

Paradigms of Multilingualism in India and Britain : A Comparative Study

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Abstract. India is a land of many languages. In the constitution of India, English, Sanskrit, Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi, Maithili, are recognised, English and Chinese are mother tongues of some people but they are foreign languages. Rajasthani and Bhojpuri are also important languages. Tribal languages are also substantial. Late Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has declared that there are 15 major languages in India. India is a country where unity lies in diversity. Many languages survive together. Although language problem arises sometimes but it can be solved. Provisions of opportunities for the growth of languages of backward ethnic group must be the democratic policy of the government. According to the rights of all ethnic groups, communities and languages, the integration of India can be safely maintained. England is also a multilingual country where English, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic, French, Chinese, Portuguese, Swedish are spoken. Like India, multilingualism is used for social communication, business, work, service, social cohesion in England. The paper aims to study multilingual perspectives of both the countries.

Keywords : Language; ethnic; mother tongue; foreign language.

Multilingualism implies the presence of more than one distinct languages in a given space. A person who can speak many languages can communicate with people from those language backgrounds easily and hence he or she gets a wider social life. Multilingualism is an asset in terms of acceptance into a different language culture. If an immigrant speaks the language of the natives, he or she is considered a member of the native community. This acceptance offers a sense of security to the individual. Multilingualism also brings with it the opportunity to read and understand the literature of different languages which is a great asset as it offers a variety of perspectives and the key to a huge repository of codified knowledge. In a world where knowledge of the codified form is power, and access to that knowledge is limited, a multilingual literate is privileged. A multilingual literate enjoys a greater privilege than a monolingual literate. Multilingualism offers a political edge. In the world of globalisation, the multilingual people hold position of power.

Multilingualism in India dates back to "ancient times when ethnic groups and races came in contact with one another through migration from one region to another." (Sharma, 1) It has resulted owing to close contact between the four language families. It is a product of its history and a reflection of its diverse cultures.

The languages of India have originated from four families of languages – (i) the Austric (Austro-Asiatic) or Eastern family (ii) the Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Chinese) family (iii) the Dravidian family (iv) the Indo-Aryan family. Kol, Munda and other communities belong to the 'Austric' or Proto-Austroloid people. Kol or Mundari, Santhali belong to this group of family. Dravidian group is the principal family of language throughout Southern India. There are four major Dravidian languages - Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Chinese) is given the ethnic name Mongoloid. The major languages of India are originated either in Indo-Aryan language or in Dravidian. Through more than four millennia of known history, "the linguistic families which co-existed together have continuously interacted with each other and achieved a pan Indian character which is unique in itself, firstly, in the matter of sentence structure and secondly, in the number of shared items of vocabulary". (Prasad,43)

Sir G.A. Grierson accomplished the Linguistic survey of India (LSI) between 1866 and 1927. The survey identified 179 languages and 544 dialects. The 1951 census listed 845 languages including dialects, out of which 100,000 persons spoke 60 language dialects. The 1961 census returned 1652 mother tongues and classified them under 193 languages belonging to four different language families – the Austric (20 languages), Dravidian (20 languages), Tibeto-Burman (98 languages) and Indo - Aryan (54) languages. The 1991 census found the returns of mother tongues to 10,400. The scrutiny resulted in 1576 rationalised mother tongues. The rationalised mother tongues were regrouped following linguistic method under 114 languages. 18 languages are included in the 8th schedule of the constitution of India.

In the constitution of India, English, Sanskrit, Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi, Maithili, are foreign languages. Rajasthani, Bhojpuri and tribal languages are also important. Late professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has declared, "there are in effect 15 major languages in India." (Haldhar, 16) The third All India Education survey records that 58 languages are included in the school curriculum, 47 are used in public administration. Newspapers are published in 87 languages and radio broadcasts are made in 91 languages.

India is a pluralistic nation in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and religion. India shows a high degree of multilingualism. Bilingualism is used by many Indians. A sizeable population of the state speaks the dominant language of the neighbouring state along with the mother tongue. Indian bilingualism is complimentary. An individual speaks a language at home, another in the neighbourhood and the bazaar, another in formal domain such as education, administration. Hindi and English are the languages of national and international communication for a large number of Indians. Linguistic diversity is inherited in the process of acquiring the composite culture of India.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are recognised as a social need. Most of the states have accepted more than one language for official purposes to meet the aspirations of linguistic minorities. Safeguards are provided to the linguistic minorities in the constitution of India. Laws and constitutional safeguards for the linguistic minorities are effective in protecting the rights of the minorities and in maintaining the linguistic identities of the minorities. Multilingualism is also practised in Indian education system. Each state imparts education in many languages. The three language formula in the country aims at developing and strengthening the multilingual character of our education system.

The conflict between speakers of different languages is old. Linguistic diversity is a critical aspect of multiculturalism. More than 700 languages are spoken in the country. The lack of a centralised political union across South Asia throughout history did not produce any social trouble till the advent of British rule. The British tried to centralise the administration beyond the ambit of the English language in the mid-19th century and thus began to explore the divides in the linguistic identities of India as a means of imposing domination. Following the policy of divide and rule, the British started the Hindi - Urdu controversy in the late 19th century, the issue often cited as the beginning of the Hindu Muslim divide in India. The imperialist and propagandist Indo - Aryan theory implied an age old socio - cultural divide between the Aryan dominated north and the Dravidian dominated South. Subsequent division on the lines of caste opened up radical movements parallel to the nationalist movement. Led by middle class intellectuals such as Periyar and C.N. Annadurai, the movement for Dravidian state developed from opposing Brahmanism and unilateral imposition of Hindi across southern Indian states to get separated from India. The demand for secession was postponed after being outlawed in 1963. The movement became successful to obstruct phasing out of English to pave the way for Hindi as the sole national language in 1965.

The movement consolidated a three language formula. According to it certain states would function and support education in one primary vernacular language along with English and Hindi, the two official languages of India. Many states such as Maharashtra and Odisha implemented the three language formula but Tamilnadu assembly disapproved it. Annadurai, the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu criticised the requirement of non Hindi speakers to learn both Hindi and English. To judge the immiscibility of languages and associated culture on the basis of an incomplete and controversial theory with imperialist roots is to be discouraged. It is rightly stated, "The role of languages in modern India could probably be best understood by their capacities to connect various groups of people from different cultures. Judging languages by their artistic elements or rigid regional limits simply cannot do justice to the contemporary needs of people". (<https://www.fairobserver.com>) India is a country where unity lies in diversity. Many languages survive together. Although language problem arises sometimes but it

can be solved. Provisions of opportunities for the growth of languages of backward ethnic group must be the democratic policy of the government. By the rights of all ethnic groups, communities and languages, the integration of India can be safely maintained. Viv Edwards observes:

Although linguistic diversity has always been a defining feature of the British Isles, it has assumed new proportions in recent years, a period during which the transnational flow of people has been accompanied by a corresponding flow of languages.
(<https://we.uri.edu>)

England and Wales census data 2011 shows that English, Welsh, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic, French, Chinese and Portuguese are the most commonly spoken languages. Swedish, Manx Gaelic, Scottish and Romany have lesser speakers. In the process of globalization, linguistic diversity of England is miraculous. The number of speakers of minority languages in the UK cannot be properly counted. The 2001 census indicates differences in the distribution of minority ethnic communities. Two percent of the population of England and Wales are Indians and constitutes 25.7 percent of the population in the Midland city of Leicester. Bangladeshis make 0.5 percent of the population of England and Wales, but 33.4 percent of the population of London borough of Tower Hamlets.

Baker and Eversley (2000) maintain that more than 300 different home languages are spoken by some 850,000 school children in the Greater London area. Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Turkish, Arabic, English based creoles, Yoruba and Cantonese were spoken by approximately 40,000 school children. French, Arabic, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese and Russian all constituted 200,000 or more speakers. The CILT(2005) survey of every local authority in England, Wales and Scotland maintains that approximately 300 languages were spoken by 702,000 children in England, 98 languages were spoken by 8000 children in Wales and 104 languages were spoken by 11000 children in Scotland.

Multilingualism was an urban phenomenon but there is greater presence of minority languages in rural areas. Due to the enlargement of the European Union from 15 to 25 member states in 2004, 427000 East Europeans registered for work, Poles make 62 percent proportion of the new arrivals, Lithuanians make 12 percent and Slovaks 10 percent. Salveda (2006) maintains that some 25 languages other than English are used for religious purposes in London. Polish is used for mass and confession in South - East England. In the Islamic community, Quranic Arabic is used along with other languages. *The Quran* is available in a wide range of languages - Albanian, Chinese, English, French, Korean, Polish and Spanish. Minority languages are used not only for worship but also for social interaction especially in the various social and cultural activities organised by religious groups.

Ethnic economies are salient features of the UK. In Bangladeshi areas of east London, Mirpuri Punjabi areas of Bradford, or Gujarati areas of Leicester, restaurants and food and clothing shops are run by the ethnic communities. They provide large number of employment for the large number of workers. Minority languages are used for communication with co-workers and customers from the same community. Mainstream business has recognised that the minority communities form a significant market segment. Minority languages play a significant role in the global market. The knowledge of other languages is recognised as offering business man a competitive edge. English is the language of wider communication for the educated elite. The major part of the world population understand the local language.

The minority press is another indicator of ethno linguistic vitality. Approximately 40 newspapers and periodicals go to the different language communities in the UK. Londoners get daily newspapers in Chinese, (Sing Tao), Polish (Dziennik Polski) and Italian (London Sera and la voce Sera). London is the centre for Arabic Publishing. Parikiaki uses Greek for news for the migrant generation and English for information to younger generation. Minority radio and T.V. have major roles in the transmission of new minority languages and cultures. They carry programmes for speakers of South Asian languages. Digitalisation has created new possibilities for minority media. A Cypriot household in North London watch the evening news from Greece. Networks such as Zee T.V. provide entertainment in English, Urdu and Hindi for viewers from the Indian sub-continent. Internet has revolutionised communication in the minority communities. There is a proliferation of websites dedicated to minority languages.

Linguistic minorities have great impact on the cultural life of the UK. The presence of a wide range of art forms shows the distinctive identity of minority communities. Indian weddings are associated with extensive songs. Religious music such as Qawwali is sung in the Pakistani community. Musical fusion is another example of languages and cultures in contact. Bhangra accompanies traditional Punjabi music performed on festive occasion. Indians in the UK have used the instruments that provide the rhythms for Bhangra as the foundation for strong link with musical influences from the West.

Multilingualism is used for intercultural relations in Britain. Language skills make a person working, studying and travelling internationally. They show a path to understand other ways of living and encourage tolerance and positive social relations. Programmes related with sharing language skills and cultural resources help the nation with integration and social cohesion. Multilingualism provides an opportunity for commerce in Britain. Language skills are necessary to do business with the rest of the world, and employment opportunities in the global market require language aptitude. Global sectors including financial services, pharmaceutical, chemical, automotive, IT and other industries rely heavily on

language skills to operate and business leaders to recognise the importance of language and communication for business. Economic success in exports is closely related to multilingual strategies. Public services must be linguistically accessible to people for social gains. It is very important to respond effectively to language needs for the efficiency, economy and quality of service position.

The involvement of the state with matters of multilingualism operates at various levels. EU promotes trilingualism – the home language, plus another EU language and a world language. Public discourses around multilingualism in the UK change but they encourage certain types of bilingualism, particularly through formal learning. Bilingualism is considered an asset if it is learned rather than acquired. Developing appropriate and effective language strategies by government, business and public service providers need to take account of the complex language landscape. Many employers both in the private and public sectors resolve their language needs by recruiting abroad but it is fruitful to mobilise locally based resources and educational processes to meet these needs. The value of languages in business and employment should be emphasised to help increase the status of language skills in the minds of all language learners and community language speakers.

Linguistic factors must be taken into account while monitoring provision and access to public services. The healthcare and the legal system should be sensitive and responsive to linguistic issues. Confidentiality, lack of fluency and translation or interpretation can lead in some cases to miscarriage of justice. The gaps between different language communities and particularly between different language communities and public services should be maintained. Education and education policy play a key role in enhancing UK's multilingualism. Cultural learning should be incorporated into language pedagogy and the UK's rich community based cultural resources should be shared effectively. Educational institutions should utilise the linguistic diversity in their student population. In schools, friendship among students of different languages should be encouraged. Text messaging or social media will help students to engage with other languages. Linguistic diversity within a learning community can be used for greater advantage. The students can be engaged through sports, drama, art and other cultural and creative activities and the linguistic capital within the student body can be used for language exchange and development. Bilingualism learning helps the student to increase speaking and reading skills, to increase confidence and motivation for language use and greater enthusiasm for language learning. The value of languages must be recognised regardless of their perceived status.

The multilingual character of England helps the nation 'to succeed in the globalised world, for global citizenship, for diplomacy, security and international relations and for developing a taskforce to operate efficiently in trade and investment.' (<https://www.britac.ac.uk>) Like India, multilingualism is used for social

communication, business, work, service, social cohesion, travel etc. in England. Indian multilingualism is enormous in size, with over 1600 mother tongues reducible to about 200 languages for a population of about 1.27 billion people, with the population of many of the linguistic minorities being larger than many European countries (Annamalai, 2001) In fact the magnitude of multilingualism in India has made scholars wonder about how communication happens and how social cohesion is maintained. (Annamalai, 2001)

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