LINGUA PAX

Demographic Imperatives In Language Planning

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Elitist Moorings

In the realm of language policy-making and language planning we tend to 'perceive' languages in monolitihic terms. Language rights movements also generally focus attention on monistic aspects of language A or language B. in everyday life. We may identify languages as 'strong' or 'weak' in categorical terms. But when looking at the scene in a plurilingual paradigm, we need to devise a scale plotting stronger and weaker languages in relative terms which respond in a unique manner to the space-and time-bound institutional reality, viz. language accreditation by the state, identity aspirations of a speech community, accessibility of a language in everyday communication.

In the entire process of language planning (it also includes language policy-making), the common man - the 'consumer' of LP programs - is present only by proxy, carrying the elite 'cross'. It is mainly the custodians of languages who decide loftily what is 'good' for the masses, by the virtue of their hold on the socio-political and literary scene (Khubchandani 1983: 149).

A few remarks from the critique of language planning (Khubchandani 1997) may be relevant here "The notion of language planning in its exhaustive sense is a relatively new concept[1] [1]. Its models, to a large extent, are influenced by those in the spheres of industrial and agricultural planning. From the narrow linguistic concerns of 'intellectual fostering' of the standard languages (Prague School 1932, Tauli 1968), the canvas of language planning is now enlarged to include language as an object of human manipulation, introducing, the cost-benefit and

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[1] A distinct enquiry concerning the issues of language planning is attributed to the 1996 Airlie House Conference held in the United States (Fishman et al 1968); it was followed up by the 1969 Conference on corpus language planning at the East-west Center, Honolulu (Rubin and Jernudd 1971).

During the same period, in the wake of the nation-wide debate in India on the 'Three-Language Formula', the first-ever seminar on "Linguistics and Language Planning in India" was held at Deccan College Research Institute, Pune, in April 1967 (Khubchandani 1968). It was soon followed up by a national Seminar on "Language and Society in India" at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla in October 1967 (Poddar 1969). It might be a case of inertia that the developed world does not seem to have adequaltely dealt with the pioneering efforts made in the developing world with regard to the formulation of LP concepts (Chatterji 1943, Alisjahbana 1949, Spencer 1963). But the apathy of Indian LP experts towards accounting for the contributions initiated in India around the same time presents a sad commentary on the 'sociology of knowledge' as such. This can be understood in the terms of linguists in India, anxious to establish their credibility in the pursuance of a modern discipline falling prey to import their expertise and concepts through 'secondary' modernization.

decision-making models from economics and political science (Rubin and Shuy 1973; Singh and Srivastava 1990). But one cannot deny that the basic character of many language planning agencies and also the major concern of many investigators in the field have remained largely normative. In this sense, the deliberate change envisaged for a language is in actual terms 'manipulation by the elite'. The cost-benefit models regard language as a 'societal resource' and the success of planning is evaluated in terms of operational policies: targets (based on ideologies), strategies of action, legislative authorization, implementation by executive agencies, and periodic evaluation (Jernudd and Dasgupta 1971). All these operations are 'top-downward' (rather than 'bottom-upward').

There has been a keen contest among the philosophers of language between the view that the primary function of language is that of (a) an instrument of communication, and the view that it is (b) a vehicle of thought (Dummett 1989). Communication pursuits in contemporary society have re-activated the philosophical debate over language viewed as a mode of action in an ethnographic sense (Malinowsky 1923), emphasizing the 'synergic' qualities of participation" (Khubchandani 1997, 1998).

In early stages of language policy making many custodians of language put a greater weight on the broad interpretation of the mother tongue i.e., regarding all minority languages not having a written tradition as 'dialects' of the dominant language in the region. This interpretation amounted to an implicit denial of equal rights to linguistic minorities on the ground of practicability, similar to the French view of treating minority languages such as Provencal (another Romance), Breton (a Celtic), and Basque (a non Indo-European languages), as dialects of the dominant French (a Romance language).

In modern times, with the growing sentiment of minority groups for equal language privileges, many authorities seem to be becoming more sensitive to the narrow interpretation of mother tongue, though still a good deal of ambivalence prevails over the issue (cf. UNESCO Committee 1953, Verdoodt 1990). During the post-World War period language privileges have become the rallying ground of most demands in many newly-independent nations. "Unlike socio-economic interests, the cultural and linguistic interests admit of greater subjective definition and, therefore, a greater possibility of political manipulation and negotiation." (Das Gupta 1970).

Interpretation of Language Claims

Language is a complex multilateral phenomenon, manifested in physiological, psychological, institutional, and other forms. Various overt and covert characteristics in verbal communication point to at least three distinct contours of speech behaviour:

(1) what people do with speech, that is, language usage; (2) what people think they do with speech, that is, language image; and (3) what people claim they do with speech, that is, language posture.

The language claims of many societies can be characterized as tips of icebergs: much more is hidden under the surface than is revealed through an individual's declarations. A language census accounts for information on one or more aspects of speech behaviour:

1. Population aggregates portraying of language usage in a region or society.
2. Head counts according to the levels of proficiency in different languages.
3. Populations signifying unconscious attitudes or values regarding the languages with which

they feel concerned in one way or another.
4. Populations asserting conscious alignments toward different languages in a particular context.

Very often the insistence on 'face-value' interpretation of the implicit assertions give a distorted picture of a population. In order to evaluate the language scene of a community, it is essential to process language statistics in a sociolinguistic framework that accounts for all relevant aspects of speech behaviour. (Khubchandani 1995).

In a plural society a speaker's declaration about his/her mother tongue is purely individual, mostly based on the considerations of his/her social identification and group loyalty, rather than the speech he/she uses for primary communication. The branching of Makedonian standard language from the Bulgarian standard is an example where political identities of Makedonia (in former Yugoslavia) and Bulgaria respectively overshadow linguistic similarities between the two speech varieties.

One often finds inherent contradictions in the language scene concerning different aspects of speech behaviour, namely, patterns of language use, levels of competence, unconscious attitudes (images), and conscious assertions (postures) about speech activity. Elicitation techniques for ascertaining speech behaviour developed through language surveys and decennial censuses in various countries tend to provide stigmatized responses from people about their claims, which are conditioned by the propriety of domains or tasks associated with different languages. In reacting to the questions concerning language, a respondent unconsciously or deliberately reveals certain patterns of 'acculturation' or 'manipulation'.

Though the actual speech of an individual is marked by various diverse and heterogeneous characteristics revealing stratificational demands of the context, people perceive their own and others' speech in categorical terms as discrete language A or language B, as if it were uniform and homogenous. This paradox of performance and perception (i.e. categorization) is one of the characteristic features of speech behaviour. The nation of 'language' to a speaker is not the same as to a linguist. It is particularly true or oral cultures where language is more of symbolic significance of identifying a speaker within the group, than a matter of its purely formal criteria which are a priori considerations for a linguist in defining a language.

Language - Space-and Time-bound Institution:

Ground Realities

The 1961 language census gives an exhaustive account of language dynamics in a heterogeneous society (Mitra 1964, Khubchandani 1969, 1983). Decadal variations in Indian language census since 1881 present a vivid picture of peoples' perceptions of their speech - a significant tool for understanding grassroots reality of language identity and language communication.

The decadal language census during past one century stands a good testimony to the semantic acrobatics over the issue of defining Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani to suit different audiences, variedly treating all claims under one language (Hindustani), under two languages (Hindi and Urdu), or under three languages (Hindi, Urdu and Hindustani). The British penchant for clear-cut categorization and monistic instant (but often vacillating) decisions concerning languages and scripts - often arbitrarily just to bring some order in 'chaotic' diversity, or at times for serving imperial interests, distributing favours or prejudices to different interest groups through language

concessions or constraints - gave rise to a good deal of suspicion in the minds of people regarding language returns in the census. (cf. Gait 1913, Hutton 1933, Cohn 1967, Mohan 1992). In the context of post-colonial projections of culture and language development, it is significant to note the role of present demographer is not very different from that of the colonial times, in manipulating (often camouflaging) speech claims by redefining languages, as attempted in tabulating the data enumerated in 1971 Language Census. Language information in the census can serve as a useful tool for the study of sociology of communication in general, broadening the scope of population studies as a subject of social ecology.

On the basis of language-identity pressures, as manifested in language census, Indian federal polity can be divided into two major zones: Stable Zone, and Fluid Zone. The North-central part of the country, comprising all eleven Hindi states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, and Uttaranchal) and two Union territories (Delhi and Chandigarh), Punjab, and Jammu & Kashmir, belong to the Fluid Zone where language identity and language communication patterns are not necessarily congruent. Affiliations with one language or the other tend to fluctuate with the shift in social-political climate and pressures of acculturation. Populations in this Zone have other than linguistic criteria for determining ingroup/outgroup identity. This characteristic seems to have weighed heavily with the authorities in their decision to re-classify languages in the 1971 Census (primarily affecting the classification of Hindi, Panjabi, and Marathi).

The Indian census bears witness to very large fluctuations concerning mother tongue claims, responding to overt identity pressures. Most of the sporadic minorities in different states also reveal the trend of assertion during the period 1951-1961, which is distinguished by a sharp awareness of languages (for a detail discussion along with tables, see Khubchandani 1969,1972,1983). In case of Urdu after the Partition, there was a move away from regional towards the religious identity among bilingual Muslims throughout the country. Urdu growth rates during the decade 1951-1961 reveal dramatically the process of consolidation throughout India: a growth of 68.7 per cent (against the country's total population growth of 24.4 per cent). State-wise Rajasthan +200.2 per cent; Karnataka +110.3 per cent; Madhya Pradesh + 76.8 per cent; Uttar Pradesh +66.8 per cent; Andhra Pradesh +43.9 per cent; Bihar +37.0 per cent; and Tamil Nadu +32.3 per cent. One does not find any evidence of genuine language displacement in daily life, such as abandoning a regional or minority language in favour of Urdu. Hence, these astounding increases in the claims of Urdu as mother tongue can be regarded as the assertion of cultural solidarity of bilingual Muslims through Urdu and their relegating the respective regional languages to subsidiary languages status in their subjective evaluation of competence (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1968), in reaction to the post-Independence language politics in the country. [Tables to be attached].

The edifice of linguistic plurality in the Indian subcontinent is traditionally based upon the complementary use of more than one language and more than one writing system for the same language in one 'space'. Plural communities organize their multilingual repertoire through various processes of language contact. The use of the lingua franca Hindustani represents one such process. Bilingualism is another such process, manifesting diverse patterns characterized by socio-economic strata and the density of population (in metropolitan cities, towns, and rural areas). In many regions one finds some rough correlation between the degree of heterogeneity in the native population and the intensity of bilingualism. If these can be quantified in some way, it will be useful to evaluate individual and collective bilingual experiences. These, then, can be correlated to education development programmes in the process of language policy making and planning.

The enormous diversity prevailing among tribal groups is not merely the result of an isolated existence, as is commonly believed, but has grown out of a highly functional plural ethos

characteristic of the Indian heritage. The speech interaction among heterogeneous speech communities is primarily guided by ecological multiplicity deeply entrenched in the tribal areas. The inter-group communications among tribals record a wide range of variation in the claims of bilingualism, mostly depending upon the degree of heterogeneity. Characterizing cultural pluralism of the Jharkhand region, RamDayal Munda states: "Culturally Chhatanagpur is the only area in the entire country where three major cultural streams - Aryan, Dravidian and Austroasians, represented through various languages - have converged to create a cultural synthesis of its own kind". This phenomenon highlights the assertion of the particularist identity through their ancestral language (Santali, Kurukh, Ho etc), the regional identity through the consensus over creolized Sadan/Nagpuria, and the national identity through the super-consensus over Hindi, signifying the vitality of non-exclusive identities in a pluralistic framework.

Reality and its Negation

Nagaland presents an interesting case of assessing the status of contact languages in formal education. It is indeed a sociolinguistic marvel for a small state with a population of 1,216 thousand (in 1991) to function with nearly thirty languages. One does not notice any significant communication barrier as Naga Pidgin, better known as Nagamese, operates as the de facto lingua franca in the state (Haimendorf 1939: Sreedhar 1988). In a sociolinguistic survey of Nagaland (Kapfo 1988), Nagamese ranks the highest 44.4 per cent, followed by English 34.3 per cent, Naga languages other than one's mother tongue 12.8 per cent, and Hindi 12.4 per cent.

The use of Nagamese is much more intense as the lingua franca among different groups of uneducated Nagas, over 65 per cent. Among educated Nagas the most preferred language for inter-group communication is English 62 per cent, Nagamese 24, other Naga languages 10, and Hindi merely 5 per cent.

In spite of such intense use of Nagamese for inter-group communication in all oral situations, a majority of respondents recorded quite reverse attitudes towards the promotion of Nagamese language as such: 66 per cent do not like the language but accept it as a "useful tool" for communicating with others. Many Naga groups show strong resentment to the suggestion of sending their own children to learn Nagamese in school. If Nagamese as a subject is to be introduced in school at all, 93 per cent favour it as an optional subject and 92 per cent would like it to be taught in Roman script (and not in Devanagari). Some of the contradictory responses in the Survey lead us to reflect over the issues of the 'real' versus the 'apparent' reality in human behaviour. It, no doubt, presents a striking contrast of reality and its negation.

Several heterogeneous communities in Jharkhand and neighbouring States (Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa) also operate in a diglossic situation, conversing with their children in hybrid Sadan/Sadri and among adults in their ancestral language. Attempts to introduce Sadan in schools have met with limited success. Many tribal elites resent Sadan for education because of their 'low' estimation for the hybridized vernacular; they prefer to confine its use to informal and spoken domains, with Hindi or a regional vernacular (such as Bhojpuri, Maithili) as medium of education. The dilemma of accepting Hindi as a lingua franca on the national scene can also be understood in the light of the language identity and communication issues of Nagamese in many North-eastern states and of Sadani n the Jharkhand region.

Language Identity and Communication

A major factor contributing to the low claims to bilingualism in many linguistically pluralistic societies in India seems to be the conviction among many speech groups that knowledge of a contact language is associated with the ability to write that language in its prevalent script. Overlapping claims of Urdu (identified by Arabic script) and Hindi (identified by Devanagari script) made by nearly two million Hindi and Urdu natives in 1961 census is sound evidence in support of this tendency (for details, cf. Khubchandani 1983). [Tables to be attached]

To what extent this conviction can blur the bilingualism picture is evident from the claims of reporting Gurumukhi as a subsidiary language by Sindhi immigrants from Bombay Province in the 1951 Census. Sindhi is primarily written in Arabic script. But some Sindhi Hindus, especially women, read and write Sindhi in Gurumukhi script. Some people equate having this knowledge

of Gurumukhi script with acquiring another language. There is a widespread traditional conviction among many speech communities in India that associates the mastery of any additional script with the knowledge of another language. The Panjabi language is predominantly written in Gurumukhi script. Hence, Sindhi speakers' claims to know 'Gurumukhi' were interpreted in the census as knowing the 'Panjabi' language, and over two thousand Sindhi native speakers (mostly women) were shown claiming Panjabi as their primary contact language in the 1951 census, which is far from true (Khubchandani 1963).

Many such traditional convictions distort the objective account of bilingualism among the Indian population. The extent to which many contact languages are spoken or merely understood cannot be fully discerned through census returns. Hence, one has to accept these returns as presenting a rather conservative account of bilingualism. At the same time, these returns present a valuable picture of the attitudes of speakers and trends of social identification at a particular moment in time. In spite of their limitations, one cannot underestimate the importance of the data made available through these returns.

Census figures do not warrant assertions of accurate distinctions per se. With a critical evaluation one can detect many possible sources of bias (as the obsession with script in the case of distinguishing Hindi or Urdu, as discussed above). Barclay (1958) rightly asserts: "Demography is concerned with the behaviour of the aggregate, and not with the behaviour of individuals." Census data are useful for determining the representative locale for fieldwork, and for comparative studies of macro regions or other social aggregates.

A census would only lead to the politicization of an institutional trait like language if it is aimed at introducing compulsory shifts in the patterns of speech behaviour of a population, and the language identity data (providing the accounts of language image and/or language posture) are utilized for bringing mandatory changes in the language policy (Levy 1960).

The Holistic Approach

Language planning experts in developing countries have, by and large, been active in international, political and academic forums, and have not focused attention on the 'nitty-gritty' grassroots issues of plurilingual societies and oral cultures in an anthropological sense. Hence one does not find a coherent integration of language planning formulations as such. 'At a purely conceptual-theoretical level, is it any wonder, then, that we are even further away from closure in the status planning area in so far as applied sophistication is concerned?' (Fishman 1990).

Until now each discipline has arrived at a totality by aggregating or multiplying a single aspect, giving a fragmented picture of society, and failing to present a total view of life. The elitistic concerns of language planning remind us of the parable of the "Blind men and the Elephant".

In the pursuit of knowledge, the isolation of a phenomenon under study by controlling its variables has long been recognized as a legitimate means of enquiry, but when it comes to introducing drastic changes in human behaviour deliberately, then the enquiry, such as language planning, concerned with problem-solving or decision-making for a community or for a country, needs to be considered in a wider perspective and with an integrative holistic approach.