

# Imagining Mother Tongue: Language, Education, and Identity in South Asia

## Overview

The concept of mother tongue gained salience in India in the mid-nineteenth century and has been central to language and education policy, scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, and lay conceptions of language. While some works treat mother tongue as something a person possesses as an objective feature of the world, scholars have recently analyzed it as an ideologically mediated concept that is variable, multiple, and politically and morally driven. This course will draw on literature in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and history to explore the socio-cultural and historical significance of mother tongue across diverse cultures and societies in South Asia.

This course will be conducted in person from July 26-August 1, 2023. It is aimed for undergraduate students in the humanities and social sciences. The course is divided into five classes, which will be three hours each. The course will begin by discussing how the concept of mother tongue has been historically defined in different regions of South Asia in both the colonial and postcolonial periods. Students will define and discuss terms related to mother tongue in English, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Sinhala, and other languages. The course will then consider how people ascribe value to their mother tongues across different domains of social life, from schools to workplaces, homes, and the street. It will also delve into the relevance of concepts of mother tongue to ethnic, religious, regional, and national affiliations. Overall, this course seeks to use mother tongue as a lens in which to examine South Asia as a dynamic, multilingual region.

<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Enhance the understanding of the concept of mother tongue in South Asian languages and English from a linguistic anthropological perspective</li> <li>ii) Identify the history of the concept of mother tongue in colonial and postcolonial South Asia</li> <li>iii) Explain the significance of mother tongue to ethnic, religious, regional, and national identities in South Asia</li> <li>iv) Build students' skills in thinking about language and linguistic identities in a critical and comparative perspective</li> </ul>
<b>Modules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology and mother tongue as a language ideology</li> <li>ii) Historical Conceptions of mother tongue in South Asia</li> <li>iii) Mother tongue, multilingualism, and schooling in North India</li> <li>iv) Mother tongue and medium of instruction in schooling</li> <li>v) Mother tongue in English</li> </ul>
<b>Who can attend?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Students in the humanities and social sciences</li> </ul>

## THE FACULTY

### INSTRUCTORS



**Christina P. Davis** is an Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Western Illinois University, USA. Her research concerns language and digital media practices, multilingual education, and ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and India. She is the author of *The Struggle for a Multilingual Future: Youth and Education in Sri Lanka* (2020) and co-editor of *Language, Education, and Identity: Medium in South Asia* (2022).



**Chaise LaDousa** is a Christian A. Johnson Excellence in Teaching Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology at Hamilton College, USA. His research interests include language and culture, political economy, and education, in India and the United States. He is the author of *Hindi Is Our Ground, English Is Our Ground: Education, Language, and Social Class in Contemporary India* (2014) and co-editor of *Language, Education, and Identity: Medium in South Asia* (2022).

### HOST-FACULTY



Course Co-ordinator

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**Nishaant Choksi** is an Assistant Professor in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar. His research interests include Semiotics, Linguistic ethnography, Script and writing systems, Language and politics, Aesthetics of language, Adivasi societies and history, Gujarat, Jharkhand/West Bengal border regions. His is the author of *Graphic Politics in Eastern India: Script and the Quest for Autonomy* (2020) and co-editor of *Expressives in the South Asian Linguistic Area* (2021).