

Impact of Language Planning and Policy on Social Integration in Highly Diverse Societies: Lessons from Catalonia and India

By Swagata Basu

Language Planning and Language Policy (LPP) are the set of political decisions and laws that govern the use of one or more languages in different ambits such as education, media, administration, law, public spaces, art etc. in a given territory. (Ricento, 2006) These policies either promote or suppress certain languages in the territory governed by the policy. In the process of the emergence and consolidation of Western European nation-states LPP played a significant role. A common language and a common history were seen as justification for a unified national identity, therefore language policy tended to favour monolingualism, in the form of the promotion of a single language in all fields. Fishman (1973), Gellner (1983), Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1992), Susan Wright (2004). However, from the late twentieth century there has been a shift in the perspective of Western European nations with regards to policies that manage diversity. A discussion on diversity emerged as a response to managing cultural, religious and ethnic differences among people in a society, considered homogenous until large number of immigrants arrived. However, in reality the internal or historical diversity always existed within European nation-states, but they got more visibility in this new context. (Keating and McGarry, 2001). Thus, policies and laws have evolved to respond to the needs of a highly complex diversity.

Language Policy can be based on or can create Language Ideology, the world view that makes a certain language seem to be an unquestionable candidate for a particular use for a group. This ideology creates distinction between standard language and its variants, which are valued less and categorized separately as dialects. (Blommaert, 2006). The common notions that people in a linguistically diverse society hold, for example, that language A provides more opportunities and thus is more useful than language B, which is only suitable for use at home or personal space, are all part of language ideology. Language Planning and Policy (LPP) can perpetuate such ideologies further or they can undo unjust practices and ideologies when LPP is used for the language revitalization of minoritized languages. That is why LPP has a direct impact on social integration, as in one way or the other it determines what people feel about the languages they use in different ambits and the languages that other people use in those situations. Repression of the use of a language has been historically one of the most common way of humiliating and subjugating a people.

Both Spain and India are linguistically diverse countries. The constitutions of both the countries recognize the presence of different languages and relegate the regions the right to use their respective languages while giving one language the status of the official language across the country. In case of Spain it is Spanish and in case of India it is Hindi. But this hierarchy of languages in a linguistically diverse country has been questioned by certain sections of people in both the countries.

This article is an attempt to reflect upon the impact of LPP on Social Integration and the common challenges faced by linguistically diverse societies such as Spain or Catalonia and India. It is based upon the study of the language policy of the state and regional governments and field-based research in Barcelona conducted in the summer of 2018 by the author as part of her doctoral research.

LPP of Catalonia and its impact on its population with immigrant background

Catalonia's Multiple Diversity (Zapata-Barrero, 2015) and its complex situation as a state seeking nation provides an interesting and unique case study. Catalan language has been one of the main symbols of Catalan identity. There has been a history of repression of Catalan language during centralization, especially during Franco's dictatorship. Spain's 1978 constitution recognized the other languages of Spain as important cultural heritage of Spain and gave the regional governments the right to use their own language in addition to Spanish not in substitution. This language policy created a competitive framework (Elvira Riera Gil, 2016) in which regional languages are not promoted by the central Spanish state. Instead the governments of the autonomous communities with their own languages are given the responsibility to maintain and promote their languages which have historically been marginalized. Out of the seven Autonomous Communities which have recognized and given co-official status to their own language Catalonia, is the one to have made maximum progress in normalization of its own language. Normalization of Catalan language has been done through the Language Normalization Act, (1983). There has been constant effort by the Catalan government to use Catalan as the normal language of use in all possible contexts. It is one of the few examples in the world where *Language Shift* has been reversed (Fishman, 1991). The LPP of Catalonia is within the competitive framework of languages in Spain and thus has a defensive stance. Defense of the minority or vulnerable language has become responsibility of the Catalan govt. and the Catalan people. However, when foreigners are added in this context and they do not understand the competition existing in the country, this defensive attitude of

the Catalan people may be perceived as cultural chauvinism. Foreigners or immigrants who come to work in Catalonia are caught between the two languages as our study reveals. Some of the results are discussed below.

The Catalan Language (Basic 1 level) is almost¹ a requirement for gaining documents for undocumented migrants to gain residency in Catalonia. The Spanish Nationality or Citizenship requires knowledge of Spanish of A2 level. While residency and registration (*empadronamiento*) happens at a municipal level thus under the purview of the local government, the granting of documents such as residency and citizenship comes under the central government. The Catalan government dedicates its resources to Catalan language learning among immigrants while in reality the immigrant population tends to use Spanish as the common language.

In our study we conducted 34 questionnaires based in depth interviews (QBIDI) in Barcelona in the summer of 2018. The questionnaire had nearly 50 questions related to language, integration, identity, sense of belonging and language policy. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it allowed both quantitative and qualitative results. The researcher spoke to the respondents as they went through the survey and filled it allowing a free discussion on all the topics. Interviews were multilingual, using the language the respondent was most comfortable in among Spanish, English, Bengali and Hindi. Translations or explanations were provided whenever necessary.

20 of the respondents were from immigrant² background and 14 were host society members. We tried to understand the perception of both groups on the use of different languages and their feelings towards such use. Our study suggests that the perception of the two groups differ a lot on certain topics. This can be a potential source of social conflicts.

Both the groups acknowledged that the Catalan language helps in social integration for immigrants.

When asked the question “Do you think that foreigners/immigrants should learn the local languages in order to integrate into the society?” all 14 respondents of the host society say yes. When the immigrant respondents are asked “Do you feel it is important for everyone to know/learn a common

¹ The grant of permit to reside is issued based upon the concept of *arraigo*. Knowledge of Catalan Language is one of the points that prove *arraigo*. Thus it is not mandatory but immigrants tend to view it as a requirement.

² Immigrant in our study is defined as any foreigner who come to live and work in Spain or Catalonia. Foreigners are those who may come for a short period for travel, business or education.

language in order to live together and develop a sense of belongingness and solidarity in a society?” 16 out of 20 respond yes. 2 say it is important but not necessary. 2 say it is not important.

When asked “According to you, in Barcelona, which language/s should immigrants learn and use?” 13 out of 14 respondents said both Spanish and Catalan. When immigrant background respondents are asked “Which language plays the role of common languages in the society you belong to?” 16 out of 20 respondents said Spanish. Only two responded both Spanish and Catalan. One responded English and one responded Catalan.

When both the groups are asked “Do you believe that the presence of two languages in Catalonia makes the social integration for immigrants more difficult in comparison to other monolingual regions?” 11 out of 14 host society respondents said “No”. While 10 out of 20 immigrant background respondents said “Yes”, 8 said “No” and 2 said “Not sure”.

While host-society members sometimes believe that using Catalan with all members of society is normal and positive, in fact more inclusive as one is not making the other feel different based on their physical appearance, immigrant background people reported that they felt that those who use Catalan are more rigid. Some of the respondents reported that they feel integrated into Spanish society but not in Catalan society.

These results highlight the gaps between the perspective on languages between host society members and immigrant background members. Given the *supersdiversity* (Vertovec, 2007) of a city like Barcelona, in order to attain an intercultural model of social cohesion, interaction amongst the different groups are essential (Barrero, 2017). Language is thus a key factor for facilitating such interactions. These interactions would lead to a better mutual understanding between all the groups living together in a society and ultimately better integration amongst them.

Our study also reveals that within the host society members there is a deep sense of injustice, the feeling of not being respected and valued, amongst respondents because of the attitude of Spanish state towards the Catalan language and culture. 10 out of 14 respondents felt that “Language Policy is one of the factors that has caused conflicts between Spain and Catalonia”.

The general opinion of the Catalan people interviewed in our study is that in Spain very little is explicitly done by the central government to recognize, preserve or promote the diversity of Spain. Although proving this aspect is beyond the scope of this article at the moment.

LPP and Linguistic Diversity in India

Language Policy and Planning in India is intertwined with governance of a highly diverse country in linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnic terms. The magnitude of diversity present in India is incomparable to any country in Europe. India, like Spain, and unlike Catalonia, does not have a Language Policy Department. Apart from the constitution there are no laws and acts that govern use of languages. India is a federal country and the regional governments called state governments govern education, road transport, communications, police and media. Across India many languages are used as official languages of the state. The eight schedule of the constitution of India recognizes 22 official languages. The division of states have been done on linguistic grounds. Language, the use of Hindi as official language, use in education and as a requirement for government jobs, have caused several conflicts in India especially in the first few decades after the independence (Das, 2002). Since its independence the government has not conducted any linguistic survey. Language is a sensitive issue in India and a strong marker of identity within the country. The only official data available to talk about the number of languages spoken in India is the census held once in every 10 years which primarily tries to count mother-tongue, defined as the language used to speak to an infant by his/her mother. The British Government undertook the first Linguistic Survey of the Indian subcontinent. Known as Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India, 1905, the survey revealed about 300 languages. As per the census of 1961 there were 1,652 languages in India.

The method of counting the number of languages has changed in the census of different periods and gave very different figures. The Census of India, collects data on mother tongue by asking each respondent to specify his/her mother tongue. These are recorded as is by the information collector as is. "At the 2011 census, the number of such raw returns of mother tongues has totalled 19569" (Office of the Registrar General, 2011). Then a method is applied to rationalize this number. The method is explained in the census publication

The report states "Since mother- tongues as returned in the census are basically the designations provided by the respondents of the linguistic mediums in which the respondents think they communicate, they need not be identical with the actual linguistic mediums. For assessing the correlation between the mother tongue and designations of the census and for presenting the numerous raw returns in terms of their linguistic affiliation to actual languages and dialects, 19569 raw returns were subjected to thorough linguistic scrutiny, edit and rationalization. This resulted in 1369 rationalized mother tongues and 1474 names which were treated as 'unclassified' and relegated to 'other' mother tongue category. The 1369 rationalized mother tongues were further classified following the usual linguistic methods for rational grouping based on available linguistic information. Thus, an inventory of classified mother tongues

returned by 10,000 or more speakers are grouped under appropriate languages at the all India level, wherever possible, has been prepared for final presentation of the 2011 mother tongue data. (Office of the Registrar General, 2011).

The total number of languages arrived at is 121, these are all big languages because languages with speakers' strength of less than 10,000 are not counted as languages. Those languages are classified as mother tongues and total 270. Basically various small languages are grouped under one of the 22 official languages of the eighth schedule of the constitution of India. The highest number of languages grouped under one language is the case of Hindi. More than 50 languages are grouped under Hindi. While a simple test of intelligibility will reveal that most of these 50 languages have no reason to be counted as Hindi. They are spoken in different regions with their own history, culture and identity. Not only do they have large number of speakers, many of them also have big and flourishing media and entertainment industries as well as literature.

Hindi, the official language according to the constitution is no doubt one of the most widely spoken languages in India but the census data clearly decreases the real diversity of languages and count more number of people as Hindi speaker than actually exists. In every state of India one big language, stands and dominates over several other minority languages, many of which are endangered. The 22 languages specified in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India are given in Part A and languages other than those specified in the Eighth Schedule (numbering 99) are given in Part B of the census report.

A more nuanced understanding of the diversity of languages in India can be found in a work led by an NGO called Bhasha Research³ headed by G.N. Devy which is called *People's Linguistic Survey of India*. This survey gives a figure of 780 languages. It does not try to count the number of speakers but makes a map of the presence of the languages in different regions in India. The survey points out how languages die when the speech community is forced to shift out of its original zone due to socio-economic reasons (Lalmalsawma, 2013). While it is true that a large number of languages in India needs attention, especially languages of tribal communities, who very way of life is threatened, the government has yet to come up with concrete measures to stop this. With the death of these languages valuable knowledge systems are vanishing as well.

In spite of this India offers many examples of respecting linguistic diversity that could be applied elsewhere. Most Indians regularly use more than one language in their day to day life

³ See <https://www.bhasharesearch.org/peoples-linguistic-survey-of-the-india.html>

thus multilingualism in practice is common and well accepted. The Parliament of India is multilingual. Ministers can use their own language in all proceedings, with the help of continuous translation. It is not only permitted but also practiced. The central government funds the promotion of languages and cultures of all the states. Sahitya Akademi, funded by central government promotes literature in all scheduled languages, funds translation projects between the different languages of India, gives awards to writers from different languages. Similarly, the *National Awards*, given by the President of India regularly recognize regional culture such as cinema in different languages. Schools and colleges in the capital city offers many of the regional languages. Thus, students do have the option of learning their mother-tongue in school even if they study outside the region of its use. The states use their own language in administration, education, signage in public places and transport along with English which is the lingua franca across India. Politician use the local languages in their speeches and political manifestos.

Conclusion

Although the reality of India, Spain and Catalonia are so different that comparisons and generalizations are difficult. This article stems from the simple fact that I am a researcher from India researching LPP in Catalonia and Spain. It is natural therefore for me to observe how things are done differently in these different situations. I believe that the non-recognized minority languages in India can learn from Catalonia, how to revitalize and normalize a previously marginalized language, the importance of Linguistic Surveys and Language Policy in the process and the importance of a sense of pride in using one's own language in all context. The thing that is common in all the cases is that language is not just a means to communicate but a symbol of one's identity. Thus a diverse society needs to figure out how to balance two parallel needs: the need for a common language to communicate with others, and the need of an individual to use his/her own language (even if the other does not understand).

Works Cited

- Anderson, Benedict (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Barrero, R. Z. (2017), "Interculturalism in the post-multicultural debate: a defence". *Comparative Migration Studies*, 5, 14.
- Blommaert, Jan. (2006), "Language Policy and National Identity", In Ricento, Thomas. *An introduction to Language Policy. Theory and Method*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Das, A. K. (2002), "Language Conflict in India". *Journal of Philology*, No. 2(10), 20-23.
- Fishman, J. (1973), *Language and nationalism. Two integrative essays*. Rowly Mass: Newbury House.
- Gellner, Ernest (1983), *Nations and Nationalism*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Gill, Elvira Riera (2016), *Why Languages Matter to People*. Generalitat de Catalunya. Institut d'Estudis de l'Autogovern. Barcelona Pg. 36
- Hobsbawm, Eric (1992), *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. Programme, Myth, Reality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Keating, Michael and McGarry, John. (2001) *Minority Nationalism and the changing International Order*. Oxford University Press.
- Lalmalsawma, D. (2013, September 7). India speaks 780 languages, 220 lost in last 50 years – survey. Reuters. Retrieved from <http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2013/09/07/india-speaks-780-languages-220-lost-in-last-50-years-survey/>
- Office of the Registrar General. (2011). Census of India 2011, Language. Paper 1 of 2018 (). New Delhi: Government of India. Retrieved November 2019, from http://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/C-16_25062018_NEW.pdf
- Ricento, T. (2006). *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). "Super-diversity and its implication". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1024-1054. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599465>
- Wright, Susan (2004), *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.