the Far East. The victory reverberated like a thunderclap through the "whispering galleries of the East" (Mishra 2013, p. 1). While the contemporary world, to quote President Theodore Roosevelt, looked at this naval battle as "the greatest phenomenon that world has ever seen" (Mishra 2013, p. 1), its consequences in the realm of social sciences and humanities were far more serious and decisive. The Japanese victory represented the triumph of the East. It questioned the episteme which views modernization as a unilinear evolutionary process. For it demonstrated that any such conception, which makes explicit identification of modernization with westernization and treats both the processes synonymously, suffers from the fallacy of historicism.

A parallel can indeed be drawn with regard to the plethora of terms such as 'polylingual languaging', 'metrolingualism', 'translanguaging', etc. that emerged in sociolinguistic literature. These terms were developed to deal with the study of multilingualism and aimed at describing and analysing "linguistic practices in which meaning is made using signs flexibly" (Blackledge and Creese 2014, p.2). By sharing a proposition that language is not a separate bounded entity, these terms reflect the anxiety and tension surrounding the notion of language and language practices outside the context of monolingualism and monoculturalism. However, these terms still reflect a viewpoint of the linguistic sensibility of the Global South from the lens of the Global North. They fail to understand that linguistic diversity and the social, political and historical implications of linguistic practices prevailing in the Global South require another analytical lens; one which allows the viewing of language as a ubiquitous and polymorphous phenomenon and not as an abstraction. In the Global South, multilingualism is neither an additive, compartmentalized notion nor the sociolinguistic categories and concepts of a mother tongue, other tongue. Standard language and community are anchored in the "authenticity and moral significance of *real* language of a speaker, transparent to the true self" (Woolard 1998, p. 18).

While interrogating linguistic diversity from the norms of multilingualism in the Global South, this presentation will touch upon the notions of mother tongue, other tongue, language ideology, and education in the sociolinguistics of India.