

## POSTCOLONIAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE POLITICS TODAY: READING RAMANATHAN'S *THE ENGLISH-VERNACULAR DIVIDE*

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### Abstract

In this essay, I will discuss the ideological structure of current postcolonial English language politics in the world, arguing that despite the “advances” in post-Independence nationalist rhetoric in most “postcolonial” countries, the debates on language continue to rehash tired voices of pragmatism and linguistic nationalism. I further argue that what is usually “notable” in current postcolonial English language politics is the disappearance or devaluing of class as a central concept in the understanding of postcolonial language and society. I will discuss these arguments through my review of Ramanathan's *The English-Vernacular Divide: Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice*. I claim that the book's powerful arguments run against dominant perspectives on the role of English and local languages in many societies today. The book's main argument that English still divides could be a stirring response to those who maintain that English, through its hybrid, localized and “fighting back” forms, is now stripped of its colonial trappings and baggage.

### Keywords

language politics, postcolonialism, postmodernism

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Language ideological debates, for example on national languages and media of instruction whether that be in Singapore (see Pakir), Hong Kong (see Li) or the Philippines (see Sibayan & Gonzalez), tend to reduce the complexity of issues into simplistic claims: English is the language of globalization, science and technology, and social mobility; while the national languages help maintain our various national heritages and identities, English must take first priority in education and society because this is the way to move ahead. The issues of languages in society and education are very complex (see the various discussion of Ganguly; Tsui and Tollefson; Alexander, *English*; and Aquino); but anyone who is “critical” of English is deemed either blind to the unfolding marvels of globalization, or is

deemed to be against the teaching or learning of English in all its forms.

In this essay, I will discuss the ideological structure of current postcolonial English language politics in the world, arguing that despite the “advances” in post-Independence nationalist rhetoric in most “postcolonial” countries, the debates on language continue to rehash tired voices of pragmatism and linguistic nationalism (e.g., via globalism, academic postcolonial and postmodern theorizing). I further argue that what is usually “notable” in current postcolonial English language politics is the disappearance or devaluing of class, with its various uses and nuances in meaning (see King), as a central concept in the understanding of postcolonial language and society.

I will discuss these arguments through my review of a recent book on the topic of postcolonial English language politics: Ramanathan’s *The English-Vernacular Divide: Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice*, which is a nuanced and grounded view of such politics in India. Its core argument is simple but powerful: *English divides*. I consider this book a brave book because it comes at a time when dominant globalization ideologies in the field of English language teaching and related fields drown out anything or anyone that professes some “critical” arguments about the role of English in society today. In particular, I believe that the book’s powerful arguments run against dominant perspectives on the role of English and local languages in many societies today, but the manner by which it generates its arguments is sometimes peppered with problematic elements of postmodern and postcolonial theorizing which can be re-appropriated by some within the “usual” frame of language ideological debate: “English as divisive is a thing of the past. We now can resist through English. So, there is nothing wrong with it, especially now when we need it to globalize our respective societies.” The book’s main argument, as I note above, is this: English still divides, and this could be a stirring response to those who maintain that English, through its hybrid, localized and “fighting back” forms, is now stripped of its colonial trappings and baggage (see also Parakrama; Tupas, “The Politics”).

## POST-INDEPENDENCE LANGUAGE DEBATES: A BRIEF REVIEW

In the case of present-day South Africa, Alexander notes that “there continues to be tension between the explicit constitutionally enshrined principles of the promotion of multilingualism in South Africa, and the concurrent practical commitment to the hegemonic status of English” (“Language” 144). This tension may be understood in terms of “the middle class notion that under South African conditions the universalization of the English language was an essential precondition for the building of a modern nation

in this country” (142). There are crucial differences in the way ex-colonial states have responded to the language question or problem because of their unique sociopolitical structures – for example, Ramanathan describes the pervasiveness of caste- and class-based ideologies in India (“English”); Canagarajah gives a background to the ethnic/ultra-nationalism in Sri Lanka (“Critical”); Islamist nationalism in Malaysia is nuanced by Ganguli; Lorente highlights the commoditization of human labor in the Philippines; and Chua explains multiculturalism as statist ideology in Singapore. Such national differences need to be recognized and respected in any analysis of postcolonial English language politics. However, Alexander’s formulation of such politics in the context of South Africa is essentially true in these other countries as well because, as argued by Chua in Singapore, Annamalai in India, Parakrama in Sri Lanka, Lin in Hong Kong, and Tupas (“Back”) in the Philippines, English has never been “class-free” despite attempts to picture it as an equalizing language in the midst of multiple racial, ethnic, and multilingual loyalties. The earlier ideological manifestations of these issues could be partly gleaned through past dichotomous debates on language and society immediately following the “independence” of these colonized countries from the middle part of the twentieth century, for instance the work of Constantino, and Yabes in the 1970s.

At the time, anti-colonial language rhetoric reverberated in the hearts of many colonized people: the colonial languages, English especially, were the key tools of ideological subjugation and social oppression. They colonized the mind; they created westernized colonial subjects whose tastes and sensibilities betrayed their indigenous makeup. They helped create the great divide between the small national elites and the poor majority or “masses.” Anti-colonial struggles, thus, went hand-in-hand with the nationalization of society, the economy, education and government (see the early work by Nkrumah; and Fanon; and a later assessment by Young), and the roles of both the colonial and indigenous languages were crucial in this march towards social and political change (Constantino; Akoha).

But, the counter-argument lost impetus, after all the nationalists also spoke through the colonial languages which they claimed oppressed the “masses.” The colonized whose minds were subjugated and whose lives were exploited by colonialism were also never passive dupes who simply followed their colonial masters. Power did not come solely from the colonizer. Power was everywhere. In so many ways big and small, the colonized also resisted colonialism. In terms of language, the colonized created hybrid speech and writing, altering language standards and creating new voices. Counter-discourses were possible. Resistance through the colonial languages was possible. Language does not merely

impinge on our consciousness; we, the speakers, also leave traces of what we want to be, of our dreams and identities, in language (see the arguments of Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin; Kachru; Dissanayake; Bolton & Hutton).

And so when the 1980s and 1990s came, when a confluence of global phenomena conspired to elevate the invincibility of global capitalism, as Stiglitz described it, class-based issues on language suffered a major blow. One could be nationalistic and speak English. Or, one was not anti-nationalistic if she spoke English. *English as a divisive language* once again was swept away by *English as a language of mobility and equality*. Nationalism and development could not go together, argued Andrew Gonzalez in the Philippines. Either we became pragmatic, embraced English and globalization; or we became nationalists, embraced our local languages, and became isolated from the rest of the world. Even now (in fact, increasingly so), we are asked to look at the evidence: English is everywhere. Somehow along the way, much of the historical, political, educational and sociocognitive issues raised in the 1960s and 1970s have been lost in the midst of the mad rush towards English.

This is why I consider Ramanathan's book a bold book. This is especially so since it is written by someone who is herself involved in the profession – *Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages* (TESOL) – that is at the forefront of the promotion of English around the world. Of course, TESOL is precisely what Pennycook (*Critical* 145) refers to as the Teaching of English to Speakers of Othered Languages (TE/SOL). Many others have written similar critical treatises on the sociopolitical consequences of English language teaching and learning around the world (e.g., Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*; Pennycook, *The cultural*; Holliday), but I believe that Ramanathan's book has the benefit (or potential) of responding to the theoretical and political questions posed by such earlier critical work. Therefore, my interest in writing this article about the book is not simply because it is a good book, but also because I hope to map out a theoretical outline of the book's claims in relation to historically established conversations in postcolonial English language politics. As I indicated above, my feeling is that Ramanathan's claim that English still divides will once again lose out to much more powerful voices of those who refuse to engage with more complex debates and relegate such a claim – as has been done in the past – to so-called "obsolete" nationalist politics which the claim really is not (see Bernardo; Tupas, "Back"). In some parts of the book, Ramanathan seems busy addressing potential (postmodern and postcolonial) questions about the seeming rigidity of her claim that English still divides, while interspersing them with her own answers which, if theoretically conceptualized, actually transcend past debates on English and its relation with other languages in

education and society.

Therefore, I am not simply interested in what the book is saying, but more importantly, I am interested in presenting my own reading of the book as I locate it within the theoretical and political conversations that have been going on both in academic and other social contexts in many so-called “postcolonial” societies. What I hope to accomplish in the end is to help push conceptualizations of “English” or what it stands for in contemporary societies beyond the rigidities of past positions and hopefully into fresh and more nuanced discussions.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### *The Major Argument*

This book has six chapters, and in all but one of these the concluding paragraphs state explicitly the main argument of the book: English “divides” (chap. 1, 2 & 5); is at the heart of some “divide” (chap. 3); and is “simultaneously divisive and integrated on the postcolonial ground” (chap. 6). Of course, the author throughout the book has been especially careful with such pronouncements, tempering the argument with qualifications like “from some points of view” (13), “through particular lenses and in some parts of the world” (19), “from some lenses” (38), and “how the English-Vernacular divide is resisted” (2), but the core of the argument is the divisive nature of English language politics. Chapter one frames language politics in a “divisive postcolonial landscape.” Chapter two discusses “divisive” ideologies, policies and practices, while Chapters three and four explore “divisive” pedagogical tools and pedagogical practices, respectively. Chapter five discusses the “divisive politics of tracking” while Chapter six attempts to reconcile such a divisive nature of English with postmodern and postcolonial practices of resistance, hybridization, and nativization which create “bridges” between languages and, in a broader sense, social divides.

### *India as the Place of Research*

Ramanathan develops her argument through the vantage point of India, where English stands at the core of class-based inequalities (intertwined with caste and gender dimensions) in which its social value is best understood and located in the English-Vernacular divide. In India, students are generally educated either in English-medium (EM) or Vernacular-medium (VM) schools. While theoretically all students can choose

which types of school they want to attend, such “choice” is socially conditioned because of a number of intersecting factors, including socio-economic and familial reasons. The book demonstrates how both types of schools (EM and VM) generate two broad sets of class-based and class-indexed ideologies and practices which “slot students into invisible grooves” (38), and which create and sustain well-entrenched “gulfs” and “chasms” in Indian society. Consequently, but less substantially, the book also explores local forms of resistance which disrupt such divides and live out more fair educational and social practices.

### *Research Tools*

The presentation of the local dynamics of the English-Vernacular divide is based on Ramanathan’s study of three tertiary institutions in the city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat, India, where she spent the first twenty-three years of her middle-class life before she went on to pursue graduate work and teach in the United States. Her largely ethnographic study uses a range of “data types” including interviews with students, faculty members, classroom observations and written documents, collected during seven consecutive summer months. The three institutions whose “divergent” realities inform the analyses in the book were “a middle-class largely EM Jesuit institution” (which has recently opened up to low-caste, poor VM-educated students as part of its vision of social justice), “a low-income VM women’s college,” and “an EM private business college” (with few VM students admitted based on their English language proficiency) (10). Based on such divergent socio-educational experiences, the author provides us with detailed analyses of three topical strands: (1) the politics of divergent pedagogic tools, (2) the politics related to divergent pedagogic practices, and (3) the politics of tracking.

### *The Politics of Pedagogic Tools*

The discussion of pedagogic tools focuses on differing “cultural models” in English language textbooks into which EM and VM K-12 pupils are socialized. These models also include assumptions about what it means to be literate in English. According to the author, the textbooks are indeed radically divergent in terms of their cultural models: VM textbooks focus on survival English, discrete grammar lessons, and local content only, and assume that students cannot learn on their own and that teachers are not proficient in English (thus the availability of “explanations” sections). EM textbooks, on the other hand, have a much more cosmopolitan outlook (through western-oriented reading texts) and work towards developing multiple and complex sociolinguistic/cognitive skills among



pupils, including thinking critically, exploring different voices in writing, and enhancing independent learning. These varying models, according to the author, form part of a class-based *assumptions nexus* which is actually “‘assumptions that partially explain why things are the way they are” (37) or, in other words, why particular social practices inside and outside the classroom privilege the middle class and devalue other income groups. Thus, the divergent pedagogical tools to which the two groups of pupils are exposed have huge consequences for these students’ educational performance such that even those few VM students who manage to find places in EM tertiary schools find it difficult to cope with (more westernized) (EM) socio-educational practices and sensibilities which devalue the Vernacular and the more localized notions of literacy and thinking.

### *The Politics of Pedagogic Practices*

The discussion of pedagogic practices is also based on a largely contrastive inquiry into the local institutional practices at the low-income VM women’s college and the upper-middle class EM business college. At the VM school, classroom practices make much use of the Vernacular, create a general sense of cultural alienation among students, and focus heavily on correct answers. The Vernacular (and Vernacular-related practices and traditions) is integrated into classroom teaching, such as the use of choral recitation like the “Kathas” in Hindu festivals during which priests relate myths to everyday realities. However, such “seamless transference of valued community practices into classroom realms” (72) is not always successful. In several classroom settings, such as the teaching of literature, while the Vernacular is much used, the content of texts is foreign and is in English, creating severe ramifications for students’ well-being like cultural alienation and difficulty in state-board university examinations in English. At the EM school, on the other hand, pedagogic practices are oriented towards group work, active participation and critical inquiry, as well as the study of grammar in business contexts, thus creating a largely relevant classroom environment for students. Reflecting on these divergent pedagogic practices, bridged to some extent by teachers and students who find ways to create better opportunities for democratic teaching and learning, Ramanathan situates such practices within broader social conditions of production and consumption of power and knowledge, aligning themselves to create “(mis)matches” (86) between the socio-educational experiences of students and the expectations from them when they enter college, and making medium of instruction “only one social cog indexing very different social worlds” (87).

### *The Politics of Tracking Practices*

Third, the discussion of tracking practices is taken mainly from the socio-educational practices of the upper-middle class Catholic EM college where the author received her BA degree in literature. According to the author, the politics of tracking – or the process by which the institution determines the kinds of curricula into which different groups of students are “slotted” – largely affirms the English-Vernacular gulf, although similar ways to bridge it have been identified as well. Consequently, in providing its VM students with special English language instruction, this institution follows state-mandated policies of streaming: VM students who have had prior English language instruction from Grades 5-12 are slotted into the A-stream, while those who have had similar instruction from Grades 5-9 only are slotted in the B-stream. In B-stream classrooms, there is extensive use of translation which helps bridge the “gulf” by drawing positively on the students’ Vernacular backgrounds, but an almost exclusive focus on grammar teaching limits the possibilities of language learning. Among the A-streamers, on the other hand, there is a preference for English literature because their English proficiency is deemed better, an opportunity that is almost closed to B-streamers. Compared with their EM counterparts, however, their English is still deemed inadequate, resulting in specific tracking practices which also work towards sustaining the gulf between media of instruction: (1) some teachers emphasize their role as teachers of literature and not of language, (2) students rely heavily on study guides which are extremely oriented towards final examinations, and (3) there is “cultural dissonance” (100) between what the students know and what they ought to know from the “texts with overly western themes” (106).

## THEORETICAL ISSUES

### *Earlier Debates*

Ramanathan’s book is recently published (2005) which puts it in a strategic position to address some of the core concerns and issues surrounding English language politics around the world. But a crude reading of the book (which, I will argue later, may be partly due to the book’s failure to make explicit mention of its positioning vis-à-vis theoretical and political conversations in the field and other social contexts) may quite wrongly put it along the lines of the linguistic nationalisms of anti-colonial struggles of colonized countries, especially of the Third World from the middle part of the twentieth century (Tupas, “Back”). Why not, indeed? The book’s main argument that class is a defining feature of



English language politics goes back largely to efforts to decolonize much of the colonized world: for example, English created the wedge between “the elite” and “the masses” in the Philippines (Constantino; see also Hau and Tinio). However, to repeat what I earlier wrote, the grand narratives of anti-colonial struggles became the targets of intense criticism from emerging postcolonial and postmodern theorizing of the 1970s, but especially of the 1980s. Colonization, it has been argued, was never a one-way process; the colonized, also fought back through various means. The colonized, in other words, were never helpless subjects of colonialism; they actively engaged with the brutalities of colonialism by resisting or circumventing it in many creative and novel ways (e.g, Guha; Bolton and Hutton). This is how the complex concepts of “resistance,” “hybridity,” and “nativization” (among other terms, of course) could be partly understood; they provided us with more nuanced ways of understanding colonial experiences as opposed to the simplified notion of colonized people as “the oppressed” (Bhaba). Within this framework, English has fought back against the Empire; the colonized “destroyed” English to reflect their own complex characters. Whereas English was earlier deemed as a tool for ideological subjugation, English was now an instrument of counter-consciousness and counter-discourse through which nationalism and local identities could flow (see Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin; Pennycook, “English”; Kachru, and most of the essays in Kirkpatrick).

### *Capitalist Globalization and the Disappearance of Class*

However, the great theoretical flaw of such revisionist understandings of English (think of *World Englishes*, *English as an International Language*, *English as a World Language*, much of TESOL and some language planning and policy-making studies) has been to ignore or, at best, sideline, the issues of class in the study of English (but see Tollefson; Holborow; Alexander, *English*; Parakrama; Hau and Tinio). English has ceased to become a colonial weapon of oppression; we, the ex-colonized, have taken control of the language and made it our own. Ideologically, such political posturing has found an unhealthy alliance with the almost hysterical glorification of capitalist globalization starting in the 1980s, and helped by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the USSR. This opened the floodgates of an “open market” dogma: consequently, the English language has spread across the globe and has been embraced by almost everyone whose cultures are impinged on it. English is the undisputed language of globalization and capitalism; anyone who does not agree with it is wrong or “ideological” (see Honey; Alatis and Straehle; Li). Of course, the issues are much more complex than that but this brief discussion of the dominant framing of English as a language of freedom and mobility which valorize “resistance,”

“hybridity,” and “nativization” (among other terms) should help us trace the ideological sources of recent academic and popular stances towards turning a blind eye on glaring social inequalities within which the teaching and learning of English are deeply implicated (see Rajagopalan; Bisong; Alatis and Straehle).

### *The Pitfalls of Postmodern (and Postcolonial) Theorizing*

My fear about Ramanathan’s book, therefore, stems from how it will be (re) appropriated by many people, and this is due in part to the book’s failure to deal explicitly with debates surrounding anti-colonial, postcolonial and postmodern theorizing and politics. I see the book as a complex response to all such theorizing and politics, bringing back issues of class at the center of debates in TESOL, sociolinguistics of English and related fields, but acutely aware of the realities “on the ground” where ordinary people, and even institutions, resist disempowering social structures through their day-to-day practices. In fact, throughout the book Ramanathan takes pains in making sure this picture is clear to the reader without losing sight of the social gulf that English helps to create and sustain. Thus, early on she paints us a social picture of “a complex domination and an equally complex resistance” where “facets of subordination and resistance typically operate as two sides of the same coin, intertwined and wrapped as each is in the other” (3-4). Throughout the book, she refers to “gulfs and bridges” and how they are loosely connected in some ways, to the “ridges and caveats of the larger English-Vernaculars enterprise” (860), and the English-Vernacular “chasm” and “canvas” (92). Given the fact that the book is primarily about the English-Vernacular “divide,” such nuances in the book seem to address (and anticipate?) particular responses to the book itself, such as those of postmodern theorizing which tends to focus more on “contact zones” and “discursive methods that capture the fluid, hybrid, overlapping nature of all learning and teaching” (119).

But, is the book really about postmodern theorizing? Interestingly, Ramanathan has an early answer as well:

Postmodern views of cultures and peoples as being fluid and dynamic and of all identities being hybrid are most valuable, most especially because they give us a way of talking about individuals in contexts. But social stratifications of class, caste, ethnicity and gender in societies still exist and when languages – especially English and the Vernaculars in postcolonial contexts – seem to fall along those lines, then a critically and

ethnographically oriented research has little choice but to address the chasms as well. (ix)

She continues with an equally clear statement: “the book contributes to the larger globalization and English narrative by singling out instances of divides lying latent beneath contexts of appropriation” (ix). Such statements – which do not discount the possibilities of resistance and other related practices – emphasize the centrality of social stratifications, or social structure, or social gulf, in English language politics. Likewise, such statements open up a different conceptualization of resistance and appropriation (and, for that matter, agency): it is not opposed directly to domination and social structure *per se*. Rather, practices of resistance and appropriation work *within* conditions of domination and social structure (Butler). Such practices do not necessarily become passive, reactive, or futile attempts to develop agency, but they remind us not to reify or celebrate resistance (as is the case in some theorizing) at the expense of power, inequality, hegemony, and domination (Shohat; Dirlik).

### *Domination, Resistance and Appropriation Revisited*

Ramanathan’s book, in fact, has given us some examples of this theorization: “(some) teachers have not only taken note of the strings that manipulate their and their students’ movements but take additional steps to resist the tugs actively *while still participating in the performance* (117, emphasis mine); “Although the larger socio-educational system at all three colleges—and other tertiary institutions—tends to devalue Vernaculars and their associated practices, there are clearly small but significant ways in which the English-Vernacular chasm is critically countered” (117-8). In other words, bridges may be crossed to ease up the lives of people who do so, but the gulfs upon which such bridges have been built in the first place continue to exist. To transform these gulfs, we need to create radically different social topographies, although this may be a near-impossibility considering the extreme conditions of inequality that bedevil much of the world today. What happens here is to re-read local initiatives and practices of resistance at changing social structures and conditions as positive, dynamic, and liberative without unsettling the centrality of stratifying infrastructures and without claiming that everything is fine with English and the world because of it.

### *The Politics of Resistance*

But even if such becomes the case, we are still left with yet another related concern

regarding the conceptualization of resistance. Except for a very brief discussion of “backchat” of students as an instance of opposition (83), much of the resistance and local initiative described in the book which helps bridge the chasms between English and the Vernacular is articulated and engaged in by teachers and the tertiary institutions, in other words by those who are already in some relative position of power. Through various ways—from the use of translation in the teaching of literature to the Jesuit college’s decision to increase the enrolment of VM students to help address socio-educational injustice—these teachers and institutions hope to “empower VM students by both validating their students[’]” (Vernacular) backgrounds and by reconstituting ELTL in more “inclusive, ethical and democratic terms” (118). Thus, Ramanathan’s questions early on in the book are particularly apt: “Who is given the opportunity to speak and how? Who is simultaneously rendered ‘voice-less’? Who assumes the power to speak?” (5). Ramanathan does not really explicitly deal with these questions in the rest of the book, but the examples provided direct us towards yet another dimension of resistance (through English) which is rarely taken up in the literature. This brings to mind Alexander’s (“Language” 142) assertion that the continued hegemony of English in South Africa is a middle class construction; Zhao and Liu’s (121) empirically-based revelations about Singapore’s language policy as pulling the country toward a linguatocratic society (see Pendly 50) where social stratification (with English as the privileged language) “is linearly marked by the symbolic power translated via linguistic differentiation”; and Azman’s contention that there is a deeply-rooted mismatch between urban English language teaching/practices and rural multilingual literacies among poor Malaysian pupils. In the Philippines, Villareal’s incisive view of hybridized Englishes is that they ultimately display a similarly elitist idea:

although much scholarly discussion and literary experimentation have been done on the concepts of hybridity, the appropriation of English, and the development of our varieties of English, it is too facile to speak of equality in language and culture. Note, for instance, the concern to capture the notion of a Filipino variety of English, and the “standardization of the grammatical features of Filipino English” or Singlish, or other varieties of English. Languages are documented mainly by the educated and standards set by them. Thus, English, even when appropriated, eventually becomes exclusionary and divisive. (33-34)

In other words, going back to Ramanathan’s book, it is one thing to talk about

“a complex domination and an equally complex resistance” (this seems to be a given in postmodern and postcolonial theorizing and politics) but another thing to talk about “instances of divides lying latent beneath contexts of appropriation.” Both provide different conceptualizations of the relation between domination and resistance, or between divides and contexts of appropriation. The latter does not only give us a much more complex understanding of the relation between domination and resistance, but it also reminds us that resistance is socially conditioned as well. Much of the book works within this latter conceptualization, but it has not explicitly and clearly articulated it as a theoretical stance, resulting in proffering mixed signals to the reader, and may thus perhaps open up old rehearsals of language ideological debates which polarize the positions between the much maligned *English is an ideological weapon of subjugation* claim and the much celebrated *English is an instrument of resistance, empowerment and freedom* claim.

## CONCLUSION

Ramanathan’s book, minus its postmodernizing rhetorical slippages (which are concentrated at the start and the end of the book anyway) should be far more sophisticated than earlier positions: it avoids the ideological rigidity and essentialism of anti-colonial politics and decolonization projects of the mid-twentieth century, but it likewise addresses the abstractness of postmodern (and some postcolonial) theorizing and politics. The gulfs which English helps create are constantly resisted, but all is not well with the world with such resistance. We could only have wished that Ramanathan were clearer and more consistent with this theoretical and political positioning. Nevertheless, if we start with this assumption, then we start being “mindful of how the very profession in which we are engaged perpetuates unequal power relations between entire groups of people and what we can do as teachers in small and not-so-small ways to mitigate divisions” (87). Ramanathan’s book is a refreshingly honest book which avoids past unhelpful dichotomies; it is brave enough to propose a highly delicate yet carefully-researched claim: that English *still* divides.

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