

## Chapter 13

# ***Multilingualism of the Unequals and Predicaments of Education in India: Mother Tongue or Other Tongue?***

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### **The Nature of Indian Multilingualism: A Closer Look**

Linguistic diversity is a 'hallmark of India' (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004: 794). But Indian multilingualism goes beyond a simple diversity of numbers which, in themselves, are quite overwhelming. There are 1652 mother tongues (1961 census) and a much larger number of dialects. These have been classified into 300 to 400 languages (five language families). There are 22 constitutionally recognized official languages (*Constitution of India*, VIIIth schedule, after the 100th constitutional amendment, December 2003) along with English (the associate official language). Some 104 languages are used for radio broadcasting and for adult literacy programs, and 87 are used for print media. It is not just the presence of a number of languages in different spheres of social life in India but the dynamics of the relationship between these languages and their users that make the ethos of language use in India quite distinct from that of dominant- monolingual societies. Of the several features that are characteristic of Indian multilingualism (Mohanty, 1991, 1994), the following seven are particularly relevant to understanding how multilingualism impacts on the social and individual processes (Mohanty, 2004):

- (1) bilingualism at the grass-root level;
- (2) maintenance norms;
- (3) complementarities of languages;
- (4) multiplicity of linguistic identities;
- (5) bilingualism as a strategy for mother tongue maintenance;
- (6) multilingualism as a positive force;
- (7) early socialization for multilingual functioning.

### **Bilingualism at the grass-root level**

Widespread use of two or more languages in different domains of daily

life makes it possible for individuals and communities at the grass-root levels to communicate among themselves and with members of different speech communities. Despite linguistic diversity, communication across the country remains open and unimpaired (Khubchandani, 1978; Pattanayak, 1981). As Pattanayak (1984: 44) has said: 'If one draws a straight line between Kashmir and Kanyakumari and marks, say, every five or ten miles, then one will find that there is no break in communication between any two consecutive points.' This is because individual and community bilingualism at the local or regional levels can be seen as constituting the first incremental step towards concentric layers of societal multilingualism.

### **Maintenance norms**

Language contact in dominant monolingual societies is associated with language shift. In such societies, bilingualism is a point in transition from monolingualism in native language to monolingualism in the dominant contact language. In India, minority languages in contact have tended to be maintained over generations. It has been held that, when Indian languages are in contact, language maintenance is the norm and shift is a deviation (Pandit, 1977). Such maintenance norms in India are supported by the multilingual ethos and the non-competing roles of languages in the lives of the common people. However, despite such strong maintenance norms, minority languages suffer marginalization and neglect owing to the hierarchical nature of the multilingualism that will be discussed later.

### **Complementarities of languages**

The multilingual life style in India involves various patterns of language use in social interactions and in different domains of daily life. Complementarity of relationship between languages is achieved by smooth functional allocation of languages into different domains of use. Languages are neatly sorted into non-competing spheres of activities such as home, in-group communication, market place, religious rites, formal communication, entertainment, media, inter-group communication, and so on. For example, I use Oriya in my home, English in my work place, Hindi for television viewing, Bengali to communicate with my domestic helper, a variety of Hindi-Punjabi-Urdu in market places in Delhi, Sanskrit for my prayer and religious activities, and some conversational Kui with the Konds for my research in their community. These languages fit in a mutually complementary and non-competing relationship in my life. Under such conditions of multilingual functioning individuals naturally need and use different languages because no language is sufficient or suitable for meeting all the communicative requirements across different situations and social activities (Mohanty, 2004).

### **Multiplicity of linguistic identities**

Bhatia and Ritchie (2004: 795) have said that '[m]ultiple languages and multiple language identities are defining features of Indian (and south Asian) bilingualism that reveal the dynamics of language usage and a constant negotiation of identities.' Typically, language users in India extend their identities beyond a particular language. This is possibly due to a high degree of flexibility in perception of languages and their boundaries (Khubchandani, 1983, 1986), which makes people move between languages with the patterns of identities changing under various social psychological conditions. Such multiple linguistic identities affect the dynamics of perceptions of mother tongues and linguistic boundaries (Mohanty, 1991, 1994).

### **Bilingualism as a strategy for mother tongue maintenance**

Stable forms of bi/multilingualism in contact situations in India are a result of communities maintaining their languages, not by rejecting the contact language, but by linguistic accommodation (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004). Becoming bilingual is an adaptive strategy for individuals and communities and this effectively stabilizes the relationship between individuals, communities and languages (Mohanty, 1994, 2003).

### **Multilingualism as a positive force**

When mother tongues are healthily maintained along with bi/tri or multilingualism at the individual and community levels, social, psychological and educational benefits accrue to the minority groups. Our studies (Mohanty, 1982 a, 1982b, 1990; Mohanty & Babu, 1983; Mohanty & Das, 1987; also discussed in Mohanty, 1994, 2003; Mohanty & Perregaux, 1997) have shown that bilingual children:

schooled as well as unschooled, have a distinct edge over their monolingual counterparts in terms of their cognitive and intellectual skills, metalinguistic and meta-cognitive task performance and educational achievement [in the case of schooled children]. (Mohanty, 2000: 110).

These studies were conducted among bilingual and monolingual Konds in Orissa (India) and it was possible to draw comparison samples from the same cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, and at the same time to separate out the role of formal schooling from that of bilingualism *per se*. Community level bi/multilingualism has also been found to promote social integration in contact situations (Mohanty, 1987 reported in Mohanty 1994; Mohanty & Parida, 1993; Mohanty & Saikia, 2004; see also Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995 for a review of Mohanty, 1994). Reviews of cross-cultural studies on

bilingualism including the Indian research (Mohanty & Perregaux, 1997) support the positive psychological and social role of multilingualism.

### **Early socialization for multilingual functioning**

Given the grass-root level of multilingualism and the functional allocation of languages into different domains of daily activities, the processes of language socialization in India involve learning to communicate appropriately in a multilingual context. Such learning involves awareness and acceptance of functional separation of languages into different domains and contexts and interlocutor-specific differentiation of languages. The differentiation of languages also involves developing a hierarchy of preferences in patterns of language use. Studies (Mohanty, 2000; Mohanty *et al.*, 1999) among 2–9 year old children growing up in different regions of India under different contexts of linguistic heterogeneity show that Indian multilingual socialization involves development of:

- (1) a progressive differentiation of languages;
- (2) the norms of multiple language use and
- (3) understanding and consistent use of the rules governing multilingual communication including a context-sensitive hierarchy of socio-linguistic preferences.

Regardless of their multilingual competence, the children show these developments by about 9 years of age, proceeding through three broad developmental periods – a period of language differentiation, a period of social awareness of languages, and a period of multilingual functioning (each period further divided into two stages). Thus, Indian multilingualism is supported by the early multilingual socialization through which children can be said to develop multilingualism as a ‘first language.’

All these features make Indian multilingualism quite special and distinct from the presence of multiple languages in dominant-monolingual societies. In India, presence of many languages is natural and unmarked in all forms of social and individual communicative acts. Quite early in her/his development, the average Indian learns to easily accept the presence of many languages, to function smoothly and spontaneously with multiple modes of communication in different spheres of their activities, and to use a variety of languages as natural and flexible expressions of multiple identities. Thus, Indian multilingualism does not pose any threat or conflict for the individuals and the communities; languages are accepted as necessary and positive aspects of the social mosaic. These features add up to making multilingualism a positive phenomenon. They also ensure that the languages fall into neatly arranged pieces of coexistence which Pattanayak (1988), a leading Indian linguist, characterizes as ‘the petals of the Indian lotus.’

Despite the multilingual ethos, however, a closer look at how languages are mutually related in the society shows a different picture. Nearly 80% of Indian languages are endangered. India is a multilingual country in which many languages coexist, many languages are maintained, but at the same time, many languages are also treated with neglect, discrimination and deprivation. In terms of their constitutional legal, political, economic and educational status, Indian languages are hierarchical in the sense that some languages are privileged with access to power and resources while others are disadvantaged due to various forms of neglect. In practice, Indian multilingualism is characterized by unequal status of the languages (Mohanty, 2004).

## **The Other Side of Indian Multilingualism**

### **Language and power: Multilingualism of the unequals**

Chances of survival of minor, minority, and tribal languages in India are undeniably higher than in dominant-monolingual societies owing to the positive maintenance norms and the adoption of dominant contact languages by linguistic minorities along with native language maintenance in a form of stable bilingualism. However, such maintenance norms do not ensure equality of power and opportunities for speakers of all the languages. Particularly when it comes to minority and tribal languages, the very process of language maintenance is also the process of their marginalized survival, as I will show later in this chapter. Disabilities and disadvantages often associated with minor languages are not in any way inherent to these languages; they are social in origin and result from unequal treatment in the society. In fact, social, political, educational and economic conditions conspire to strengthen the association of the minor and tribal languages with the powerlessness and insufficiency that springs from the stark reality that the speakers of these languages are invariably disadvantaged to begin with. As a group they are usually poorer, belong to mostly rural and economically underdeveloped areas, and share many features of the disadvantaged populations.

### **Formal bases of language hierarchy**

Often, linguistic hierarchy and inequality are institutionalized through various political and statutory processes. Of the large number of mother tongues (and languages) only some (22 by 2003) are given the status of constitutional recognition in terms of inclusion in the VIIIth schedule as 'scheduled languages'. English is given the status of an associate official language.<sup>1</sup> Table 13.1 lists all the constitutional languages and English with the percentage of the population who claim the language as their mother tongue.

**Table 13.1** Constitutional (Official) languages and English (Associate Official language) in India

<i>Scheduled languages</i>	<i>Total no. of speakers</i>	<i>Percentage of population</i>
Hindi	329,505,517	38.93
Bengali	69,595,738	8.22
Telugu	66,017,615	7.80
Marathi	62,481,681	7.38
Tamil	53,006,368	6.26
Urdu	43,406,932	5.13
Gujarati	40,673,814	4.81
Kannada	32,753,676	3.87
Malayalam	30,377,176	3.59
Oriya	28,061,313	3.32
Punjabi	23,378,744	2.76
Assamese	13,079,696	1.55
Sindhi	2,122,848	0.25
Nepali	2,076,645	0.25
Konkani	1,760,607	0.21
Manipuri	1,270,216	0.15
Kashmiri	56,693	0.37
Sanskrit	49,736	0.01
Maithili	7,766,597	0.92
Bodo	1,221,881	0.14
Dogri	89,681	0.01
Santali	5,216,325	0.62
English	178,598	0.02
<i>Total</i>	<i>817,268,379</i>	<i>96.57</i>

Figures are based on mother tongue returns in the 1991 Census (which did not cover the state of Jammu and Kashmir). Hence, the figure for Kashmiri language is based on earlier census.

There are some other languages that are recognized for specific purposes such as state level official use, and some are acknowledged as mother tongues (often grouped under major language categories as in census reports). The rest are usually grouped under the 'other languages' category. The 1991 census of India lists 216 mother tongues with a minimum of 10,000 speakers. The mother tongues declared by fewer than 10,000 persons are all grouped under the 'other mother tongues' category, which includes nearly 9 million persons. Thus, more than 900 mother tongues go unlisted. Although these 'other mother tongue' speakers together constitute nearly 1% of the population, they seem to be powerless in the numbers game.

Educational neglect of languages is yet another notable instance of institutionalized linguistic inequality. Apart from the 22 constitutionally recognized official languages (Table 13.1), very few mother tongues find a place in the school curriculum (see below for details). The number of languages (as teaching languages and/or as school subjects) in Indian schools is declining over the years, almost down to half of what it was in 1970. Most of the tribal and minority mother tongues have no place in the educational system of India. The children who enter schools with these mother tongues are forced into a dominant language 'submersion' education with a subtractive effect on their mother tongues.

### **English and the power game**

Linguistic accommodation, attitudes of mutual acceptance, and a 'true' multilingual worldview are seen as very characteristic of Indian multilingualism (e.g. Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004; Pattanayak, 1988). This has traditionally been reflected in a natural, mutually supportive, complementary and additive relationship between languages. However, this traditional relationship of sharing, coexistence and tolerance between languages seems to have been obliterated by the powerful presence of English as an international 'killer language' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) in post-colonial India. In today's India, English is the language of power, used as an indication of greater control over outcomes of social activities.

In the colonial period, education in English was a means to social and economic resources, and now, it is also used to divide the society into the privileged and under-privileged classes. Public education, mostly in major regional state level languages and of poor quality, is seen as a disadvantage vis-à-vis education in English, and thus more and more people from the lower strata are forced to seek expensive English-medium private schools for their children. Over the post-Independence years, English has become the single most important predictor of socio-economic mobility. Failure in English alone accounts for more than 50% of the failures in high school examinations throughout the country. The privileged English-knowing elites (estimated to be less than 2% of the Indian population) seem to have

an advantage since, with the positive attitudinal and environmental support for English, their children outperform the new aspirants. With the globalized economy, English education widens the discrepancy between the social classes. English has now become the most favoured first or second compulsory language in the school curriculum, pushing out the major state-level official and scheduled languages. Under the new dynamics of power relationship between languages, English has become a potent factor in the differential power equation. As English pushes the major languages, including Hindi, into positions of weakness, the minor and tribal mother tongues pushed further by the major languages, are rendered most powerless. Thus, multilingualism in India has yielded to a hierarchical 'pecking order' (Phillipson, 2001).

### **The hierarchical pecking order in action**

The dominant status of English in official, educational, and economic spheres of Indian society is openly acknowledged. But what had perhaps not been anticipated, and hence has not been much discussed, is its power over the regional state languages and Hindi. This power of English over Hindi is augmented by the political processes by which acceptance of English is a strategy for keeping Hindi from being imposed as a national official and educational language. This is particularly true of the states in South India. In virtually all the non-Hindi states, English has continued to be the dominant language of governance, considerably weakening the position of the major regional or state languages. These languages, in turn, are also imposed on the minority, minor and tribal<sup>2</sup> languages.

In the educational sphere, projected as a global language of science, technology, and commerce, English has been seen as having a primary role despite statutory attempts to enforce regional state languages in schools. In Hindi majority states, as well as in non-Hindi states, an alarmingly-increasing proportion of the parents and students aspire to English-medium education as a road to power and success. This is weakening the already weak system of state-sponsored regional majority language schools that are imposed on tribal language communities, other linguistic minorities, and the poor and disadvantaged groups who cannot afford high-cost English-medium schools.

The hierarchical power relationship between languages is legitimated through a process of social transmission. Early language socialization, a life-long process of socially-constructed psychological processes of identity formation, reconciliation of dissonance, and perception of reality tempered by a fatalistic resignation, make linguistic communities legitimize the assigned roles for their language in the hierarchy. Most Indian children develop awareness of the higher social status of English compared to their own mother tongues, and schools contribute to such perceptions (Mohanty



*et al.*, 1999). Even the speakers of the so-called non-standard varieties of major languages are disadvantaged because these varieties are considered inferior and even sometimes unacceptable for academic and formal use. Standard varieties are usually arbitrarily identified on the basis of the degree of *Anglicization* and *Sanskritization* of language, perpetuating an elitist bias and increasing the sharp discontinuity between school language and home language, and particularly for the disadvantaged groups adding further to their school failure. Thus, in the dynamics of power, languages and speech varieties are sorted into a hierarchical relationship with the dominant English language rendering even the major languages less powerful.

Pushed out of significant domains of power such as official and educational use, the major languages seem to remain confined to limited domains, and they in turn pressure the minority and tribal languages, pushing them into narrow domains of limited use and restricting the scope of their development. In the process, minority and tribal languages are marginalized. These languages are forced to adapt defensive survival strategies that I have characterized as 'anti-predatory strategies' (Mohanty, 2004).

#### **Anti-predatory strategies and the cost of language maintenance**

When animals of subordinate species are threatened by powerful predators, they engage in some anti-predatory behaviours to enhance their chances of survival. Such behaviours usually involve retreating to areas of lesser access and visibility and low resources. A similar pattern is quite evident in the maintenance of minor and tribal languages in contact with major languages in India. In face of pressures from dominant contact languages, these languages withdraw into domains of lesser socio-economic power and significance and their speakers usually adopt a form of bilingualism in which the tribal/minority languages are invariably restricted to domains of home and in-group communication and other less significant domains. These languages are pushed out of domains of power, such as education, official and formal use, trade and commerce, which are taken over by the dominant contact languages. In India, although language shift does not occur as a general pattern, there is considerable domain shrinkage for minority and tribal languages as a contact outcome. It seems that 'natural' bilingualism among the weaker and disadvantaged communities such as the tribals is a survival strategy that ensures smooth social functioning in the contact situations. But the cost of such survival and maintenance of languages is identity crisis, deprivation of freedom and capability, educational failure (due to inadequate home language development and forced submersion in majority language schools), marginalization, and poverty (Mohanty, 2000).

### **Minority group challenges to hierarchical multilingualism**

There are several examples of minority and tribal language groups rising above the inequality inherent in hierarchical multilingualism through a process of struggle to assert their linguistic rights, a process characterized as 'assertive language maintenance' (Dorian, 2004). In December 2003, the Parliament of India passed the Constitutional (100th Amendment) Bill 2003 granting the status of scheduled official language to Bodo, language of the Bodo tribals of Assam. Along with Bodo, three other languages including Santhali (a tribal language) were also given official status as constitutional scheduled languages. The speakers of each of the new scheduled languages (Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santhali) have had a history of long struggle for assertion of their linguistic rights.

Particularly for the Bodos, there has been a process of agitation, armed conflict and political negotiation spanning a period of nearly four decades to assert their language rights. The Bodo movement began with a demand for Bodo-medium schools for the Bodo children, who were earlier forced to attend schools with Assamese as the teaching language. Through persistent and collective assertion of their linguistic, educational, and political rights, the Bodo have been able to reverse the process of marginalization of their language and culture. Our studies of linguistic identity, ethno-linguistic vitality, inter-cultural relations among the Bodos in Assam, and the positive benefits of mother-tongue-medium schooling for Bodo children (Saikia & Mohanty 2004) show that it is possible for the minor and tribal languages to rise above the hierarchy in Indian multilingualism by collective assertion of identity. However, the Bodo situation is to be contrasted with the passive acceptance of marginalized status as a *fait accompli* by other tribal linguistic minorities, such as the Konds. It seems that the minor, minority and dominated languages need to reach a minimum threshold of ethnolinguistic vitality in order to show signs of assertive maintenance pressure and of striving for linguistic rights. Most of the tribal languages in India do not have the necessary economic and political support to reach the minimum level of vitality. They seem to have accepted their marginalized status by a clear dissociation between the perceived instrumental and integrative functions of languages.

In our sociolinguistic surveys of the Kond tribals in Orissa, India (Mohanty, 1994; Mohanty & Parida, 1993), the two languages (Kui, the indigenous language of the Konds, and Oriya, the majority language of the state of Orissa) were clearly separated in terms of their perceived instrumental value for education, employment, and economic benefits. The Konds agreed with their non-tribal Oriya contact group that Kui has no instrumental value, whereas Oriya was seen as instrumentally significant for education as well as economic mobility. The Konds accept the develop-

ment of their language and culture as necessary for their maintenance and have a sense of pride in them. But, they do not consider educational use of Kui as beneficial for employment and economic opportunities. Thus, in a process of passive language maintenance, and perhaps resulting from anti-predatory strategy, most tribal linguistic communities such as the Kondrs are resigned to the status of their language and even to the fate of its speakers. Their language is the language of their identity, their group belongingness and pride, but its powerlessness is accepted as their destiny.

### **Multilingualism and Education in India**

The systems of education in India – the public as well as the private – reflect the hierarchy of the power relations of societal multilingualism. Both school and higher education in India are dominated by English. English-medium instruction at all levels of education is the most preferred form despite the national policy of mother-tongue-medium education, and despite the research evidence that challenges the superiority of English-medium schools over mother-tongue-medium schools. Multilingualism is a social reality in India. Meaningful participation in the larger democratic socio-political and economic system of the country requires its people to develop oral and literacy skills in many languages. Therefore, educational practices need to promote multilingualism for all. The tribal and other linguistic minorities need to learn the majority regional language and languages of inter-regional and wider communication, beside their mother tongues. Similarly, the speakers of major languages need to learn at least one other language of national-level communication and a language for wider communication. Further, all educational programs in India must develop competence in English at some point or other. Thus, it is necessary to have multilingual education starting with mother tongue as a medium. In this context, the question, ‘How well does the educational system in India meet the challenges of multilingualism?’ is quite important.

### **Languages in Indian education: The beginnings**

Prior to the modern education that started during the British rule, education in India was multilingual. In the earlier form, children began their education in the vernacular language, with each child learning to read, write and engage in arithmetic operations in his/her respective mother tongue. Later, following development of proficiency in the early subjects of instruction, the focus usually shifted to higher levels of scholarship which invariably involved learning a classical language such as Sanskrit. At higher levels of learning, the classical language became the medium of instruction (MI) in religious texts and philosophical discourse of various schools.

The distinction between language as a medium of teaching and language as a school subject began during the British rule. The language policy in British colonial education evolved around the Orientalist–Anglicist controversy (see Evans, 2002 for a discussion on the history of the 19th century language issues in Indian education). This centered on the role of English language vis-à-vis the vernacular and classical languages of India<sup>3</sup> as MI as well as curricular subject(s) in the government-sponsored education. Schools with English-medium instruction were promoted by British rule, and education in English was increasingly perceived as necessary for access to power and economic benefits. In any case, multilingual education in pre-Independence India usually stood for ‘use of one language as medium, and two or more languages as subjects of study’ (Koul & Devaki, 2000: 114). As the following discussion of the current status of languages in India shows, this notion of ‘multilingual’ education has hardly changed.

#### **Education in multilingual India today: Policy and practice**

By the end of British rule, English was well entrenched in Indian education and its essential role was widely accepted. The constitution of India accepted the principle of mother tongue medium instruction. Article 350A of the Constitution of India states that the state and the local authorities shall endeavor to ‘provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to minority groups.’ This constitutional provision still remains to be implemented in practice. Further, the question of the language of teaching at the secondary level was not resolved in the Indian constitution. So, the issue of languages in education continued to be examined and debated, and in 1957 the three-language formula was proposed for education.

*The three-language formula* was the official policy of the government of India which in 1957 recommended use of:

- (1) regional language or mother tongue as the first teaching-language for five years;
- (2) Hindi in non-Hindi areas and any other Indian language in Hindi areas as the second language (as a school subject) for 3 years (i.e. the 6th to 8th years in school);
- (3) English as third language subject from the third year onwards.

This policy envisaged regional language or mother tongue being used as a MI in school. Further, the distinction between regional languages and mother tongue was not clear. This led to forced imposition of the majority regional language on the minority and tribal language groups. This policy was applicable to the government sponsored education only. The private educational institutions were free to introduce their own system in respect

of languages. This eventually led to proliferation of English-medium private schools (which are ironically called 'public schools' in India, just like in Britain).

In 1964 the three-language formula was modified. Hindi was no longer compulsory for non-Hindi areas, and English could be taught either in place of Hindi or as a foreign language. According to this modified formula, the three languages to be studied as school subjects (regardless of the MI) were:

- (1) mother tongue or regional language;
- (2) Hindi or English;
- (3) one modern Indian language or foreign language not covered under (1) and (2), and not used as MI.

In addition, for the tribal children this modification also proposed the use of the tribal language as the medium of teaching for the first two years and oral instruction in the regional language and use of regional language as MI from the third year onwards.

The three-language policy underwent several modifications, and different versions were applied depending on how the formula was interpreted in various states and school systems. Despite such variations, English became the most common second language subject in all the states, followed by either Hindi or Sanskrit as a third language subject.

With respect to minority languages, a significant policy recommendation was made in The Ramamurti Committee Report (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1990). It recommended setting up minority-language-medium primary schools in areas with at least 10% minority language speakers. It also suggested having parallel sections in the same schools for instruction in the minority and the majority language medium so that the minority children are not segregated from the other children. Further, in areas with less than 10% minority-language speakers, appointment of minority-language teachers was recommended for teaching the minority children. These recommendations, however, mostly remained untranslated into practice.

It may be noted that in the Indian language policy, the mother tongues (which mostly refers to the languages of the tribal and other minority groups) were gradually differentiated from the regional majority languages. This resulted in use of some languages (outside those recognized as the scheduled languages in Indian constitution) as media of instruction. Further, from the policy perspectives in India, and in practice, use of different languages in a succession of phases, with mainly monolingual instruction through the medium of one language first, then another, and even a third, is sometimes considered multilingual education. For example, a regional language or in a few cases a minority mother tongue may be used as MI up to high school (10th year of school) level (with other languages

taught as school subjects), and a different language such as English or Hindi or another majority language may be used as the medium for higher education. Finally, because of anomalous statutory provisions regarding privately-run educational institutions and also those run by minority religious groups, no uniform policy perspective ever emerged in respect to the role of languages in Indian education. On the whole, the three-language formula and other policy formulations have mostly remained political and ideological statements far removed from the actual practices, which were quite diverse.

### **Languages as media in Indian education today**

The *Sixth All India Educational Survey* (NCERT, 1999) shows that only 41 languages are currently used in schools, either as MI or as a school subject. What is even more alarming is that this number has actually declined from 81 in 1970 to 67 in 1976 (Chaturvedi & Mohale, 1976), 58 in 1978, 44 in 1990, and 41 in 1998 (NCERT, 1999; also Pattanayak, 1997). It should be noted that the actual number of languages used as the language of teaching in schools (MI) is even smaller and is also declining. The sixth survey (NCERT, 1999) places the number of languages used as MI at 33 in primary level (i.e. the first five years of school), 25 in upper primary (6th and 7th years of school), 21 in secondary (8th to 10th years of school) and 18 in higher secondary (11th and 12th years of school) levels of education. The corresponding figures in the earlier fifth survey (NCERT, 1990) were 43 in primary, 31 in upper primary, 22 in secondary and 20 in higher secondary levels of school education.

Further, use of minor languages (i.e. languages that are not recognized as official languages in the VIIIth schedule of the Indian constitution) and of tribal languages as languages of teaching (MI) is clearly decreasing. Although the three-language formula recommends use of mother tongue or regional language as the first language (language of teaching and as a school subject), in practice, mother tongues other than the major state languages or regional languages are left out. Koul and Devaki (2000, 2001) have shown that these languages are not used at all as media of instruction in higher secondary education. In any case, with less than 1% of the tribal children getting early education in their mother tongues, mismatch between school language and home language and the subtractive language development triggered by the forced 'submersion' are major educational issues.

### **English-medium schools in India**

Unlike any other Indian language, English is used in all the states and Union Territories in India as a language of teaching (MI) at all levels of education. Thus, English language happens to be 'the most pervasive of all the media instruction (Koul & Devaki, 2001: 107). In a majority of the states

in India, English is taught as a compulsory school subject by the 6th year of schooling, and it is gradually being moved to earlier grades – to the first year of schooling in some states. This is in contrast to the fact that (except in the Hindi-speaking states), Hindi is not taught as a compulsory subject, or is taught only as a third language from the 5th year onwards, in the schools in a majority of the states (Government of India, Ministry of HRD 2003). In some states (e.g. Tamil Nadu), Hindi is not a compulsory requirement in the school curriculum. Thus, in practice, English is better placed in school education in India than Hindi, the national language.

Evidently, the English language has impacted all aspects of Indian life. But its impact on education is perhaps the most crucial one. It is not only one of the most significant school subjects, but it is the most sought-after medium of schooling. It has given rise to a new basis of stratification of the Indian society – those educated in the more expensive privately run English-medium schools, and the less privileged others who go for the almost free regional-language-medium schools supported by the Government.<sup>4</sup> Since English-medium schools are ‘market driven’ the cost of privately-run schools is quite high. The fees for non-residential schools in India vary from less than 15 rupees (about US\$0.30) to more than 15,000 rupees (about US\$330) per month. The higher fees are for private English medium schools, and the schools in the lower end are usually state sponsored regional language or mother tongue schools. The increasing demand for English-medium schools has resulted in a large number of low quality English-medium schools charging lower school fees than the better quality and prestigious ones. Such schools have proliferated in rural and semi-urban areas all over the country. Lured by the aspirations for Anglicization of children, parents from the lower economic strata struggle to meet the somewhat lower fees for the relatively inferior quality English-medium schools.

Our analysis (Mohanty, 1988) of the academic achievement of low socio-economic status (SES) children in poor-quality English-medium schools show that these schools fail to promote adequate achievement among the children because the English language has no support in their home environment (unlike the higher SES children). Further, mother tongue development of all the children in these English-medium schools becomes restricted, since schools do not support it. The children from the tribal and other disadvantaged communities are clear losers in the process; their mother tongues have little scope for development outside their home, and their school language has little support outside the school. This has given rise to a new class of English-medium students with marginal success. Thus, the economics of choice of different forms of English-medium and regional language-medium schools, and the politics of language in school education, have provided the basis for a new social stratification of the literate groups:

- (1) the privileged social class educated in high-cost English-medium schools;
- (2) the less privileged social class educated in the low-cost English-medium schools;
- (3) the under-privileged class educated in the regional language (also the mother tongue) medium schools; and
- (4) the least privileged stratum, who are forced to be schooled in the medium of a regional language other than their home language.

The social cost of English-medium schooling in India is enormous and, it seems, the English educated élite has not cared to look critically at this issue.

Unfortunately, the question of English-medium schooling is pitted against mother-tongue-medium education creating an unnecessary duality and tension that ignores the possibility of bridging the language gap in the existing multilingual ethos of the Indian society. Schools where the language of teaching is English or a major regional language are thought of as better alternatives to schooling in mother tongue medium; the latter is considered unnecessary for further education in any major language. The possibility of additive development of other languages, along with mother tongue in a suitable form of multilingual education, has not been seriously considered in the Indian educational system. Bilingual or multilingual education is thought of only as a system in which multiple languages form part of the curriculum. Thus, a true form of multilingual education is yet to emerge in India.

In the following section I turn to an analysis of different modes of school education in India that deal with ways to develop multilingual competence. They do not use multiple languages for teaching school subjects other than the languages themselves and, hence, they are not multilingual education in the strict sense of the term (Anderson & Boyer, 1978). I have labeled them *nominal forms* of multilingual education.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nominal Forms of Multilingual Education in India Today**

As has been mentioned, bilingual/multilingual education in the Indian context does not refer to the use of two or more languages as media of instruction, either simultaneously or successively. Rather, it refers to the use of two or more languages in education, usually as school subjects. In an informal sense, given the multilingual communicative ethos and the presence of different linguistic groups, Indian classrooms often become multilingual communicative contexts. Srivastava and Gupta (1984) have also discussed different patterns of informal bilingual / multilingual communication in the formal monolingual classrooms in the Indian schools.

Two types of nominal forms of multilingual education are described



below: (1) *informal* multilingual education, and (2) *formal* multilingual education with a single or multiple MI.

### **Informal multilingual education**

#### *Support bilingual education*

In some schools, the medium of school instruction needs to be supplemented or supported by another language. The lesson may be read in the medium of school instruction (MI) and explained/discussed/clarified in another language particularly when the MI is not the mother tongue (MT) of some or all of the students.

#### *Partial bilingual education*

Students provide answers in their mother tongues, but classroom interaction is conducted in a local language as MI. Sometimes, the teacher is not familiar with the students' MT (as when tribal children are taught by a non-tribal teacher who does not know the tribal language). In such cases a simplified register may be informally used for classroom communication, and the majority language is used as formal MI.

### **Formal multilingual education with a single MI**

#### *Majority language mother-tongue programs*

A majority language MT is the MI, and other languages are taught as school subjects. These programs usually follow the three-language policy. But, their implementation in different states is quite different, particularly across Hindi and non-Hindi states (Viswanatham, 1999). In effect, these programs are forced submersion programs for minority and tribal language children whose MT is not the school MI.

#### *Non MT-medium program*

These programs are in a second-language medium with other languages taught as school subjects, such as in English-medium schools (sometimes also Hindi-medium schools) for children whose MT is not English (or Hindi) and where other languages are taught as school subjects.

#### *Formal multilingual education with multiple languages as MI*

In these programs usually two languages are used as MI either simultaneously or successively.

#### *Simultaneous dual language MI*

In some government-sponsored schools (e.g. Kendriya Vidyalaya), English is used as MI for mathematics, science and English subjects, and Hindi is used as the MI for teaching social studies and Hindi.

#### *Successive dual language MI programs*

A majority language MT is used as MI up to a certain level with other

languages taught as school subjects. Thereafter, the students switch over to a second language MI. Sometimes primary and/or secondary level education is (are) in MT medium with English and/or Hindi and other languages taught as subjects. At a higher level is secondary education or university level, when the students switch to English (or Hindi) as the MI.

A program called the *Bilingual Transfer Model*, developed by the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore, was specifically designed as a special type of successive dual language MI programs for the tribal groups. This program begins with use of tribal language as MI in the first year of schooling, along with oral communication in the regional language. Instructional time for the regional language is progressively increased as that for the tribal language is reduced so that, by the beginning of the fourth year of schooling, the child is ready for instruction in regional language only. Since most of the tribal languages do not have a writing system, the script of the regional language is modified and adapted for the tribal language for special transfer texts and for early reading instruction.

The two programs above are nominal forms of multilingual education because they are more focused on languages being taught as subjects rather than used as media of instruction. In most cases, use of languages is incidental to the nature of the programs, and as such, program outcomes cannot be linked to bilingual or multilingual education. Pattanayak (1997) has also referred to lack of any structured bilingual education programs in India.

### **Nominal forms of bilingual education in India. Conclusion**

On the whole, education in India is only superficially multilingual, and it remains monolingual at an underlying level. The official *three-languages formula* is more abused and less used. Apart from the erratic manner in which it has been variously interpreted and used in different states and in school systems, it has also not addressed the real issues. Further, in spite of the multilingual predicaments that education in India has always faced, the relationship between societal multilingualism and communicative objectives of education has not been seriously attended to. This is true at the levels of social enquiry and policy formulations, as well as research. Even if the questions of the role of languages in education and multilingual education are extremely significant in the Indian society, there is still a dearth of a systematic, theory-driven empirical research on issues pertaining to multilingualism and multilingual education.

### **The Myth of English-medium /Second-language-medium superiority**

The hegemonic status of the English language and the instrumental benefits associated with it have led to the propagation of several myths

about the success of English-medium education in India (Dua, 1994). English-medium privately-run schools that charge high fees are in a position to offer better physical facilities compared to the almost-free but poor-quality government-run regional or mother-tongue-medium schools. Further, the upper class bias in the student population of English-medium schools, associated with positive attitudinal and home-based support for English, has given the English-medium students added advantages. These conditions have led to a widespread belief in the superiority of English-medium schools over the mother-tongue-medium schools. This is also associated with the belief that early exposure to English results in improved English proficiency.

The available research evidence refutes these assumptions regarding English-medium schooling. Srivastava and his colleagues (1990) compared MT-medium and English-medium school students on measures of school achievements and self-concept. With the effect of intelligence separated out, there was no difference between the instructional media groups. The advantages of children from English-medium schools were attributed to variables related to the school climate, such as the criteria of selection and admission, the teaching methods, and the use of teaching aids and materials.

Another study (Patra 2000) addressed the questions of MI and the early exposure to instruction in a second language. Patra compared Oriya mother tongue children from the 6th and 8th year classes in Oriya-medium and English-medium schools in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, on measures of mathematics, science, and language achievement. The two groups were matched for IQ, socioeconomic status and school climate. The mother-tongue-medium students did better than their English medium counterparts. In the second part of the study, Patra (2000) also compared Oriya-medium students in the 6th and 8th years of school with early and late exposure to teaching of English. The early-exposure group was taught English as school subject from the first year, and the late-exposure group from the 4th year of schooling. By the 8th year, there was no difference between the two groups. In other words, the late-exposure groups attained the same level of proficiency in English (as a second language) after four years of instruction, as the early-exposure group did after seven years. Thus, contrary to popular belief, early exposure to English (as a second language) does not enhance proficiency in English compared to late exposure. These findings clearly support Cummin's theory of linguistic interdependence.

A recent study (Saikia & Mohanty, 2004), examined the role of mother-tongue-medium schooling in school achievement of Bodo tribal children in Assam (India). Bodo children from Bodo (tribal mother tongue) medium and Assamese (regional majority language) medium schools were compared at the fourth year of schooling. The two groups were matched for SES, quality

of schooling, and the ecological conditions of their villages. The tribal mother-tongue-medium children performed better than their non-MT medium counterparts in classroom achievement measures of mathematics and language, standard tests of minimum level of learning (in language and mathematics as school subjects), and class examination performance. Further, the performance of Bodo children in their mother-tongue-medium schools was comparable to that of the majority Assamese children in the Assamese-medium schools, in all but two of the mathematics achievements measures. This study shows the benefits of MT-medium instruction for tribal minority language children.

Thus, available Indian research questions the superiority of English (L2) medium over the MT medium schooling. It clearly shows that, when quality of schooling and student characteristics variables are controlled, MT schooling has a distinct advantage over schooling in a second-language medium (such as English or a regional majority language).

### **Imagining Multilingual Schools in India**

Education in India has not responded to the challenges of its multilingual ethos. As I have shown in the first part of this chapter, the core of Indian multilingualism is in complementary relationship between languages and in the need to bridge the gap between the minor, minority, and tribal languages, and the languages of wider communication, including the regional and state level languages – Hindi and English. Multilingual education holds a central position in planning for a resourceful multilingualism that does not marginalize and deprive the minor, minority, and tribal language groups.

The existing educational programs in India hardly meet the criteria of multilingual education. Some school systems use two languages for teaching of different school subjects. The Kendriya Vidyalay schools of the Central Government located all over the country use a form of simultaneous dual language program of teaching. In these schools some school subjects (mathematics, sciences and English) are taught in English and the others in Hindi. Although at the surface level this program appears to be a bilingual one, its approach and objectives do not meet the requirements of a true multilingual program. It ignores any consideration of the mother tongues of the children. All the pupils, regardless of their linguistic background, have English and Hindi as instructional media. Further, use of English in teaching school subjects like mathematics and science reinforces the popular belief regarding English as the language of science and technology. The bilingual transfer program discussed earlier have claimed to be 'bilingual education'; but in reality they are soft assimilation programs that lead to a subtractive language learning and eventual loss of mother tongues. Both early-exit and late-exit transitional programs in different

parts of the world have been shown to have the same characteristics of soft assimilation (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984). In the context of Indian society, it is necessary to assess the extent to which the existing educational systems really support multilingualism. Skutnabb-Kangas and Garcia (1995) draw some general principles on the basis of which educational programs purporting to be bilingual or multilingual can be assessed. Unfortunately, the Indian programs of education do not support the weaker languages, nor do they promote a high level of bilingual proficiency.

Elsewhere (Mohanty, 2004), I have pleaded for a comprehensive language-in-education policy for empowerment of tribal and minority languages, along with the reappraisal of the role of English in Indian society. Multilingual education in India must be seen as a broad framework of education necessary for preserving the multilingual character of the society and for promoting multilingualism for all. It must be viewed not simply as a process of bringing the minority and tribal linguistic groups to the mainstream, nor as a process of enriching the majority alone.

Multilingual education in India can be imagined as a process that starts with development of MT proficiency which forms the basis for development of proficiency in all other languages with functional significance for specific groups. The theoretical foundation for such a system is well-developed and supported. It now needs to be implemented as multilingual schools developed within the context of Indian multilingualism. The question for these schools is not whether to use the mother tongue OR the other tongue. It is not about whether to use Hindi OR English. Multilingual education in India is about the mother tongue AND the other tongues as it develops multilingualism for all in Indian society.

### Notes

1. The Indian Constitution initially granted this status to English for a period of 15 years only. But this privileged status to English has been extended for an indefinite period.
2. The indigenous or aboriginal communities are officially called 'tribes' in India, and referred to as 'scheduled tribes' in the Indian constitution. Specific tribes are identified as scheduled tribes on the basis of 'primitive traits', 'geographical isolation', 'distinct culture', 'economic backwardness' and 'limited contact with the outgroups'. So far, 573 notified or scheduled tribes are identified, and they constitute 8% of the total population. In this chapter, the term 'tribe' (rather than 'indigenous peoples') is used in its formal/official sense.
3. During the British rule, Sanskrit was usually referred to as a classical language, while all other Indian languages were labeled as vernaculars.
4. So strong is the link between English-medium education and perception of social class that the matrimonial advertisements published in newspapers emphasize English-medium education as a very positive point in the marriage negotiations.
5. The following discussion of different forms of multilingual education is based on Koul and Devaki (2002), who provide an exhaustive analysis.

## Summary

Analysis of the nature of Indian multilingualism shows that, despite the strong maintenance norms, the hegemonic role of English gives rise to a socially legitimated and transmitted hierarchical pecking order in which mother tongues are gradually marginalized and pushed into domains of lesser power and resource in what can be characterized as a self-defensive anti-predatory strategy. Caught in the process of unequal power relationship between languages and lacking a clear multilingual framework, education in India is unable to balance the demands of the societal multilingualism and the dominant status of English.

The place of languages in Indian education and the various nominal forms of multilingual education are analyzed to show the cost of neglecting the mother tongues and tribal languages in education. Some studies interrogating the myth of English medium superiority and showing the benefits of mother-tongue-based multilingual education are discussed. It is argued that education must cater to the social needs of every child to develop from mother tongue to multilingualism and provide equality of opportunity through a language-shelter type of multilingual education that begins in mother-tongue medium and introduces other languages after at least three to five years of primary schooling.

भारतीय बहुभाषावाद की प्रकृति का विश्लेषण यह दर्शाता है कि सशक्त निर्वाह मूल्यों के बावजूद अंग्रेजी की प्रभुत्ववादी भूमिका ने सामाजिक बैधानिकता प्राप्त एक ऐसे वरीयता सौपान को जन्म दिया एवं प्रसारित किया है जिसमें मातृभाषाओं को हाशिये पर ले जा कर एक शक्ति-संसाधन क्षीण क्षेत्र में धकेला जा रहा है जिसे आक्रमण से बचने की आत्म-रक्षात्मक रणनीति के रूप में समझा जा सकता है। भाषाओं के मध्य असमान शक्ति संबंधों की प्रक्रिया में उलझी और स्पष्ट बहुभाषावादी ढाँचे के अभाव में भारत में शिक्षा सामाजिक बहुभाषावाद की मांगों और अंग्रेजी के प्रभावशाली स्थान के बीच संतुलन बनाने में असफल रही है। भारतीय शिक्षा पद्धति में भाषाओं का स्थान और बहुभाषावादी शिक्षा के अनेक किंतु नाममात्र के स्वरूपों का विश्लेषण शिक्षा में मातृभाषाओं एवं जनजातीय भाषाओं की कीमत को दर्शाने के लिए किया गया है। अंग्रेजी माध्यम की श्रेष्ठता के मिथक पर प्रश्न-चिन्ह लगाते और मातृभाषा पर आधारित बहुभाषावादी शिक्षा के लाभ पर किए गए कुछ अध्ययनों पर विमर्श किया गया है। यह तर्क दिया गया है कि शिक्षा को प्रत्येक बच्चे के मातृभाषा से बहुभाषावाद की ओर विकास की सामाजिक आवश्यकताओं की पूर्ति करना चाहिए और एक ऐसे भाषाई संरक्षण प्रकार के बहुभाषावादी शिक्षा द्वारा अवसर की समानता प्रदान करना चाहिए जो मातृभाषा माध्यम से आरंभ होती है और कम से कम तीन से पाँच वर्ष की प्राथमिक शिक्षा के बाद अन्य भाषाओं से परिचय कराती है।

(Hindi)