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Author(s): S. L. Doshi and D. S. Purohit

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Social Aspects of Language

Rajasthan's Multilingual Situation

S L Doshi

D S Purohit

Rajasthan has no common regional language. The people speak some 20 different dialects. The speakers of each of these dialects constitute a distinct cultural sub-group.

This article examines how these sub-groups have adjusted themselves to the multilingual situation and solved the problems of communication. The study is based on a survey of college and school students, college teachers and parents in Udaipur city.

The data reveal that the speakers of different Rajasthani dialects have solved the problems arising from multilingualism by turning increasingly to Hindi not only for communication with members of other dialect-groups but even within the same group. Hindi, it is found, is preferred to the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges and even for communication within the family and the kin group.

In this situation any attempt to evolve a common 'Rajasthani' language as the regional language for the whole State is wholly pointless. By raising the issue of the relative weightage of the different dialects in the common 'Rajasthani' language, it may reactivate tensions between the different dialect-groups and reverse the present trend towards adjustment and harmony through the use of Hindi.

LANGUAGE, besides being a medium of communication, has a bearing on the status and prestige of groups and is an instrument of group formation and group adjustment. It is in this perspective that the multilingual situation in Rajasthan has been studied here. Though our findings relate to Udaipur city, the generalisations have some validity for the whole of Rajasthan.

ADJUSTMENT AND INTEGRATION

The present State of Rajasthan was made up of 22 native States each of which had its own distinct dialect and was a specific cultural sub-group. After their integration efforts have been made to bring together the different Rajasthani dialects and to label them as a single 'Rajasthani' language. The case for a single language for the whole State is made on the basis of the need to establish effective communication links between the different cultural sub-groups and to foster integration among them. Without such integration, it is feared, Rajasthani society would remain only politically integrated.

Among the dialects of Rajasthan the more important are Mewari, Marwari, Haroti, Dhundhari and Mewati. They remain media of communication and form the basis of cultural sub-groups characterised by different dress and food patterns, religious and ritual idiom and traditions. The questions that arise are :

(1) How does a person living in a

multilingual society adjust to the other linguistic groups?

(2) Will 'Rajasthani', if given the status of a regional language for the whole State, be able to integrate the different social sub-structures into a single cultural whole? And what will be the mechanism of tension management?

Our study covers a group of students in Udaipur who are assumed to be exposed to adjustment problems related to the medium of instruction in the educational institutions and the means of communication within the family and in social life. The sample consists of 140 students belonging to primary (40), middle and higher secondary (50) and college (50) standards. As the problem also concerns teachers and parents of students, a sample of 100 teachers and guardians was also covered. In all 240 persons were administered the schedule and interviewed. Fieldwork was done in the year 1967-68.

INCORPORATE TWENTY DIALECTS

The languages spoken in Rajasthan fall within the Aryan sub-family of the Indo-European family of languages. The 1951 Census report compiled a list of 33 dialects in Rajasthan. Of the 33, 9 are non-Indian and of the rest some 20 are local dialects and are named after the parts of the State where they are mainly spoken. 'Rajasthani', if it is to be a regional language, would have to incorporate these 20

dialects spoken in different parts of the State.

THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA

The fear has been expressed that if Hindi is given the status of the national language, regional languages and along with them regional cultures would weaken. So, it has been argued, along with propagating Hindi as the national language, the regional languages should also be encouraged. This approach has resulted in the three-language formula. But one has only to look at the language situation in Rajasthan to realise that the problem is far more difficult than is suggested by the national language-regional language dichotomy. Implementation of the three-language formula in Rajasthan raises the following questions:

(1) If Hindi is to be both the national language and the regional language for Rajasthan, what will happen to the different linguistic groups in the State?

(2) If, on the other hand, a composite language, 'Rajasthani', is recognised as the regional language, how will the different dialects be integrated?

So either the cultures of the different linguistic groups of Rajasthan have to be suppressed and merged with the culture-system of the country as a whole or the different linguistic groups have to pass through a process of cultural synthesis so as to bring forth a 'Rajasthani' language and an integrated Rajasthani culture.

The geographical distribution of the major dialects is as follows :

Dialect	Regions of the State
(1) Marwari	Marwar, Bikaner and Jaisalmer
(2) Haroti	Bundi, Kota, Sahapura and Jhalawar
(3) Mewati	Alwar
(4) Brija	Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karoli
(5) Bagri or Vagari	Banswara, Dungarpur, Sirohi and Pratagarh
(6) Dhundhari	Jaipur
(7) Mewari	Mewar

The 20 dialects enumerated in the Census can be grouped into the above seven cultural sub-groups. These groups have in course of time developed their own individuality, communicable through their dialect. We term these seven sub-groups as dialect-sub-culture-groups.

DOMINANT PLACE FOR MARWARI

Marwari is spoken by the largest number of persons, 4,171,253, followed by Mewari (1,981,531), Dhundhari or Jaipur (1,560,761), Bagri or Vagari (923,818) and Haroti (815,191). The dialects Rathi, Mewati and Dhado have comparatively fewer number of speakers. Bhili and Girasiya, which are the dialects of the aboriginals, are spoken by 256,273 and 18,803 people, respectively. Thus it is evident that in a composite 'Rajasthani' language for the whole State, Marwari will occupy a dominant place.

Our sample consists of school students, college students, teachers and parents. Out of 140 students from primary school to college level, 86 or 61.4 per cent speak Hindi within the family and 25 or 17.8 per cent speak Rajasthani dialects. Thus Hindi is spoken in the family by more persons than Rajasthani dialects. This study is confined to the region of the Mewari dialect. But of 71 students, whose mother-tongue is Mewari, 23 (32.4 per cent) speak only Mewari and the rest use it along with Hindi. Evidently even those whose mother-tongue is Mewari prefer using Hindi to Mewari. At the college level only 33.3 per cent of the students whose mother-tongue is Mewari speak Mewari; this percentage is, however, much higher at

the middle and high school level (73.6 per cent). What is interesting is that it is at the primary level that the percentage is lowest (8.8 per cent). The generation now in primary school evidently prefers to speak Hindi in the family, indicating that even families in which Marwari was spoken as the mother-tongue till recently are gradually changing over to Hindi.

Answers to the question — would you like to marry in your own linguistic group or outside it? — reveal that out of 150 college students, teachers and parents (we intentionally excluded from the sample students below the college level), 68.7 per cent wanted to marry within their own linguistic group. Parents fear communication difficulties if they married their children into other linguistic groups. With marriage within the same linguistic group, adjustments in food, festivals and ceremonies and general styles of life are made easily by the daughter-in-law in the new family. One of the informants said: "with marriage outside the linguistic group, you have to observe the rituals of both the groups. Where is the money and the time to do all this?". Those who had no objection to marriage outside their own linguistic groups numbered 47 or 31.3 per cent of the sample. They are conscious of the problems of adjustment, but argue that these are not likely to be insurmountable, especially when the girls are educated.

PREFERENCE FOR HINDI

A sample of 50 parents was administered the question about the language in which they would like their children to be taught. None of the parents wanted the medium of instruction to be their mother-tongue; 38 per cent wanted their children to be taught through Hindi and 52 per cent through both Hindi and English. Four per cent of the parents wanted English to be the medium of instruction, 2 per cent Hindi and Sanskrit and another 2 per cent wanted Hindi, English and Sindhi.

We now turn to our findings about the use of Rajasthani dialects in communication with persons outside the family and kin group. In a sample of 50 primary, middle and higher secondary students who have Rajasthani dialects as their mother-tongue, 66.6 per cent use Hindi for communicating with equals and friends. Among college students in a sample of 36, 63.8 per cent whose mother-tongue is one

of the Rajasthani dialects speak to their friends in Hindi. Among teachers the percentage of those who use Hindi is 75.5.

Rajasthan has a few Hindi daily newspapers, but none in any of the Rajasthani languages or English. Out of the 50 parents surveyed, 43 read Hindi newspapers, 3 English, 2 both Hindi and English, one Hindi and others and one did not read any newspaper. Thus adjustment to Hindi is facilitated because 86 per cent of the parents read Hindi newspapers. Teachers and college students were also asked about their preferences in newspapers. Out of 50 teachers, 60 per cent read only Hindi newspapers and the rest read both Hindi and English papers. As for college students, 33 per cent read only Hindi newspapers, 54 per cent read both Hindi and English papers and 12 per cent read only English papers.

TENTATIVE HYPOTHESES

We had begun with two questions: how are social adjustments made in the multilingual situation of Rajasthan? And how can a common 'Rajasthani' language be given the status of a regional language for the whole State? On the basis of the data collected in our study the following hypotheses may be formulated, though they need to be tested against data covering a wider area:

(1) Adoption of a common 'Rajasthani' language as the regional language will create tension in relations between the different linguistic groups. Since there is no 'Rajasthani' language, it will have to be a mixture of the various dialects. So far no attempt has been made to bring about a synthesis of the different dialects. At present each one of the dialects — like Mewari, Marwari, Bagri, Sonawadi, Haroti, Mewati and Dhundhari — is known as Rajasthani. Marwari occupies a dominant position among the dialects since it has the largest number of speakers. A good deal of the literature is also in Marwari. The two monthly journals published from Jodhpur and Bikaner are in Marwari. Finally, the dominant position of Marwari also reflects the dominance of the Marwari sub-culture group. So if any attempt is made to evolve a common 'Rajasthani' language for the whole State it will be Marwari which will actually come to be the regional language. This fear has already generated tensions. The same would happen

if instead of Marwari some other dialect were to be given the status of the regional language.

(2) A separate regional language will weaken the integration of Rajasthan with Indian society as a whole. Our study reveals that there is ready acceptance of Hindi for communication, for education and for other purposes. This facilitates Rajasthan's integration with Indian society. If, on the other hand, a 'Rajasthani' language is adopted as the regional language, this process of integration will be hampered and regional feelings may be strengthened.

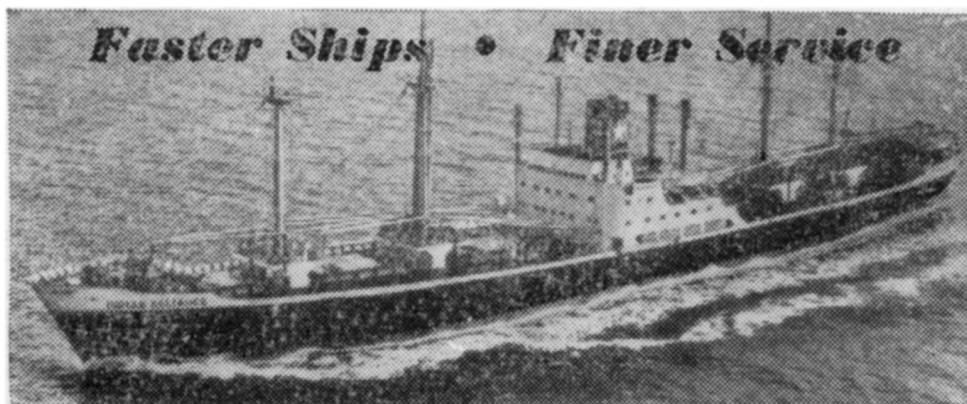
(3) A language is symbolic of the culture-content of the group to which the speaker belongs. The language of a backward section of society would not be spoken by a higher group. A Brahmin in Wagada who speaks Vagadi would not, for instance, speak Bhili, the language of the tribals. Further, we found that within a linguistic group itself a person does not like to speak his mother tongue as that marks

him out as being 'backward' and 'conservative'. A very common trend among all Rajasthani dialect groups is that members feel it a mark of inferiority to speak in their mother-tongue. Speaking in English or Hindi gives one status and prestige. English or Hindi is invariably preferred to Mewari or Marwari, especially for official purposes. Officials feel shy to use their Rajasthani mother-tongue. Their language is English or Hindi and their children are trained to speak in Hindi or English and to forget their mother-tongue for good. The language of the elites is Hindi or English. For common people the reference group is the elites and so the language spoken by the latter naturally becomes a reference language; there is, therefore, among the younger generation a marked trend in favour of using Hindi as the medium of communication.

There are seven linguistic groups in Rajasthan which also constitute seven sub-culture groups. These cultures have in the past shown marked dif-

ferences in their food and dress habits, their patterns of life and their festivals and rituals. But our study shows that Rajasthan is steadily moving toward unilingualism with Hindi becoming the medium of communication between dialect groups and even within the same dialect group.

In the circumstances, the quest for a 'Rajasthan' language to be the regional language for the whole State is pointless. It might even generate unnecessary tensions since an attempt to evolve a 'Rajasthani' language as the regional language would inevitably result in the dominance of Marwari at the cost of the other dialects. In any case, the vocabulary of the Rajasthani dialects is more than 60 per cent Hindi and so it is logical for speakers of all the dialects to accept Hindi as the common regional language. Along with the movement from Rajasthani dialects to Hindi, the erstwhile pronounced differences between the dialect-sub-culture-groups are also disappearing.



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