“Immy, can you tone it down a bit?” I was watching a film shoot at the Marriott Renaissance in Mumbai in July 2014, and the director, Vikram Bhatt, was instructing the lead actor, Emraan Hashmi, about his body language during a tracking shot where he had to stride resolutely across the hotel’s ballroom. When Bhatt’s assistant director began to block the shot for Hashmi, Bhatt bellowed in Hindi from his position in the back of the room, “Arre beta, thode dheere se jao! [Hey son, go a little slower!]” He then spoke on the phone in Gujarati with a marketing representative from the music company that had released the soundtrack of his soon-to-be-released film. I noticed that the sheets of Hindi dialogue used by another assistant director to monitor actors’ accuracy were written in Roman rather than Devanagari script.

A Hindi film set is a highly multilingual environment, and it is common to hear several languages spoken, but the linguistic bifurcation illustrated in this example, where Bhatt spoke in Hindi with his assistants and in English with his lead actor and screenwriter, is a manifestation of the increasing presence of English in the everyday life of the Hindi film industry. In 1996, when I started fieldwork on the production culture of the film industry, I was surprised by how prevalent English was as a lingua franca, especially among the actors, directors, writers, art directors, designers, and others responsible for the creative labor that goes into a film. For below-the-line workers, Hindi was merely one language in a complex linguistic universe that included Marathi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, and Punjabi. This is a testament to the tremendous linguistic diversity of India—18 official languages but 122 languages with at least 10,000 native speakers—and the cosmopolitan nature of the Hindi film industry, where people hail from every
linguistic region of India as well as other parts of South Asia (or beyond) and are not necessarily native Hindi speakers. According to the 2001 census, while Hindi is spoken by 53.6 percent of the population, there are fifty different types of Hindi.

India is perhaps unique among film-producing nations for having at least eight major film industries, all distinguished by language, and for producing films in about twenty languages every year. The polyglot nature of the contemporary Hindi film industry fits into the broader history of filmmaking in Mumbai. Mumbai, as a colonial center of commerce, has always been marked by tremendous linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity, and this diversity has been apparent in the world of filmmaking from its origins: early Indian cinema featured Parsi and Gujarati capital, Marathi directors, and Anglo-Indian performers.

With the advent of sound in 1931, Mumbai filmmakers had to choose which language to make films in; Hindi offered the largest market, but which type of Hindi? Filmmakers finally settled on a version, referred to as Hindustani by the British, that had operated as a sort of lingua franca throughout northern India. Thus Mumbai became the only city in India where the language of the film industry’s output was not congruent with the dominant languages of the region, Gujarati and Marathi. This was in direct contrast to other major centers of film production in India, such as Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Trivandrum. Thus the Hindi film industry, unlike other Indian language film industries, has not had recourse to a regional state apparatus to promote its interests. Other states in India promote filmmaking in their official languages by offering incentives and subsidies, whereas Hindi films are not identified with any one particular state.

Whether it is the earmarking of subsidies for filmmaking in specific languages, the promotion of a particular dialect as a normative standard in advertising, the daily translations undertaken by news agencies, or Hollywood studios’ local language production strategies, language—as a category of socio-political identity, a form of labor, a set of commodified skills, and an object of market exchange—plays a critical role in the political economy of media industries. Referring to the increasing opportunities and attractions afforded by the Hindi film industry and the growing international profile of Bollywood, this chapter discusses how changes in language or code choice within Hindi cinema and the increasing significance of English in the production culture of the film industry concretely animate the transformations that have taken place in the political economy and social world of the Hindi film industry since the advent of neoliberal reforms in India mandated by the International Monetary Fund in 1991.

The changes I have characterized elsewhere as gentrification have resulted in a situation in which two apparently contradictory phenomena are taking place within the contemporary industry: the spoken language in many contemporary
Hindi films is much more diverse and regionally specific than in films from earlier decades, at the same time that fluency in Hindi appears to be waning among certain elite categories of creative workers (writers, directors, actors, producers), resulting in a situation where English has attained a certain primacy and status and putting those whose primary language is Hindi in a far more socially and economically precarious position within the industry. This chapter discusses the reasons for and consequences of this paradox and illustrates how language and linguistic competence become sites for the elaboration of distinction, the performance of cultural capital, and the enactment of new hierarchies within the Hindi film industry. I argue that the turn toward localized registers of Hindi in film dialogue is integrally connected to the increased prevalence of English within the film industry, as both phenomena emerge from structural transformations that have beset the industry since the mid-2000s.

These transformations have reduced the economic precarity that typified Hindi filmmaking for much of the industry’s history. Flexibility, fragmentation, decentralization, and their associated occupational/employment insecurities, which are cited as characteristics of a global late-capitalist order, have actually been defining features of the Hindi film industry since the end of World War II. Dramatic changes in the structure of the Hindi film industry were initiated after the Indian state recognized filmmaking as a legitimate industrial activity in 2000. Official designation as an industry paved the way for a greater variety of financing for filmmaking, including loans from banks and other financial institutions, and initiated a number of structural changes commonly characterized as “corporatization,” where high-profile Indian conglomerates established new production-distribution companies or existing production, distribution, or exhibition concerns became public limited companies listed and traded on the Indian stock market. These new regimes of finance and organization in the film industry transformed it from a very undercapitalized enterprise (with accompanying high rates of attrition and stalled films) to one where raising capital was no longer an obstacle. However, these very conditions have produced a scenario where Hindi has become marginalized within the Hindi film industry.

This chapter is divided into three main sections, based on fieldwork conducted with screenwriters, writer-directors, directors, and journalists in Mumbai in August 2013, January 2014, and August 2014. First, I provide historical background on the multilingual nature of the Hindi film industry, including the long-standing presence of English. Then, I discuss how contemporary members of the film industry assess the relationship between English and Hindi within the industry and outline the impact, especially on screenwriting labor, of the growing reliance on English within the creative process. Finally, I examine how certain filmmakers deploy their linguistic skill in Hindi as a form of cultural capital and a mode of elaborating distinction within the film industry.
ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN THE HINDI FILM INDUSTRY

If I’m making a Hindi film, I’m a Tamilian, but my DOP is a Malayali, and my editor is from Gujarat, so our common language is English.
—Sriram Raghavan, writer-director

When reflecting upon the linguistic history of the Hindi film industry, two features stand out: the relative insignificance of fluency in Hindi/Urdu as a prerequisite for acting, directing, or even writing; and the consistent presence of English as a language of trade discourse, commentary, and professional nomenclature. As mentioned previously, the industry emerged in multilingual Mumbai rather than the regions of northern or central India referred to as the Hindi “heartland” and drew personnel from all over the subcontinent and beyond. While standard histories of Indian cinema point out the diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of actors and directors during the silent era, making special mention of how actors and actresses who could not speak Hindustani were displaced by stage actors and courtesans with the arrival of sound, the scenario is actually more complex.

Even with the advent of sound in 1931, directors and actors came from diverse linguistic and national backgrounds. For example, Bombay Talkies, which left an important legacy in the postindependence Hindi film industry in terms of stars and directors, had many Germans in its employ. One of its directors, Franz Osten, who did not know any Hindi, directed some iconic Hindi films from this era. Throughout its history and continuing till the present, there have always been a few directors working in the industry who knew very little or no Hindi at all. This holds true for actresses as well. One of the top stars of the 1930s was the Australian-born Mary Evans, renamed “Fearless Nadia,” who gained fame in action/stunt films despite her heavily accented Hindi. Presently, women from non-Hindi-speaking parts of India as well as from as far afield as Australia, Brazil, Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, and the United States continue to try their luck in Bollywood.

Even in the scripting process, English has played an important role starting from the early sound era. During the 1930s, in studios like Bombay Talkies, scripts and dialogues were initially conceived of in English by the writer (who was referred to as a “scenario” writer), after which the dialogue writer translated them into Hindustani. Since scripts were often written by individuals who were not proficient in Hindustani, the autonomous dialogue writer emerged as a staple of Hindi cinema. The credits for a script were broken down into three components: story, screenplay, and dialogue, with each element attributed to a different individual—a practice continuing into the present. As a result of the varying ethno-linguistic backgrounds of Bombay film personnel, writers who were fluent or had a facility in Urdu were in great demand as dialogue and lyric writers, since Persianized Urdu was a valorized register for song lyrics and dialogues. Many well-known
Hindi/Urdu poets, playwrights, and novelists supported their literary endeavors by working in the Hindi film industry, and scholars have pointed out that after the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, whereby Urdu became the official language of Pakistan, the only site in India where Urdu was kept alive, and even flourished, was the Hindi film industry.9

In this multilingual context—Urdu writers, German directors, Bengali actors, Marathi singers, Parsi producers, and so on—it is not surprising that English emerged as a lingua franca for cultural producers based in a British colonial port city. While Hindi was (and remains) important as the language within the diegesis and that of consumption, English served (and continues) as the primary language of professional nomenclature and discourse about Hindi cinema and filmmaking. The English terms director, producer, writer, actor, and film are part of daily parlance within and outside the industry, rather than the Hindi equivalents nirdeshak, nirmata, lekhak, abhineta, and chalchitra. In contrast to films made in other Indian languages, the opening and closing credits for mainstream Hindi films have been in English since the 1930s. The Devanagari (Hindi) and Nasta’liq (Urdu) scripts make an appearance in a film’s title, but only after the prominent appearance of the title first in Roman script. One reason is perhaps because Hindi films are the only ones to have been consistently distributed nationally since the 1930s and internationally since the 1940s.

The most prominent forms of journalistic, critical, and trade commentary about the Hindi film industry have been in English since the 1930s. Film reviews, interviews with stars, industry news, celebrity gossip, and trade reports are carried out in English-language periodicals, whether Filmland, Filmindia, or Blitz in the 1930s–1960s; Filmfare, Trade Guide, or Screen since the 1950s; or Film Information or Stardust since the 1970s. While there are several Hindi fanzines and newspapers that cover Hindi cinema, they are quite marginal in terms of their impact or readership within the industry. The main trade journals, Trade Guide, Film Information, and Box Office India, which carry box-office figures and report about the business of the film industry, are in English.

If English has always played a prominent role in the Hindi film industry, how is the contemporary moment distinctive? The most drastic difference is English’s changed status and value relative to Hindi. While English has served as a necessary lingua franca throughout the industry’s history, it is increasingly operating as a language of production, creativity, and decision making since the mid-2000s. This change has to do with key demographic shifts in the film industry: namely, the intensification of kinship networks whereby a significant number of leading actors, directors, and producers represent the second, third, or even fourth generation within the industry; and a larger number of creative personnel drawn from urban social elites whose formal schooling has been wholly in English. Since the turn of the millennium, as Hindi filmmaking became more lucrative and
rationalized, taking on an aura of professionalism and respectability that it had not traditionally enjoyed, social elites and film industry progeny gravitated toward the film industry as a viable career path. In the next section I discuss how these shifts are implicated in industry members’ assessments of the state of Hindi within the film industry.

THE PRECARIOUS STATUS OF HINDI IN THE HINDI FILM INDUSTRY

During my fieldwork in Mumbai in 2013 and 2014, several observers and members of the Hindi film industry lamented that the knowledge of Hindi had become so abysmal that the language appeared to be in a precarious position within the industry. Anupama Chopra, a noted film critic and television host, stated bluntly during our conversation, “Hindi is a secondary language now.” She relayed the travails of producing a Hindi version of her popular English-language weekly television show, Front Row with Anupama Chopra—a talk show that mixes film reviews, interviews with actors and directors about their upcoming releases, and group discussions about important issues or key trends within the industry. The challenge of producing the Hindi version, according to her, was that “no one thinks in Hindi here,” especially the younger generation of actors, who, though quite voluble and articulate in English, were unable to express themselves in Hindi. Chopra recounted how since it was so difficult for many actors to speak entirely in Hindi, they frequently devolved into English. She noted how in an episode on the relationship between Bollywood and fashion, eight minutes had to be cut from a thirty-minute segment because of the inability of the guests to converse about the topic in Hindi. Chopra quipped, “We would all breathe a huge sigh of relief after we finished the Hindi version, and then sit back and think [referring to the English version], ‘Now we can relax and have fun!’”

Social class, generation, and geography are the central reasons offered by industry observers for waning fluency in Hindi. The two main social groups identified as having a poor knowledge of Hindi are actors and directors who grew up within the film industry, nicknamed “star kids,” and upper-middle-class residents of Mumbai, dubbed “South Bombay types.” What these groups have in common is limited formal education in Hindi as a result of going to elite English-medium schools in India or boarding schools abroad, as well as the absence of a Hindi-speaking milieu by virtue of growing up in an elite social world in Mumbai where the primary language is English. Ajay Brahmatmaj, the film editor for the Hindi-language Dainik Jagran, the most widely circulated newspaper in India, discussed how in the current generation of actors, those who are from Mumbai and especially from film families speak Hindi only when they are compelled to with their domestic labor and household staff, and hence their knowledge of Hindi is limited.
to a very simple register. He said (in Hindi), “Many of them say they practice their Hindi, but with whom? With their cook, driver, and vegetable vendor. Now, the conversations with such individuals will be limited in terms of the vocabulary, not more than one hundred to two hundred words. At the most it will be ‘gaadi lao’ [bring the car], now ‘gaadi lao’ is hardly Hindi!”

Screenwriter Kalpana Chadda, a native of Delhi, who started working in the film industry in the early 2000s and who had learned and spoke English only in school, described how colleagues and friends regard her as an anomaly for being comfortable in Hindi, asking her frequently, “Why do you speak in Hindi so much?” She reflected, “Delhi is very Hindi, friends speak to each other in Hindi, but in Bombay it seems not to be appropriate to speak in Hindi and to date that’s the joke about me.”

Chadda spoke at length about the challenges faced by screenwriters like herself who “think in Hindi” in an industry run by people who primarily “think in English.” One particularly ironic manifestation is when she is hired to write a screenplay but not dialogue. Since a screenplay has to have dialogue, the screenwriter will put in “dummy” or placeholder dialogue, after which the dialogue writer takes over and crafts the speech in the film. Although she is instructed to write the screenplay in English, Chadda ends up writing her dummy dialogue in Hindi because of her facility with the language, but then has to translate them into English for the director, producer, and actors, even though the film will ultimately be in Hindi. Chadda said she felt like telling filmmakers, “Why don’t you just keep this dialogue and throw it away and let the writer write something else because it is double work for me to make the dialogue into English.” She also mentioned that she was much less precise in English, but according to her, most directors and producers from Mumbai are unable to comprehend an entire screenplay in Hindi. She asserted, “They won’t be able to listen to a script written completely in Hindi. They won’t get it. When it is in English, they’ll get the craft and say, ‘Oh this scene is tight’ because English lends itself to crispness. Hindi is very difficult for you to go crisp on it. And we can’t use difficult words because everybody is not familiar. If I use good Hindi words, I’ll write a crisp Hindi script, but I can’t do that—I have to use colloquial and general words.”

Notice that Chadda mentions “listening” to rather than “reading” a script. The dominant convention in the film industry is to orally recount a script, and it is commonplace to hear actors assert in interviews that they decided to work in a particular film after “hearing the script.” Key members of the production team gather to hear the writer or director relay the film’s screenplay. These sessions, referred to as “narrations” in the industry, are undertaken for the purpose of pitching or having a project green-lighted as well as recruiting the cast and crew. Since a script is often judged on how well it is narrated, Chadda explained that the practice of narrating a script disadvantaged writers who had limited proficiency in English.
While Chadda related the difficulties writers face with producers and directors, others spoke of the challenges of working with actors who had limited Hindi skills. Kamlesh Pandey, president of the Film Writers Association, who has written the dialogue or screenplay for a number of prominent films starting in the late 1980s, was vociferous in his criticism of the state of writing and Hindi in particular. Pandey blamed urban, English-educated writers and industry insiders for the poor state of Hindi, and criticized the prevalent practice of having to write Hindi dialogues in Roman rather than Devanagari script because of the inability of many younger actors to read Hindi. Pandey complained, “Hindi has come to such a state that it has to be read in Roman, and hence I’m afraid the *lipi*, the script will soon become extinct. In cinema, *Devanagari lipi* [script] has more or less disappeared.”

For those writers who specialize in writing dialogue in Hindi, either from the outset or adapting someone else’s English dialogue, an actor’s facility with the language has significant consequences for the writer’s creative labor. For an individual who is fluent in Hindi, which is a phonetically based language and alphabet, having to write dialogues in Roman script involves more effort, especially since the screenplay of a Hindi film on average comprises about seventy-five to eighty scenes and tends to be dialogue-centric.

Another impetus to transliterate Hindi into Roman script is connected to broader efforts to refashion the film industry into a professional, corporatized site with greater emphasis on planning, preproduction, and rationalization of the production process.

An important artifact of such planning is the “bound script,” which has achieved a near totemic status within the film industry. The desire for a complete typed script with dialogue available in advance, supported by a younger generation of computer-literate screenwriters and assistant directors who have had some formal film training, has led to an increase in the use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft, which is an English-only application. Hence, even if actors can read Hindi, screenwriters who utilize such software have to write their dialogues in Roman script, and then may have to transcribe the dialogue separately into Devanagari for veteran actors who find it alienating to have to read Romanized Hindi. Chadda, who uses Final Draft, remarked, “It’s so strange that we have a multibillion-dollar Hindi film industry, but we are slaves to English. We even write the Hindi word in English.”

Writers also related that they had to think harder about vocabulary and syntax when actors were not fluent in Hindi. Pandey complained that he was unable to be subtle in his dialogue writing since actors did not understand nuance or idioms specific to Hindi. Writer-director Sriram Raghavan mentioned that he had to keep in mind an actor’s facility with Hindi when composing dialogues because good lines could ring false depending on the actor’s ability to deliver them. Sameer Sharma, a writer-director who has written dialogues for films helmed by directors who knew little to no Hindi, related his frustration: “I think the sad part is that
most actors today have a diction problem, so they don’t really try, and there are directors who don’t correct them because they themselves have a problem. That’s very visible, and it’s very irritating for somebody who knows the language, but they get away with it so they don’t work hard.”

Writers thus feel they have to work harder to make it easier for actors to read and speak Hindi, rather than actors expending the effort to improve their language skills. This appears as another manifestation of the starcentric nature of the Hindi film industry. Ever since the decline of the studio system in the aftermath of World War II, the Hindi film industry is star oriented, star driven—and many would complain, star controlled. In the next section I discuss how language becomes critical to some filmmakers’ attempts to redefine or challenge mainstream paradigms of filmmaking.

**HINDI “INDIE”**

From 2006 on, a number of films produced by A-list production companies have utilized local registers of Hindi that set them apart from earlier films. With a few exceptions, these films forgo the use of major stars and are set in small towns or subaltern spaces of large cities. Screenwriter Anjum Rajabali commented that the generic Hindustani of earlier eras of filmmaking was disappearing and that in contrast to the past, when characters spoke in the same dialect and register regardless of region or social class, in contemporary films, “characters’ language is rooted in the cultural milieu in which they exist—not just region-specific, but also area-specific, city-specific, and locality-specific.” Rajabali explained this shift in terms of a greater concern with authenticity and realism. Devika Bhagat, a writer-director trained at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, asserted that it was not possible to have a uniformity of speech across an entire film when its characters represented a wide array of socioeconomic backgrounds. Discussing her directorial debut, Bhagat described the characters and their various milieus: “I have a boy who’s from the Dharavi slums, he speaks in Mumbaiya tapori language. And then there is a middle-class IT professional who speaks in Hinglish, so for each character, the language is specific to their background, their region, their attributes, so that’s why there cannot be a pure form of Hindi anymore.”

This quasi-ethnographic attention to linguistic detail reflects the tremendous concern of a newer generation of filmmakers with gesturing toward a form of realism in mainstream cinema. One way to index the “real” is through spoken words and dialogue. Even if the rest of the production design is in the realm of fantasy and spectacle, dialogue can mark the rootedness of a film. In many recent films, the setting is actually not integral to the narrative. For example, certain films that showcase a Delhi Punjabi vernacular could have been set anywhere in India, as Delhi was not crucial to their plots; they could have easily been set in Mumbai.
These films are anchored to a particular place not by the story but by the language and the register of the dialogue.

Language has become an important way to distinguish among films; it is being foregrounded not just in songs but also in dialogue and speech. Thus language, in terms of dialect, accent, slang, and proverbs, has become an important part of the mise-en-scène, akin to songs, action, locales, and sets. Dialogue has always been important in Hindi cinema, but the turn to the colloquial helps to “dress the dialogue” in a different way. Writers are less reliant on clever turns of phrase or memorable dialogue because mere showcasing of the vernacular is enough. Writers can demonstrate skill not by cleverly crafting witty or memorable dialogue but by merely sounding nonstandard and “rustic.”

Industry professionals offered two main explanations for this turn to the vernacular. One was framed in terms of a backlash of sorts by filmmakers, who were mostly from the Hindi-speaking north and outsiders to both Mumbai and the industry, against the dominant paradigm of filmmaking in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Referring to filmmakers like Anurag Kashyap, who is heavily identified with gritty, violent, dark dramas frequently set in nonmetropolitan sites, writer-director Sriram Raghavan stated, “There was that big phase of the Yashraj and Karan Johar films, which were shot largely abroad. Anurag and that group made it even more specific about certain areas [in India] because it was a reaction to some of these big films—that there were too many of them and they were seeming fake.”

Director Tigmanshu Dhulia asserted that the artifice of films from this period was a result of Mumbai-bred filmmakers catering only to diasporic audiences: “Because films were being catered to the sensibility of the NRIs [nonresident Indians], the language became fairly easy, poetry was lost, subjects and story lines became very frivolous. Suddenly we stopped making rooted films, and because we were getting revenues from abroad, we stopped making films for Indians.” Dhulia went on to describe how filmmakers who grew up in the Hindi film industry—the second- and third-generation professionals who began their careers in the 1990s—“had not seen India; they’d only seen Bombay.” Due to their limited experience of India, according to Dhulia, such filmmakers only made “films about films; they were creating characters out of filmy characters, because they had no experience of India, of life; they thought Bombay is India.”

Dhulia claimed that people coming from outside Mumbai played a significant role in transforming Hindi cinema and the film industry. In Dhulia’s words, outsiders enabled cinema to “find geography.” Referring to himself and a number of other filmmakers, Dhulia remarked, “We came with our experiences, and so we started making films about the characters we knew, about the region we knew, so that is why the change of character and of language; we became very area specific. Now films have a geography, whereas earlier films didn’t have a geography at all.” Sameer Sharma pointed out how even if the “bosses”—those who control finance and
distribution—are from Mumbai, many of the directors, such as Anurag Kashyap, are outsiders who are becoming producers themselves and thus are able to green-light or foster films that are set in nonurban or nonmetropolitan settings. With reference to his own directorial debut, *Luv Shuv Tey Chicken Khurana*, a quirky comedy produced by Kashyap and set in Punjab, which employed Hindi heavily laced with Punjabi expressions, idioms, and humor, Sharma explained that although Kashyap is not from Punjab, he was able to understand a script that was rooted in a small town milieu by virtue of not being from Mumbai. Sharma stated, “It’s important that people who are actually from outside can influence the making of certain films, which may not be understood by a producer who is only from Bombay.”

Sharma’s remarks illustrate how even filmmakers who self-identify as “outsiders” or as “indie” work very much within mainstream structures of finance, distribution, and exhibition. In fact, their use of Hindi can be seen as another way to assert and perform their “independence” from “Bollywood,” so that their linguistic ability becomes an important form of cultural capital that allows them to distinguish themselves within the industry. The overwhelmingly positive critical reception of such directors—including Dibakar Banerjee, Vishal Bharadwaj, Abhishek Chaubey, Tigmanshu Dhulia, and Anurag Kashyap—by the English-language media in India, mostly for their “authentic” portrayals of the “Hindi heartland,” illustrates the success some filmmakers have had with an outsider or renegade image.

However, rather than indexing the “real” or “geography,” the Hindi in such films circulates as an exotic parlance or a simulacrum of the Indian hinterlands within English-speaking cultural spheres. The widely divergent responses between English-language and Hindi-language media regarding Anurag Kashyap’s *Gangs of Wasseypur* provide a case in point. Screened at Cannes in the Directors Fortnight in 2012, this tale about a long-running blood feud between the families of an outlaw and a corrupt politician in Bihar was widely celebrated in the international and Indian press for “redefining” Indian cinema and identified as a potential crossover success. Interestingly, some media analysts noticed that the Hindi press was quite underwhelmed with the film and pointed out that reviewers for Hindi newspapers dismissed the film’s claims to authenticity and argued that it simply pandered to metropolitan stereotypes under the guise of realism. With respect to the dialogue, one analyst pointed out, “The English-language media were fawning about precisely the sort of things the Hindi reviewers noticed as false, including the language with its extravagant crudity.” I contend that it is only as a result of English becoming the unmarked, naturalized language of production and discourse within the film industry that filmmakers are able to deploy Hindi as a self-consciously marked commodity.

The second reason for the turn to the colloquial has to do with changes in the political economy of the film industry. The fact that some filmmakers are able to
utilize language in a way that would have been regarded in an earlier era of filmmaking as limiting or alienating one’s audience has to do with changing structures of finance, production, distribution, and exhibition that have reshaped the Hindi film industry’s audience imaginaries—issues I have explored in detail elsewhere.\textsuperscript{33} For example, Tigmanshu Dhulia, referring to his 2012 film \textit{Paan Singh Tomar}, a biopic about a celebrated and medaled Indian steeplechase runner who is forced by circumstances to become a bandit, stated, “The language was Bundelhi; it was not even Hindi and I was scared that . . . I thought the audience would not even understand the language, but they did! So now cinema has changed, and I think it has changed for the better.”\textsuperscript{34}

One of the biggest changes in the political economy of the Hindi film industry since the advent of multiplexes and corporate production and distribution companies is the diminished significance of the “universal hit”—films that do well all over India and across all demographics. This is due to the structural transformations in filmmaking caused by the entry of corporate production companies and multiplexes, which have altered ideas of commercial success in the industry. Multiplexes, with their high ticket rates, revenue-sharing arrangements, and financial transparency, have managed to transform even low to moderate audience attendance or ticket sales into a sign of success. The entry of the Indian organized industrial sector into film production and the ability of established producers to raise money from the Indian stock market have diminished the role of traditional territorial distributors, who were always perceived by filmmakers as averse to cinematic experimentation. Many corporate producers have ventured into both all-India and overseas distribution and possess a much higher threshold for financial risk. These corporate distributors can either rely on profits from some territories to offset losses from others or profit from their investment by reselling distribution rights to individual territorial distributors. A universal hit is simply not as necessary within this new financing and distribution scenario. Thus there is less anxiety on the part of the financing side of the industry if a film appears limited in its appeal.

Sameer Sharma asserted that filmmakers now have a greater opportunity to express their individual style: “Previously you had to cut across to a whole section of the audience, and your way of making was dictated by the fact that a film should work both in New York and in Patna. But today, it’s become more flexible. I think people have gotten more confident that you don’t have reach out to everybody.”\textsuperscript{35} Sharma’s statements illustrate how the reduced value of the universal hit within the industry has expanded the criteria of success to the benefit of filmmakers. While the previous structure of the industry rewarded—in terms of both economic and symbolic capital—only filmmakers who strived for universal hits, the contemporary structure enables those filmmakers who are unable to achieve or are unconcerned with broad appeal to also raise money and earn prestige and status within the industry.
Filmmakers’ prestige and status is critically connected to the ability to circulate within elite social spheres, such as international film festivals, and to garner praise from the English-language press in India and abroad, as seen in the divergent responses to *Gangs of Wasseypur*. Not all “outsiders” or primary Hindi speakers from northern India are able to leverage their linguistic skills in the same manner as the filmmakers mentioned in this essay. Linguistic skill or fluency in Hindi serves as a form of capital only for those who are also fluent in English—that is, filmmakers like Anurag Kashyap, who are internationally celebrated in prestigious film festivals, such as Cannes and Toronto, and garner a great deal of media and critical attention within India. Those film professionals who know only Hindi, with limited proficiency in English, are condemned to remain assistants (to a variety of department heads), dialogue writers for hire, or language tutors, and are frequently marginalized in the social networks that provide a chance at upward mobility in the industry. Therefore, it appears that while not knowing Hindi is not much of a setback or obstacle to participating in the Hindi film industry, not knowing English can be a problem.36

The Hindi film industry has always been and had to be self-conscious and reflexive about language because of its commercial box-office orientation. In the early years of the film industry, language choice was thought about in terms of intelligibility and access to the largest market. Here I have argued that filmmakers consciously consider code choice as a way of marking a film as distinct within a crowded marketplace and of garnering symbolic capital within the film industry. Both are choices born of commercial considerations, but they speak to different moments and transformations in the political economy of the Hindi film industry. Thus, language/code choice helps make visible, or perhaps more appropriately, audible, the changing political economy of the film industry, as well as the changing social relations within it.

NOTES

2. *Hindi*, *Urdu*, and *Hindustani* are not self-evident and neutral terms, but rather index a long, complex history starting from colonialism when British administrators along with language activists drew boundaries between Hindi and Urdu. At the level of colloquial speech, Hindi and Urdu are mutually intelligible and interchangeable.


6. Such actresses are usually dubbed over by voice artists fluent in Hindi.


8. Ibid.


10. For a more in-depth discussion of the social and structural transformations that have beset the industry since the late 1990s, see Ganti, *Producing Bollywood*.

11. “South Bombay” refers to the oldest and most expensive parts of the city, often synonymous with “old money” and an Anglicized elite, and also happens to be the farthest geographically from the northern and western suburbs that comprise the heart of the film industry.

12. Interview with Ajay Brahmatmaj, Mumbai, August 7, 2014.

13. I have assigned a pseudonym as she is still trying to establish herself within the industry and did not want her frank remarks attributed to her.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Interview with Kamlesh Pandey, Mumbai, August 28, 2013.

18. The Hindi alphabet contains fourteen vowels, forty-one consonants, and fourteen conjunct consonants—a total of sixty-nine characters, conveying a much wider phonetic range than the twenty-six-character Roman alphabet.


20. Interview with Kalpana Chadda, Mumbai, August 2, 2014.


25. Interview with Sriram Raghavan, Mumbai, August 28, 2013.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Interview with Sameer Sharma, Mumbai, September 2, 2013.


32. Dasgupta, “Art or Artifice.”


34. Interview with Tigmanshu Dhulia, Mumbai, January 25, 2014.

35. Interview with Sameer Sharma, Mumbai, September 2, 2013.

36. Knowledge of English is more important for above-the-line workers than those below the line.