

## **THE LANGUAGE POLICY OF INDIA**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Diversity in the area of culture, religion, ethnic, and language is the most characteristic trait of India. This is mostly because of India's long dated history and to be a home of varying cultures, ethnics, and religions. In addition to these, after a long time being isolated from 3000 B.C. to 8<sup>th</sup> century, India was ruled by the Muslims which includes Arabs, Persian, Turks, and Afgans. The British ruled India for almost 200 years. By Muslims, Islam and Persian and to some extend Turkish, particularly Old Turkish, The British, English and Westernization were introduced to India. These historical developments have added to the diversity of India in all areas.

In this study, I will focus on the language policy and the position of the official language of India. To do this, historical developments and current situations will be examined. At the same time, linguistic structure and its social context in India will also be studied. In the end, the findings relating to language policy and their effects will be discussed.

### **II. THE LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE OF INDIA**

Today, four language families out of twelve language families in the world are found in India. These are Indo-Aryan, The Dravidian, the Munda, and the Tibeto-Burman. According to the 1971 Census, more than 1600 languages and dialects are spoken in India. But many of them are spoken by a small number of people. Only 281 languages and dialects of the country are spoken by more than 5000 people each, the range being as follows (Gandhi, K.L. (1984) 1):

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Number-range of speaker	Number of languages and dialects
5000-10.000	60
10.001-100.000	139
More than 100.000	82

Among these languages and dialects only fifteen of them have been chosen as the state languages in the Eighth Schedule of Constitution of India. These languages and their percentages to the total population are Assamese 1.65, Bengali 8.17, Gujarati 4.72, Kannada 3.96, Khasmiri 0.46, Malayalam 4.0, Marathi 7.62, Oriya 33.62, Punjabi 2.57, Sindhi 0.31, Tamil 6.88, Telugu 8.17, Hindi 38.04, Urdu 5.22, and Sanskrit is spoken just by 2000 people. When these languages classified according to language groups, the Indo-Aryan linguistic groups of the states constitutes 71.88 percent and the Dravidian language group constitutes 26.66 percent of population.

Categorisation methods of languages under Eighth Schedule affects the proportion of languages. For example there are 40 languages and mother-tongues mentioned under Hindi in the 1971 Census. When categorisation methods changes, the percentage of languages also changes. For example Hindi speakers in Bihar 81% in 1951, 44.3% in 1961, and 79.8% in 1971 (Kamat, A.R. (1980) 1053-1055). Each language has a home state except Hindi and Urdu. While Hindi has five home states, Urdu has none.

As a result of language diversity, societal bilingualism rather than individual bilingualism exist in India. Urdu speakers have the highest percentage of bilingualism by 22.1%. The percentage of bilinguals in the other languages are Assames 9.0%, Bengali 8.7, Gujarati 7.3, Hindi 55.1, Kannada 14.4, Khasmiri 10.2, Tamil 8.1 and Telugu 14. The existence of the highest percentage of bilinguals among the Urdu speakers could be due to its use in urban areas. According to the 1961 Census, 40.3% of Urdu speakers were living in Urban areas (Prasad, N.K. (1979, 21-22).

### III: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF LANGUAGES IN INDIA

In a multilingual society like India, many languages are used in daily life. One languages may be preferred in the domains of domestic and friendship groups, another for administration and work, and a third language in religious discourse. This was exactly the situation in Purjab in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: "Panjabi in domestic and friendship groups; Urdu/English in work, administration and education; and languages other than English (Urdu/Panjabi/Sanskrit) for religious discourse" (Pandit, P.B. (1979) 4).

Historically there had not been a dominant language across the country except among the elites and higher education. There was a language of ritual and religion, the language of court and elite, the language of education and literature and the language of home and neighbourhood. This situation is still exist and the choice of language for different domains is functionally determined. The functional bilingualism has not been maintained by formal education but by informal learning. In this multilingual network of communication, each language in turn, becomes a contact language (Pandit, P.B. (1977) 8, 10, 12). Given the number and the distribution of languages, the importance of contact or link languages could be understood easily. "There is a saying that languages in India changes in every 60 to 80 kilometers" (Kluck, K.A. (1986) 192). Contact or link languages across the country were Sanskrit in Ancient India, Persian in Medieval India, and English in Modern age. English is still chosen as a link language particularly by elites but English literacy is not more than about 3.5 to 4 percent (Kamat, A.R. (1980) 1063). In contrast to this elite context, the traditional communicational link in India has been an *oral* one: Hindustani (Rao, V.K.R.V. (1978) 1028). Hindustani is used in the mass media and in the other pan Indian context such as in the Armed Forces, in the Indian Rail Ways.

Another characteristics of languages in India is that, generally speaking, there is no direct relations between languages and religions and sub cultures. For example while the Muslims' percentage in total Indian population is 11.2%, Urdu speakers' percentage in total population is 5.22% an in addition to Muslims, Urdu is spoken by Hindu and Sikhs (Srivastava, G.N. (1970) 116; Kamat, A.R. (1980) 1063).

In sum, the relations among the languages and between languages and religions, cultures, elites, and common people are very complex. This complexity increases the diversity in communication styles, ways and methods. This also makes the language planning more difficult. That is why the language policy in India has not been stable and is a very controversial issue.

#### **IV. NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND LANGUAGE PROBLEM**

During the colonisation of India by British in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English became a lingua franca and in 1835, it was made official language at both the central and provincial or state levels. However English was not used throughout the entire administrative system. In lower lever administration some regional languages were used. For example Urdu was used as a second official language and in the last quarter of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hindi in Devanagri script was recognised as a court language in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In terms of language administration, this situation called as "horizontal bilingualism" (Nayar, B. R. (1969) 58, 59, 97)

Since Nationalists began to fight against the British Colonisation, the Congress Party the leader of National Movement in India drew attention to languages of the Indians as a sign of national identity. In fact the Congress Party had organised itself on the basis of linguistic and cultural regions. The leaders of National Movement were very sensitive about using an indigenous language. Throughout the movement the need for developing the different mother-tongues (regional languages) was felt with political awakening and regional consciousness (Prasad, N.K. (1979) 49). To be against English means to be against the British rulers. Gandhi expressed that "for banishing English as a cultural usurper as we successfully banished the political rule of the English usurper" (Nayar, B. R. (1969) 12). Gandhi was not against regional languages, but to him a common Indian language for independent country was of utmost concern. The Nehru Committee Report of 1928 expressed state boundaries on the basis of linguistic factors and the Congress Party accepted Hindustani as the official language of the Party (Laitin, D.D.(1989) 418). Although Hindustani was the official language of the Party, largely in theory, the language problem was not solved. Gandhi emphasised Hindustani as an official language of all India. Nehru suggested Urdu or Nagari script for Hindustani. Indeed these combination could be thought mostly a compromise on the larger Hindu, Muslim question in India and real loyalty was generally to either Hindi or Urdu. When Pakistan became independent in 1947, also India became independent in 1947, also India became independent, Hindi stayed only candidate for official language of India (Nayar, B. R. (1969) 59-61)

As is seen throughout independence movement official language had relative importance. Under charismatic authority of Gandhi and the relations between Hindus and Muslims, Hindustani was chosen and partially applied as an official language. In addition, there was no any programme for implementation and development of Hindustani.

## V. INDEPENDENCE AND OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

### A. LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION

It is well known that there are two language planning strategies: assimilation and integration. While assimilation strategy to eliminate the linguistic diversity in a favor of a single language, integration strategy accepts not only the linguistic diversity but also one or more languages for official purposes (Nayar, B. R. (1969) 10). In India, with three-language and later two-language formula, integration strategy has been accepted at Union and state levels.

The language standardisation in a country is shaped by political, economical, social, cultural factors, and languages themselves. In fact, language

standardisation is a part of more general strategy of state rationalism. State rationalism suggests that to some extent language standardisation is necessary for the administration of society efficiently and orderly functioning (Laitin, D. D. (1989) 416)

Language standardisation or setting official languages is not always subject to legal regulations when there is a consensus on a language in the society like English in the U.S.. In contrast, usually in multilingual societies there is no such a dominant language; therefore, it is necessary to choose one of them as an official language for the country. India, as a result of its historical, political, cultural, and social situations had to choose its official language and to bind it by law.

### **B. LEGAL SETTINGS OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

After three years from independence of India, on January 26, 1950 the Constitution of India was accepted. In the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, Union and States languages have been mentioned. According to the Constitution, Hindi is official language of India and Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu are states languages. In 1976, Sindhi was added as 15<sup>th</sup> language by the Constitution (Twenty First Amendment) Act (Gandhi, K.L. (1984) 13). In order to assess the official languages five criteria are required. According to criteria, a language should be (a) indigenous; (b) spoken by a substantial proportion of the population; (c) popularly studied in schools and colleges; (d) rich in literature, tradition and national heritage; and (e) having a script (Gandhi, K.L., (1984) 13).

Constitution suggested to use Hindi as official language at the Union level and the state level states own languages. English was going to be eliminated by replacing Hindi in fifteen year from 1950 but as we will see, as a result of opposition to Hindi, with a political concession, English stayed as a *de facto* official language in India.

### **C. DEVELOPMENTS AND PROMOTION OF HINDI**

Many programmes have been applied in order to promote Hindi by public, semi-public, and private organisations. Four important institutions namely Board of Scientific and Technical Terminology in 1951, Central Hindi Directorate in 1960, Kendriya Hindi Shikshana Mandai, Agra, in 1960, and Ahil Bharatiya Hindi Sanstha Sangh in 1964. Also, a Central Hindi Committee was set up in 1967 under the chairmanship of the prime minister. In addition to these, Hindi teaching centers opened by the Union Government in Hindi speaking and non Hindi speaking areas. Their numbers were 55 and 108 in 1975 respectively.

Moreover, the central government has been providing financial assistance to the non Hindi states for appointment of Hindi teachers in schools (Gandhi, K.L. (1984) 102-105).

The promotion programmes of Hindi includes writing original books, and translation, providing text books at all levels particularly college and postgraduate level. Also many incentives have been provided for students and for authors in non Hindi states. Office manuals, codes, and other procedural literature of the government of India have been translated to Hindi. Developing mass media particularly movie industry in which Hindi is most powerful language helped for prevailing of Hindi (Pattanayak, D. P., ( ? ) 6-9). The other mass media, television and radio, also help to improve Hindi. In 1949, All-India radio changed its broadcasting language from Hindustani to Hindi. The lessons began in radio and lasted until 1962 (Gupta, D. J. (1970) 175). Today radio and television broadcasts are mostly local, but everyday at 9 p.m. all televisions link to central broadcasting whose language is Hindi.

Throughout the promotion of Hindi, language planners have given more attention to codification of the form of standard Hindi than practising Hindi by the large number of people. The result is new grammatical rules, new sounds, Sanskritization of Hindi and artificially increased lexical stock. That set new barriers between the newly standardised Hindi and the commonly used Hindi.

(Gupta, D. J.-(1970)-183-184)

#### **D. OPPOSITION TO HINDI**

The language controversy began five years after the passage of the Constitution. Initially, non Hindi leaders were hoping that the implementation of Hindi would be by persuasion but not imposition. After a while they felt that Hindi leaders wanted to impose Hindi by using Constitutional provisions. This perception led to doubt about Hindi leaders. Indeed Hindi leaders were using the dominance of Congress Party during the first decade of Indian independence. Therefore, every single move to place English by Hindi increased the degree of suspicion. Non Hindi leaders counteracted to the implementation of Hindi but not directly to the Constitutional provisions. Later they changed their tactics to revise the substantial provisions. (Gupta, D. J. (1970) 188-190)

In fact, the source of opposition was basically because of cultural and historical background of states. For example, Southern states had been a long tradition of suspicion against the North. This suspicion was existing even during the National Movement. For South, the North symbolized a potential source of Aryan Domination. Using Aryan symbols by the North contributed to the alienation of Muslims, also (Gupta, D. J. (1970) 190-191). In general as far as teaching of Hindi is concerned, opposition of the states in India on the basis

of "(1) South versus north, (2) coastal states versus hinterland or (3) Dravidian language family versus Indo-Aryan language family" (Nayar, B.R. (1969) 222). As a result of language rivalry, Madras, Tamil, Manipur, Nagaland, and some of Union territories like Goa, Daman, and Diu dropped teaching Hindi and admitted English as a link language (Handa, R.L. (1983) 30-31; Gandhi, K. L.. (1984) 100).

Another reason for opposition to Hindi was that the new position of Hindi due to official language. That meant people who speak Hindi would have more power in social, economic cultural, and political life. That was like the relations between English speaker people who were usually in higher class and non English speakers in the past. In other words Hindi speakers would take advantage against non Hindi speakers according to opposition.

People and leaders opposing to Hindi were supporting English as an official language at Union level. Some attempts took place to introduce English as an official language, but their demand were not accepted in the Amendment Act of 1967. This resolution brought some gains to Hindi Supporters, but no time-bound or phased programme for the complete replacement of English by Hindi (Gandhi, K.L. (1984) 68-69). In other words, with this resolution, English was accepted as *de facto* official language of all India.

English has been seen as a library language and a link language between India and Western developed countries. In fact, English has been used by a small percentage of Indians, approximately 4% and usually by elites. Historically, people speak English have taken advantage in social, economic, political, and cultural life. Therefore, they were in favor of English and wanted Government to admit English as an official language and put it into the Constitution.

#### **E. FROM THREE-LANGUAGE FORMULA TO TWO-LANGUAGE FORMULA**

Three-language formula was suggested by the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1956 and approved by the Conference of Chief Ministers in 1961 (Pandit, P.B. (1977) 28). According to the formula three languages, would be thought in schools. One language was that of the state, the others were Hindi and English. The programme suggested that students in the South states would learn their state language, Hindi and English and students in the North -Hindi spoken states- would learn Hindi, English, and one of the south states, language.

In reality, some authors suggest that India now has *de facto* a  $3 \pm 1$  language policy. Students whose mother-tongue are Hindi will learn just one more language, English; 3-1; and students whose mother tongue are not state

language they have to learn three more languages: state language, Hindi and English: 3+1 (Laitin, D. D. (1989) 415-416). This formulation is true due to failure of application of three-language formula. If the formula had been applied particularly in Hindi states, students would have learned one of southern state languages and most students would have been in the same situation. That was the desire of the law, but it did not work. Therefore, three-language formula revealed itself 3 + 1 formula. Furthermore, even if three-language formula had been applied successfully, the students whose mother-tongues are not Hindi and state language, their situation would not go to change; so that they are always subject to 3+1 formula. In contrast to state policies, in India, it is suggested that each student by the time he completes his education has to study between 3 to 6 languages if he intends to participate meaningfully in the twentieth century life (Pattanayak, D. P. (?) 5).

The three-language formula has failed. Among the reasons why the formula did not work were opposition to Hindi as we mentioned earlier and practical reasons. Three-language formula was basically a political bargaining and it did not look at conditions for language learning. In addition to this, surveys showed that in schools in which three - language formula are thought compulsorily, 45 to 55 percent of total teaching hours are spent in teaching various languages. Even undergraduate level, 50 percent of the total time was spent for teaching of the principal subjects. (Pandit, P.B. (1977) 30-32). Furthermore, none of the Hindi states had taken the teaching one of the south Indian languages as the third language, although most of chief ministers of these states had promised (Handa, R.L. (1983) 6).

In sum, opposition to Hindi and failure of three - language formula led to many states to follow two-language formula, generally in Hindi spoken states: Hindi and English, and in non Hindi states: state language and mostly English or rarely Hindi.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As is seen the official language of India has been a controversial issue. Although Hindi is the *de jure* official language, English has been a *de facto* official language in India. This coexistence is due to the historical, cultural, social and political settings of languages in India. Debate on official language is not yet over. Besides, which language should be chosen as the official language, its script is also argumentative. For example, some politicians and thinkers have suggested to use Roman script instead of Devanagri for Hindi (Handa, R.L. (1983) 21).

The implementation and promotion of Hindi as the official language have been affected by elected politicians and governors. When non Hindi leaders took

office, the programmes related to Promotion of Hindi in both administration and education have been weakened and instead of three-language formula, two-language formula has been applied by the most states.

To some extend another negative development is differences between two Hindis. Hindi as the official language has been subject to be developed artificially. New vocabulary, new grammatical rules, new vowels, and partially Sanskritization of Hindi have made it different from spoken Hindi among the people. So that the question of which Hindi should be used is being asked. On the other hand, Hindustani as an *oral* link language has become more common among the people.

Lastly, forty years is not enough time to replace a language across the country particularly in a highly diversified country in terms of language. There is a long way to go. It seems that the debate on official language of India will continue in the future.

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