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Bilingual English teaching in colonial India: the case of John Murdoch's work in Madras Presidency, 1855–1875

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There is a prevalent conception about colonial Indian education – in the absence of much empirical research into specific contexts – that it was carried out only in English with the aim of anglicising the masses. While it is true that there were colonial motives of acculturation embedded in English language teaching and English-medium instruction, the idea that English language learning was exclusively monolingual is historically inaccurate. Indeed, the survival of bilingual teaching materials prepared in the nineteenth century for use in colonial schools suggests that, outside elite English-medium instruction, the use of Indian languages was common in English teaching. To explore this possibility further, this article focuses on the work and ideas of a prominent colonial educationalist, John Murdoch (1818–1904), with a focus on the schoolbooks he was associated with and on his recommendations for bilingual English teaching in the colonial schools of Madras Presidency. Murdoch's ideas on the use of local languages in teaching reveal complexities and intricacies which have been under-explored in previous histories of colonial Indian education.

Keywords: colonial bilingualism, own-language use, John Murdoch, bilingual English language teaching, Anglo-Vernacular school, English-medium, Vernacular-medium

Introduction

How English was taught and learned by imperial actors and colonial subjects in 17th–19th-century India has been insufficiently addressed in previous historical research

(though for some recent exceptions see Chaudhary 2017; Mallik and Mishra 2017; Mukherjee 2017). In the absence of studies which look not just at policy but at questions of language use in specific educational contexts, a prevalent view has emerged that colonial English language education in India was only in English, with an imposed aim of anglicising the masses (e.g. Basu 1989: 713; Chaudhary 2002: 44–45; Krishnaswamy & Krishnaswamy 2006: 39–65; Zoha Alam 1999: 1). While it is true that there were colonial motives of acculturation embedded in English language teaching, the idea that it was exclusively monolingual is, however, historically inaccurate (cf. Brutt-Griffler 2002; Kumar 2005; Sengupta 2018). Indeed, a closer look at lesser-known colonial education policies in nineteenth century India reveals advocacy of the use of own-language¹ for the study of English in missionary and vernacular-medium (as opposed to English-medium) schools, while teaching materials prepared in the nineteenth century for use in colonial schools in India show a variety of bilingual

1 In order to align with current debates in the field of English language teaching (ELT) (cf. Hall and Cook 2013), in this article we sometimes use the term ‘own language’ to signify what colonial educators, historians and other researchers have tended to call ‘vernacular (language)’ and what present-day linguists may term ‘L1’ or ‘mother tongue’. In the present-day Indian context, ‘vernacular’ has a colonial connotation, implying subordination in status due to the way English has, over time, gained prestige and pre-eminence in Indian education (cf. Jain 2017). The term ‘vernacular (language)’ is therefore used in this article only to avoid anachronism, i.e. to mirror but not to condone colonialist usage. We also avoid use of the terms ‘mother tongue’, ‘native language’ and ‘first language’ due to imprecision of reference in multilingual contexts, where children often grow up as bilinguals (indeed, as Mitchell (2005) has argued, the concept of ‘mother tongue’ was itself a nineteenth -century colonial imposition in India). ‘Own language’ – a language or languages which one identifies as belonging to oneself (cf. Hall and Cook 2013) – is ideologically a relatively neutral term which shifts the agency of language choice and linguistic identity away from outside forces to language users themselves.

models.

One reason for the relative neglect of bilingual initiatives may be that colonial historiography has tended to focus excessively on selected educational documents – in particular, Macaulay’s infamous (1835) ‘Minute’, with its strong claims for the superiority of English-medium instruction over instruction in Indian languages. Phillipson’s (1992: 111) claim that this had a ‘seminal influence on language policy throughout the British Empire’ has been critiqued by, among others, Brutt-Griffler (2002: 53), Howatt with Widdowson (2004: 146) and Pennycook (1998: 69), and the extent of its influence even within India has been questioned (cf. Frykenberg 1986). It is true that higher education in English was promoted by Macaulay and the Governor-General of the time, Lord Bentinck, and that a spur was given to elite English-medium schooling. However, the continuing use of Indian languages in both ‘native’ and Mission schools and the production of bilingual missionary literature have tended to be neglected in accounts like Basu’s (1989), which over-generalise the intended extent of cultural and linguistic assimilation:

The British [...] hoped that English education would close the gulf between Indians and Englishmen – ‘If India were anglicised, a community of interest would follow’. [...] English education would stop Indians from regarding their rulers as foreigners and make them ‘intelligent and zealous co-operators’. (p. 713)

Basu (1989) draws attention to the use of romantic (imaginative) literature in mid-19th-century Bengal as a tool of cultural imperialism (cf. also Viswanathan 1989), but this neglects the fact that bilingual or vernacular factual or moralistic, not monolingual ‘imaginative’ literature tended to be favoured in missionary schools.

As Brutt-Griffler (2002: 62) argues, there were also changes over time in colonial educational policy in nineteenth -century India, while practice was sometimes out of kilter with the education policy at any one point. Again, this argues against a

uniform view of the role of English in colonial education. There are severe limitations of focusing excessively on selected educational policies and documents at the expense of others and, indeed, on focusing on policy at all – regardless of its impact – in the absence of considerations relating to actual practices ‘on the ground’ (cf. Smith (2016) for related considerations).

Among the many types of schooling in British India, missionary and, particularly, vernacular-medium schooling has been relatively neglected in previous research (Venkateswaran 2013: 146). Exceptionally, Bellenoit (2007) provides an authoritative account of missionary schooling in North India but mainly focuses on English-language institutions. Where the existence of vernacular-medium colonial education is acknowledged, this tends to be assumed to be transitional – always leading up to completely English-medium (Phillipson 1992: 111–12; Viswanathan 1989: 54). However, vernacular education was not always ‘seen as a transitional phase prior to instruction in English’ (Phillipson 1992: 112). In some cases, especially in Mission schools, vernacular education was provided for native pupils with the express purpose in mind of bible study, and of preparing at least some pupils for careers as preachers and teachers.

Finally, there were differences in education in the different presidencies as well as at different times and in different types of school which have tended to be obliterated under the overarching label ‘colonial Indian education’. Frykenberg (1986: 65) makes this point quite strongly, emphasising that a focus on Macaulay’s Minute and Bentinck’s reforms may be relevant for Bengal but not necessarily Madras, which had its own history.

Given the above, and in order to shed light on the bilingual nature of colonial English language teaching outside the area of English-medium instruction, we focus in

this article on one influential colonial educationalist, John Murdoch (1818–1904), highlighting his views on vernacular language use in the colonial schools of Madras Presidency during the period 1855–75. By situating Murdoch’s recommendations for English language teaching within an overview of his career and in relation to contemporary changes in educational policy, we aim to reveal something of the usually obscured complexity of choices made by colonial educators in the light of their cultural background, including belief in western knowledge as well as Christian morality, and in relation to the incipient development of a mass education system in India. Our relatively narrow focus on Murdoch’s work in this area serves as a revisionist antidote to broad-brush historical accounts which fail to describe concrete realities ‘on the ground’ due to the way they (often very selectively) foreground particular policies as opposed to practices, over-generalise about the entire nineteenth century and about all school types, and consider history to have been everywhere the same in India. First, however, we provide some necessary historical background and an overview of the nature of schooling in 19th-century Madras Presidency.

Backdrop: educational proposals, policies and contexts

A common colonial way of classifying Indian education was in terms of three branches: native, government and Christian (CVES 1855[?]: 9). However, the classification, as it applies to colonial schooling, is not as simple as it seems: a more complex interplay of factors which shaped school models is highlighted in Figure 1, which explains types of colonial school in Madras Presidency, based on our analysis of late nineteenth-century histories of education in India (Saththianadan 1894; Mahmood 1895). In this article, we focus specifically on Madras Presidency because attempts to study teaching practices and not only policies require, as we have argued above, context-specific research.

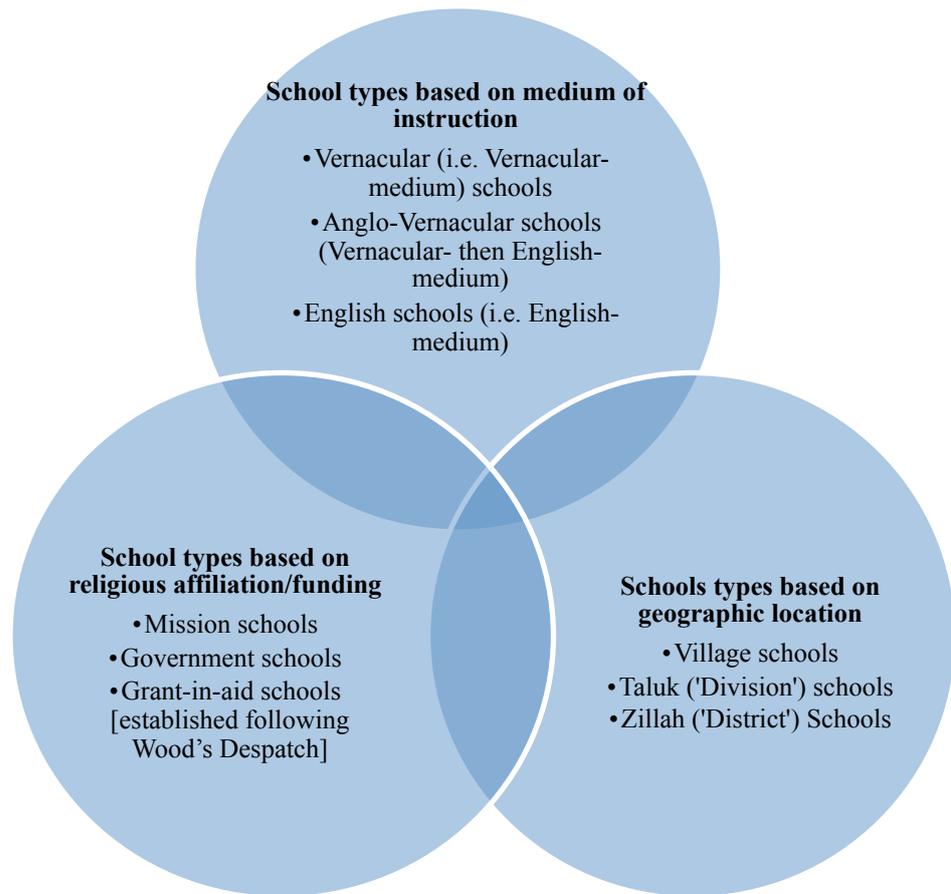


Figure 1. Types of colonial school in Madras Presidency in nineteenth-century India

As is evident in Figure 1, the types of schools in colonial education varied, firstly, according to medium of instruction (Anglo-Vernacular schools were a type of bilingual school, with English being no more than a subject of instruction in the lower classes but becoming the medium of instruction for other subjects in higher classes (Murdoch 1860: 128; cf. Figure 4 below)); they also, however, varied according to type of governance – under control of the British government in some cases, or of Missions, or sometimes resulting from landmark education policies such as the ‘grants-in-aid’ scheme established as a result of Wood’s (1854) Despatch (see below). Thirdly, there was variation in the ways a school functioned or teaching was organised according to geographical location. As represented in Figure 1, these factors intersected, so that there

were, for example, both Vernacular and English-medium Mission schools, and (after 1854) grant-in-aid schools in different types of location. It is also important to emphasise that the distribution of types of school varied at different chronological points; for example, until after the First War of Independence (known in Britain as the ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ or ‘Indian Mutiny’) in 1857, the colonial rulers did not have much reach in relation to Indian education. In the absence of much government schooling, Christian missionaries and societies filled some of the gap.

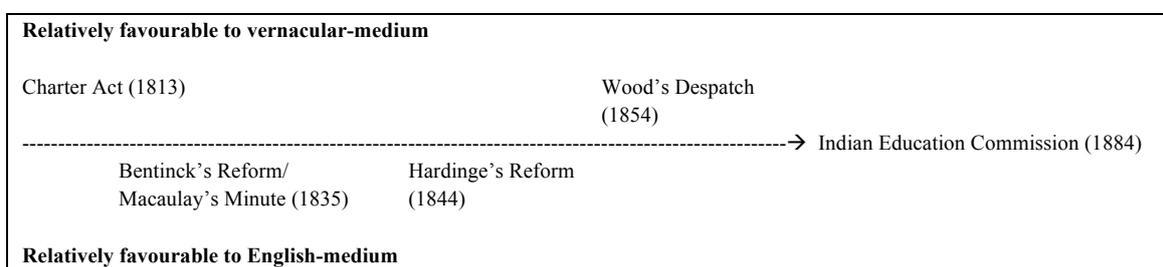


Figure 2. Timeline of official policies and statements regarding education

We now turn to a brief overview of government policies and statements affecting language-in-education policy in Madras Presidency, as elsewhere in India, in the nineteenth century, to see how vernacular language use was considered as part of governmental process, education policy and missionary education (see Figure 2). Whereas the Charter Act of 1813 condoned ‘non-interference’ as a policy towards indigenous education and maintained patronage of Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani and Madrassa colleges, the East India Company began to involve itself more in education in the 1820s, with committees of public instruction being set up from 1823 onwards (in Madras, in 1826). As Figure 2 shows, there was a definite policy swing towards advocacy of English from the 1830s, when Lord Bentick’s reform (1835), with its stress on promoting English as the official language in East India Company operations, brought to a head discussions of whether English or Indian languages should be used as

the medium of instruction. This was connected with a debate on whether western forms of knowledge must replace traditional Indian forms within education. These deliberations, usually historicised as the ‘anglicist–orientalist’ controversy, gained momentum with Macaulay’s (1835) *Minute*, which recommended English both as a window to knowledge and as a medium of instruction. In theory, Macaulay’s ‘downward filtration’ model was intended to first result in the education of an elite, who in turn would educate the masses via refinement of Indian languages, in a kind of ‘trickle-down’ process.

In line with this mass instruction model, the East India Company aligned with Christian Missions in the establishment of schools and colleges. Moves towards anglicisation were further bolstered by Lord Hardinge’s (1844) promise of government employment for people who were educated via English-medium instruction. However, there was then a significant change in official policy which is often under-reported. The use of Indian languages in education was reinvigorated by Wood’s (1854) Despatch² – issued at a time when the Missions were being relied upon more and more for the management of colonial public instruction. The Despatch set up universities and resulted in the expansion of secondary education over the ensuing decades. It recommended that Indian languages should, in general, be used for teaching at the school level and English at higher levels. It, therefore, replaced the filtration policy and gave an impetus to vernacular education on its own merits. Given that the government

² Charles Wood, the president of the Board of Control of the East India Company sent a Despatch introduced a framework for western education from primary to higher education. The Despatch favoured building on existing networks of indigenous and colonial schools for the development of mass education via an emphasis on the use of vernacular languages. The Despatch had a large impact on English language teaching in Madras Presidency by means of the setting-up of new indigenous, missionary and colonial schools across the Presidency.

would not be able to provide mass education on its own, the Despatch recommended grants-in-aid to other agencies and institutions, including missionary societies, which would be willing to take on the role. The grants-in-aid rules were more favourable to missionary involvement in some Presidencies, including Madras, than in others (Murdoch 1872: 22).

Specifically, within the Madras Presidency, the following three periods can be distinguished: 1820–1854, 1855–1875 and 1876–1900. The first period (1820–1854) begins with a rise in English language teaching in the 1820s which steadily continued. A demarcation is made in the year 1854, keeping in mind the considerable impact of Wood’s Despatch on school education in colonial Madras. The second period (1855–1875) –focused on in this article – is characterised by the rise of various missionary organisations and the increasing participation of the colonial British government in public instruction. This period ends in 1875 with the report of the textbook revision committee, in preparation for a large-scale revision of the teaching material used in schools in Madras Presidency. The last period (1876–1900) – beyond the scope of this article – concerns the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the educational role of missionaries steadily declined.

Against this wider historical backdrop, the following sections will highlight the role of Murdoch and the Christian Vernacular Education Society (CVES) for which he worked as important players in solidifying the presence of Christian education in Madras Presidency at a time of increasing involvement of missionary societies in the development of a mass, vernacular-medium education system, following on from Wood’s Despatch.

John Murdoch’s career

John Murdoch (1818–1904; Figure 3) was an educator, a missionary and a prolific

author of tracts, reports, manuals and school-books who spent 60 years of his life in India, mainly in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Madras (now Chennai). He was termed a ‘literary evangelist’ by two of his biographers (Ferguson 1898; Morris 1906) and a ‘travelling bookman’ by McClymont & Hodge (1947) in the title of their own later account.³ These designations allude to his pioneering work, especially in South India, in the production and distribution of school textbooks as well as Christian literature, in English and in Indian languages.

Early career

Murdoch trained as a teacher at the Glasgow Normal Seminary, the oldest teacher training institute in the United Kingdom, and in 1842 obtained an appointment as headmaster of a British government school and teacher training institute in Kandy, Ceylon. Although deeply religious, at this time he was not working as a missionary and he experienced some internal conflict as to whether, as a government employee, he should be providing religious instruction at all. In 1849, he left his post and, having already ‘taken a deep interest in the production of Christian literature’ (Morris 1906: 51), set up a Tract Society for the production and distribution of Christian texts in Sinhalese.

³ We base our own account of Murdoch’s life and career here on these sources (particularly on Morris (1906), which is the most substantial work), making additional reference to Creegan (1903) and Savage (2004).

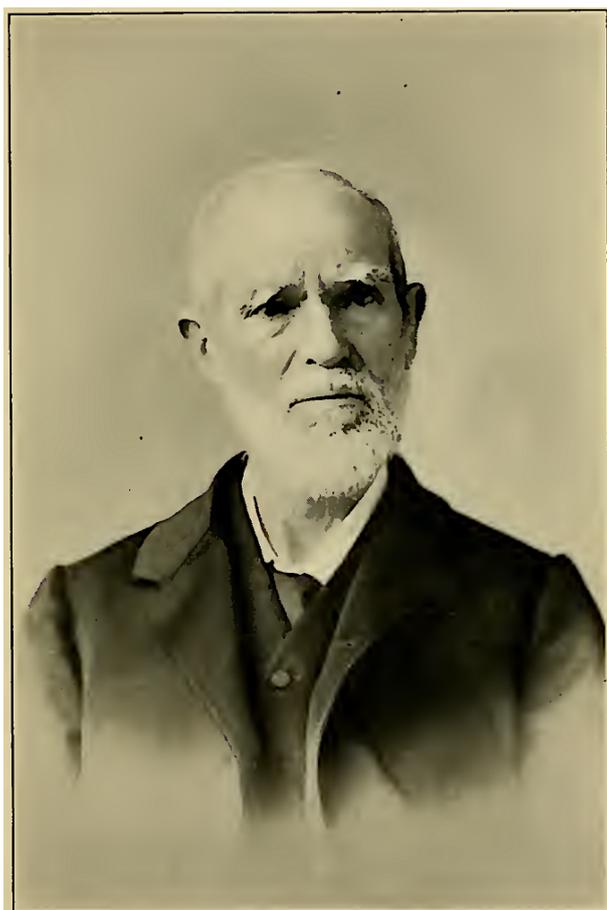


Figure 3. Photograph of John Murdoch (source: Creegan 1903: 177)

During his frequent visits to Mission Schools, including in South India, he became aware of a great lack of suitable schoolbooks and came up with the idea of founding a Christian School Book Society for the whole of India. He tried to gain support for this idea in Madras in 1854 but it was met with scepticism by the committee of the existing Madras School Book Society (MSBS; founded in 1820), which had been focused hitherto on providing books with non-religious content to government schools in Madras Presidency. The committee members felt they could not become involved in circumventing, as they saw it, the East India Company's policy of religious non-interference in education. However, Murdoch did then succeed in founding a new society called the South India Christian School-book Society (in 1855), with the

Governor of Madras Presidency as Patron, the Bishop of Madras as President and Murdoch as sole 'Agent' (Morris 1906: 76). The prospectus for the new society (cited by Morris 1906: 77–78) highlighted particular needs in the lower classes of English schools, and in Vernacular schools generally, as well as likely demands for the provision of appropriate schoolbooks from indigenous schools seeking government grants-in-aid following Wood's (1854) Despatch.

Work for the Christian Vernacular Education Society (CVES)

After the First War of Independence of 1857, John Murdoch's efforts for Christian education became more widely recognised by the London Missions, being seen as worthy of upscaling in order to appease Indians and cultivate moral values. This led to the merger of SICES and other missionary bodies to form the London-based Christian Vernacular Education Society for India (CVES) in 1858, with teacher training and textbook production as the first activities to be undertaken.

Indeed, the colonial government's stance shifted in the 1850s – religious non-interference was not a stringent rule to be followed anymore. The books produced by the CVES increased in number in colonial Madras and the restrictions which had applied to the MSBS with regard to religious content were no longer applicable to the CVES. The bilingual English school textbooks prepared by the CVES (see next section) thus show a remarkable contrast to those previously prepared by the MSBS, containing, as they do, explicit Christian teachings.

After the transformation of SICES into a larger, more geographically wide-ranging enterprise in the form of CVES, Murdoch's role was that of their 'travelling and organizing agent' (CVES 1859: 2) rather than the leader of his own society. What Murdoch had started with his efforts in Madras Presidency, the CVES – under his

direction though not his overall management – took across India, forming branches in various presidencies.

The British Indian government's increasing involvement in the development of public instruction in South India led to the formation of the Madras Education Department in 1857 (later, an overall Indian Education Service was founded, in 1882). In 1873, as part of its centralising efforts, the colonial government launched a survey of textbook usage throughout India. Murdoch played a leading role in the Madras Textbook Revision Committee, which surveyed a number of English, Telugu and Tamil textbooks prescribed for schools and which published its recommendations in 1875.

Murdoch's writings in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, following the publication of the Textbook Reform Committee's report (Madras Government 1875), moved away from questions of teaching, medium of instruction and textbook production. Rather, he began to focus more on issues of governance and religion. This corresponded with an overall shift in priorities away from educational material within the CVES, which changed its name to the 'Christian Society for Knowledge' and focused increasingly on publishing and distributing Christian tracts. With an increase in the number of Indians maintaining printing presses, textbooks (often bilingual or trilingual) from local publishers were coming more into circulation and, at the same time, there was increasing importation of (monolingual) textbooks from British publishers. There was also an increasing demarcation between vernacular-medium and English-medium education, with 'bilingual' Anglo-vernacular schooling no longer being promoted by the Missions or the government. This may also have been a factor in a decline in demand or perceived need for the CVES bilingual materials.

Murdoch's overall advocacy of vernacular-medium education and bilingual English language teaching

Murdoch was an advocate of vernacular-medium instruction overall, of bilingual education in Anglo-Vernacular schools and in failing English [medium] schools, and of bilingual English language teaching where English was being taught or introduced as a subject of instruction.⁴ He started from a base of belief that vernacular-medium education and vernacular literacy were important for Christian education, as a means of proselytisation but also for other 'higher aims' including 'improvement of the sanitary condition of the people' and '[l]oyalty to the British government' (Murdoch 1860, iv).

As doors seemed to be opening to missionary educational efforts following Wood's Despatch (1854) and the First War of Independence (1857), Murdoch's attention – as principal agent of the CVES – was focused firmly on the production of Indian-language materials which might be used in vernacular-medium or Anglo-

⁴ As we shall see, Murdoch, in fact, refers to [English] 'Reading', 'Spelling and Dictation' and 'Grammar and Composition' as 'special subjects of instruction' (Murdoch 1860: vii–viii), not to 'English' per se, and it is an open question (still to be researched) when 'English' became a recognised, internally unified subject – i.e. distinguished as 'English' – within school curricula in different types of school in India. Thus, our use of the umbrella phrase 'English as a subject' (as opposed to English as a 'medium of instruction' to teach other subjects) in this article is somewhat anachronistic, though useful for analytical purposes. Similarly, phrases like 'English-medium instruction' ('EMI'), 'bilingual education' and 'bilingual English language teaching' are present-day ones, not employed at the time but useful, we feel, for analytical and comparative purposes. 'Bilingual education', in our usage, refers broadly to the use of two languages, that is, English and an Indian language, as vehicles of instruction in different subjects. 'Bilingual English language teaching' (or 'BELT') refers specifically to teaching *English* bilingually, that is, using and/or referring to a language other than English when the focus is on English language development. Depending on school type, point of time in the nineteenth century, and region, the presence of bilingual education or BELT varied in colonial India.

Vernacular schools, whether or not run by missionaries. At the same time, CVES also prepared a series of English-only schoolbooks ‘with Special Reference to the Religious, Moral, and Social Condition of India’, for religious instruction, reading, grammar, geography, history and arithmetic (CVES n.d., inside back cover) in Anglo-Vernacular and English-medium schools.

In this connection, it should be stressed that Murdoch was not against English-medium instruction *per se*, for an elite (cf. Murdoch 1864: 348). However, he argued against using English as the medium of instruction for the majority of Indians, cautioning that ‘the imperfect knowledge of English obtained by the great majority of those who commence its study, is of little worth’ (Murdoch 1863: 26) and that contemporary imperfections in provision and high drop-out rates (due to failure and the relative expense of English-medium schooling) had created dissatisfaction (Murdoch 1864: 349). He also argued (*ibid.*) that ‘The remedy is to use the vernaculars largely in the junior classes’, and thus that English should be taught as a subject of instruction but not used to convey other subjects in these lower classes, even in English-medium schools. In other words, Murdoch’s overall preference was for ‘Anglo-vernacular’ rather than exclusively English-medium schooling.

In one of his books for teachers and educational administrators, to be discussed further below, Murdoch (1860) provides a schema, partially reproduced in Figure 4, to represent his view of the language that materials for all subjects should be presented in for each school year within the kind of bilingual education model he favoured, with ‘Diglott.’ here signifying the use of bilingual materials.⁵ It can be seen how Murdoch’s overall advocacy of proceeding from greater to lesser vernacular language use across

⁵ ‘Diglott’ was a term commonly used by colonial administrators and missionaries in India to describe a bilingual document. For example: ‘a diglott register’, ‘a diglott calendar’, ‘a diglott grammar’ or simply ‘a diglott’.

the span of schooling from the First Class [8–9 years old] to the Sixth Class [14 years old and above] could work out in practice, and how teaching English as a ‘subject’ in the lower classes would – in this conception – morph into and support English-medium instruction (for other content) from the fourth class onwards.

	First Class	Third Class	Fourth Class	Sixth Class
English	Short Lessons and First Reading Book.	Third Reading Book. Dictation.	Fourth Reading Book. Grammatical Primer. Geography of India. History of India. Writing. Arithmetic. Music.	Evidences, Doctrines, and Duties of Christianity. Readings in Science. Specimens of English Grammar. Morell’s Analysis. Composition and Translation. Surveying. Book-keeping. Geography of Europe, Africa, and America. Modern History. Music. Drawing.
Diglott	Familiar Words and Sentences. Part I. Writing.	English Phrases. Geographical Primer. Writing. Music.	Composition and Translation.	
Vernacular	New Testament Stories. (Orally.) First Catechism. First Reading Book. Geography of the Presidency. Mental Arithmetic. Lessons on Objects. Music.	Old Testament Stories. Second Catechism. Third Reading Book. Grammar and Dictation. History of India. Arithmetic. Lessons on Objects.	Second Catechism. (Revised.) Pentateuch. Selections. Matthew. Fourth Reading Book. Native Classics. Grammar and Composition.	Scripture Passages committed to Memory. II Kings–Malachi. (Selections.) John and Selections from the Epistles. Native Classics. Grammar and Composition.

Figure 4. Suggested ‘course of study’ for Anglo-Vernacular schools [Second and Fifth classes omitted] (Murdoch 1860: 128–130)

Closest to Murdoch’s heart, though, was the development of vernacular-medium schooling, both as a means for raising the general educational level and as a valuable means of Christian missionary activity (Murdoch 1864: 329–331). Indeed, he felt that, no matter the kind of school, religious instruction should everywhere be given in local languages: ‘The way to reach the hearts of the children is through their mother-tongue. If they are addressed in a language which they comprehend with difficulty, their thoughts will be taken up merely with the words – not with the subject-matter’ (Murdoch 1864: 350).

Overall, indeed, the CVES intention was to change the shape of colonial education towards more of a mass model by emphasising vernacular medium. As Savage (1994: 442–43) has stressed, this involved ‘a reaffirmation of [the strategy of schooling in the vernacular languages] by all the participating denominations and an implied recognition that two decades of English-medium schooling for the elite had produced few converts’. At the same time, English teaching could be enhanced by means of bilingual materials and methods, whether in Vernacular or in Anglo-Vernacular schooling, and it is to Murdoch’s further practical suggestions and work in this specific area that we now turn.

Teaching English bilingually in practice – materials and methods

Murdoch consistently criticised the wholesale importation of British models and materials into Indian schools, recognising that English teaching would need to differ in quality from English literacy instruction in British schools, not only in the area of bilingual pedagogy but also in that of textbook contents. Although, with his broad interests in educational provision and missionary activity overall, he rarely addressed specific issues of classroom pedagogy in his publications, it is possible to piece together a composite view of the kinds of practice Murdoch advocated for English teaching from published CVES school-books, and two further books he authored. The first of these, *Hints on Education in India with Special Reference to Vernacular Schools* (Murdoch 1860), was intended as a training manual for novices entering teaching in Mission schools (concerning various subjects, including English language), while *Hints on Government Education in India* (Murdoch 1873) was written for teachers working in Lower and Middle schools directly under the Madras government. While the earlier (1860) book provides comprehensive advice about teaching methodology, classroom management and school financial planning, the later (1873) book has a much narrower

focus on schoolbooks. The Table of Contents of Murdoch (1860) shows his view of the main components of English language teaching (see Figure 5). (This overall schema is confirmed in Murdoch 1864, 1873). We will set out our analysis of his views on the role of vernacular language use within each of these areas in turn below, making reference also to some relevant school-books produced by the CVES.

- Spelling and Dictation
- Reading
- Grammar and Composition

Figure 5. ‘Special subjects of instruction’ relating to English according to Murdoch (1860: vii–viii).

Spelling and Dictation

It will be noted that the above schemata (Figures 4 and 5) place the focus of English teaching firmly on second language literacy instruction, not on the development of speaking or listening abilities. Nevertheless, an interest in pronunciation and oral production is revealed in Murdoch’s advocacy of phonics and ‘look and say’ techniques for beginning readers:

The *phonic* method, or giving only the *sound* of the letters, may be employed to a certain extent. As the sounds of the letters vary so much, however, in several cases the *look and say* method, or teaching a child simply to name a word without attempting to analyse its parts, should be adopted. (Murdoch 1860: 78)

Thus, in one bilingual CVES beginners’ textbook – *English and Telugu First Book* (CVES 1862a; see Figure 6) – explicit directions are given to the teacher not to teach students the ‘names’ of the letters of the alphabet, but only the sounds:

The Powers of the letters are to be given – not the names. The letter o should be written by the teacher; and when the children have acquired the sound, let n be treated in a similar manner. Next, combine the sounds of n and o. (p. 4)

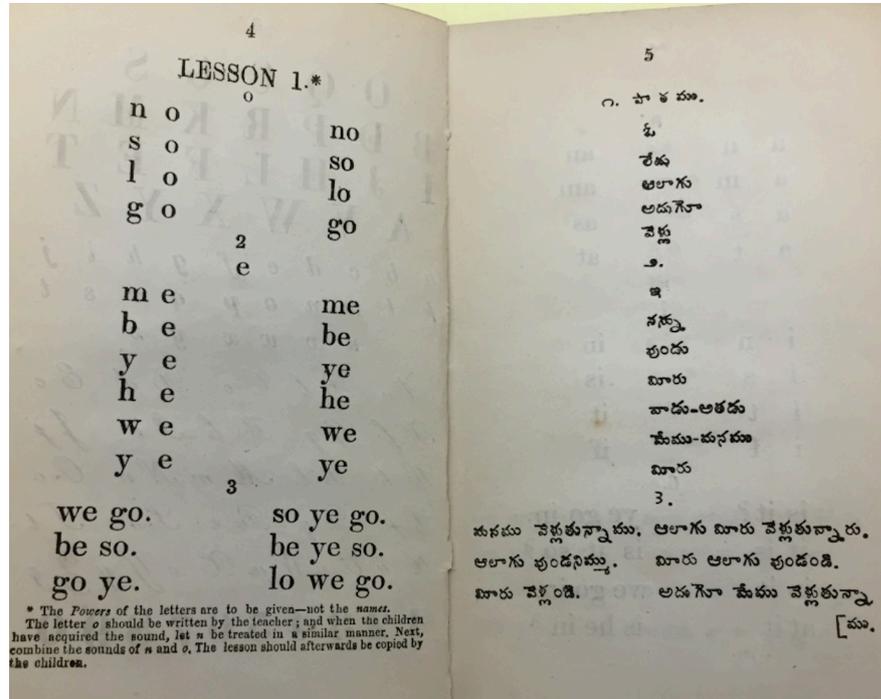


Figure 6. Pages from Part First, *English and Telugu First Book* (CVES 1862a: 4–5)

How this form of teaching spelling and sounds can be combined with own-language use is indicated in Murdoch’s (1860) *Hints*:

Proceed in like manner with go, so, lo. Question the children on the meaning of the words. Formal definitions are not to be expected: accept such answers as show that the sense is understood. Native children learning English should always give the meaning of every word and sentence in their own language. (p. 78)⁶

⁶ The very close correspondence between this passage from the *Hints* (1860) and advice given to the teacher at the beginning of the *English and Telugu First Book* (CVES 1862a) is just one reason for us to surmise that Murdoch was the author / compiler of these and probably most of the CVES materials, even though his authorship of the latter is not explicitly indicated.

Murdoch's (1860) *Hints* also contains quite detailed practical instructions on teaching the mechanics of English writing (pp. 106–108) and spelling (pp. 83–85), including advice to build early spelling instruction on prior understanding of the main Reading book rather than 'making children commit to memory long columns of words from a Spelling Book' as tended to be practised in English-medium schools (p. 83). Apart from copying the lesson onto slates, dictation exercises – again, with content from the Reading Book – are a favoured second stage (particularly in Second and Third classes, according to Murdoch's scheme of work for Anglo-Vernacular schools (Figure 4)), while at a higher level there should be a systematic course of lessons about spelling and 'select pieces of prose and poetry should be written from memory' (1860: 84). There is no mention here of language of instruction though the CVES Reading books to be mined for dictation were in some cases bilingual (see below).

Reading

Emphasis is particularly given to reading throughout Murdoch's work, both as a skill and as a way to improve morals, inculcate good habits and promote knowledge of the Bible: 'Next to the religious and moral training of the pupils, the teaching of reading is the most important part of the teacher's duties' (1860: 74). We shall consider his views on how to achieve this goal further below, but first, we provide information about just one of the bilingual Readers in whose production he was involved as for the CVES.⁷

⁷ Here we adopt Murdoch's own distinction: 'A *Reader* is a book whose primary object is *to teach reading*' [italics in original], whereas Reading Books are general School Books (for all subjects) (Murdoch 1872: 23).

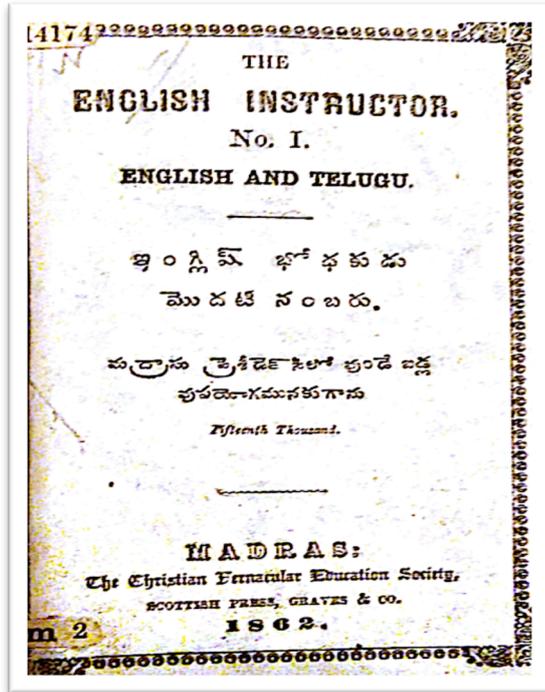


Figure 7. Cover, *The English Instructor No. I* (CVES 1862b)

Our example of a bilingual Reader is *The English Instructor No. I* (CVES 1862b; see Figure 7) – a textbook in English and Telugu for the first year of English study.

The textbook has two parts. The first part comprises 38 lessons which cover basic grammar categories. Sentences which emphasise the learning of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and so on are given in English on the left-hand page and in Telugu on the right-hand page; there are no grammatical explanations or word lists attached to the lessons (see Figure 8).

The sets of sentences given in the lessons increase in length and difficulty towards the end of Part I, with the lessons at the end of this part beginning to use Christian teachings as the content of the sentences. Thus, in contrast with earlier textbooks produced by the MSBS, the CVES adopted a textbook design which foregrounded its objective of propagating Christian knowledge.

The second part of the book has 26 lessons which are, indeed, mainly oriented towards Christian teachings (see Figure 9). Each lesson, still with English on the left and Telugu on the right, employs longer sentences and a sustained narrative for five to seven sentences, in contrast with the unconnected sentences of the first part. The book ends with three prayers from the Bible. The overall impression given by the book is that the goal of learning to read is to acquire Christian knowledge. Within each lesson, there are no italics or hints to indicate desired linguistic outcomes. It seems that instruction using the textbook leaves much to the initiative of the teacher.

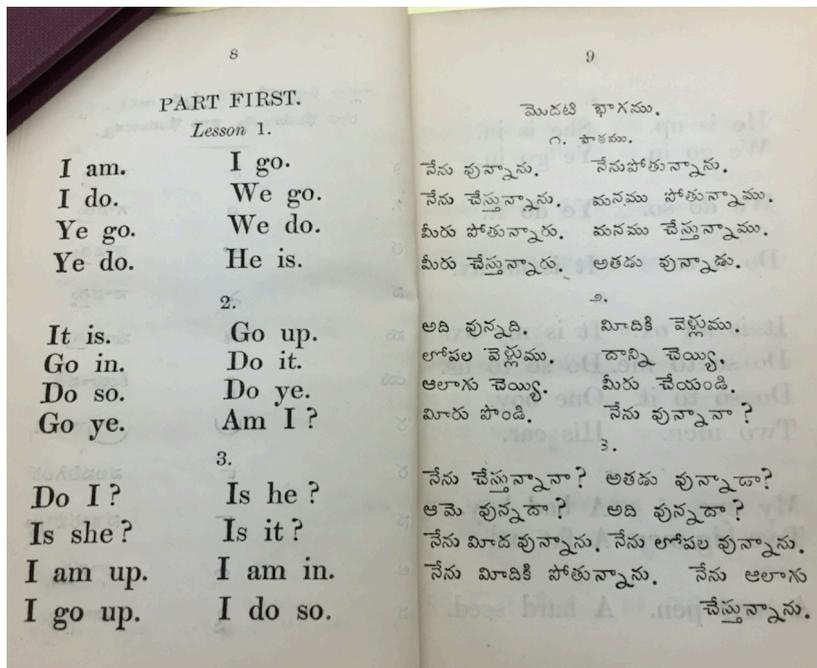


Figure 8. Pages from Part First, *The English Instructor No. 1* (CVES 1862b: 8–9)

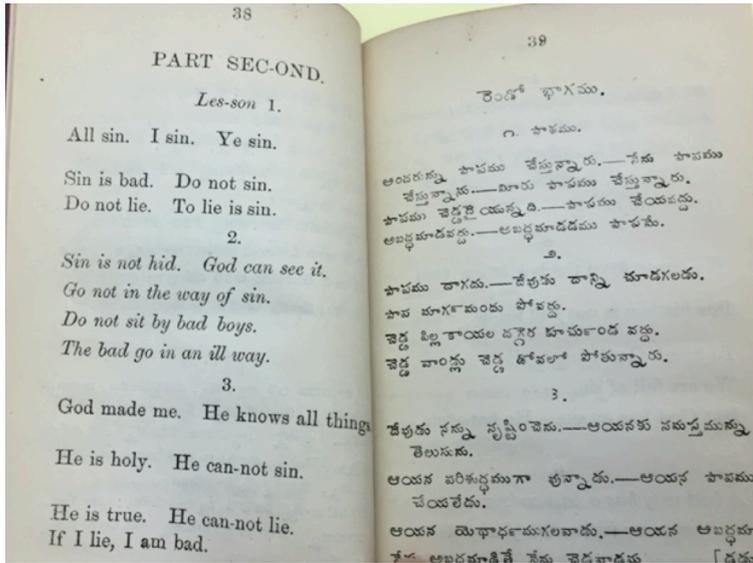


Figure 9. Pages from Part Second, *The English Instructor* No. 1 (CVES 1862b: 38–39)

However, in his (1860) *Hints* for young missionary teachers, Murdoch provides quite detailed directions with regard to teaching and assessing reading. The following ‘Directions to secure good reading’ are listed (pp. 80–82):

1. Require accurate pronunciation [...]
2. Require distinct enunciation [...]
3. Fluency is another requisite [...]
4. Expression is essential to good reading [...]
5. Frequently break up a class into small sections [i.e. groups] for reading

Clearly, the focus here is on reading aloud, but the following explanation of Direction 4. above emphasises comprehension, and the use of own language to test it, if not to achieve it:

The best test to ascertain whether the pupils really understand what they have been reading is, *to require them to paraphrase it in their own words*. Where English is studied, translation into the Vernacular affords an excellent method of determining this point. (Murdoch 1860: 81; italics in original)

In Anglo-Vernacular schools, however, Murdoch also advises own-language paraphrase of English material, not just direct translation: ‘In addition to the literal rendering in the Vernacular of every word and sentence, the pupils should be required to give the meaning of the whole in correct idiomatic language’ (Murdoch 1860: 131). As we have seen, Murdoch’s emphasis on the use of own language in teaching was, at least partly, motivated overall by his educational desire to improve comprehension and enable students to learn more efficiently because ‘meaningfully’ – as well as to propagate Christian learning.

Grammar and Composition

Whereas Spelling and Dictation are seen as important particularly in lower classes, in later classes Grammar and Composition become more important. Thus, in Anglo-Vernacular schools, Murdoch (1860: 128–130) recommends that Dictation should be a major activity in the Second and Third Forms only, with a Grammatical Primer being introduced in the Fourth Form alongside bilingual (‘Diglott.’) materials for ‘Composition and Translation’ (cf. Figure 4). Both Grammar and ‘Composition and Translation’ remain important within the curriculum for Fifth and Sixth Classes.

In his earlier book of *Hints*, Murdoch devotes a chapter to ‘Grammar and Composition’ (1860: 85–91) in which he sets out the following principles:

1. Do not begin with teaching a text-book on Grammar [...]
2. Commence with simple oral lessons [...]
3. Give the idea before the term [...]
4. Give a general view before entering into details [...]
5. Analyse sentences as well as parse [...]
6. Correct any grammatical mistakes made by the pupils either in speaking or writing [...]
7. Give regular exercises in Composition [...]
8. Advanced Pupils should be occasionally required to discuss subjects

Although the use of own language in relation to grammar teaching is not mentioned here, Murdoch does briefly mention the following procedure later in the same book, as an occasional means to highlight inadequacies in oral production:

Always require answers in correct language. – Do not receive one or two unconnected words in reply to a question. Their absurdity can often be best shown by giving a literal translation of them to the pupil in the vernacular. Attention to the above is of greater importance than lessons in Grammar from a text-book.

(Murdoch 1860: 131)

As exemplified here, Murdoch does not seem very much in favour of explicit grammar teaching. Indeed, he emphasises that ‘sprachgefühl’ [*sic*] – language intuition – is the key to unlocking the complexities of grammar (1873: 76), and both in his *Hints* and in the forewords to CVES materials including *A Manual of Grammar with Numerous Exercises* (1865a) and *The Grammatical Primer with Exercises* (1865b), he⁸ stresses that grammar teaching must both begin with oral lessons and be based on prior understanding of meaning:

The teacher should begin with simple oral lessons. The idea should be given before the term. Thus, instead of commencing with the definition, A Noun is the name of a person, place, or thing,” let the pupils be asked to mention names of persons, places and things. (CVES 1865b, foreword)

As we have seen, in his ideal course of study for Anglo-Vernacular schools, it is only in the higher classes (Fourth Form onwards) that grammar study becomes important and, while bilingual materials for Composition and Translation are referred to for the Fourth Form, we have not come across any record of such materials having actually been

⁸ Duplication of wording between *Hints* (1860: 85–6) and these forewords justifies our citing Murdoch as the author of the forewords, and is another reason for us to assume that Murdoch was the (unnamed) compiler of (many) CVES materials (see also footnote 6 above).

published by CVES, perhaps because there was an assumption that the higher classes, at least in Anglo-Vernacular schools, would have become able to cope with English-medium instruction. Indeed, the school books CVES published for grammar are exclusively monolingual, with no attempt having been made to ‘bilingualise’ them.⁹

In his later writing, however, Murdoch (1873: 76) expressed dissatisfaction with the grammar books CVES had published and highlighted the problems of using monolingual English grammars originally prepared for pupils in England. He approvingly repeats the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab’s lament that ‘No grammar exists by which English can be easily and intelligently learned by a comparison of the differences in idiom and construction between English and the Vernacular of the scholar’, recommending that ‘Two or three grammars on this principle’ should be prepared for different stages of study’ (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

In this article, we have set out to counter a common picture which involves:

- portraying colonial education as a uniform, well-strategised ‘project’
- viewing all colonial education as English-medium education
- ignoring bilingual initiatives in teaching English within colonial education

Our own research supports the contention that in practice, not only in theory, ‘pragmatic vernacularism’ was a major strand in the development of colonial education (Pennycook 1998: 84-85), contesting assumptions that colonial education policy was uniform and purely advocated English-medium instruction and countering populist beliefs that

⁹ In relation to bilingual dictionaries in colonial Madras, James (2003: 135) defines ‘bilingualisation’ as the strategy of making a bilingual (English) dictionary from a monolingual one originally compiled for English-native speakers.

colonial Indian education predominantly followed a monolingual path. The persisting dominance of such beliefs may have contributed to a longstanding neglect of the kind of bilingual and translingual practices which have only recently started to become uncovered and validated by researchers (e.g. Anderson & Lightfoot 2018). On the one hand, research like ours supports current moves to accord own language more of a place in English language teaching (cf. Cook and Hall 2012) and can potentially supply models for imitation or at least spurs to reflection regarding current practice. On the other hand, we need to bear in mind Pennycook's (2002) point that the British colonial government in Hong Kong promoted vernacular Chinese education to inculcate conservative Confucian ethics and enhance colonial domination – 'Conservative Chinese education was the colonial route to the making of docile bodies' (p. 108) – and that this 'brings into question [the] widely held view of language policy that mother tongue or vernacular education is necessarily preferable to education in other languages' (*ibid.*). We have shown how imperial language policy in India did not just involve promoting English and how a particular colonial actor, James Murdoch, promoted vernacular language use in his recommendations to school teachers as well as in the textbooks he was associated with. Partly this was as a means of proselytisation (a form of 'making of docile bodies', perhaps) in a context of widespread British colonial anxiety following the First War of Independence. However, Murdoch also provides evidence overall of a keen interest in enhancing access to knowledge/enlightenment for the benefit of Indian development, not just colonial subjugation or proselytisation.

Thus, Murdoch's ideas on the use of local languages in teaching reveal complexities, intricacies and tensions neglected in previous histories of colonial Indian education, which, as Bellenoit (2007: 2) has suggested, may have tended to be 'relatively straitjacketed by a fixation upon institutions and high policy'. Our study

complements Bellenoit's (*ibid.*) plea for deeper, more localised treatments of education in South Asia in general, suggesting that policy-centred analysis of language-in-education debates in the nineteenth century has failed to convey adequately the complexity of language loyalties and own-language use in colonial – and missionary – education.¹⁰ As we have discussed with reference to the schoolbooks Murdoch was associated with as well as his *Hints* on education, his work reveals complexities at the level of practice which have been neglected in previous studies of language-in-education *policy*. This article has, then, thrown light on bilingual approaches to education in colonial India, with a focus on published sources (textbooks and manuals for teachers) which enable relatively particularistic descriptions of colonial education at the grassroots level, rather than painting a universalist and over-abstract picture via exclusive reference to colonial education policy documents.

Our case-study has characterised Murdoch as a colonial and missionary educator whose motives for the use of own languages in education involved a complex interlinking of the aims of proselytisation and pedagogic effectiveness. Murdoch's missionary sympathies, relating to strong traditions of own-language mediation to spread the gospel, conspired with his desire to enhance access to education to make him a prominent advocate of pedagogic vernacular language use in colonial Madras Presidency.

¹⁰ As indicated by, for example, Sengupta (2011) and Tschurennev (2019), whereas missionary education has tended to be conflated with the broader imperial 'project' in the past, missionary views on education and actual pedagogies in Mission schools should be viewed on their own terms as sometimes supportive of or dependent on but sometimes also in tension with overall government and imperial aims.

The 1855–1875 moves towards mass education may have been an appealing means for Murdoch and the CVES to pass on the gospel to the masses in their own languages but there were also other factors at work, including desires to widen access to education for purposes of Indian ‘development’, and needs to respond to a widespread demand for English. Whereas Pennycook (1998) has previously alluded to educational complexities involving tensions between the Missions, the government, orientalist, and indigenous people, we have shown that, rather than different groups holding different fixed ideological positions, it might be more appropriate to conceive of complexity in terms of tensions within individual colonial actors’ views, in relation to specific pedagogical situations. The career, expressed views and practical work of John Murdoch exemplify these tensions, or tendencies, and this complexity.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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