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MODERATOR'S REPORT

WORKSHOP 3

**Balance of the Current Sociolinguistic Research :
New Trends and New Paradigms ***

A six-hour Workshop, covering two days, provided a unique opportunity to bring into a close scrutiny some of the current sociolinguistic researches in the fields of language ecology, and language policy & planning, aimed at contributing to a *dialogue* on language diversity, sustainability and peace.

I. Presentations

Addressing the task to look for new paradigms in the rapidly changing scenario accelerated by globalization, twelve presentations in the Workshop were marked by varied approaches, supported by rich data analyzing specific situations. Moderator's opening remarks presented a review of the 'state-of-art' on language planning and language ecology particularly in the context of multilingual societies.

These studies critically assessed the programs dictated by various language policy-making agencies, at the same time, responding to the 'echo' pressures (ecological realities) on individual communities. Fishman (1990), reviewing developments in the field, has raised doubts about "the discipline being reasonably well-conceptually integrated": "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" ? Social and behavioral sciences are yet to develop sufficient conceptual tools with which to evaluate social planning strategies.

The presentations covered a vast canvas as varied as Israel, Canada, South Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea and many multilingual settings in the European Union discussing particular issues of legitimizing and revitalizing Catalan, Irish, Latvian and many languages of regional and immigrant minorities (such as Corsican, Sicilian, Frisian, etc). A remarkable feature of these studies has been that the data presented in the Workshop has utilized many

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innovative techniques, equipped with different orientations, to critically review the space-and-time-bound linguistic realities such as :

1) Scrutiny of policy documents, laws and legislations to critically assess the implementation of language policies in education for different sections of society in Israel. In contrast, linguistic landscapes in metropolitan settings, a bottoms-up display, portrays a different pattern of language use in the country (Elana Shohamy).

2) Computation of economic costs, resource allocations and distribution in meeting the demands of teaching foreign languages in multilingual situations such as Canada and Switzerland (Francois Grin).

3) Qualitative and quantitative surveys and questionnaires to assess the pace and direction of change in language attitudes and language postures, strategies for the programs of acquiring languages other than one's mother tongue, promoting language awareness and deconstructing the perceptions, myths, and stereotypes regarding one's 'own' and 'others' languages, as exemplified in the dynamics of Latvian-Russian in Latvia (Alja Preidite), of reviving Irish in Ireland (Padraig Regain), and concerning the language rights of ethnic and immigrant minorities in Europe (Giovanna Compani).

4) Examining the imperatives of language ecology through fieldwork and other anthropological methods to workout blueprints for language acquisition (applying the metaphors of architectural sketches) in multilingual settings, such as Creoles in New Caledonia and the Cook Islands (S. Ehrhart & C. Helot), and coping with language diversity in Catelonia, (Emili Boix).

5) Utilizing demolinguistic variables (such as age, etc.) to evaluate ongoing processes of normalization of traditional languages in Catelonia, Valencia, and the Basque country (T.Turell, R. Casesnoves & D.Sankoff).[1]

6) Debating the rational-ideological basis to account for ecolinguistic parameters to introduce deliberate changes in language (Nadege Lechevrel), and the rationale for introducing international language like Esperanto to meet the requirements of linguistic diversity (Abel Montagut).

[1.] At 2002 Linguapax Congress on Language Policies at Barcelona a Plenary was addressed by L. Khubchandani entitled "Demographic imperatives in language planning", critically assessing the issues of language development in plurilingual India.

II.

Second part of the Report reflects over a few concerns highlighted in the Workshop, giving some insights into a 'holistic' understanding of the complex multi-layered reality, which can help in tackling the issues of language communication, language identity, and language rights.

In a plurilingual interaction no single language caters to all the needs of the participant. Language in everyday life communication is a form of *dyadic* behavior, the *choice* of using a particular language, or a *creative blending* of different speech varieties, is determined by various institutional and pragmatic factors of identification (status, prestige, attitudes, etc).

In the realm of language policy-making and language planning we tend to 'perceive' languages in *monolithic* terms. Language revitalization and language rights movements also generally focus attention on monistic aspects of language A or language B. But in a plurilingual paradigm, we need to look at communication profiles in *relative* terms, responding in a unique manner to the *space-and time-bound* institutional imperatives, and not judging them as per the dictates of *universal* ideological standpoints (such as on language autonomy, language uniformity, language purity, etc). As a point of departure in the current debate, I enumerate below eight suggestions which merit serious consideration in contemporary sociolinguistic research.

1. Many thinkers have expressed alarm over the increasing globalization leading to cultural homogenization. It is largely felt that the *sustainable* development has to be diversity-friendly, with a thrust on the *quality* of life. In this context, multilinear characteristics of communication in everyday life focus attention to view language as an 'open-ended' ongoing process, a *live force* which remains in perpetual flux, in a state of *becoming*. This characteristic distinguishes it from the conventional notion of language as a 'ripened product', a crystallized *being*, conceived around normative entities as cultivated in school education.[2] Fluidity of language identity in plural societies and fuzziness in maintaining language boundaries (code-mixing, etc) in oral repertoires on a massive scale is becoming so primary that it has led modern societies to a new awareness of communication.

In most of the cases intervention from the   State in bringing about *deliberate* changes in language status and language use can be counted as a mixed blessing. Liberal

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[2.] Many physical scientists have also been debating over the methods for building a bridge from 'being' to 'becoming' (Prigogine 1980).

policy formulations satisfying certain nebulous ideological goals fall short on implementation. A critical assessment of language use in various domains in Israel reveals many aspects of hidden agenda and 'lip services'. There has been a great chasm between language 'allocation' and language 'implementation' in many other regions as well (particularly South Asian and southern African countries).

2. Language planning programs in the post-colonial phase have largely been ideology-driven and elite-sponsored. It is mainly the custodians of language who decide loftily what is 'good' for the masses, by the virtue of their hold on the socio-political and literary scene. "Common man, the *consumer* of LP programs, is present only by proxy — carrying the elite 'cross' " (Khubchandani 1983).[3]

   These characteristics i.e. role of State and of language elites, tend to make language identity, hitherto a *cultural* trait, more *political*. An implicit consensus over *stratificational* hierarchy of language use in traditional societies is giving way to a plethora of explicit corporate provisions of *legislative* hierarchy — such as, languages of the Constitution, state languages, national languages, Official or 'associate' Official languages (as in contemporary India). This development in the new order of pluralism has led to a radical shift in language identity, an upsurge away from a low-key *instrumental* role in a framework of stratificational pluralism, to a top-gear *defining* characteristic.

3. One significant casuality of these developments has been *monolingualism* in specific regions; the monopoly of one language dictating the concerns of a speech group (majority as well as minority) or of a nation is on the way out, or atleast it gets considerably diluted. Heterogeneous media threaten the *autonomous* functioning of different languages; individuals in a community have a greater access to diversified language choice and its content.

   Plural speech communities, by definition, cannot be "monogamous" in language use, and they tend to falter on the test of loyalty; whether it is to their *mother tongue*, to their

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3. c.f. Lachman Khubchandani, *Plural Languages, Plural Cultures: Communication, Identity and Sociopolitical Change in Contemporary India.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, East-West Center Book.

heritage language, or to their *mobility language.* In such a milieu, the prominent values of interaction, ways of interpreting, of sharing experiences, of thinking, known collectively as the *communication ethos*, are guided by *relevance.*

4. The relationship of language and nation needs to be examined in the pluralistic worldview, as envisaged in the Indian concept of *kshetra,*[4] when monitoring the concerns of 'heritage' and 'rights' of different speech communities. Distinctions between the categories such as majority/minority communities, strong/weak languages, or languages with a wide-spread or with a restrictive canvas need to be critically evaluated.

    With an upsurge of Information Technology, imbalances are created by which expansive and 'exploitative' communication networks are regarded as attributes of powerful 'strong' languages, and 'accommodating' and complementary communication networks are evaluated as powerless 'weak' languages. In a paradigm of *fair* communication, rising above petty interests and narrow loyalties in a transcendental sense, prestige and dignity (and not powerlessness) should go with the networks encouraging complementation, and not with those aspiring to promote exploitative and hegemonistic networks of communication on the local, national, regional and global scenes.

5. Language Planning theory at this stage seems to be largely concerned with language *problems,* paying little regard to the language *assets* in traditional speech communities representing rich oral cultures. One general concern of language planners seems to be "to adjust the speech behavior of a community to the demands of modernization". It is time we started looking at the possibility of adjusting the *values of communication*, and not just at the adjustment of human beings to fit the new demands. In order to counter the fractionalizing tendencies in these societies, it is essential to draw upon the traditional virtues of language tolerance and respect, promoted through language hierarchy, grassroots multilingualism, fluidity and fuzziness in speech behavior.

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[4.] The traditional Indian concept of region, that is *kshetra,* covers a wide spectrum of linguistic and cultural variation in everyday-life performance. It helps in fostering the feeling of oneness among diverse people in the region, creating in them a sense of 'collective reality'. The *kshetra* is markedly different from the modern Western model of *region* defined as a "cohesive and homogenous area" created by arbitrary selection of transient features such as religion, language, history (Khubchandani 1997 : 81-82).

6. During past four decades, language planning has indeed made a mark in establishing itself as a distinct field of enquiry. But so far the contribution of linguists in evaluating Language Planning processes in individual countries has been very much on the fringe. In the formative stages of a theory, one would expect more debate on the perspectives of language planning as a 'human phenomenon' and on the basic tenets with which the planning agencies concern themselves; such as the mechanisms of language choice, language standardization, and coining elaborate terminologies, and so on.

7. A convergence of perspectives, that other groups of people may have different basis from our own allows a general 'openness' for all kinds of concepts. This *plurality consciousness* raises the hope that in the final stage of unification many different cultural traditions may live together, and may combine different human endeavors into a new kind of *balance* between thought and deed, between activity and meditation. A noted scientist Heisenberg, Nobel Laureate in Physics, pleads: "Scientific pursuits, instead of being used as tools for competition and dominance, can be utilized as devices of complementarity and cooperation" (1959). In the new paradigm, the Global and the Local (i.e. the Universal and the Particular) are to be viewed as two sides of the same coin, rather than competing each other.

8. 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. 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 behavior *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.

Decisions in everyday life contain an inevitable element of irrationality. "The decision may be a *result* of deliberation, but at the same time *complementary* to deliberation; it excludes deliberation" (Heisenberg 1959). There must always be a fundamental complementarity between deliberation and decision". One would always have to act on insufficient evidence. The decision always rests on by pushing away all arguments, understood or not, and by cutting off all as a basis for action. In this sense, some real or *apparent* truth forms the basis of life.

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III. Concluding Remarks

The Workshop, inviting a re-appraisal of sociolinguistic research particularly focusing on multilingual societies, has been very timely. The Organizers need to be congratulated for providing a slot for such academic exercise to catch up with developments in the Information Society. It has indeed been a rich stimulating experience, collating different approaches in the field, to enable us to probe into different contours of language plurality in the diversified world.

Traditionally philosophers have been contesting over the   *primacy* of viewing language (i) as an instrument of communication (as in Bhartrhari, Wittgenstein, Durkheim), and (ii) as a vehicle of thought (as in Panini, DeCartes, Chomsky).

Pursuits of sustained development and peace in the strife-torn world have re-activated this philosophical debate over language being viewed as a mode of *action*, emphasizing the 'synergic' qualities of participation. In this perspective, human communications are seen as resting on two pillars: *power* and *trust.*

The experience of *living together* in a multilingual world, armed with new communication technologies, has brought a new scenario of 'haves' and 'have nots' in a digital divide. It is, therefore, necessary to give a clear expression not only to the *rights* of individuals and of speech communities belonging to smaller languages, but also to the *duties* of all concerned agencies (including dominating language groups such as those advocating global English) and the *obligations* of State and international forums (such as ours), so as to lead to a *holistic* understanding of the information society as such.

Experience of the developing world beckons us that a genuine understanding of plural societies through oral repertoires is largely guided by viewing language as a 'synergic' network inspiring *trust* in cross-cultural settings, along with the complementarity of *empowering* the 'particular'. This can have a significant bearing on a long-term view of the issues concerning the *quality* of human communication in a changing society.

A pluralist vigor in making policies for *fair play* in communication through the flowering of cultural diversity (as environmentalists' conviction for nurturing bio-diversity) will require a substantive shift in the concerns of social scientists to take seriously the fuzzy reality and transactive domains of lanague(s) as a *live force* in the contemporary milieu. Such a break

through is possible by stretching autonomy in the time-and-space bound reality as a manner of conviviality so that non-Western societies are not reduced to mere objects to be studied in terms of Western concepts and categories (often erroneously treated as universals !).

Language plays a crucial role in the reorganization of institutions and it is inseparable from such activities as planning, propaganda, and evaluation. The multiplicity of languages in a plural society, if handled with proper sensitivity, can lead to cohesion instead of generating friction as has been the bane of language politics in many developing countries during the post-colonial phase. In the light of this, looking for new paradigms in sociolinguistics can effectively arrest the trends of large-scale commodification and homogenization pertaining to language development and can make transparent the qualities of human communication in the emergent Information Society for an integral and sustainable development of humankind.

This is an *ethical* issue, a question of values, which the planners committed to the design for the new millennium have to resolve.

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