Languages, inequality and marginalization: implications of the double divide in Indian multilingualism

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Abstract

Features of Indian multilingualism are discussed to show that, despite several positive forces favoring maintenance of minority languages, languages are subjected to inequality and discrimination. It is argued that multilingualism in India, as in other South Asian countries, is hierarchical in nature, characterized by a double divide — one between the elitist language of power and the major regional languages (vernaculars) and, the other, between the regional languages and the dominated ones. The nature and implications of this double divide are analyzed in respect of the relative positions of English, Hindi, regional majority languages and other indigenous/minority languages. The paper shows that, at the same time as hierarchical multilingualism has led to a general loss of linguistic diversity, the progressive domain shrinkage and the marginalization of the surviving indigenous and minority languages affect the dynamics of the relationship between languages and linguistic groups in contact and negotiation of linguistic identities. The chasm between policy and practice affecting the place of languages in society, it is argued, leads to educational failure, capability deprivation and poverty in the minority linguistic groups, particularly the tribal mother tongue speakers. Programs of multilingual education are briefly discussed in the context of recent attempts to deal with classroom language disadvantage of tribal children in India.

Keywords: *double divide; English-vernacular divide; English-other language divide; language and education; multilingual education.*

1. Introduction

With 196 endangered languages, India heads the list of countries in the *Atlas of the world's languages in danger* (UNESCO 2009). This in itself may not come as a big surprise to many; the world has lost many languages and many more

0165–2516/10/0205–0131 *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang. 205 (2010), pp. 131–154*

DOI 10.1515/IJSL.2010.042

will disappear if the current trend continues. Loss of languages is considered by many as a "natural" outcome of organic decay of languages. However, as Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) points out, language shift does not just happen without any agency or intentionality; it is not a natural process of death of a language with its speakers shifting voluntarily. She argues that the disappearance of languages is better understood as a process of language murder, linguicide or linguistic genocide. Unequal power relations between languages and language communities are fundamental to her linguistic genocide paradigm. Language shift and loss of linguistic diversity need to be seen as enforced by a set of interrelated agencies — the languages and their speakers with unjust and inequitable power and control over resources, state policies of discrimination and homogenization, and socially constructed inequalities among languages pushing some to disuse and marginalization. When loss of diversity is viewed as an inevitable, natural and involuntary process, there is little one appears to be able do about it apart from documenting the endangered and dying languages. An agentive perspective to loss of linguistic vitality, on the other hand, has different consequences in enabling the analysis of the conditions associated with unequal and of hierarchical power relations among languages and action for minimizing threats to languages. Discriminatory social, political and economic practices are responsible for marginalization of some languages, language shift and loss of linguistic diversity and the dynamics of such practices need to be understood and resisted.

This paper attempts an analysis of the place of languages and their relationship in the multilingual Indian society. It takes a position that loss of linguistic vitality, marginalization and endangerment of languages in India are rooted in structural inequalities in its hierarchical multilingualism. The major divisions across the hierarchy between the elitist, dominant and dominated languages are characterized as a linguistic double divide, which is related to complex processes of negotiation of identities in situations of language contact and the consequences of such contact. Implications of the double divide for multilingualism and the role of languages in education in India are discussed.

2. Multilingualism in India

2.1. *Some characteristic features of multilingualism in India*

India's linguistic diversity ranks fourth in the world (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000), with varying estimates of 300 to 400 languages in the country belonging to five language families. The 2001 Census Survey of India listed over 6,600 mother tongues (MTs) specified by the respondents. These returns were rationalized into 3592 MTs, out of which 1635 were listed and the remaining 1957, each

with less than 10,000 speakers, were grouped under a single "other" MT category. The 2001 Census grouped the MTs into 122 major languages. These languages include 22 official languages listed in the VIIIth schedule of the *Constitution of India* and English, which is recognized as an associate official language. Indian society uses a large number of languages in different spheres of public activities — over 104 for radio broadcasting, 87 for print media, 67 languages in primary education and 104 for adult literacy programs. However, the uniqueness of Indian multilingualism goes beyond the simple presence of many languages in different activities. The complex social-psychological and socio-linguistic relationship between languages and their speakers and the role that many languages play in the life-space of individuals and communities give a very special character to Indian multilingualism. Sociolinguistic heterogeneity is deep-rooted, with linguistically pluralistic communities spread all over the country — almost half of the districts having minority linguistic groups exceeding 20% of the district population (Khubchandani 1986). Bhatia and Ritchie (2004) view multilingualism in India as a "natural phenomenon".

> Centuries of coexistence and an ongoing process of convergence have led to an unmarked pattern of widespread naturalistic linguistic coalescence rather than separation, dominance and disintegration. (Bhatia and Ritchie 2004: 795)

In many respects, the ethos of language use in India is quite distinct from that of the dominant monolingual societies.

India's linguistic diversity goes down to the grass-roots level. Language users all over the country mostly use two or more languages in different domains of their daily life to communicate among themselves and with members of different speech communities. Strikingly, despite the great linguistic diversity, grass-roots level communication across the country remains open and unimpaired (Khubchandani 1978; Pattanayak 1984).

> 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. (Pattanayak 1981: 44)

The widespread individual and community level bilingualism facilitates communication between different speech communities (Khubchandani 1978) and it can be seen as constituting the first incremental step towards concentric layers of societal multilingualism. In situations of contact between minority and dominant languages, most of the minority language speakers tend to become bilingual/multilingual in their MT as well as the dominant contact languages. This ensures inter-group communication as well as maintenance of minority languages and stable multilingualism. Thus, minority languages in India, in contact with other languages, tend to be maintained over generations.

Large numbers of instances of language maintenance have led linguists to support Pandit's (1977) observation that in India language maintenance is the norm and language shift a deviation. Linguistic communities in contact maintain their languages not by rejecting the contact language but by linguistic accommodation (Bhatia and Ritchie 2004) and by becoming bilingual/multilingual as an adaptive strategy — a process that effectively stabilizes the relationship between individuals, communities and languages (Mohanty 1994, 2003a). In contrast, bilingualism in dominant monolingual societies is a point in transition from monolingualism in a non-dominant native language to monolingualism in the dominant language of the host society and language shift is a common outcome of language contact. A high degree of maintenance of languages is possible in India because of the fluidity of perceived boundaries between languages, smooth and complementary functional allocation of languages into different domains of use, multiplicity of linguistic identities and early multilingual socialization (Mohanty et al. 1999). However, as will be shown later, such maintenance is not without its cost and consequences.

Grass-roots level co-existence and mutual contact between different languages, dialects, or speech styles and their users are accepted as natural aspects of the multilingual life-style in India. Typically, language users move between various patterns of language use in their social interactions and in various domains of their daily life. Complementarities of relationship between languages are achieved by a smooth functional allocation of languages into different domains of language use. Languages are neatly sorted into non-conflicting spheres of activities such as home language, language of the market place, language for religious rites, language for formal/official purposes and for intergroup communication and so on. Under such conditions of multilingual functioning, domain allocation of languages acknowledges the fact that no single language is sufficient for communicative requirements in different situations and occasions and, hence, individuals need multiple languages. The grounds of domain-specific choices of languages are complex and social psychological; they often signify expression of identities and attitudes and, more importantly, different power relationships between the languages. Under such conditions, code-mixing and code-switching have functional significance in communication and they often express multiple linguistic identities (Sridhar 1978; Verma 1976). Multiplicity of linguistic identities in India involves a spontaneous and tension free movement between languages and a high degree of flexibility in the perception of languages and their boundaries. On the basis of his analysis of mother tongue declarations, Khubchandani (1983, 1986) shows how language users move between languages, such as Hindi to Urdu, Hindi to Maithili and Bhojpuri, etc., with the patterns of identities changing under various social psychological conditions, which affect the dynamics of perception of mother tongues and linguistic boundaries (Mohanty 1991, 1994).

Multiple 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. (Bhatia and Ritchie 2004: 795)

2.2. *Multilingualism as a positive force: Indian research findings*

The unique characteristics of Indian multilingualism, the pluralistic ethos and early socialization into multilingual functioning seem to make multilingualism a positive force. A review of cross-cultural research on bilingualism (Mohanty and Perregaux 1997) shows that individual and community level multilingualism has positive consequences, particularly when cultural pluralism and multilingualism are accepted social norms. However, from a policy perspective, too many languages are sometimes viewed as a burden and a formidable problem for language planning and education. Further, with the dynamics of identity politics manipulating regional and linguistic identities, languages are seen as divisive and disintegrative. Scholars of languages have often pleaded for the preservation of linguistic diversity on ideological grounds and on grounds of linguistic human rights. Some studies in India sought to examine empirically questions relating to the social and psychological consequences of multilingualism: (a) is mother tongue maintenance and multilingualism at the individual and community level a barrier to intellectual and educational development (and, thus, socio-economic mobility) of linguistic communities, particularly the disadvantaged minorities? and (b) does linguistic diversity and bi-/multilingualism lead to social disintegration, as is commonly believed?

A series of studies over a period of two decades (Mohanty 1982a, 1982b, 1990a, 1990b; Mohanty and Babu 1983; Mohanty and Das 1987; discussed in Mohanty 1994, 2003a; Mohanty and Perregaux 1997) examined the cognitive and academic consequences of contact bilingualism among the Kond tribal[1] people — a group of indigenous people of Kandhamala district of Orissa, India. These studies compared Kui-Oriya bilingual and Oriya monolingual Kond children on a number of cognitive, metalinguistic and academic measures. Kui (of the Indo-Dravidian language family) is the indigenous language (and language of identity) of the Konds who are in contact with non-tribal speakers of Oriya (of the Indo-Aryan language family), the regional lingua franca and the official language of the province of Orissa. Owing to a historical process of frozen language shift, resulting in Kui to Oriya shift in some parts of the district and stable Kui-Oriya contact bilingualism in the remaining areas, it was possible, in these studies, to draw matched samples of bilinguals and monolinguals from the same cultural group. Thus, there was the methodological advantage of drawing bilingual and monolingual samples from within the same cultural group with homogeneous socio-demographic and economic

characteristics. It may be noted that, generally, in western studies, bilingual and monolingual samples differ in their cultural and socioeconomic status backgrounds, confounding the effects of bilingualism with cultural differences. Our studies, which included different samples of schooled (Grades I to X) and unschooled groups in the age range of 6 to 16, showed that bilingual children performed better than their monolingual counterparts in various measures assessing cognitive/intellectual development, metalinguistic ability, and academic achievement (of schooled children). The Kond studies show that children, growing up as Kui-Oriya bilinguals in a social milieu in which their indigenous language has been maintained in a stable pattern of contact bilingualism, have a clear cognitive advantage over their Oriya monolingual counterparts in areas where Kui has been lost as a result of language shift. The studies also show that the positive relationship between bilingualism and cognitive/academic performance can be explained in a contextual metacognition model (Mohanty 1994, 2003a) of bilingualism and cognition. This model suggests that, in a multilingual society, bilingualism is supported by its pluralistic norms and early language socialization. Further, bilingual/multilingual development and the communicative challenge posed by a complex linguistic environment together exert positive influences on children's cognitive, metalinguistic and metacognitive skills with positive impact on their intellectual and academic performance.

Evidence from our sociolinguistic surveys (Mohanty 1987, reported in Mohanty 1994; Mohanty and Parida 1993) among Kond and non-tribal adult villagers from Kui-Oriya bilingual and Oriya monolingual regions also shows that bilingualism promotes the social integration of contact communities. In terms of attitudes towards the maintenance of the language and culture of the in-group and out-group, the inter-group relationship between the bilingual communities in contact was integration-oriented, whereas, the relationship between tribal and non-tribal monolingual communities in contact was assimilation-oriented for the tribals and segregation-oriented for the non-tribals. Thus, language contact situations with stable patterns of multiple language use are characterized by positive inter-group relationship. The findings of the Kond studies question the common perception of linguistic heterogeneity as divisive and multilingualism as a cognitive burden. These findings are also supported in a number of other studies in different cultural contexts:

> There is now sound evidence from a variety of cultural settings supporting the positive role of bilingualism in cognitive development, which can be attributed to the metalinguistic and metacognitive advantage of bilinguals and to the social context of bilingualism particularly in multilingual countries. As new findings from a number of different societies accumulate, bilingualism has come to be viewed as a positive social force promoting adaptive cultural relationship, pluralism and better integration. These find-

ings have emphasized a fundamental distinction between dominant monolingual countries and the multilingual ones in terms of the very nature of bilingualism and its consequences. (Mohanty and Perregaux 1997: 246)

3. Languages, power and inequality: the other side of multilingualism

The positive maintenance norms and other positive features of multilingualism in India seem to increase chances of survival but they do not ensure equality of status, power and opportunities for the languages. In a stable and egalitarian form of multilingualism, maintenance of languages and cultures is not just a matter of development of minority languages; it should be viewed as a process of total enrichment of the multicultural and multilingual mosaic, including the majority languages. In other words, processes of language maintenance should be associated with empowerment of languages that begins with the recognition of the inherent equality and sufficiency of all languages. Languages do differ in their form and structure, but, in the cultural spheres of their use, they are all equally functional in serving the required expressive functions.

The difference in certain aspects of languages such as their complexity, ability to express specific experiences and the size of their vocabulary etc are only superficial differences based on conventions and functional requirements; no language is inherently deficient, illogical or primitive. (Mohanty 1990c: 4)

No language creates any disability — cognitive or otherwise. Disabilities or disadvantages often associated with minor languages are socially constructed based on the unequal treatment of languages. The speakers of minor and indigenous languages in India are multiply disadvantaged; as a group they are mostly poor, belonging to rural and backward areas sharing many features of disadvantage. This contributes to the association of these languages with powerlessness and insufficiency.

Linguistic inequality is institutionalized in India via the constitutional and statutory recognition of some of the languages. As pointed out earlier, only 22 languages are recognized as official languages, listed as such in the VIIIth schedule of the Constitution of India, and English is recognized as an associate official language. In the listing of languages based on Census returns, a large number of mother tongues are grouped under the 22 scheduled languages and out of the remaining mother tongues as many as 1957, each with less than 10,000 speakers, are grouped under "other mother tongues" category. The speakers of the "other mother tongues" constitute nearly 1 percent of the population, rendered powerless in the numbers game. The discrimination against languages is evident in many other spheres of social, economic, political and

educational activities. While the dominant languages are privileged as the official languages in the states, languages of laws and statutes, trade and commerce and languages specifically recognized for various purposes such as literary awards, many others are deprived of similar recognition. The use of languages in education, which is crucial to language planning and maintenance (Fishman 1991), is a major indicator of institutionalized linguistic discrimination. Apart from English and the 22 constitutionally recognized official languages, very few of the other languages find a place in school curriculum either as languages of teaching or as school subjects. In fact, as will be discussed later in this paper, the number of languages in schools in India has been declining over the years, down to nearly half of what it was in 1970. The tribal and other minority languages have no place in education and the children who speak these languages, when they enter schools, are forced into submersion education in dominant languages, with a subtractive effect on their mother tongue.

3.1. *Anti-predatory strategies and marginalization of dominated languages*

In India, while many languages co-exist and are maintained, many are also victims of discrimination, social and political neglect and various forms of deprivation. Some of the Indian languages are privileged with access to power and resources and others are marginalized and disadvantaged. There is a wide gap between the statuses of languages and, therefore, Indian multilingualism has been described as a "multilingualism of the unequals" (Mohanty 2004, 2006) in which languages are clearly associated with a hierarchy of power and privileges. Even when languages are maintained in such a hierarchical multilingualism, such maintenance is not without its cost. Language maintenance in the hierarchical multilingualism in India involves marginalization, domain shrinkage, identity crisis, deprivation of freedom and capability, educational failure (due to inadequate home language development and forced submersion in majority language schools), and poverty. Domain shrinkage and marginalization of languages to less resourceful areas as opposed to areas of greater opportunity (such as market place, legal/official domains, education, significant inter-group communication) are typical of the languages that survive despite the powerful presence of more dominant languages. The greater incidence of "natural" bilingualism among the weaker and disadvantaged communities, such as the tribal communities, is perhaps an indispensable strategy for survival, ensuring functioning with little conflict in the face of shift pressures and socio-economic onslaught. Such survival strategies of dominated languages in a hierarchical power structure have been called "anti-predatory strategies".

> When animals of subordinate species are threatened by more 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 pressure from dominant contact languages, these languages withdraw into domains of lesser socio-economic power and significance and their speakers usually adapt 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. (Mohanty 2006: 270)

Owing to such anti-predatory strategies, which the dominated language communities are forced to adopt as a survival technique, rapid language shift is averted. However, clearly, dominated languages are marginalized with considerable domain shrinkage, and are barely maintained in the domains of home and close in-group communication, with signs of declining intergenerational transmission. These languages become impoverished with restricted functions and limited scope for development. In this process, many tribal languages in India have been pushed out of public domains of social and economic significance for the communities, such as the weekly village market. For example, as Mohanty et al. (2009: 278–291) note, during the early 1980s the Kond women of Phulbani (now called Kandhamal) District of Orissa who brought their household produce for sale in the village markets spoke their Kui language and used traditional notions of weights and measures for all commercial transactions. They had the better of the bargain with the non-tribal customers with limited or no knowledge of Kui. Over the last two decades, Kui has been pushed out of the village markets and the Kond women have been deprived of their economic power of bargaining in market transactions. Similarly, Panda (2004, 2007) observes that the use of the Saora language and number system in market transactions that empowered the people of the Saora tribe in Gajapati district of Orissa is on the decline. When languages are kept out of significant domains of use, the indigenous knowledge systems are lost and their speakers weakened.

Large-scale social neglect and discrimination have led to loss of linguistic diversity and impoverishment of languages in the world. Exclusion of languages from domains of power, official recognition, legal and statutory use, trade, commerce and education, severely restricts the chances of their development and survival. Social and educational neglect strip languages of their instrumental vitality and contribute to their weakness. Such weakness of dominated languages is often cited to justify further neglect that continues to make them weaker in a vicious circle of language disadvantage (Mohanty et al. 2009:

278–291). While the processes of language shift in situations of contact in India may be less visible and slow, languages are marginalized and impoverished in the vicious circle of neglect and resultant weakness. Multiple languages co-exist in the Indian multilingual mosaic but only few are languages of power and privilege; the rest are marginalized and weakened in the hierarchical power relationship between languages. With English as the dominant language in post-colonial India, as in South Asia and other parts of the world, the linguistic hierarchy has created major gaps or linguistic divides in society, which can be seen in terms of a double divide between English and major languages and between major languages and the indigenous and tribal minority (ITM) languages.

4. The double divide and linguistic hierarchy

With a dominant presence of English, all multilingual societies in South Asia characteristically show signs of a hierarchical multilingualism with English (and, in some cases, a major national language) at the top of the hierarchy, with other major languages in the middle rungs and with ITM languages at the bottom. In such a condition of linguistic double divide, the languages in the higher levels push the lower-level languages out of significant public domains in a hierarchical pecking order. In this process, there is progressive domain shrinkage for most languages in favor of the higher-level languages and the rate of domain loss and marginalization is much higher for the ITM languages at the bottom of the three-tiered hierarchy. The linguistic double divide in the hierarchical power structure of languages leads to deprivation and impoverishment of languages, threats of language shift, and endangerment and identity crises for the ITM languages. This is certainly true of South Asian countries, which are typically characterized by multilingual social realities and monolingual state practices. Linguistic minorities and speakers of marginalized and dominated languages in these societies seem to be adopting various strategies of negotiation and assertion of their identities. In India, English is the language of power, and Hindi and other major languages dominate the ITM languages in the states. This has led to a struggle on the part of some of the ITM language communities for recognition and revitalization of their languages. A constitutional amendment in December 2003 granted official status to Bodo and Santali following a long period of language movement activity and political lobbying; this is the first time since the promulgation of the Constitution of India in 1950 that any tribal language has been regognized as an official language. In Nepal, English and Nepali are the dominant languages in all spheres of official and educational use and nearly 100 other dominated languages are beginning

to assert themselves through organized political movements under the nation's new democratic régime. In Pakistan, as Rahman (1998) observes, out of the three official languages (English, Urdu and Sindhi), English is the language of power, Urdu is the language of Pakistani nationalism, and most of the 72 languages are clamoring for recognition through several ethno-linguistic movements. Over 39 languages in Bangladesh, including many tribal languages, are in search of their identity *vis-à-vis* Bengali (which is the only official language) and English. Similarly, the place of nearly 29 languages of the indigenous communities in relation to Dzongkha, the major state language, and English is being debated for Bhutan's language and education policy. A dominant presence of English with rhetorical support to indigenous and minority languages as symbols of national identities, is typical of all South Asian countries. Practically English has established itself as the language of power in South Asian societies, often benefiting from internal conflicts between competing linguistic claims. For example, conflicts between Hindi and Tamil as well as other South Indian languages in India, and between the speakers of Sinhala and Tamil in Sri Lanka have facilitated the dominant role of English. The formation of Bangladesh as a separate nation followed the Bengali language movement resisting the dominance of Urdu; but internal power dynamics and conflicting interests have resulted in a dominant place for English. In Pakistan, English is promoted as a language of power although Urdu (as well as Islam) is projected as a symbol of national integration. With English as the language of power and privileges, particularly in the new global economy, the ITM languages in South Asia are pushed to the periphery. In spite of widespread multilingualism, South Asian societies are characterized by a typically hierarchical relationship between languages which can be seen as a double divide between English at the top of the three-tiered hierarchy, the mass language(s) of the majority at the middle rungs and the marginalized indigenous and minority languages — often stigmatized as dialects — at the bottom.

The Indian socio-linguistic scenario is affected, on one hand, by the English-regional majority language divide or what Ramanathan (2005a, 2005b) calls *the English-Vernacular divide* and, on the other, by *the Vernacular-Minority*[2] */ Indigenous Language divide* (which will be called *Vernacular-Other divide,* hereafter). This double divide is reflected in the very nature of multilingualism, which according to Annamalai (2001: 35) is "bifocal, existing both at the mass level and the elite level". Elite level multilingualism involves English as an additional language, mostly acquired through formal schooling, whereas mass multilingualism is related to grass-roots level natural or informal bilingualism, mostly acquired through language contact. Thus, the distribution of bilingualism with and without English in the multilingual mosaic of India shows the hierarchy across the linguistic double divides. This hierarchy also involves a pecking order in which English relegates Hindi and other major languages

(of the states in India) to positions of lesser significance and power, while the state majority languages push other languages out of the major domains of use.

The double divide is variously negotiated, resisted and contested in society through individual and collective identity strategies. The complex identity processes have contributed to the rising demand for English and English-medium schooling, Anglicization of Indian languages and progressive domain shrinkage of other languages in favor of English, and, at the same time, to many instances of movements agitating for the removal of English (and Hindi, in some parts of the country) and to the Sanskritization of languages. The hierarchical relationship of languages has affected the identity strategies of the speakers of dominated and indigenous languages. Collective identity strategies have led, in some cases, to language movements, and to the assertive maintenance and revitalization of languages (such as Bodo and Santali). In others, individual identity strategies of the speakers of indigenous languages in India have resulted in passive acceptance of the dominance of major languages and a dissociation between instrumental and integrative functions of language (Mohanty 2004). Such dissociation is evident from their endorsement of the major languages for children's education and for use in domains of economic significance and of groups' own native languages for in-group identity and culture. Such divergent identity strategies can be seen as leading to instances of linguistic identity without language (for example, the case of Kui[3] linguistic identity applying to monolingual Konds using the Oriya language) and language without identity (for example, many of the upper-class English-educated Bhojpuri speakers do not identify with Bhojpuri[4]). Use of indigenous and vernacular languages is often associated with shame and denial of proficiency in these languages. These are some indications of how the hierarchical linguistic structure and the double divide in the Indian society are variously negotiated through complex social-psychological processes (Mohanty 1991, 2004). Studies of multilingual socialization in India (Bujorbarua 2006; Mohanty et al. 1999) show that children in India develop an early awareness of the double divide and the social norms of preference among the languages in the hierarchy. For example, in discussing the stages of multilingual socialization, Mohanty et al. (1999) show that 7- to 9-year-old children in India have a clear awareness of the higher social status of English *vis-à-vis* their own mother tongues and that schools do contribute to the development of such early awareness. Bujorborua's (2006) study of the multilingual socialization of Assamese children shows that children develop an early preference for using English over Assamese. She also shows that parental language socialization strategies target transmission of the socio-linguistic hierarchy of languages and the preference for English over Assamese, Hindi and other languages. These studies show how the relationship between language and power and the hierarchy of preferences for languages

are socially constructed and legitimated through the processes of language socialization.

The double divide has far-reaching implications for the future of multilingualism in India. It affects the processes of language change, marginalization, shift and maintenance and the relationship between languages and their speakers. The languages across the double divide — English, the vernaculars and ITM languages — show quantum differences in their ethno-linguistic vitality and access to power and privileges in Indian society. This is quite evident in language policy and practice in education in India.

4.1. *Languages and education in India: some implications of the double divide*

The role of languages in education in India reflects the double divide in the multilingual hierarchy. At all levels of education, the dominance of English is increasingly evident. Constitutional provisions and several policy documents (see Mohanty 2006, 2008a, for discussion) accept the principle of education in children's mother tongue and in 1957 the three-language formula (TLF) was floated by the government of India to deal with the place of mother tongues, regional languages and Hindi, and English in school education in India. The TLF recommended use of regional language or mother tongue as the first teaching-language to be followed by the teaching of Hindi or regional languages and English. The distinction between regional language and mother tongue was not clear and it formalized the imposition of the majority state languages as media of school education on the minority and tribal language children in forced submersion models of schooling. The TLF was modified in 1967 making the teaching of Hindi optional and suggesting the use of tribal languages as media of early schooling for tribal children. However, such provisions in the TLF and several other policy documents "mostly remained untranslated into practice" (Mohanty 2006: 274). Subsequently, the TLF was modified on several occasions; "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 the third language subject" (Mohanty 2006: 274). The TLF did not provide a language-in-education policy. Through several modifications, it sought to balance between English, Hindi and regional languages (vernaculars) and mother tongues (of the tribal and minority groups) and, quite clearly, it failed to do so. Further, in the absence of a uniform school system and the increasingly dominant presence of private schools, most of which are English-medium schools, the language scenario in Indian education continues to be chaotic. However, two trends are

quite visible: English is rapidly gaining in significance in school education all over the country, directly undermining the role of Hindi and other vernacular languages, and there is a steady decline in the number of mother tongues in schools in India along with a negligible presence of tribal languages.

Analysis of the number of languages used in schools in India as languages of teaching and as school subjects shows a sharp decline over the years (Mohanty 2008a). This number declined from 81 in 1970 to 41 in 1998. At present, the number of languages taught or used as media of instruction (MI) is 31 in primary level (Grades I to V), 25 in Grades VI and VII, 21 in Grades VIII to X, and 18 in higher secondary levels (Grades XI and XII). English is not only present in all levels of education, but its presence in very early years of schooling is increasing rapidly. The use of tribal languages as MI is negligible (Mohanty 2008b); out of over 100 tribal languages, only 3 to 4 are used regularly as languages of teaching (Jhingran 2005); less than 1% of the tribal mother tongue children have any opportunity for education through the medium of their mother tongues. Thus, the "mismatch between school language and home language and the subtractive language development triggered by the forced submersion are major educational issues" (Mohanty 2006: 275).

In contrast to the tribal and minority languages, English is used as a language of teaching all over India at all levels of education. Higher education, technical education and university-level teaching are almost exclusively in English. English is taught at least as a compulsory school subject by Grade 4 in all the states and in Grade I in most states in India. In fact, English has replaced Hindi as the most pervasively used language in schools. There are gross differences in the nature of the place of English in different schools in India. In almost all private schools, English is the MI or language of teaching, whereas it is taught mostly as a compulsory school subject from the early primary grades in the government schools.[5] Almost all government schools, with a few exceptions, use Hindi and other regional majority languages (vernaculars) as media of instruction (MI) for children with a vernacular MT. The ITM children are also forced to attend such schools where the MI is not their MT. The private English medium (EM) schools in India are quite heterogeneous in terms of their quality and cost and the socioeconomic strata to which they cater (Mohanty 2006). As pointed out earlier, education in English, as the elitist language of power and access to economic resources, is most sought after by the parents in India. Therefore, only those who cannot afford English-medium schools for their children opt for vernacular MT medium schools, and poor parents from tribal and minority mother tongues have no choice but to send their children to vernacular-medium (VM) government schools. Thus, in terms of the linguistic double divide and the socioeconomic stratification in society, schools in India can be broadly categorized into five levels based on the annual cost of schooling (to the parents) and the medium of instruction:

i. Very exclusive elitist EM residential schools (nearly 1,000,000 INR [Indian Rupees]);
ii. High-cost EM schools for the privileged class (100,000 to 300,000 INR);
iii. Low-cost EM schools for the less privileged social class (5,000 to 20,000 INR);
iv. No-cost VM government schools for the regional majority language groups who cannot afford EM schools;
v. No-cost VM government schools for the ITM language groups who cannot afford EM schools.

The quality of the schools in these five categories is closely proportionate to the cost to the parents. The children in the last two categories are disadvantaged since they come from low socioeconomic strata and are subjected to a low quality of schooling. However, the ITM children in VM government schools are most disadvantaged with poor quality schooling in a language that is not their MT. As has been discussed earlier, exclusion of the mother tongues from schools for indigenous tribal minority children has negative consequences for their education and capability development and contributes to their poverty (Mohanty 2008b). In fact, the organization of public and private schools in India can be understood from the perspective of the linguistic double divide in the society. The societal linguistic hierarchy — the elitist and privileged position of English, the relative advantages of the vernaculars and the dominated and disadvantaged status of the ITM languages — is directly related to the manner in which schools are socially situated. This becomes quite clear from examination of the processes of negotiation of the double divide in different types of schools in India. We will now briefly focus on some recent analysis of such processes.

4.1.1. *The double divide and school practices in India: some observations.* In view of the rising demand for EM schools, a large number of low-cost (and low-quality) schools have sprung up all over the country as commercial ventures offering education in English for aspiring parents from the lower socioeconomic strata. School practices and classroom teaching are quite diverse even across the EM schools. As Ramanathan (2005b) observes, these EM schools socialize students to divergent models of English literacy. Generally, the elite and upper class schools offer better quality (and high-cost) schooling compared to the other EM schools and their school practices are distinctly Anglicized and westernized. Use of languages other than English in the school premises is not allowed, and classroom transactions are exclusively in English. The home environment and early socialization of the pupils (Mohanty et al. 1999) in these schools support learning of English and provide the attitudinal readiness for such learning. The teachers in these schools are competent in

English and usually come from middle and upper economic strata. The low-cost EM schools for children from economically less privileged social class families, in contrast, respond to the need for negotiation between the aspired English identity and the lack of socio-cultural support for English in the early socialization of the children. Typically, these schools espouse cosmetic Anglicization, insisting on western school uniform (usually with a tie and shoes as in upper class EM schools) for the pupils and other behavioral routines such as ritualistic recitation of prayers and greeting routines in English. The regional majority languages such as Hindi or Oriya and children's mother tongues (such as tribal languages like Kui and Saora) are freely used in classroom teaching of various school subjects including English (Mohanty et al. 2010), and classrooms language transactions in English are nativized and hybridized (Ramanathan 2005a). Mohanty et al. (2010) show that the EM schools for the less privileged social class correspond to inadequate home support for children's learning of school subjects in English by use of low cost, poor quality and "easy" text books and also by adapting the classroom assessment tests in such a way as to emphasize "correct single word answers" in place of elaborate written answers. Ramanathan (2005a) discusses classroom pedagogic practices of negotiation of the English-Vernacular divide in different types of Gujarati/Vernacular-medium and English-medium educational institutions in Gujarat, India. On the basis of their observations of classroom transactions in tribal areas in Orissa, India and in an English-medium charity school in Delhi for children from lower middle-class families, Mohanty et al. (2010) show how the more complex English-Vernacular and Vernacular-Other double divide is variously addressed in the early school years by teachers and school-level educational administrators (including school Headmasters/Principals and school supervisors/inspectors). The teaching practices in these schools show that the hierarchical relationship between languages — English, the vernacular languages (e.g., Hindi or Oriya) and the indigenous languages (e.g., Kui) — and the linguistic double divide (which acts as a hurdle to children's classroom learning of English and regional majority languages), are accepted at one level and strategically contested at another. As Mohanty et al. (2010) show, this leads to unexpected classroom practices like teaching English in Hindi or Oriya and strategic informal use of tribal mother tongues in teaching language subjects. They also show that, in the teaching of a vernacular language like Oriya to tribal children with a tribal language MT (Kui or Saora), teachers in VM government schools in the tribal areas in Orissa adapt various strategies to facilitate learning a non-MT school language. These strategies are intended to scaffold the learning of the vernacular language by various means, including frequent use of the tribal MT and modifying the learning targets and assessment procedures in such a way as to facilitate children's transition from MT to the vernacular language of school instruction.

The preceding observations on school practices show that the different types of schools in India variously respond to the need to scaffold the school learning of pupils in their efforts to circumvent the English-Vernacular and Vernacular-Other language divide. It must be noted that the double divide is much more than a simple linguistic divide abstracted from the hierarchical relationship between languages in a multilingual society. It is deeply rooted in the social macrostructure in which the languages, social classes and the schools are embedded. For example, the social class difference in India is the cause as well as consequence of the power of English in instilling learning aspirations among students in the lower social strata. The meaning and implications of English, vernacular languages and mother tongues are socially constructed and vary across different social classes. Such differences are rooted in the processes of socialization and availability of material, social and family support for different languages, which differ from one social class to another. As cumulative effects of such differences, children are already located at different points in the double divide when they enter formal schools (which, in turn, are also similarly located). The children from the privileged class are already located at the other side of the divide, with early advantages in respect of English and, therefore, they are not required to deal with challenges of the double divide. The less privileged are the ones who need to negotiate the challenges of the linguistic double divide in the form of English, which may be alien to their early experience. The challenge of the double divide is most formidable for the ITM children in schools, who need to negotiate simultaneously the English-Vernacular and the Vernacular-Other language divide. They struggle not only to learn the vernacular language of the school with no or little proficiency in the same but also to learn an alien language like English twice removed from their social reality and early experience. The language disadvantage of tribal children in forced submersion schools using a vernacular-language medium of teaching is a major factor in poor school learning, high exclusion rates, large scale school failure, capability deprivation and poverty among tribal mother tongue speakers in India (see Mohanty [2008b] for an elaborate discussion).

4.2. *Overcoming the language barrier: multilingual education in India*

The system of education in India has not responded to the challenges of its multilingual ethos (Mohanty 2008b). Multiple languages complement each other in meeting the communicative needs of people and, hence, education must necessarily foster multilingual proficiency in the languages of functional significance at different levels of the Indian society — MT, languages for

regional and national level communication and international language of wider communication. Thus, education for the major language communities with a vernacular language as their MT needs to develop competence in at least two to three languages such as Bengali, Hindi and English. Education for the ITM language communities, on the other hand, must involve three to four languages including, for example, a tribal language MT, major languages like Hindi and Bengali, and English as an international language of wider communication. However, analysis of the programs of school education in India shows that they offer only nominal forms of multilingual education (Mohanty 2006, 2008a). They do not support the weaker languages; nor do they develop multilingual proficiency. Multilingual education (MLE) involves use of two or more languages as languages of teaching (MI) in subjects other than the languages themselves (Anderson and Boyer 1978) and it develops high levels of multilingual proficiency and multiliteracy (Mohanty, Skutnabb-Kangas, Panda and Phillipson 2009). International experience with MLE and research evidence show that the process of education for the development of multilingual proficiency may start with the development of proficiency in MT as the language of teaching (MI) for at least six to eight years of schooling and may gradually develop other languages through their systematic use as MI (Mohanty, Skutnabb-Kangas, Panda and Phillipson 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas and Mohanty 2009). Such programs of MLE is particularly beneficial for the ITM children who are denied the choice of development of their MT and multilingual proficiency in the current system of education in India in which tribal and other ITM children are forced to go through subtractive forms of submersion education in a non-MT language (Mohanty 2006, 2008b). In recent years some programs of MLE have started in India to deal with the problem of language disadvantage of tribal children facing the formidable double divide.

The language disadvantage of tribal children in dominant language schools is a major factor in their educational failure. This realization led to sporadic efforts in India to try out various models of mother tongue-based education for tribal children (Mohanty 1989, 2006). The early attempts were transitional programs of bilingual education to facilitate smooth transition from the tribal MT to vernacular language of schooling. These government programs lacked any theoretical framework and were dropped without any systematic evaluation. Only recently, some states have started structured programs of mother tongue-based MLE for tribal MT children. Mother tongue-based MLE started in Andhra Pradesh in the year 2004 in eight tribal MTs for children in 240 schools and in Orissa in 2006 in ten tribal MTs in 195 schools (see Mohanty at al. [2009: 278–291] for details of these programs). These programs involve use of MT as the language of teaching and early literacy instruction for the first three to five years in primary level schooling. The state majority language (L2), Telugu in Andhra Pradesh and Oriya in Orissa, is introduced as a language

subject for the development of oral communicative skills in the second year and for reading and writing skills in the third year of schooling. The state language is used as a language of teaching from the fourth year and the program envisages the MLE children joining regular school programs in the majority language of the states (Telugu/Oriya) from the sixth year onwards. The tribal languages in these programs are written in the script[6] of the state language with some modifications wherever necessary. The teachers in the MLE programs are taken from the language community and speak the target tribal language. The programs follow the common school curriculum of the states but attempt to integrate the cultural knowledge system of the tribal language community in developing the textbooks and other curricular materials. In Orissa, a special intervention program (Panda and Mohanty 2009) called *MLE Plus* (MLE+) is implemented in eight of the government MLE schools in two tribal languages — Kui and Saora. This program has a special focus on cultural pedagogy that emphasizes culture and community based approach to children's collaborative classroom learning and development of cultural identity. Several evaluations of the MLE and MLE+ programs have shown positive effects on children's classroom achievement, school attendance and participation, parental satisfaction and community involvement (Mohanty et al. 2009: 278–291; Panda and Mohanty 2009). Evidently, the experimental MLE programs in India provide better quality education for the tribal children compared to the traditional programs of submersion education in the state majority language, which is not their MT. However, the burden of the linguistic double divide remains a major issue even in these relatively small-scale experimental programs, which are under pressure to accommodate the major state language, English and Hindi at early stages of primary education. Because of this pressure, MLE programs not only bring in the state language (L2), English and Hindi into the teaching program by the second, third and fifth years, respectively, but also plan to discontinue use of the MT from the sixth year onwards. This approach to transition from the MT to vernaculars and English goes against the established research findings in respect of MLE. Research clearly shows that late-exit programs of MLE, which continue with MT as the language of teaching for six to eight years, are more effective than early-exit programs and that the longer the MT is continued as the language of teaching the better is the development of proficiency in other languages including English (Skutnabb-Kangas and Mohanty 2009). Further, "while learning of the state majority language as also Hindi is supported by greater degree of exposure to these languages through their presence in several social and public domains such as market place use, intergroup communication and popular media, the same cannot be said for English in rural areas" (Mohanty et al. 2009: 289). Thus, the problem of the double divide remains a formidable challenge for education of the tribal children in India.

5. Conclusion

Languages do make us human. But used as instruments of discrimination, subjugation, assimilation and homogenization, languages are also dehumanizing. In any society, when some languages empower their speakers, giving them better access to resources, the speakers of other languages are necessarily disadvantaged. Marginalization and shift of languages occur not because the languages in question are inherently weak, but because, in the hierarchical positioning of languages in a vicious circle of language disadvantage, they are weakened systematically and cumulatively by prolonged exclusion from socially and economically significant domains including education. Multilingualism, as in India, is and can be a social and individual resource. However, when multilingualism is associated with inequality, it privileges few and disadvantages many. In a hierarchical pecking order of multilingualism, the privileged language of the elites pushes the less privileged languages into domains of lesser significance. The less privileged languages, in turn, push the disadvantaged ones into invisibility and marginalization in a defensive process of anti-predatory reactions. Indian multilingualism shows definite signs of such inequality, which is dehumanizing, since it leads to capability deprivation and poverty for the marginalized language communities such as the tribal peoples. Absence of an effective and consistent policy framework for languages in society and education perpetuates the inequality.

It has been argued in this paper that Indian multilingualism can be understood as a system characterized by a double divide between English, the vernaculars or the regional dominant languages and the languages of the indigenous and tribal minorities. The processes of multilingual socialization, collective and individual identity strategies and a host of other social-psychological and sociolinguistic phenomena such as intergroup relations in Indian multilingualism can be viewed as being deeply related to the double divide. The linguistic double divide is simultaneously a phenomenon embedded in the social macrostructure and one that affects the same. For example, the system of private and government schooling in India is organized as following from and leading to the linguistic double divide. In order to understand how schools in India make and unmake the society, one needs to appreciate this bidirectional relationship between the linguistic double divide and the system as well as the processes of schooling. Negotiation of linguistic identities in society and in educational institutions can be viewed as attempts at different levels to overcome the language barriers across the double divide. The new experimental programs of mother tongue-based multilingual education in India are attempts at helping the tribal children deal effectively with the problem of the double divide. However, the structuring of these programs and positioning of languages in them are saddled by the challenges of the societal and linguis-

tic double divide. The future of India's multilingualism and linguistic diversity lies in how the formidable problem of the double divide is addressed.

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Notes

1. The Indigenous or aboriginal communities in India are officially called 'tribes' (*ādivāsi*) and are listed as 'scheduled tribes' which are identified on the basis of 'distinct culture and language', 'geographical isolation', 'primitive traits', 'economic backwardness', and 'limited contact with the out groups' and also, sometimes, on political considerations. The Anthropological Survey of India, in its *People of India* project, has identified 635 tribal communities of which 573 are so far officially notified as Scheduled Tribes. Here the term 'tribe' (rather than 'Indigenous peoples') is used specifically in the Indian context in its formal/official and neutral sense.
2. It should be noted that no language is a national majority language in India. Speakers of Hindi, which make up the largest linguistic group, constitute 41.03% of the national population. Bengali, the next largest group has only 8.11% share of the population.
3. Kui is the indigenous language of the Kond tribe in Kandhamal District of Orissa. In parts of the district, there has been a shift of Kui in favor of Oriya, the state dominant language. The Oriya monolingual Konds in these parts of Kandhamal still identify with Kui language calling themselves "Kui people".
4. Upper class Bhojpuri speakers often assume a superordinate identity as Hindi speakers. Srivastava (1989) also noted that migrant Bhojpuri workers in Maharashtra show a language shift towards Hindi.
5. In many states in India, particularly in the northeast region, government schools are also English medium schools. Some states in India (e.g., Andhra Pradesh) are planning to open parallel sections in the same schools with English or regional majority (vernacular) language as language of teaching.
6. Tribal languages in India do not have any exclusive script system and are usually written in the script of either the dominant regional language or another major language. But, in recent years, some tribal languages, such as Santali, have developed their own writing system.

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