

Chapter 13

Language Policy in Education and Classroom Practices in India

Is the Teacher a Cog in the Policy Wheel?

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Introduction

Though linguistic diversity is seriously threatened today, linguistic minorities and speakers of marginalized and dominated languages are also asserting their identities. This trend is quite evident in South Asian countries, which are also characterized by the dominant presence of English. Though politically indigenous languages have been given rhetorical support to symbolize national identities, English has established itself as the language of power often benefiting from internal conflicts between competing linguistic assertions.

In spite of widespread multilingualism, South Asian societies are characterized by a typically hierarchical relationship between languages that 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 (Mohanty, 2008a). The chasm between policy and practice with respect to the place of languages and minority mother tongues leads to educational failure and capability deprivation of the minority linguistic groups (Mohanty, 2008b). The English–vernacular divide is severally negotiated and contested in these societies (Ramanathan, 2005).

This chapter focuses on the various modes of such negotiation and resistance in Indian classrooms—the processes by which the ground-level contextual realities of linguistic diversity, embedded in the macrostructure of hierarchical power relationship between languages, are negotiated by the teachers and the field-level functionaries in the school system in direct contact with immediate issues and problems. The context of the classrooms and school-level transactions are analyzed through a brief discussion of the language education policy in India to show that some explicit policy provisions have largely remained unimplemented and have failed to substantially influence what actually happens in Indian classrooms. Weaknesses in the processes of implementation and governance of policies have resulted in a wide range of actual practices in the classrooms where multilingual diversity seems to have yielded to chaos. Under such conditions, teachers and field-level educational administrators have a difficult task in negotiating between the prescribed curricular and pedagogic practices and the real challenges they face

in their classrooms. What actually gets transacted in the classrooms is often borne out of the ground-level contextual appreciation of the problems of individual children from linguistically diverse backgrounds. The teacher is not just another cog in the policy wheel; she is an active problem solver trying to deal with children's classroom learning in her own framework and understanding of the reality.

Multilingualism, Language Education Policy, and Inequality

In the 1991 Census Survey of India, more than 10,000 mother tongues were named. These were classified into 3,372 mother tongues out of which 1,576 were listed and the remaining 1,796 were grouped under the "other" category. The mother tongues are variously classified into 300 to 400 languages. Out these, 22 are recognized as official languages listed in the VIIIth schedule of the Constitution of India. In addition, English is recognized as an associate official language. India ranks fourth in the world in terms of the number of languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). However, the uniqueness of Indian multilingualism goes beyond the presence of many languages in different spheres of social life of the masses.

The psychosocial dimensions of the patterns of language and communication are characterized by several special features (see Mohanty, 1991, 1994, 2006). Dynamics of the relationship between languages and their users, the organization of the languages in the Indian society, and their complex manifestations in the daily lives of the common people make the ethos of language use in India quite distinct from the dominant monolingual societies. With most people and communities using multiple languages in various domains of routine communication, multilingualism is widespread and languages tend to be maintained in situations of mutual contact. A high degree of maintenance of languages is possible 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, Panda, & Mishra, 1999). With such characteristic features, multilingualism and maintenance of mother tongues remain a positive force for the individuals and communities clearly associated with cognitive and social benefits (Mohanty, 1994, 2003).

Despite such positive features of multilingualism and the maintenance norms, many Indian languages are endangered and most of them happen to be tribal languages.¹ For example, in 1971 Orissa was one of the most linguistically diverse states in India with 50 languages, including 38 tribal languages. Now, official documents of the Government of Orissa show the number of tribal languages in the state to be 22. Many languages coexist and are maintained in the Indian multilingual mosaic and, at the same time, many are also victims of discrimination, social and political neglect, and various forms of deprivation. There is a wide gap between the statuses of languages; though some are privileged with access to power and resources, others are marginalized and disadvantaged and, therefore,

Indian multilingualism has been described as a “multilingualism of the unequals” (Mohanty, 2004).

Linguistic discrimination and inequalities in India are formally rooted in the statutory and political processes of governance. With constitutional recognition to only 22 of the languages as official, most of the Indian languages are effectively kept out of the major domains of power. There is also specific official recognition of languages for many other public purposes, such as for promotion of culture and literature, and for use in limited spheres of governance. Such recognition is a reflection of the political power of the linguistic groups. The Constitutional amendment of 2003 conferring official language status to Bodo and Santali was possible due to the assertive language maintenance movements by the two tribal language communities. Other weak voices for similar recognition are ignored in the dynamics of power and politics. Despite statutory provisions for their preservation and development, minority and indigenous languages suffer from pervasive discrimination and neglect in all spheres of governance; tribal and other linguistic minorities are deprived of their voices and equality of opportunity for democratic participation. Yet another major basis of institutionalized inequality is the exclusion of most of the Indian languages, except those with an official status, from the system of schooling and formal education.

Languages in Indian Education: Policy and Practice

There is an explicit constitutional provision that the state and the local authorities shall endeavor to “provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at primary stage of education to children belonging to minority groups” (Article 350A, Constitution of India, 1950). This provision remains unimplemented and till today there is no explicit policy with respect to languages in education or with respect to the protection and development of minority languages. The three-language formula proposed in 1957, and modified thereafter, recommended use of a regional language or mother tongue, Hindi, and/or English and an additional modern Indian language in all schools (see Mohanty, 2006, 2008a). However, because of a lack of clear distinction between mother tongue and regional language and ambiguities with respect to the relative places of Hindi and English, the three-language formula and subsequent policy formulations “have mostly remained political and ideological statements far removed from the actual practices, which were quite diverse” (Mohanty, 2006, p. 275). In fact, despite the rhetoric about the mother tongues and Indian languages, English has replaced Hindi as a compulsory second-language subject in most of the schools in India; in the majority of states, it is taught from Grade 1 in regional-language- or vernacular-medium government schools. Furthermore, widespread preference for English-medium education (mostly private schools) has relegated Hindi and other major regional and constitutional languages to lesser positions in education (Kurien, 2004). The recent National Curricular Framework (National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2005) makes a strong plea for mother-tongue education, but the ground-level impact of this framework is conspicuously

absent; mother tongues continue to be ignored for children's early education and schooling.

At present only 41 languages are used in schools either as the medium of instruction or as school subjects. The number of languages taught as school subjects actually declined from 81 in 1970 to 67, 58, 44, and 41, respectively, in 1976, 1978, 1990, and 1998 (Mohanty, 2006). The number of languages used as the medium of instruction has also declined. Between the years 1990 and 1998, the number of languages used as medium of instruction declined from 43 to 33 in primary grades (1 to 5); 31 to 25 in upper primary grades (6 and 7); 22 to 21 in secondary grades (8 to 10); and 20 to 18 in higher secondary grades (11 and 12). Thus, education in mother tongue is available only for children from a limited set of major languages, and the mismatch between home and school languages and neglect of mother tongues in schooling impose on the tribal (as well as other minority) children a subtractive language-learning experience that leads to high push-out rates and educational failure (Mohanty, 2008b). The negative consequences of such mismatch have been documented in several Indian studies (e.g., Jhingran, 2005; Mohanty, 1994, 2000, 2008b).

It should be noted that in the quasifederal structure of governance in the Indian union education is a concurrent subject, which means that both the federal and the state governments exercise some control over education and the national recommendations are not binding on the states. This has added further to the chaos with respect to actual language education practices. The three-language formula, for example, is variously interpreted in different states leading to very different combinations of languages in school curricula. There are, however, broad common practices across the states: The state government schools use the major state language as the language of teaching for all children with few exceptions, and English is placed as a major language subject in government schools early in primary grades (from Grade 1 in most of the states). Besides, a rapidly increasing number of private schools all over the country are English-medium schools, where the language of teaching from the beginning of schooling is English. Mohanty (2006, 2008a) has discussed the various nominal forms of multilingual education in India in which mother tongues and other languages are variously placed in the formal school curriculum, and it is not uncommon for classroom activities to be informally transacted in different languages, particularly when the officially prescribed language of teaching is not the home language for some or most of the students. It is quite evident that the ground-level realities with respect to positioning of languages in Indian education are quite diverse, far removed from what is suggested as a policy framework in major statutory and policy documents, and appear to be chaotic and muddled in their confusing variety. With the growing significance of English and the rising demand for English-medium private schools predicated on the popular myth of English-medium superiority, the language situation in the Indian classrooms has become quite fluid. Mohanty (2006) has discussed the social implications of English-medium schooling in India questioning the popular myth of the English-medium superiority, but what happens at the ground level is far removed from the academic discourse on the

role of English. As Shohamy (2006) points out, propagation of such myths about language influences *de facto* policies.

Negotiating the Double Divide

In essence, the local educational practices in India remain quite heterogeneous and unorganized and reflect the social macrostructure of the double divide referred to earlier. The Indian educational scenario is affected, on one hand, by the English–regional majority language divide or what Ramanathan (2005) calls the English–Vernacular divide and, on the other, by the Vernacular–Minority²/Indigenous Language divide (which will be called Vernacular–Other divide, hereafter). This double divide yields to a hierarchical pecking order in which English relegates Hindi and other major languages to positions of lesser significance and power, as the state majority languages push other languages out of education and major domains of use. The double divide is, however, variously resisted, contested, and negotiated in the society through individual and collective identity strategies. The divergent identity processes have contributed to the rising demand for English and English-medium schooling and to the progressive domain shrinkage of other languages in favor of English and, at the same time, have led to many instances of movement for the removal of English (and Hindi, in parts of the country). The processes of linguistic convergence and divergence in relation to English have led to disparate trends of *Anglicization* and *Sanskritization* of Indian languages.

The hierarchical relation of languages has affected the identity strategies of the speakers of dominated and indigenous languages (Mohanty, 2007b). In some cases, collective identity strategies have led to language movements, assertive maintenance, and revitalization of languages (such as Bodo and Santali). In others, individual identity strategies have resulted in passive acceptance of the dominance of major languages (Mohanty, 2007b), which is evident from the endorsement of the major languages for education and domains of economic significance and the indigenous language for in-group identity. Such identity strategies are also reflected in instances of linguistic identity without language (e.g., Oriya monolingual Konds with Kui³ linguistic identity) and language without identity (e.g., the upper class English-educated Bhojpuri speakers who do not identify with Bhojpuri⁴). Often the use of indigenous and vernacular languages is associated with shame leading to denial of proficiency in these languages. Thus, there are complex social psychological reactions through which such hierarchical linguistic structure and the double divide are variously negotiated in the Indian society (Mohanty, 1991, 2007b). Ramanathan (2005) discusses several such processes of appropriation, nativization, and hybridization of English in the context of the English–vernacular divide in India. She focuses on the pedagogic practices through which the English–vernacular divide is negotiated in college education in Gujarat in different types of Gujarati/Vernacular-medium and English-medium institutions. Ramanathan (2005) analyzes the divergent cultural models of English literacy transacted in schools using Gujarati or English as a

medium (K-12) and relates them to the processes of contestation and negotiation of the English–vernacular divide.

This chapter has a focus on how the more complex double divide (English–vernacular and vernacular–Other) is variously addressed in the early school years (mostly primary grades, that is, Grades 1–5) by the teachers and the school-level educational administrators/managers (including school Headmasters/Principals and school supervisors/inspectors). Our observations are drawn from over three decades of work with schools and schoolteachers in tribal areas in Orissa, India, and from an ongoing study of an English-medium charity school in Delhi for children from lower class and lower middle-class families. We will discuss the school and classroom practices with respect to the teaching of English and then focus on teaching in vernacular-medium schools in tribal areas.

Negotiating Language Barriers in the Classroom

School Practices in Teaching English

English is taught in all schools in India beginning with early primary grades to children whose mother tongue is not English. However, there are gross differences in the nature of schools and in how English is placed in the school program. In private schools English is the formal language of teaching, and in government schools it is taught as a language subject only. In terms of the quality (and cost) of schools and the social strata they cater to, English-medium schools in India are quite heterogeneous (Mohanty, 2006). Apart from the very exclusive residential schools (such as the Doon School) where the cost of schooling in the primary grades is as high as 1,000,000 Indian Rupees (approximately US\$20,000) per year, other English-medium schools can be broadly categorized as high-cost schools for the privileged social class (cost ranging from 100,000 to 300,000 Indian Rupees per year for nonresidential programs) and low-cost English-medium schools for the less privileged social class (cost from 5,000 to less than 20,000 Indian Rupees per year) with few exceptions.

Though all schools purport to promote Indian values and knowledge of Indian culture and traditions, the elite and upper class schools are distinctly Westernized in school practices and classroom teaching. The students are not allowed to use any language other than English in school premises, all classroom transactions are in English, and the physical culture of schools is Anglicized. In contrast, the low-cost English-medium schools for the lower social strata go for cosmetic Anglicization insisting on Western school uniform (usually with a tie and shoes) and behavioral routines (such as saying daily school prayers in English, greetings with “good morning,” etc.). However, the classroom language transactions are much more nativized and hybridized—languages other than English are freely used even in teaching English.

As part of our ongoing study of different teaching and learning strategies in negotiating the English language as the formal medium of instruction in average-quality English-medium schools, we have some nonparticipant-observation-based

information from Grades 4 and 5 in an English-medium charity school in Delhi run by a private trust with some government support. Children in this school are from middle or lower middle socioeconomic strata and the parents of most of the students do not have a high school education. All teachers, irrespective of the subjects they teach in the school, including English language teachers, said that they used “mostly Hindi in the class to make the students understand the subject matter,” although they were aware that the formal medium of instruction in the school was English. Typically, the teacher would say something in English, mostly reciting or reading from a textbook, and quickly proceed to translate the text or elaborate the main theme in Hindi, often freely mixing the main content words in English with Hindi. The teachers justified this transgression of the school norm by referring to students’ noncomprehension of English. One teacher explained the need to combine English with Hindi in the following words:

Whenever we use only English in the class, after sometime, the students sit with blank faces with no participation or interaction waiting for the bell to ring for next period. However, if the same concept is explained by using Hindi, students not only look curious and alert but they also participate and interact more actively in the classroom. They give more input, raise doubts, ask questions, and gain some knowledge and understanding of the main ideas.

The teaching in this school mostly focuses on learning of the main content and memorization of the information that the teachers cover in the class. This is also the case with English language teachers who read a sentence or two from the English language textbook and then proceed to translate/elaborate in a code-mixed Hindi–English variety. The main information or content words are usually repeated in English, sometimes after a single translation in Hindi. It seems the requirement of the formal medium of instruction (and the language in which the students are to write their answers) weighs heavily in structuring the nature of code-mixing because the content knowledge or the main information is usually given in English words embedded into Hindi elaboration. The teachers also engage the students in drilling routines in which they ask a question and provide the model short one-sentence answer in English (with the key word in a high-pitched voice) that the students repeat in chorus. Thus, the teachers consider transaction of content information central to the lesson as more primary than the language of instruction.

In our Delhi English-medium school the teachers refer to the students’ requirement to memorize the correct answers so that they can perform well in the examinations in which they are to write in English. As one of the teachers in this school said,

We have to get the children to repeat the correct answer several times in the classroom so that they remember how to write an answer correctly in English. They do not study much in their homes. They cannot write correctly in English even if they understand. Their parents cannot teach them. So we have to do this in the classroom.

Interestingly, the consideration of limited English proficiency of students also affects the assessment practices in the school. An unwritten norm in the school is to set examination questions for the monthly class tests in a manner that minimizes writing of elaborate answers. The examination questions usually include many multiple-choice items requiring little writing and some direct questions mostly from the ones drilled in the classroom. Teachers justify this assessment strategy by saying that students' understanding of the concepts is more important than their ability to write in English, and it is necessary for them to do well in the early grades so that they can develop some confidence and motivation to perform better in higher grades. The school also does not have much ability to develop English-speaking skills. Outside the classroom, students freely speak in their own variety of Hindi. Few students occasionally participate in English debate/public-speaking competitions organized by other institutions, sometimes seeking help from the teachers or from others to write down and memorize their speeches.

The school program and classroom transactions in this school are found to be mostly focused on textbooks; teaching-learning practices are directed at learning and rote memorization of the main information content from the textbooks. With emphasis on structured examinations and lack of availability of other books particularly in the government schools, there is a general "textbook culture" in Indian schools (Kumar, 1987). This is also the case with the low-cost English-medium schools for the less privileged class. In these schools, as in the government schools, the textbook culture prevails also because parents cannot afford books for their children outside the prescribed texts. The English-medium schools generally choose among different textbooks available for specific grade levels covering the prescribed grade-level curriculum, and the parents buy the chosen ones from the market (or, quite often, from the schools). The quality of textbooks across schools is quite divergent and so is its cost. Usually the low-cost English-medium schools opt for textbooks of indifferent quality, which usually cost less. In the English-medium school that we observed, the textbooks are generally cheaper with poor quality paper, printing, illustrations, and fewer pages, compared to the ones used in other schools catering to the upper class. We examined the Science textbooks for Grades 4 and 5 in the school and found that the books are of lower quality than the one used in other English-medium schools in Delhi. The main focus in the books is on introducing the required concepts as per the prescribed government syllabus without much elaboration and additional information. There is also minimal focus on activities for stimulating students' interest and curiosity. Also, the exercises given at the end of each chapter were found to be simple and direct, requiring short textual answers and leaving little space for creative and nonstandard answers. A teacher described the school textbooks as "very easy books." Most of the teachers in the school are aware of the overall quality of the books, but justify their use; they believe that their students cannot cope with books of "higher standard" because of their poor socioeconomic background and low levels of education of the parents. One teacher admitted:

In good quality English-medium schools, teachers cover the basic concepts and leave the rest to the students and their parents who work with them to

develop better understanding. In science books there are project work for students. The parents help the children with the project work and explain it to them. The parents of our children are not educated. So they cannot help them with English books. We have to accept that.

The school system and the teachers recognize the need to scaffold the learning experience of their students in their mutual efforts to circumvent the English–vernacular divide. The divide, however, is more complex than a language divide; it is deeply rooted in the social macrostructure within which languages, schools, and social classes are themselves embedded. The power of English in instilling learning aspirations among students (to be empowered through it) is the cause, as well as consequence, of social class differences in the Indian society. At one level, the English language teaching and learning practices are informed by the vernacular as Ramanathan (2005, p. 87) points out:

Medium of instruction, then, is only one social cog indexing very different social worlds, with divergent ways of producing and consuming knowledge. While the degree to which the Vernacular is embedded is relative, being more heightened in some contexts than in others, the fact remains that the Vernacular informs ELTL [English language teaching and learning] realities in a range of local ways in multilingual contexts that are not necessarily apparent in Anglophone countries.

At another level, the relationship between English and vernacular is itself socially constructed. Therefore, the manner and the processes through which this relationship is mediated are sensitive to the various other contextual conditions (“local ways”), including the social class background of the learners. The meaning and implications of the English–vernacular divide are quite different across different levels of social class. Differences are rooted in early socialization processes with different levels of material, and social and parental support for English in different social strata. In fact, it can be said that children from the privileged classes and those from the less privileged ones are already located in different sides of the English–vernacular divide by the time they enter formal schools—the former on the other side of the divide already with the early advantages of a home environment in which English is amply supported and the latter still trying to scale the divide because English is alien to their early experiences. The schools and teachers of this latter group have a difficult task in devising strategies for their students to negotiate the divide. The pedagogic practices in the English-medium schools for the less privileged are to be appreciated from the problem-solving perspective that the schools and teachers assume in recognition of resources and limitation of the students.

Teaching English to Tribal children

The pedagogic challenges in English language teaching and learning in the case of students from the less privileged social classes discussed so far are difficult, but, at

least, there is just the English–vernacular divide to negotiate, with some purpose and willingness to circumvent the divide. But the challenges are extremely formidable for children and their teachers who have to simultaneously negotiate the English–vernacular divide as well as the vernacular–Other divide and who find themselves struggling unwittingly with a foreign language like English twice removed from their social reality. The tribal children in India, who come to schools with an indigenous tribal language as their mother tongue and with very limited or no proficiency in the dominant language of school teaching, are taught English as a third language early in primary grades—from Grade 1 or 2, in most cases. The following discussion is based on our interactions with the teachers and observations of classroom transactions in Grades 4 and 5 in a number of Oriya-medium government schools, with a majority of Kui-mother-tongue Kond children in Kandhamal District and Saora-mother-tongue (Saora tribe) children in Gajapati District of Orissa (India). Our reflections here are partly based on over two decades of study till 2002. Then English was taught to these children from Grade 4 as in the rest of the government schools (now it is taught from Grade 3 in all Oriya-medium government schools in Orissa).

The Kond and Saora children with Kui and Saora mother tongues, respectively, come to schools with very limited proficiency in Oriya, which is the language of teaching for all government schools in Orissa. The mismatch between their home language and school language leads to large-scale push out (more than 50% of the tribal children entering Grade 1 are out of school by Grade 5) and educational failure (see Mohanty, 2008b, for a discussion of the language barrier for these children). Those who manage to reach Grade 4 have acquired some (generally below grade level) proficiency in Oriya. At Grade 4, English is introduced as a language subject. It should be pointed out that the English language has negligible presence in the tribal areas with occasional road and commercial signs written in English and almost no use of the language in the media or other forms of local communication. Therefore, the children have very little contact with English. The teachers have low competence in English, although they had English as a language subject through their high school (Grades 10–12). Most of the children are first-generation learners and their parents have no knowledge of English. Thus, it is not surprising that English is taught in the classrooms in the tribal areas of Kadhamal and Gajapati Districts in Oriya, sometimes mixed with Kui or Saora for greater clarity. Like the Delhi school discussed earlier, the teachers read from the text—a single word or a sentence at a time—and immediately translate the same and elaborate in simple Oriya occasionally using Kui/Saora (only when the teacher knows Kui/Saora). Children are engaged by the teacher in a lot of choral practices seeking to have the children memorize English alphabets and numbers in sequence, some words in English taken from the state government English textbook for the grade level and sometimes routine conversational exchanges (e.g., “My name is Baruna; my father’s name is Dhani,” etc.). The teachers ask the students to copy from the blackboard—initially single alphabets traced repeatedly while the alphabet names are spoken aloud, and then some words. In effect, the teaching

practices in these schools are directed at symbolic efforts to meet the curricular requirement for English, without any serious attempt at teaching and learning of a foreign language.

It is generally accepted that not much can actually be achieved, as not much is expected. The official system also supports this lack of any substantive English learning for tribal children. Assessments are very loosely done and officially, even if a student may fail in English, he or she is considered suitable to move up to the next higher grade. The teachers, headmasters, and local school administrators as well as the parents and community members agree that there is not much to be expected from the teaching of English to the tribal children, not at least in the primary grades. A teacher in a residential school (Ashram School) for tribal children in a remote rural area near Phiringia in Kandhamal district (which was then called Phulbani district) says:

Sir, these children do not even understand Oriya. What English will they understand? We somehow manage by using sometimes Kui and sometimes Oriya. Luckily they are not failed if they fail in English.

Pedagogues of English in Orissa, who have contributed to designing the school curriculum and English textbooks, often blame the teachers for giving up too soon and not doing enough to follow the desired teaching methods. Perhaps one can argue that, given the right kind of teaching–learning support, English is achievable for these children. But it should be noted that optimal teaching–learning conditions remain elusive in the kind of ground-level reality of the abject limited resource conditions of these schools for tribal children—insufficient number of teachers in almost every school (a single teacher teaching two to three grades at a time is quite common), lack of training in language teaching methodology, and generally impoverished conditions of schools—to point to only some of the factors contributing to poor quality.

School Practices in Teaching (Vernacular) Language to Linguistic Minority Children

In 1979, when a major research project of the first author on bilingualism among the Konds started in Phulbani (now Kandhamal) district, the system of school education projected a very dismal picture particularly for the Kui-speaking Kond children in parts of the district. Oriya, the majority language in the state of Orissa, was the medium of teaching and the teachers; almost all of them were from non-tribal communities and hardly knew any Kui⁵. The Kui-speaking children had some but limited and inadequate exposure to Oriya. The teachers, both nontribal and tribal, complained of the tribal children's problem of noncomprehension due to very limited proficiency in Oriya, the language of teaching, and most of them believed in the limited learning potential of the tribal children. This was also equally true of other tribal children in Orissa, including the Saora children in Gajapati. Following is a typical statement often heard from the teachers in the area,

222 Ajit Mohanty, Minati Panda, and Rashim Pal

narrated by an Oriya nontribal teacher in Baida Ashram School (residential school for tribal children) in Phulbani district:

these Adivasi (tribal) children cannot learn. They do not even understand what we tell them in the classroom. Most of them do not know Oriya at all. Anyway, we are here to do our duty and we try our best to teach them.

The attitude of the teachers in the area has changed considerably during the past three decades. There seems to be a better understanding and appreciation of the issues in the education of tribal children, perhaps due to the cumulative effects of several government programs and a greater level of awareness among the teachers. Appointment of a larger number of teachers from the tribal communities has also contributed to this positive development.

Greater participation of tribal teachers in the processes of planning teaching strategies at the school level and also sometimes at the level of policy formulation has brought appreciable changes in school practices. The teachers who speak the tribal mother tongues seem to have a better appreciation of this difficulty for the tribal children; they themselves have somehow made it through the system of education in a major language, which was not their mother tongue. Mohanty (2007a) in his introduction to the Asian edition of *Bilingualism or NOT* (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984) has cited the story of a Halvi-speaking tribal teacher who had dropped out of the Hindi classroom he did not understand as a child. He later became a teacher and was present among many other tribal teachers in a multilingual education workshop in 2006 in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. As the workshop was trying to persuade the participants for mother-tongue-based multilingual education for tribal children, many teachers pulled out various teaching-learning materials prepared by them in tribal languages for use in their classrooms. The materials were mostly handwritten (some with pictures and illustrations) and some were also printed (at teacher's own cost); they included stories, songs, number rhymes, and many other innovative materials that they had created. These teachers appreciated the tribal children's difficulty in negotiating the language divide between Hindi, the language of teaching, and the mother tongues, and they did not need the workshop to convince them that early education in and for strengthening the mother tongue is an effective strategy to get around the vernacular-Other divide. Even without any official policy or sanction for use of the tribal mother tongues and, of course, without any formal exposure to the principles of multilingual education, they improvised their teaching because of personal experience, as pupils and teachers, in negotiating the vernacular-Other divide.

Caught in the gulf between policy and practice, between what is prescribed by others and what is required for the children, teachers do innovate and find some solutions, even if not always the best ones. Such solutions and strategies address the immediate issues and problems that they face and, often, defy the more general policy positions. In December 2006, the first author, Mohanty, visited a primary-grade classroom in a school (Bhaliapani U.P. School) in Kandhamal district in preparation for a project on multilingual education in some tribal schools in

Orissa. The class teacher surprised him by recalling his name from a Kui language primary-level textbook (*Badu Endina* printed in Oriya script) that was developed for the government of Orissa in the year 2000 by some teachers working with his (Mohanty's) guidance. The text was printed in 2001 but it was never used or circulated because the government policy of introducing tribal mother tongue in primary grades had changed by then.⁶ When Mohanty wondered how the teacher could know about the Kui book, because he was not a part of the team of teachers who worked on the book project, the teacher pulled the book from one of the children in the classroom and showed it to him. In fact the books were there with every single child in the classroom. The books looked much worn out and overused. It turned out that some of the teachers in the school felt that introducing the Kui-speaking children to literacy through this book in their language, printed in Oriya script, would be an effective strategy. Four years earlier, they had managed with some influence in the government office to get some copies of the printed text that were lying in the office store without any use. The copies of the book, which the teachers had managed to smuggle out, had since then changed hands from one to the next batch of students in the school. The prescribed Oriya language book of the government (which is given free to each tribal child) was being taught formally in the school, but the Kui book was also used to prop up the emergent literacy initiative in Oriya.

Interestingly, teachers in some schools in Gajapati district in Orissa also used a similar book (*Yerai Yerai*) in Saora language (developed earlier by a team including the second author of this chapter under the same government program). In both these contexts, teachers were conscious of the formidable language divide for the tribal children in forced submersion programs of schooling and had found some way of dealing with it in their own ways. In these instances, the teachers in the two areas in Orissa may have chanced upon an available resource to support their initiatives, but even otherwise, they do engage in routine classroom practices that show their constant resistance to the language divide deeply rooted in weak, covert policies and official recommendations. Instances of classroom improvisation in negotiating the language divide are not uncommon.

We will briefly look at some general classroom practices in the context of tribal children's education in the forced submersion programs. Again, the observations are drawn from the Oriya-medium schools in Kandhamal and Gajapati Districts in Orissa (India), particularly those with a large proportion of tribal language (Kui/Saora) mother-tongue children. At one level, the classroom transactions in the Oriya-medium government schools for the Kui/Saora-speaking tribal children resemble the ones in the Delhi English-medium school we have described earlier. Oriya and Kui/Saora are mixed as freely in these schools in Kandhamal/Gajapati Districts as English and Hindi in the Delhi school, and in both the contexts the main content words are taken from the target language, Oriya in Kandhamal/Gajapati and English in Delhi, embedded in translation, simplification, and elaboration in the pupils' mother tongue. A common strategy seems to trigger the classroom practices in all these settings: use the pupils' developed language to prop up comprehension in the target language. However, unlike the school in

Delhi, those in the tribal schools in Orissa are linguistically diverse. Children vary in the degree of exposure to and proficiency in Oriya and occasionally, depending on the specific location of a school, there may be some Oriya mother-tongue children in the class also. Adding to the diversity, proficiency in the tribal language of the area varies from one teacher to another. Tribal teachers with Kui/Saora mother tongue are proficient in both the languages. Their strategy is to optimally use the tribal language, as well as Oriya, depending on the composition of the classroom and also the specific pupil(s) being addressed. The hybrid variety of code-mixed language, however, pivoted around the main content word(s) in the school's target language, Oriya. For explanation and elaboration, Kui/Saora and simple Oriya are used sometimes in a simultaneous translation mode (same meaning expressed in two languages one after the other) and sometimes in parallel forms (some ideas in the tribal language followed by others in Oriya). Such concurrent use is more common when the linguistic composition of the classrooms is diverse. Teachers seem to be aware of an emergent bilingual child's relative proficiency in Oriya and Kui/Saora at any point in time. They would ask questions in Kui/Saora or in Oriya depending on their own assessment of a child's proficiency. Often the children also engage in "translanguaging" (García, 2009), drawing from their mother tongue and school language and code-mixing for effective communication in the classroom with a bilingual teacher and with other children who know both the languages. Thus, though both Oriya and tribal language are used in classroom transactions, the bilingual tribal teachers contextually modulate the nature of the bilingual code-mixed and code-switched communication. Quite often, when the teachers feel that some concept is not clearly communicated through expressions in one language, they draw on a more commonly occurring expression from another language. Thus, it can be said that translanguaging classroom practices are often used strategically for effective communication.

How does the nontribal Oriya monolingual teacher negotiate the classroom linguistic diversity? As we have observed, most teachers have limited proficiency in Kui/Saora language, and therefore, cannot engage in bilingual transactions like their tribal counterparts. They usually explain and elaborate classroom concepts using a simple local variety of Oriya and engaging the pupils in a lot of choral repetitions of the focal information. Often, these teachers "collaborate," with some proficient bilingual tribal pupils in classroom transactions inviting them to fill in on behalf of the teacher. The bilingual child in such cases proceeds to "teach" repeating after the teacher and offering some clarification in Kui/Saora for the benefit of the other Kui/Saora-speaking children who fail to understand the teacher. The following is an example of such collaborative teaching in a Grade 2 classroom in Biragada U.P. School in Kandhamal:

- Teacher (T):* (asking a question to Student 1) *barasha pani keunthu ase re?*
 "Tell me, where does rain water come from?"
Student 1(S1): akasha ru.
 "From the sky"

- T: *akasha ru na baadala ru, re?*
“From the sky or from the cloud, tell me?”
- S1: (remains silent)
- T: *akasha ru na baadala ru?*
“From the sky or from the cloud?” (With emphasis on the word for cloud)
- S1: *baadala ru.*
“From the cloud”
- T: *akasha aau baadal bhitare kana tafaata janichhu kire?*
“Do you know the difference between sky and cloud?”
- S1: (looks confused)
- T: (turning to S2, a Kui–Oriya bilingual child) *tora bhai ku tikie bujhei de re.*
“Explain (it) to your brother (classmate)”
- S2: (proceeds to explain in Kui, using Kui words for sky and cloud)
- T: (To S1) *bujhilu re?*
“did you understand?”
- S1: (nods his head)
- T: *achha*
“Good”

Sometimes, teachers ask the students from a higher grade to explain some concepts to younger ones. Such collaborative practices are used for the tribal, as well as Oriya language, depending on which child needs further clarification. Calling upon the students from higher grades has become a common classroom practice in tribal areas of Orissa, as very often multiple grades share the same classroom with a single teacher. In multigrade classrooms students do engage in a lot of cross-linguistic communication between older and younger students and such mutual helping is encouraged so that the single teacher would have time and space to attend to children from another grade in the same room.

The classroom practices in the Oriya-medium schools for the tribal children are noticeably multilingual and multicultural. Teachers as well as students draw from different languages (and cultures) and from the multilingual resources in the classroom (in the form of the presence of students with different levels of proficiency in one or the other language). Communicative practices in such contexts involve effective use of nativized, hybridized, and translanguaging varieties, and sometimes simplified registers of the target language to support students' learning. Often a teacher also draws from the tribal mother tongues or the familiar language and also from children's familiar cultural experiences and everyday concepts to develop understanding of classroom concepts. For example, in Seranga Ashram School (residential school) for the Saora tribal children in Gajapati District, the mathematics teacher in Grade 1 introduced the universal number system, which the school follows by referring first to Saora number words followed by the Oriya symbol for the corresponding number. The correspondence between a number word and the quantity was established initially by using Saora

226 Ajit Mohanty, Minati Panda, and Rashim Pal

number words that the children were already familiar with. The teacher showed a flash card with the picture of one mango on one side and its symbol in Oriya on the other and read it as *aboy* (the word for number one in Saora). He followed a similar practice for all other numbers up to 10. He used the Saora words to teach the relationship between the quantity and the symbols. Each time the number corresponding to the number of items in the picture is uttered in the class (by the teacher or students), the teacher would show the reverse side of the flash card to show the number symbol (in Oriya). One excerpt from the classroom observation is presented here:

- T (Teacher):* (showing the picture side of the flash card)
Keteta amba achhi?
 “How many mangos are there?”
- S (Student) 1:* *Aboy*
 “One”
- T:* (the teacher did not mention the Oriya name for one, that is, *eka*, but went on to show the flash card for three) *Ethire keteta amba achhi kahila?*
 “How many mangoes are there?”
- S2:* *Yagi*
 “Three” (in Saora)
- T:* (Showing another flash card with the picture of five mangoes) *Ethire keteta achhi kahila?*
 “Say, how many are there in this card?”
- Ss:* (Children started counting in Saora)
Unji
 “Five” (in Saora, in chorus).0

(The teacher then proceeds to show the flash cards for the other numbers from 1 to 10)

In the next three to four sessions, the teacher drew on the blackboard a number of items and asked the students to write the corresponding Oriya number symbol on their slates. This method was used to introduce writing of all numbers from 1 to 10. After nearly 10 sessions, the teacher introduced Oriya words for the numbers. The Saora number words were used in initial sessions to introduce Oriya number words. The teacher discouraged the children from using Saora number words once he introduced the Oriya number words. In three of the subsequent seven sessions (which were observed) the teacher told the children “Say only Oriya numbers; if you use Saora words in the class, you will never learn Oriya numbers.” The teacher used children’s familiarity with the Saora counting and their cultural experiences to support learning of the Oriya numbers and symbols. Evidently, the teacher used the principles of bridging in these sessions.

In the absence of any agency in the formulation and implementation of language policies, and systematic training in second language or third/foreign language teaching pedagogy, the teachers are left, at best, to themselves to do

something meaningful that can qualify as formal teaching–learning activities in their views. This has led to development of numerous highly individualized pedagogic practices, which do not explicitly contest, but negotiate between the desirable and what is feasible in such a context (Panda, 2006). As many of the teachers in tribal area schools are not from tribal communities, they have very little familiarity with the children’s language and culture. The requisite cognitive processes in these classrooms, therefore, have to be necessarily distributed among teacher, tribal students, and the cultural artifacts. As was noted in the earlier discussions of classroom processes, the more successful nontribal teachers take advantage of the classroom diversity and children’s cultural knowledge to coordinate the classroom activities and create conditions for peer learning and collaborative learning. With the help of peers and the students from senior grades, these teachers develop the transactional processes. Some of these interventions by teachers are Vygotskian in some sense, though they may sometimes fail to create a zone of proximal development for the children (Panda, 2004, 2006). This is primarily because of the lack of formal training or understanding to organize and scaffold children’s learning. The classroom practices like the ones we have discussed earlier do help the teachers communicate and transact in the classrooms under difficult circumstances, particularly with children from the lower social strata and indigenous communities. But they remain minimalist in teaching quality partly because the teachers have not been trained for effective multilingual and multicultural education and also partly because their agency has never been explicitly acknowledged.

At a formal level (and top-down practice), the schools for the tribal children are monolingual in the major language of the state. But in actual practice, classrooms are clearly, if not systematically, multilingual. From the top-down perspective, the classroom practices of the teachers can be seen as subversive. When this is pointed out to the teachers, their views are different. Many teachers defend the linguistic (and cultural) hybridity of the classrooms as inevitable and necessary in the real-life local context. For them, this “improvisation” facilitates learning in the medium of instruction and they do not see anything wrong with this practice. In other words, ground-level classroom practices are directed at effective negotiation of the vernacular–Other language divide. Unfortunately, the language education policy fails to take note of the language divide for development of structured pedagogy for effective classroom learning in multilingual contexts. The monolingual policy in a multilingual social context fails to acknowledge the necessary links between children’s home language and the formal language of teaching. The classroom diversity entails hybridity as necessary for effective communication and learning. As García, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Torres-Guzmán (2006, p. 37) suggest,

The hybridity that emerges from the multilingual students and parents “in between” or “borderland” experiences must be brought out into the open and acknowledged as different and important worldviews, and as an important pedagogical tool.

It seems the teachers' classroom practices in the schools of Kandhamal and Gajapati Districts do point to a variety of pedagogical tools contextually relevant and necessary for effective negotiation of the vernacular–Other divide.

Conclusion: Is the Teacher Just Another Cog in the Policy Wheel?

García et al. (2006, p. 25) point to “the tension between state imposed homogenization and real life multilingualism” as an issue that affects the future of multilingual schooling. At one level, the seminal statutory discourse concerning language policy in Indian education is clearly pluralistic in its promises for multilingual schooling. But as one enters the actual state practices the paradox is glaring; what is handed-down as the model for actual practices is superficially multilingual, at best. Languages do get into school curricula, mostly as language subjects and not as media of classroom teaching. The nominal forms of multilingual education fail to take note of the real-life multilingualism and classroom linguistic diversity. The homogenizing impact of the gap between the ideological policy discourse and school-level implementation is visible through two major state practices: (1) English has clearly emerged as the major language in schools both as a language of teaching and as a language subject, and (2) the dominated minority and indigenous *other* languages have been almost completely neglected in schools contributing to educational failure for a large segment of the Indian population.

The state practices have perpetuated the societal double divide, one, between English and vernacular languages, and the other, between the vernaculars and *other* languages. In the classroom reality of linguistic diversity and real-life multilingualism, the teachers negotiate the gap between what is handed over to them as state-prescribed teaching objectives with respect to languages and what they experience and confront in the classrooms. Our discussion of the classroom practices in teaching of English as an official medium of instruction (as in the Delhi English-medium school for the children from the lower social class) and as a school subject (in the vernacular-medium schools in Orissa for the tribal children) and of Oriya in submersion programs of vernacular-medium schools in Orissa shows that the teachers are not uncritical bystanders passively acquiescent of the state practice; in their own ways, they resist and contest the state policy or rather, in the Indian context, its absence and injustice by default. It is quite clear that the agency of the teachers in the classrooms makes them the final arbiter of the language education policy and its implementation. They confront the challenges of the societal language divide and state policy by improvising and creating their own space in the chain of policy and implementation. These strategies of improvisations and negotiation may not always stand the critical pedagogic scrutiny, but they do show the resistance of the teachers and their willingness to have a creative space in their classrooms. The actual classroom strategies and practices of the teachers do expose the weaknesses and ruptures in the policy wheel; they show that what is handed down to them as state policy is unjust, inadequate,

and cannot be implemented, given the classroom realities that they confront. Taking note and responding to the teachers' agency is a key issue for language policy in Indian education.

Discussion Questions

- 1 What do Mohanty, Panda, and Pal mean by the English–vernacular divide and the vernacular–Other divide? How do these two different situations affect language education policy in India?
- 2 This chapter points to a three-tiered hierarchy of languages in India, with English at the top, the regional majority language or vernacular in the middle, and indigenous languages at the bottom. Are all languages completely equal in your context, or are some more powerful than others? If all languages are not equal, which is typically the case, draw a diagram showing a hierarchy of languages in your context from “top” to “bottom.” How does such a hierarchy affect language education policy in your context?
- 3 What are the challenges and opportunities presented by English-medium schools in India? How do teachers negotiate the classroom situation?
- 4 Describe the challenges of educating tribal children in India. What does official policy say about their education? What happens in practice? Give specific examples from Mohanty's paper.
- 5 In your country/local context, in what ways does the English language serve as a gateway and/or barrier to opportunities? Is it important to know English in order to succeed in school? In what ways are students who do not speak English disadvantaged, if at all?
- 6 In your context, do teachers ever use more than one language in instruction (If you are unsure of local practices, go visit several schools—particularly those including culturally and linguistically diverse students)? Do students use more than one language when they are learning? If the answer is “yes” to either of these questions, how are the different languages used and for what purposes? For example, is the language spoken by the children used to clarify directions or for discipline, or instead for deeper instructional aims such as biliteracy development? Are there clear boundaries between languages or is language use more fluid?

Notes

- 1 The Indigenous or aboriginal communities in India are officially called “tribes” (*div si*) 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 outgroups” 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 is the largest linguistic group, constitute 38.93% of the national population.

230 Ajit Mohanty, Minati Panda, and Rashim Pal

- 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 Kondes 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 (1993) also noted that migrant Bhojpuri workers in Maharashtra show a language shift toward Hindi.
- 5 There was an incentive package (financial bonus and salary increase) for all teachers (and other government officials) to learn and clear an examination in the tribal languages including Kui. Many teachers successfully cleared the test but hardly maintained any proficiency in Kui and, hence, were unable to engage even in routine conversation in Kui with their pupils. The system still continues with somewhat better effect in recent years partly because of the influence of larger number of teacher colleagues from the Kond community now appointed in most of the schools in the district.
- 6 Multilingual education, called MLE, was again introduced by the Government of Orissa in the year 2007.

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