

Variations in National Language Policy

We'll look at the role of political efforts in setting up national languages in 5 different cases. I'll be handling Indonesia and southern Africa

Indonesia:

- About 250 languages and dialects prevalent
- Javanese is the mother tongue of a population of 40 million (out of 100 million)
- Other languages like Sudanese, Madurese and Balinese not as prevalent
- Yet Bahasa was imposed on the populace by the Indonesian elite
- Based on Malay which is spoken by a minority of 6 million
- Chosen because of ease of learning and few implications of social superiority (because it was a relatively unknown language, the ground for language rivalry was weakened) (eg. If Javanese was chosen it would alienate speakers of the other major tongues).
- When the Japanese landed in 1942, they suppressed the Dutch language, the official language then (from which Bahasa borrowed).
- This gave rise to the use of Malay for official use, which also made it a symbol of national unity.
- Nationalist leaders had been looking to push for a national language since 1926 and the brief Japanese occupation served as the impetus for Bahasa to become the national language.

Differences b/w Malay and Indonesian:

1. Malay went from Arabic letters to Roman alphabet with English and Dutch influences. But Indonesian borrows from Dutch more heavily and Dutch-ifies existing words, e.g.- Initially tj was used for the [tʃ] sound in Indonesian (similar to Dutch) while ch is used instead in Malay (as in English) as in chuchu meaning 'grandchild'. Malay has televisyen (based on the English word television) but Indonesian has the word televisi (based on the Dutch word televisie). (Unified spelling system in 1972 changed them both to c, hence making it cucu).
2. Words are pronounced as spelled in Indonesian while tone matters in Malay. Indonesian is also spoken at a faster pace while vowels can be pronounced differently in Malay.

Why Bahasa Indonesian is easy to learn?

- No hard words like some words in English, e.g.- faux, choir
- Has a lot of loan words so it's easy for speakers of English, Dutch etc.
- No modifiers needed for tenses (root form of verbs are used) and markers for time aren't always used. Dia berbicara kemarin (He talked yesterday) berbicara-talk kemarin-yestersay
- There are no difficult phonemes in Bahasa and phonemes at different positions in a word are pronounced similarly e.g.- [ð] like in 'this' and [θ] like in 'thing' can't be pronounced properly by Indonesians and is replaced by [t], [d] or [s]. [tʃ] and [dʒ] are also pronounced differently (pronounced as palatal stops).

- There are no articles and nouns don't have gender.

South Africa:

- Contrasting case of extreme linguistic variety.
- 800 different tongues and dialects are spoken in South Africa, none which enjoys significant majority or tradition.
- Even at places where Swahili and Hausa are spoken, the percentage of people doing so is no more than 8%.
- Many of these languages have no written form
- In Ghana itself, a place having 6.5 million people, there are 100 tongues.
- Political discussions at the parliamentary level take place in foreign languages with indigenous languages being used for the same at places other than the centre, e.g.- in the Northern Rhodesia elections in 1962, the polling took place in 6 indigenous languages. This led to a lot of confusion as not all of the candidates understood the difficulties arising due to linguistic differences in polls
- Because of no single language being socially superior, the former colonial languages are still dominant in the political sphere. The only language common to many people is English and even that is used only by the educated minority.
- This led to the usage of pidgins, i.e.- languages that develop when two groups have no language in common. These draw from the languages of both groups and are an amalgamation of sorts., e.g.- West African English Pidgin, formed due to interaction b/w African and British slave traders in the western part of Africa ("Mary it" means Mary ate where it and ate are similar)

Now Mukund will touch upon similar linguistic situations in South Asia.