

will go a long way in discouraging mechanical copying from the blackboard, textbooks and guides. It is also necessary to break the routinization of tasks like letter and essay writing, so that imagination and originality are allowed to play a more prominent role in education.

#### Why don't Children Learn to Read?

- Teachers lack basic pedagogic skills (understanding where the learner is, explaining, asking appropriate questions) and, an understanding of the processes of learning to read, which range from bottom-up processes such as syllable recognition and letter-sound matching, to top-down processes of whole-word recognition and meaning making from texts. They also often lack class-management skills. They tend to focus on errors or hard spots rather than on imaginative input and articulation.
- Pre-service training does not give the teacher adequate preparation in reading pedagogy, and neither does in-service training address the issue.
- Textbooks are written in an ad-hoc fashion, with no attempt to follow a coherent strategy of reading instruction
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially first-generation learners, do not feel

accepted by the teacher, and cannot relate to the textbook.

#### A Workable Approach to Beginning Reading

- The classroom needs to provide a print-rich environment, displaying signs, charts, work-organizing notices, etc. that promote 'iconic' recognition of the written symbols, in addition to teaching letter-sound correspondences.
- There is a need for imaginative input that is read by a competent reader with appropriate gestures, dramatization, etc.
- Writing down experiences narrated by children, and then having them read the written account.
- Reading of additional material: stories, poems, etc.
- First-generation school goers must be given opportunities to construct their own texts and contribute self-selected texts to the classroom.

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## Language and Dialect

*Rama Kant Agnihotri*



People 'know' quite a lot about the language(s) they speak. They 'know' how to put sounds together to make words and to put words together to make sentences that are always grammatical and acceptable; often they use language in nuanced and metaphorical ways. This knowledge, though extremely abstract, rich and complex is not conscious. This is true irrespective of whether you call what is acquired 'language' or 'dialect.' It is effortlessly

acquired by every child before the age of four without any explicit tutoring; though the normal processes of socialization are central to language acquisition. At some level people are also aware that without language, no systems of language or culture may exist. Yet the same people treat the issue of language with indifference and immaturity. For them, there is a fundamental difference between a 'pure and standardized' language and a 'locally spoken rustic' dialect.

Many people hold and propagate irrational and baseless beliefs about language. They are a serious threat to peace in human societies. Our education system, especially, has been bearing the brunt of these baseless beliefs and policies based on them. In fact, it is perhaps not even their fault. Creating a scientific understanding about language is NOT a part of either our socialization or of our education.

#### Knowledge of Grammar

There is no doubt that all of us are quite efficient in using the grammar of the language we speak. We seldom go wrong; even if, by mistake, we produce a wrong sentence, we immediately repair it. We also immediately notice when somebody else makes a mistake. We produce novel sentences on a regular basis and effortlessly understand new sentences and words produced by others. Despite all this, the discussion on the issue of language has been restricted to the circle of linguists alone and what linguists discuss is not easily understood by common people.

For example, every Hindi speaker knows that गीता खाना खाता है। is not a correct sentence. Some of them may explain that since the subject Geeta is feminine, the verb cannot be masculine. But this rule is not applicable in the following two sentences:

मोहन ने खाना खाया।

गीता ने खाना खाया।

Both these sentences are grammatically correct. Here though Mohan and Geeta are of different gender the verb remains the same. When one says

गीता ने खाना खाई। it is wrong. If you are getting confused then look at the following two sentences:

मोहन ने रोटी खाई।

गीता ने रोटी खाई।

Now after some serious thinking one can say that when the term 'ने' comes after the subject then the verb corresponds to the object and not the subject.

But what about the following two sentences:

मोहन ने गीता को मारा।

गीता ने मोहन को मारा।

Both these sentences are correct. We know गीता ने मोहन को मारी। is wrong, even though the subject is feminine.

All speakers of Hindi 'know' that when all the nouns in a sentence are blocked by postpositions, the verb does not agree with any of them. These are some of the questions that linguists address.

#### Language or Dialect?

The most common reply to the above question is the following: "Languages follow a certain grammar and have a script associated with them while dialects have none. A language is spoken by a larger population and in a larger area while a dialect is local or limited to a particular area. A language is standardized and sophisticated and used in literature, journalism, government and other offices, courts, etc. while a dialect is just used in ordinary conversation." Some also say that purity or correctness is very important in a language while dialects don't care much about any rules. There could be several other similar explanations which people give to distinguish between language and dialect.

However, from a linguistic point of view, there is no difference between a language and a dialect. Both have grammar and follow rules. What gets called a language and what remains a dialect is purely a social and political issue. A variety used or patronized by important people (powerful and wealthy) gets noticed, and in due course, is declared a language. Gradually, its lexicons, dictionaries and grammars are written. It also becomes the language of literature in that area. With time, it gets standardized and becomes the medium of instruction for children in schools. After some time, other similar modes of communication of that region are declared as dialects of that particular 'language.' It is only through such a process that languages such as Awadhi, Braj, Maithili, Bhojpuri etc. which are mothers of Hindi come to be called its dialects. Perhaps the most suitable definition of language given by Bright is right: language is a dialect with an army and a navy.

In these complicated socio - political processes, it is

the underprivileged children who suffer, as the language with which they come to school gets sacrificed at the altar of a standardized language. For example, take a look at the Hindi sentence : नन्द का नन्दन कदम्ब के पेड़ के नीचे धीरे-धीरे मुरली बजाता है।

The same sentence in Braj would be:

नन्द को नन्दन कदम्ब को तरु तर धीरे-धीरे मुरली बजावें।

and in the language of the famous Maithili poet Vidyapati it would become:

नन्दक नन्दन कदमक तरुतर धीरे-धीरे मुरली बजाव।

In the grammatical rules of Maithili, the relationship of नन्द and नन्दन can be shown with the use of just one letter 'd,' in Braj it is 'dks' while in Hindi it is shown by 'dk.' From a linguistic point of view, all the strategies are equally grammatical.

#### Relationship with Authority

In a school, the teacher considers herself/himself as the custodian of 'pure and standardized' language. This again is an issue of understanding and approach. One needs to keep in mind that, first, at the time of joining a school, a child knows almost all the grammatical rules of the language he/she speaks. Second, that his/her mother tongue is not the medium of instruction in the school is a political issue. Third, the errors which a child commits while learning the standardized language are not erratic and baseless; they reflect a certain pattern. Fourth, these errors get corrected only in due course, and teachers' efforts don't give any instant result. Fifth, no child learns a language without making mistakes and first language learners tend to make the same 'mistakes' as those who learn it as a second or third language.

Let us now come to the issue of literature. Generally, people believe that it is in the 'language' alone that serious writing is done. For example, Khadi Boli Hindi is the only standardized 'language' because it is used in newspapers and offices while others like Braj, Awadhi, Maithili etc. are simply called its dialects.

It is an irony that Awadhi, in which Tulsi Das composed

Ramacharita Manas, Braj in which Surdas and several other poets composed beautiful poetry and Maithili which Vidyapati used for his compositions are now considered Hindi's 'offspring' and not 'mothers.' It is not just a phenomenon of our times. When Kannauj was the centre of power, Apabhramsa became the language of the elite and Awadhi, Braj, etc., in whatever form they existed at that time, were declared its dialects. Similarly, when the power centre shifted to the Braj area, Braj got patronage and the Khadi Boli, of Delhi and Meerut, was considered its dialect. In the same way when Delhi became the centre of power, Khadi Boli came into prominence and all other languages were relegated to the status of dialects.

It is essential to understand the relationship of language and power; only then we can have a balanced and constructive approach towards this issue.

#### Script and Language

Let us now examine the issue of script which is considered to be one of the most important desirables for acquiring the status of 'language.' This again is a big misconception. In fact, all the languages of the world can be written in any one script, or one can write any particular language in all the scripts of the world with minor modifications. For example take the Hindi and English languages and the Devanagari and Roman scripts:

Hindi (Devanagari) - मोहन खेल रहा है।

Hindi (Roman) - Mohan khel rahaa hai.

There are several languages in India which are written in the Devanagari script; Sanskrit is one language which is written in several scripts in our country. It is also not true that script is essential for the development of literature in any particular language. Take the case of the Rig Veda. For many centuries after its composition, the Rig Veda was not written, as there were no scripts at that time. Despite this, the purity of the Rig Veda was maintained by the people of that time. Language predates script and script may not have any role in the development of literature in any language.

Any group of people can invent/initiate a script of their own for their language. But how much acceptance it will get from society will depend upon the kind of political support it generates for itself. Today, Santhali language is written in several scripts - Devanagari, Roman, Bangla, Oriya and Ol Chikki. Now, which of these gets the acceptance of the larger Santhali community is a purely political issue. The struggle till then is on for all of them!

Another issue is that of the area in which the language is used. It is proclaimed that language is one which is spoken in a larger area or one which is spoken by a larger population and dialect is one which is restricted to a limited/smaller area. This is very interesting. Take the case of Hindi again. It has been continuously projected through newspapers, radio and television as one which is spoken by almost fifty per cent of India's population. It was given constitutional status by declaring it as the official language of the Union (mostly people confuse this with national language). It was also made the medium of instruction in schools. With all this backing and support, Hindi became a 'language' while others like Braj, Awadhi, Bhojpuri and Maithili became its dialects. The large population that speaks these 'dialects' has been clubbed together under the umbrella of 'Hindi-speaking' people and it has, therefore, been declared that Hindi is spoken by millions of people in India.

How many people actually speak standardized Hindi? Very few indeed. People generally use their own

languages - Bhojpuri, Maithili, Awadhi, Braj, Magadhi, Bundeli, Hadoti, Bagdi, Chhattisgarhi, etc. - in their informal conversations, and hardly use standardized Hindi. Standardized Hindi is probably spoken in some parts of Allahabad, Benaras and Meerut only. But what about people in Chamba and Hamirpur (Himachal Pradesh), Rohtak and Bhiwani (Haryana), Jaisalmer and Sawai Madhopur (Rajasthan), Ara and Chhapra (Bihar), Raipur and Bilaspur (Chhattisgarh) etc - do they speak standardized Hindi?

So, it is clear that on the basis of grammar, script, literature and the size of the area, it is not possible to make any difference between language and dialect. Then why is this difference or hierarchy created? Why is Hindi or for that matter Queen's English or any other language given a superior status? This is a question which demands some deep introspection by everybody.

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## A Bird's Eye View of Language in Society in India

Dr. Jennifer Bayer



Diverse and united India is complex with many cultures and faiths, ways of life, dress and food habits, traditions and rituals. The different religions of the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, with a variety of sects, and varying tribal religious beliefs are like petals of one flower.

This diversity extends over to Indian languages as well.

This article peeks into the language scene in India, and presents research results of four recent studies.

Language Families of India

Languages in India belong to six language families: