DIGLOSSIA IN DYING LANGUAGES: A CASE STUDY OF GUYANESE BHOJPURI AND STANDARD HINDI[1]

Surendra K. Gambhir
University of Pennsylvania

Abstract. This paper presents a comparison of the diglossic relationship between Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi with the original concept of diglossia given in Ferguson (1959).[2] It is argued here that the Guyanese Bhojpuri-Standard Hindi diglossia has been only partially developed. In the present wake of their replacement by Guyanese Creole and Standard English in most of the domains, it seems that the "higher" counterpart of the diglossia has chances of limited survival but the "lower" language is heading for a sure death.

1. Guyanese Bhojpuri is the name given to the koine that developed from all the Indic dialects that East Indian immigrants brought to British Guiana (now Guyana) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Guyana, however, East Indians are not familiar with the term Bhojpuri (also known as Bhojpuriyā) on which the koine is based. Instead, they call their language Hindi or Hindustani. They may also employ the term Puraniyā Hindi *old Hindi* in order to distinguish it from Standard Hindi. Their reason for calling it Puraniyā Hindi is not that it is more ancient than the other but that it was spoken by the oldest members in the society and the preceding generations.

Guyana has a multiethnic society comprised of East Indians, blacks, Chinese, Portuguese, and Amerindians. East Indians, the largest ethnic group, are about 55 percent of the total population and blacks, the next largest group, are about 35 percent. Although East Indians of the Caribbean in general, and of Guyana in particular, have been able to maintain their sociocultural unity, they shifted to the Guyanese Creole and English as their natural choice in communication. The process of language replacement started about two generations ago in the 1920s (Gambhir 1981:4). Today, in the Indo Guyanese speech community, Guyanese Bhojpuri is used in a very limited way by members of the oldest generation. Younger generations are passing through a gradual loss of their ability to speak Guyanese Bhojpuri. As far as Standard Hindi is concerned, it never enjoyed the breadth of functions to begin with. Most Indians had only a passive knowledge of Standard Hindi, and those who knew it actively had only an imperfect control of it.

2. Broadly speaking, the social functions carried out by Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi are in complementary distribution.[3] While Guyanese Bhojpuri is used by members of the

oldest generation in folk songs, and in a limited way at home, with friends, old servants, and children, Standard Hindi is employed in religious rituals, in books, and in a limited way in personal letters. Standard Hindi is the sole language used in Indian movies which are so popular in Guyana. Movie watching, however, does not reflect active competence of viewers. Broadly speaking, the distribution in the present case is binary along the lines of formal and informal functions. A natural corollary of this kind of binary relationship is the question: can we call the functional and structural relationship between Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi a diglossic one?

3. Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi diglossia. In order to describe the language situation at hand, let us apply Ferguson's criteria to the Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi situation in Guyana and see how far the sociolinguistic and structural relationship between these two languages fits into his originally provided framework. To accomplish this, I have reorganized Ferguson's factors and subfactors into six major categories: Demography, Acquisition, Sociolinguistic Distribution, Literary Heritage, Linguistic Features, and Stability. Under these categories are the subcategories which differentiate the "lower" variety from the "higher" variety.

The following table sums up Ferguson's concept of diglossia and its applicability to the Guyanese Bhojpuri-Standard Hindi situation in Guyana. Column 3 sums up the original concept and column 4 shows how the subcategories apply to the situation in Guyana today.

3.1. Demography. While the higher variety is limited to the elites who use it in formal domains, the lower variety is used by almost everybody in informal domains. A careful analysis brings out clearly that the actual population involved in diglossia, that is, using the higher variety in formal domains and the lower variety in informal domains, is a very limited one. While some elites may use the higher variety in both the domains, there is a majority who are not in control of the higher variety and thus use the lower variety in formal and informal domains. In formal domains, however, it is likely that some of the nonelites, who are socially more conscious, would try to incorporate some syntactic and lexical features of the higher variety in their speech. Their success would depend, however, on their previous exposure to the higher variety and their ability to activate their passive competence in the higher variety.

In Guyana, there were few literates in the immigrant population of indentured laborers, and virtually no one who could be called an elite. There was no class distinction in the immigrating labor force. There were, however, members of the priestly class who used Standard Hindi in conducting religious activities as they do up to this day. In addition, the official interpreters and the English supervisors in the plantations used Standard Hindi with the immigrants in the early decades of Indian immigration (Nath 1950:222).

TABLE

ORIGINAL CONCEPT AND THE GUYANESE BHOJPURI-HINDI DIGLOSSIA

	Diglossia			
	Classical		Guyanese Bhojpuri Speech Community	
Demography	L	H	L	H
Population involved	almost total	elite	oldest generation only	limited elite
Acquisition				
Learning mode	natural	formal	natural	formal
Order of acquisition	first	second	first	second
Competence	full	less than full	full	less than full
Sociolinguistic Features				
Language domains	informal	formal	informal	formal
Prestige	low	high	low	high
Use in Ordinary Conversation	extensive	limited	limited	nil
Use in Writing	limited	extensive	nil	extremely limited
Literary Heritage				
Tradition	folk	classical	folk	classical
Written Language	limited	large	nil	large
Contemporary Literary Production	limited	sizable	nil	nil
Tradition of Grammatical Study	no	yes	no	yes
Linguistic Features				
Grammatical Categories	lesser	more	lesser	more
Variation	extensive	limited	limited	limited
Phonology	basic system	sub/para system	basic system	para system
Lexicon	shared cognates		shared cognates	

Use of the lower variety, on the other hand, was very extensive and covered the whole of the Indo Guyanese society. In the early stages, the immigrants used their different dialects, and later the koine (Gambhir 1981). The current situation is, however, different and the Indic languages are being replaced. The current oldest generation, those sixty years and above, preserves an active competence in Guyanese Bhojpuri; the second generation, however, those thirty to fifty-nine years of age, possesses only a passive competence in Guyanese Bhojpuri; and the third generation has lost both active and passive competence in Guyanese Bhojpuri. This is a picture of gradual language death, which is being brought about not by the extinction of its speakers, but by gradual language replacement. The relationship between age of speaker and level of competence in Guyanese Bhojpuri suggests that Guyanese Bhojpuri was actively used by the Indo Guyanese community at a time when the present second generation was in its childhood. People still remember that several decades ago, street vendors used to shout kelā kīno kalkatte vālā *buy bananas from Calcutta* and gari dūdiyā nariyar ke *milky white coconut* for selling their items.

3.2. Acquisition. In considering the acquisition of Standard Hindi, it must be stated that formal education in the language was not available in Guyana. Those who are literate in Hindi usually learned the skills from other individuals in order to read religious texts or to conduct their religious profession. Since Standard Hindi is part of the passive competence of all Guyanese Bhojpuri speakers (Gambhir 1981:293), learning of Standard Hindi was not in terms of grammatical rules and concepts as suggested by Ferguson, who claims that "the grammatical structure of H is learned in terms of rules and norms to be imitated" (1959:9). In situations in which the two languages in question are linguistically related, and the passive competence of the higher variety is also a part of the repertoire of the speakers of the lower variety, what is really required in order to learn the H, is the activation of the rules already passively known. In the case of the east Indian community in Guyana, however, it may be stated that very few ever learned Standard Hindi formally, or commanded it well. The question of the acquisition of Hindi is also directly related to the fact that Hindi is a receding language and people have little motivation in learning it or speaking it better.

3.3. Attitudes. In order to find out how Guyanese Bhojpuri speakers feel about their language vis-à-vis Standard Hindi, I initiated conversations with several speakers that centered around the use of Puraniyā Hindi. In such a context, some speakers illustrated the higher and lower forms of speech. One speaker named Mahadeo[4] spoke of three different bolis *language varieties* that were in vogue in Guyana. He described them as uttam *superior*, madhim *medium*, and nīc or halluk *low*. From his examples, it clearly emerged that the more the speech had elements typical of Bhojpuri, the more it was regarded as lower in terms of elegance. Conversely, speech became more elegant with

the introduction of elements that were reported as belonging to Standard Hindi. A few of his examples along with his ratings are given below:

(1) a. ham roj nikerī jāyā kare hɛ — uttam
I daily Nikeri go aux
I go to Nikeri everyday

b. ham roj nikerī jāilā — halluk

(2) a. ham bhojan kar rahl hɛ — uttam
I meal do ing am
I am having my meal

b. ham bhojan karat bāṭī — halluk

(3) a. tu ab jā rahl ho — uttam
you now go ing are
You are now going

b. tu ab jāt ho — madhim

c. tu ab jāt bātī — halluk

(4) a. tu sab log — uttam
you all people
You all

b. tohni — halluk

Mahadeo rated each of these examples uttam, madhim, or halluk. The underlined forms in (b) and (c) sentences are forms typical of Bhojpuri not shared by Standard Hindi. The underlined forms in (a) sentences above are either Standard Hindi forms or forms that have been perceived as such. In (1a), jāyā kare hɛ is not a Standard Hindi form though it is widely used in the western Hindi dialects. In (2a), the form kar rahl hɛ is not a Standard Hindi form but it was also perceived as such. The progressive construction stem - rahl is a case of grammatical translation from Standard Hindi and is rated higher than the Bhojpuri progressive construction stem+at - auxiliary.

Although sentence (3) was the only one that Mahadeo provided that had three gradations of uttam, madhim, and halluk, it is possible to imagine further sentences with multiple gradations. For example, the use of the perfective jāyal in place of jāyā in sentence (1) would relegate it to a secondary position of madhim, and similarly karat hɛ instead of karat bāṭī in sentence (2) would upgrade it from halluk to madhim as bāṭī is typical of Bhojpuri as against hɛ which is a Standard Hindi form.

Another point that needs to be mentioned here is that the ratings given in the above-mentioned examples are only relative to each other and are not absolute. It is possible that a halluk form may go further down the rating scale if more typically Bhojpuri elements are introduced into the sentence; and conversely, a madhim or an uttam form may go up the rating scale if more typically Standard Hindi elements are introduced into the sentence. For example, a form like jā rahā hɛ should be higher than jā rahl hɛ as the former has the Standard Hindi form rahā instead of its grammatically equivalent word rahl in Bhojpuri.

In another example, Mahadeo gave five different versions of a sentence where each successive sentence was rated lower than the former:

(5) a. ye acchā larkā hɛ
b. ye acchā chaorā hɛ
c. ī acchā chaorā hɛ
d. ī nīman chaorā hɛ
e. ī niman chaorā bā
this good boy is
This is a good boy

As is clear from this example, each successive sentence introduces an additional Guyanese Bhojpuri word, thus causing every successive sentence to be rated lower than the previous sentence. Thus, the version (a), which consists of all the Standard Hindi words, is on the uppermost extreme, while the version (e) consisting of all Guyanese Bhojpuri words occupies the lowest extreme. All the other sentences are ordered in gradient fashion between these two extremes.

Ratings very similar to Mahadeo's have been offered by other speakers, too. Sister Kevala gave the following version and described the former sentence as having "more grammar" in it:

(6) a. ham roj nikeri jāyā karat rahī̃
I daily Nikeri gone used aux
I used to go to Nikeri everyday
b. ham roj nikeri jāyal karat rahī̃

Sister Kevala rated the former sentence higher than the latter. The perfective marker ā in (6a) above belongs to Standard Hindi, and the perfective marker al in (6b) belongs to Guyanese Bhojpuri.[5]

3.4. Use in ordinary conversation and in day-to-day writing. The functions of both Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi are considerably reduced. This is the direct result of the ever-decreasing domains in which Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi are now being used. Guyanese Bhojpuri is now used only by the oldest generation and even here, it is used in a limited way with friends and family members, mostly within the same age group. Guyanese Bhojpuri's use is confined to exchaning of some ritual greetings, issuing some short requests or instructions (for example, get me some water, shut the door, etc.), hiding information from non-Guyanese Bhojpuri speakers. Competence in speaking Guyanese Bhojpuri for the younger generations is limited to lexical items especially those pertaining to the domains of religion, food and kitchen, kinship, and abuses. Standard Hindi is employed in religious services and in a very limited way in personal letters, especially those exchanged with East Indians in Surinam. Even in religious services, its use has been considerably reduced during the last few years. Today, Hindu and Muslim priests usually explain the contents of the scriptures in Guyanese Creole or English instead of in Standard Hindi or Urdu in order to accommodate members of the third generation in the audience, who do not understand any Indic languages.

3.5. Written literature. Standard Hindi has a rich tradition of literature, but Guyanese Bhojpuri, or even Indian Bhojpuri, does not have any such tradition. It it true, however, that such a rich tradition in literature pertains not to Standard

Hindi in Guyana,[6] but to Standard Hindi in India. In Guyana, it is the awareness of the rich tradition of Hindi literature and the prestigious signals accompanying it, which accounts for the higher status of Standard Hindi. This shows that the Guyanese Bhojpuri-Standard Hindi diglossia did not originate in Guyana, but that the East Indian immigrants brought the notion of higher status of Standard Hindi intact from India. The settled status of Standard Hindi in India gave it a head start in Guyana.

3.6. Grammatical categories. If fewer categories in grammar means a relatively simpler structure as Ferguson suggests, then Guyanese Bhojpuri is certainly simpler and less complex than Standard Hindi. While there is no number and gender distinction in Guyanese Bhojpuri, these grammatical categories do exist in Standard Hindi. In regard to cases in nouns and pronouns, Guyanese Bhojpuri has one and two categories, respectively, while Standard Hindi has three each. The modifiers in Guyanese Bhojpuri have a constant form whereas in Standard Hindi the ā -ending modifiers show concordance with the nouns or pronouns they modify for number, gender, and case. Finally, the verb in Guyanese Bhojpuri always agrees with the subject but in Standard Hindi it has a four-fold classification of agreement.

3.7. Variation. As the table shows, variation in Guyanese Bhojpuri is limited rather than extensive. Limited variation, however, seems very uncharacteristic of lower languages in diglossic contexts. There seem to be two reasons for such an atypical situation in Guyanese Bhojpuri. First, Guyanese Bhojpuri has undergone a process of dialect leveling, the result of which has been the loss of most of the dialectal variation. Secondly, Guyanese Bhojpuri is no longer a spoken language. As a result, age-graded and social variation which usually develops as a result of internal social strains and stresses, and the socio-economic power relationship of the society, has been dislodged.

3.8. Phonology. With regard to phonological systems of L and H, Ferguson (1959:15) says:

> The sound system of H and L constitutes a single phonological structure of which the L phonology is the basic system and the divergent features of H phonology are either a sub-system or a para-system.

From this description, it seems that L, spoken more informally and hence more unconsciously, contains a wide range of phonetic variation, while the formal H is standardized. It may also mean that L contains more phonological contrasts, some of which are perhaps merged in H. It is in this sense, perhaps, that L contains the underlying system, and H, with some divergent features, is either a subsystem or a parasystem of the basic system.

The situation in Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi is perhaps different as neither seems an underlying system of the other. It is, however, true that Guyanese Bhojpuri has more phonetic realizations than Standard Hindi has. This is because many Hindi and Bihari dialects formed the input into the formation of the koine Guyanese Bhojpuri, and as a result, a wide range of phonetic variation existed in Guyanese Bhojpuri at least

in the initial stages. As the phonological structure of Guyanese Bhojpuri awaits a systematic investigation, it is not possible to discuss in detail the differences, if any, between Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi.

3.9. Lexicon. Lexicon in lower and higher varieties is shared considerably, though there are some phonological and semantic differences. There are also a number of words exclusive either to the higher or the lower variety, the use of which immediately stamps the speech as higher or lower variety. See the following examples:

COGNATES

Guyanese Bhojpuri	Standard Hindi	
mandil	mandir	*temple*
ganes	ganeś	*Ganesh deity*
oisnu	viṣnu	*Vishnu deity*
lachmī	lakṣmī	*goddess Lakshmi*
laikā	laṛkā	*boy*
ū	vo	*that*
ī	ye	*this*
dui	do	*two*
pacamrit	pãcāmrit	*a liquid used in religious ceremonies*
jag	yagya	*religious discourse/fire-worship*

LEXICON TYPICAL OF LOWER OR HIGHER VARIETIES

Guyanese Bhojpuri	Standard Hindi	
gor	pær	*foot*
mūri	sir	*head*
girhast	kisān	*farmer*
albaṭ	hã̃	*yes*
phajīre	subah/prātah/savere	*in the morning*
bihān	kal	*tomorrow*
hāli	jaldī	*hurry*
ājā	dādā/bābā	*grandfather*
ājī	dādī	*grandmother*
rahā,rahe	thā,the,thī,thĩ	*was, were*
mahtārī	mã̃/mātā	*mother*
manai	vyakti/ādmi	*person*
ke	kɔn	*who*
kāhe	kyõ	*why*
kā	kyā	*what*

It must be added that while the cognates found in the two varieties enhance mutual comprehensibility, the lexicon which is exclusive to the higher variety is also passively shared by most of the speakers of the lower variety.

4. Conclusion. An explanation of the social and functional relation between Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi provides a fuller description of the Guyanese Bhojpuri speech community. A

description of such a relation is useful in explaining trends in linguistic change, especially in the lower language. It may also explain the emergence of an intermediate or mixed form of the two languages involved, which may ease linguistic tensions caused by the two tightly compartmentalized varieties or languages involved in diglossia. In the present case of Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi in Guyana, I have argued here that the diglossic nature of the relationship has been only partially developed. As a result, influence of one variety over the other was very limited. Standard Hindi, despite being the formal and more prestigious counterpart, did not contribute to the processes of koinization in any significant way (Gambhir 1981:201). This shows that a higher language in a diglossic relationship does not necessarily influence its lower counterpart. Such limitations on the role of the higher counterpart are caused by the type and extent of diglossic relationship between the two. In the present case, the type of diglossia between Guyanese Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi is, to make use of Fishman's classification (1967), a diglossia without societal bilingualism with a weak complementarity of functions (Timm 1981:359). The two groups that use Standard Hindi and Guyanese Bhojpuri, respectively, rarely employ one or the other variety to interact with each other. This is not because of any social distance between the two groups. Standard Hindi is used, as mentioned earlier, mainly in religious contexts and Guyanese Bhojpuri is used by the oldest generation in a very restricted way. For freer interaction, both groups employ Guyanese Creole in their routine social activities. Though the people at large had, and still have passive competence in Standard Hindi, their active competence was severely restricted because of the widespread illiteracy. Later in the 1920s, when Indian children started going to schools, Standard Hindi was not available as a part of the regular school curriculum. Some sporadic attempts to teach Standard Hindi under the auspices of several social and religious organizations proved insufficient. Lack of sufficient motivation on the part of learners was possibly also one of the major reasons why Standard Hindi did not become popular in Guyana. However, there has recently been a fresh attempt to introduce Standard Hindi into the school curriculum. In 1979, Standard Hindi was introduced in six schools in Guyana as a part of a plan that will be extended to other schools in the country. Even if this experiment is successful, it is almost certain that Guyanese Bhojpuri will not survive.

When one or more external languages begin to be introduced into the same speech community, what is affected may be either each system individually, or both systems collectively as part of the same complex communicative system (cf. Ferguson 1978). It is, as a matter of fact, the higher variety which is more often partly displaced by a more prestigious language from outside. This does not directly affect the lower variety. On the other hand, if for some reason the lower variety is affected first, then it seems a sure case of language death. When only the higher variety is affected, only a minority of speakers (i.e.,

elites) are directly affected. In such cases, the eclipse of the higher variety by the outside language is seldom total. But when the lower variety is affected the majority of speakers are affected. Examples of the latter type are the special cases like mass emigration to a single geographical point (e.g., the cases of Guyana and Trinidad), where the immigrants may begin to replace their first language by another one in their new homeland. This is likely to affect the higher variety also in due course.

A higher variety, however, has an advantage over its lower variety. The higher variety has a written tradition and can leave behind a tangible and concrete tradition whether or not still used in formal functions of the society. This advantage makes revival possible at later stages.

If, for some reason, the clock is ever turned back in Guyana, and East Indians and the Guyanese school system decided to retrieve the the linguistic wealth of Standard Hindi, it might be possible for those who currently know it to retain the language, and for those who have partly or fully lost it to learn it again. The higher prestige of Standard Hindi will also help in its retention over the lower counterpart.

Such a retention or revival of the higher variety is likely to be limited to some cultural and religious functions only. Its extension, however, to more active formal and informal domains of language use is not common in the history of mankind, but is surely possible as has been demonstrated by the modern Hebrew speech community in Israel (Blanc 1968).

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NOTES

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2. The term diglossia is originally a Greek term and was first introduced according to Sotiropoulous (1977:10), by the German linguist Karl Krumbacher in his work Das Problem der Modernen Griechischen Schriftsprache (1902), in which he dealt with the origin, evolution and implications of diglossia in Greek and Arabic languages. Ferguson introduces the term in English modeled on the French diglossie (1959:325).

3. For a good critique on the functions of two languages involved in diglossia, see Timm (1981).

4. Mahadeo is a self-taught person and has read several books in Standard Hindi. He is eighty years old and his exposure to Standard Hindi is better than many others. In interviews, however, he spoke Guyanese Bhojpuri without any impact from Standard Hindi.

5. For a similar approach to evaluation of attitudes towards a language, see Geertz (1960).

6. I have not recognized here any distinction between Standard Hindi and Hindi used in Guyana. Precisely speaking, the Hindi used in Guyana has incorporated into its system a few linguistic features from Guyanese Bhojpuri. This is dealt with in detail in Gambhir (1982).