
Multilingualism in India

Rumica Afzal & Shaista Afzal

¹Department of English, University of Kashmir, Hazratbal Srinagar-190006, J & K, India

²Department of Political Science, Lovely Professional University, Jalandhar-144402, Punjab, India

Abstract

Multilingualism is a gift to India. Multilingualism means using several different languages. A multi-lingual person can speak two or more than two languages very well. In terms of heterogeneity, multilingualism can be explained properly. Five language families in India marked its linguistic heterogeneity. The multilingualism in India is multidimensional and intricate. There are many changes in every single language on the basis of caste, religion, gender, occupation, age etc. An individual may use different style of language at different places. It is present in the life of all citizens. Indian multilingualism became unique because of its dynamic relationship of its language. The present work is an attempt to find out the nature of multilingualism in India. It also aims to look into the different aspects of Indian multilingualism arising due to the high diversity of Indian societies.

Key words: Multilingualism, Heterogeneity, Linguistic, Indian language.

Introduction

The term multilingualism which is the center of attention of this paper is derived from two Latin words namely “multi” that means many and “lingua” that means language. Thus multilingualism is referred to as the capability of a speaker to articulate himself or herself in numerous languages with equal and native like proficiency (Bussmann,1996). However, it has been comprehended in both the written and verbal communicative practices that proficiency in one language frequently tends to dominate in a multilingual set up as compared to the others. Multilingualism can also be regarded as the co-existence of a number of languages within a society (Lyons,1981). These languages can be official or unofficial, native or foreign and national or international.

There is an old saying, “A man who knows two languages is equivalent to two men”.

This is because a person who can speak many languages can articulate with people from those language backgrounds easily and hence have a wider social life and easily fit in a new place. Therefore, multilingualism suggests a lot of autonomy to an individual, and is a benefit in terms of acceptance into a different language culture. If an immigrant can articulate the language of the natives, he or she is considered a member of the native community, although tentatively. This acceptance offers a sense of security to the individual and hence becomes very important for his / her wellbeing. In reality, the world itself has now entered a phase of globalization where the phenomenon of bilingualism / multilingualism has become an additional value. Globalization has improved the value of multilingualism. Heterogeneity is the best term to explain Indian multilingualism.

The Indian society has different social groups which are of varying shape and size, and perform different functions. This heterogeneity makes Indian society unique in itself. It can be seen at various levels such as geography, religion, caste (there are as many as 6000 castes in India), ethnicity, culture, languages, scripts, etc.

Heterogeneity on account of language, which supposes importance for the present study, becomes obvious from the census report. Census of 1961 reported 1652 mother tongues of various language groups. Five language families in India describes linguistic heterogeneity.

Every society has linguistic diversity. This is not the end of diversities present in India. There are many other diversities like diversity of food habits, dressing, religion and region etc. because of all these diversity, India is multilingual. The multilingualism of India is multidimensional and intricate. It is present in all citizens. It became unique because of its dynamic relationship of Indian language. In spite of its linguistic diversity, communication is conducted easily (Saba, 2013).

Multilingualism in India

Multilingualism in India is a creation of its history and a manifestation of its diverse cultures. India is said to be a socio-linguistic giant and the nerve system of this giant is multilingual. According to Li Wei (Wei, 2000), "Language is a human faculty: it coevolves with us" and monolingualism, which even in normal circumstances is a rare phenomenon, is beyond imagination in



a context such as India where English has coexisted with indigenous languages over a long period. In fact, the magnitude of multilingualism in India has made scholars wonder about how communication happens and how social cohesion is maintained (Annamalai, 2001). "Indian multilingualism is huge in size, having 1620 mother tongues reduced to 200 languages.... With the population of many of minorities larger than European countries"(Annamalai, 2001) Since time immemorial, India has been a multilingual country. Through more than four millennia of known history, the linguistic families which co-existed together have continuously interacted with each other and achieved a pan Indian character which is unique in itself, firstly, in the matter of sentence structure and, secondly, in the number of shared items of vocabulary (Prasad, 1979) norm. India houses about 1.1 billion people with a population growth rate of 1.6 per cent a year. As per Census 2001, India is administratively organized into 35 entities, each as big as many independent nations. There are 28 States and seven Union Territories, broadly set up on the linguistic principle. Currently, India has 51 Cities, 384 Urban Agglomerates and 5161 Towns (2843 in 1951) in India. However,

most Indians still live in rural areas and in small towns with different linguistic, religious and cultural practices. (Saraf, 2014) The Indian constitution recognizes twenty two official languages. Hindi and English are used by the Union Government of India for official purposes. Tamil and Sanskrit were designated "classical languages" by the Indian government in 2004 and 2005. The number of dialects in India is as high as 1,652. India does not have a mother tongue, it has mother tongues. Does India have a national language? Presumably, it does, and it is Hindi. How it came to become a national language is described by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who was the Chairman of the Drafting Committee when the Draft Constitution of India was being considered, on the issue of adopting Hindi as the National language: "...There was no article which proved more controversial than Article 115 which deals with the question. No article produced more opposition. No article more heat. After a prolonged discussion when the question was put, the vote was 78 against 78. The tie could not be resolved. After a long time when the question was put to the party meeting the result was 77 against 78 for Hindi. Hindi won its place as a national

language by one vote. I am stating these facts from my personal knowledge. ..."

(Ambedkar,1989)

As of today, the Indian constitution identifies 22 major languages of India in what is known as "the 8th Schedule" of the Constitution. They also occur to be the major literary languages in India, with a substantial volume of writing in them. They include, besides Sanskrit, the following 21 modern Indian languages: Assamese, Bangla, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Santali, Sindhi, and Urdu. Originally, only 14 languages were included in the 8th Schedule of the Indian constitution. Bodo, Dogri, Konkani, Maithili, Manipuri, Nepali, Santali and Sindhi were recognized later. The first Prime Minister of India, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had made this comment about the recognition of languages: "The makers of our Constitution were wise in lying down that all the 13 or 14 languages' were to be national languages. There is no question of anyone language being more a national language than the others. The languages listed in this Schedule had acquired different

names at different stages. They are better known as the Scheduled languages now".

By 1960s, 87.13 per cent of Indians spoke languages previously included in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. India today has 92.07 per cent schools at the primary stage teaching through mother tongue, and the rural and urban comparison shows 92.39 per cent schools in rural areas and 90.39 per cent school in urban areas teach through mother tongue. At the Upper Primary stage 91.34 per cent teach through mother tongue which consists of 92.71 per cent in rural areas and 87.37 per cent in urban areas. 12.14% at the primary stage, 14.47% schools at upper primary and 18.53% at the secondary stage have two or more media of instruction. It is also interesting to note that 91.95% of schools in the country at the primary stage teach two or more languages. With regard to number of languages taught 90.61% of schools at the upper primary stage follow three language formula (i.e. at least three languages are taught), 84.86% of schools follow the formula at the secondary stage (NCERT, 2007). Forty seven languages are used as media of instruction in schools and forty one languages are taught or used in schools

(Srinivasa,2008). Multilingualism is constitutive of Indian diversity. Multilingualism in education refers to the use of two or more languages as medium of instruction (UNESCO,2003). Researches have shown that there is a highly positive relationship between bilingualism / multilingualism, cognitive flexibility, and scholastic achievement(Peal and Lambert 1962).Bilingual children not only have control over several different languages but they are also academically more creative and socially more tolerant (NCERT,2005). Language teaching requires to be multilingual not only in terms of the number of languages presented to children but also in terms of evolving strategies that would use the multilingual classroom as a resource. Children will receive multilingual education from the beginning. In the non-Hindi speaking states, children learn Hindi. In the case of Hindi speaking states, children learn a language not spoken in their area. Sanskrit may also be studied as Modern Indian Language in addition to these languages. At later stages, study of classical and foreign languages may be introduced (NCF, 2005). The number of languages taught or used in Indian schools had been reduced during the period between 1973 and 1993. The number

of languages used in schools in 1973 (NCERT ,1975) was 67; the number came down to 41 in 1993 (Srinivasa, 2008). While the promise of education through / in the mother tongue of the child is made time and again, we notice that within a period of twenty years at least 25 languages were thrown out of the school system. This means children whose mother tongues are these languages would have to suffer the trouble of studying in a language which is not theirs. This only adds to what Amartya Sen calls compounded disadvantage of those who are already disadvantaged.

Language families (genetic variation):

India is home to five major language families of the world :Indo Aryan, Dravidian, Austro Asiatic, Tibeto Burman and Andamanese. Earlier there were only four identified language families but new researchs added Andamanese to it.

Indo Aryan: It is the largest language family .It includes 21 languages. Among these, 15 have been renowned by the constitution as scheduled languages .The indo Aryan languages basically includes the northern and central region of India.

Dravidian: It is the second largest language family . It includes 17 languages .Among

these , 4 are scheduled languages . These languages are usually spoken in southern part of India, exception of kurukh which is spoken in the Gumla district of Jharkhand.

Austro-Asiatic :This family includes 14 languages which can be separated into groups :Khmer-Nicobarese and Munda .

Tibeto-Burman: It consists of 66 languages . It has three main sub branches :Tibeto-Himalayan, North –Assam ,Assam-Burmese.

Andamanese: This language is spoken by the people of Andaman and Nicobar islands .It is divided into two parts :Great Andamanese ,Ongan(Wikipedia,retrieved 02/09/2009).

Three language formula

India is a country of several languages. Therefore, one needs to know more than one language if he/she wants to interact with people from different parts of the country. If one knows only his/her mother tongue he/she will only be capable to communicate

with people within one's own state. This means one is totally isolating oneself from other regions and other languages. A student who has learnt only his/her mother tongue cannot obtain knowledge regarding the other regions and languages unless it is translated into his/her own language. His/her education thus becomes very limited. The Three Language Formula (TFL) which emerged as a political consensus on languages in school education was a strategy (not a policy) to accommodate at least three languages with in the ten years of schooling (Pattanayak,1986).The All India Council for Education recommended the adoption of the Three Language Formula in Sept. 1956 (Mallikarjun,2002). According to this formula, every child has to learn the following: 1 The mother tongue or the regional language; 2. The official language of the union or the associate official language of the Union so long as it exists (official language of the union is Hindi and its associate official language is English); 3. Modern Indian language or a foreign language, not covered under (1) & (2) above and other than that used as the medium of instruction.

The First Language (L1):

The language that we learn from our childhood is generally spoken by our parents, family members and the other people around us. This is known as our first language or L1. Since this is the language we know best and utilize commonly, the government decided that the medium of instruction at primary stage should be one's own regional language. Being a teacher we might have experienced that at the primary stage most of the instruction takes place only through the regional language or through the children's mother tongue. First language is obtained naturally, through interacting with family members and friends without much formal instruction. But even though, we may communicate efficiently in our first language, most of us do not have a complete knowledge of all the sounds and letters of the language or its grammar. This is because we attain it informally. Therefore formal instruction in the first language is provided in the School.(subhas,2013)

The Second Language (L2):

One of the purposes of education is to expose the learner to different situations and develop such ability which enables him/her

to gain knowledge from all possible source and share the same with others. Therefore, the learner needs to learn the second language (L2) which in our country usually is either Hindi or English. The second language is learn intentionally and deliberately for a specific purpose i.e., to gather information and acquire knowledge. (subhas,2013).

The Third Language (L3):

We might ask what happens in a case where the learner's first language is Hindi and second language is English and neither of this can help him/her in certain situations. For instance, child's mother tongue is Khasi and he/she learns English as his/her second language. When he/she goes to a village in Bihar he/she may not be in a position to speak to people either in his/her first language (Khasi) or second language (English). Because people of that village in Bihar may not be knowing either Khasi or English. In such cases, communications or interaction with other people becomes difficult, and may even be impossible at times. This is where third language (L3) has a significant role to play. (subhas,2013).

The spirit of the three-language formula thus offers Hindi, English, and Indian languages,

rather a south Indian language for the Hindi-speaking States, and a regional language, Hindi, and English for the non-Hindi-speaking States. The underline merit of this formula in the promotion of multilingualism is hardly questionable and best represents the multilingual character of the nation (Kachru, 1997). But this formula has been observed more in the violate than in the observance. The Hindi-speaking States operate largely with Hindi, English, and Sanskrit, whereas the non-Hindi-speaking States, particularly Tamil Nadu, operate through a two language formula, that is, Tamil and English.

Conclusion

Multilingualism in India is a product of its history and a reflection of its diverse cultures. India is said to be a socio-linguistic giant and the nerve system of this giant is multilingualism. There are 28 States and seven Union Territories, broadly set up on the linguistic principle. Language families present in India are an outcome of different races which came to India many years back. An individual's language is groomed by many social variations .So the relationship of language with the diversities present in Indian societies makes the linguistic

scenario completely unique . It talks about language variation on the basis of caste ,tribe, races, region ,script etc. So this diversity and heterogeneity makes the people of India multilingual. Actually various policies have been framed for the enhancement and maintenance of diversity and multilingualism. It is natural for human being to learn or to use several languages at the same time. Infact ,in many speech communities it is common practice to use mixed codes in several domains of activity. Multilingualism rather than monolingualism is the norm. The sooner we recognize the importance of the multilingualism , the better for us.

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