

Language Planning in India

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Abstract

This note explores India's linguistic diversity from a language policy perspective i.e. Language planning in India, emphasizing on policies such as the 3 language formula. Planning and development of the languages of such a multilingual and pluricultural country as India is being done in different ways following different extensive methods. The field has faced and posed many challenges. Thus, analysing policies such as the 3 language formula, gives us a deep insight in the workings and history of language planning in India

Introduction

First, it is important to understand the key terms in our context of discourse. 'Official language' usually refers to a language in which the government functions, and in which all government services are typically available by law. For example, Singapore has four official languages (Malay, English, Mandarin Chinese and Tamil). Any engagement you have with the government can be in any of these languages. 'National language' is more general, and refers to any language that has some special status within the nation. In Singapore, Malay is designated as the only national language, being the indigenous language there.

If we look at the current language policy of India, it has an official language (Hindi), a co-official language (English) for non-Hindi speaking states and 22 scheduled languages (representing 90% on Indian population). Interestingly enough, there exists no national language in India which has some special status within the nation.

Now, though the teaching of Hindi across the country was part of a long-standing system, it was crystallised into a policy in an official document only in the National Policy on Education, 1968. The 3 Language Formula (TLF) as enunciated in the 1968 NPE is:

“At the secondary stage, State governments should adopt and vigorously implement the three-language formula, which includes the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States.”

Moreover, on the promotion of Hindi, it also stated that

“Every effort should be made to promote the language and that in developing Hindi as the link language, due care should be taken to ensure that it will serve, as provided for in Article 351 of the Constitution, as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of

India. The establishment, in non-Hindi States, of colleges and other institutions of higher education which use Hindi, as the medium of education should be encouraged”.

Need for the Formula

The first recommendation for a three-language policy was made by the University Education Commission in 1948–49, which did not find the requirement to study three languages to be an extravagance, citing the precedents of other multilingual nations such as Belgium and Switzerland.

While accepting that Modern Standard Hindi was itself a minority language, and had no superiority over others such as Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, Bengali, Punjabi, Malayalam, and Gujarati all of which had a longer history and greater body of literature, the UEC still foresaw Hindi as eventually replacing English as the means by which every Indian state may participate in the Federal functions.

The 1986 National Policy and the new Drafts on Education written by K. Kasturirangan’s committee (2019) still reiterates the 1968 formula.

The National Education Policy 2019 without question rests on the policy followed since 1968 which, it recommends,

“will be continued, keeping in mind the Constitutional provisions and aspirations of the people, regions, and the Union.”

But it also admits (4.5.6) it needs to be implemented “in spirit” implying that it has not been so implemented till now for which it politely reminds the Hindi speaking states of their bigger responsibility. .

Thus the current policy fulfills the linguistic interests of dominant ethnic communities in India. However, has met with a lot of political opposition, mainly from the state of Tamil Nadu.

Implications

The political leaders in some parts of the country like Tamil Nadu, were quick to dub the proposal as an attempt to impose Hindi on the unwilling State. It has been following the two-language formula for many decades, under which only English and one regional language are compulsory in schools.

C.N Annadurai, the CM of Tamil Nadu said,

"What serves to link us with the outside world is certainly capable of rendering the same service inside India as well. To plead for two link languages is like boring a smaller hole in a wall for the kitten while there is a bigger one for the cat. What suits the cat will suit the kitten as well."

He was willing to adopt the formula in Tamil Nadu only on the condition that all other states of India too would adopt it.

The southern states like Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, and Tripura were not ready to teach Hindi, and Hindi-speaking states did not include any south Indian language in their school curriculum. Kiren Rijiju added that the states had interpreted the formula in different ways and so its implementation was uneven.

“Only some states accepted the three-language formula in principle. Others made some adjustments and some changed it to an extent that it became impossible to implement it,”

the Union home ministry said. The central government formulated the policy in 1968 with the objective of schools teaching a modern Indian language, preferably from south India, apart from Hindi and English in Hindi-speaking states. In other states, the languages to be studied were Hindi, the local language and English.

Though TLF provides scope for mother tongue language education, the emphasis is lost due to varied implementation. Amidst asserting political rights of dominant ethnic groups, the TLF fails to protect various mother tongues from becoming extinct.

TLF even today requires several modifications which are yet to be acknowledged and implemented by the government.

Recommendations

Some of the recommended changes include a redefined formula where the first language is the mother tongue, second language is English and the third language is an Indian language of the learner's choice (listed in the list of official regional scheduled languages and Indian Constitution)

The schools should be granted autonomy to choose the first (mother tongue) and the third (other Indian) languages, as per language preferences of the students enrolled in the school. Process of adding languages to the scheduled-language list must not solely have a political orientation.

The new three-language policy for pedagogic purposes will allow Indian languages in educational institutions to co-exist without being limited by nationalist and subnationalist sentiments and language loyalties. Keeping in mind migration and increasing ethnic mobility within India, the government must allocate funding for research and development of mother language pedagogy.

A revised TLF will ensure that minority languages are protected from extinction.

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