THE CHANGING ROLES OF ASIAN LANGUAGES A STUDY IN REGISTER CREATION

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ABSTRACT

I propose to do three things in this paper; (i) to show how notions like 'Mother Tongue' (L_1). 'Second Language' (L_2), and 'Foreign Language' (FL) derive their 'meaning' and 'value' from the system network of languages in which they function; (ii) to highlight the fact that changes in the role of any of the languages in the network can create problems for planners; and (iii) to prove on the basis of the use of Hindi in India and of English in Singapore that 'role-changes' and 'function assignments' necessitate the creation/adoption of role-worthy registers, extension of register-range, and recognition of teaching and training strategies at secondary and tertiary levels to meet the changing communicative needs of people who operate in multilingual and multicultural settings.

KEYWORDS: Foreign Language (FL), Lingua Franca, Multilingualism, Modernization, Official Language, Register Creation, Socio – Cultural, Second Language (SL)

INTRODUCTION

One of the mysteries that linguists have been trying to understand for ages is: What a piece of work is man? What is it that has enabled him to produce this marvelous tool called Language? There are linguists who are interested primarily in trying to understand how the human mind 'ticks' and how this 'ticking' is reflected in man's use of language which has an unbounded character. They are intrigued by the possibility of learning something, from the study of language that will bring to light the innate endowment that makes it possible for humans to attain the system of knowledge that underlies the use and understanding of language.

Notions like 'Mother Tongue' (L_1)

There are other linguists who are interested in trying to understand 'the socially significant creativity of language': the speaker's ability to switch codes, mix codes, select intralanguage and interlanguage varieties keeping in view the demands of 'topic of discourse', 'participants in interaction', and 'socio-cultural setting' (Verma, 1976, pp. 153-165). For purpose of this paper I am going to look at language as a network of relations functioning in a wider network called 'socio cultural network'. Language examined this point of view is a system of choices. Each term in this system represents a choice or a bundle of choices and has a contrastive value relative to other terms in the system (Verma, 1974, p. 5). Languages in contact in multilingual settings from a system network. Each language in this network represents a bundle of features and has a contrastive value based on the role(s) played and function(s) performed by it relative to the roles played and functions performed by other languages. It is on the basis of roles and functions that languages have been subcategorized into (i) Mother Tongue, 'First Language', and 'Second Language', 'Foreign Language', 'Native Language', 'Non-native Language', 'Standard Language', 'Vernacular'; (ii) 'National Language' and 'Official Language'; (iii)'Link Language', 'Lingua Franca', 'International Language', 'Library Language', and 'Language for Specific Purpose'. Note that the value of these categories is context-governed and use controlled.

As a result of rapid global movements and pressure exercised by 'context and use', it is not uncommon today for a person to have someone else's tongue as his mother tongue. I have heard people say, "My father and mother speak Tamil, but for all practical purposes my mother tongue is English".

What is geographically a non-native language may acquire the status and value of a first language in a new setting. One of the meanings of a second language is a language acquired in addition to or after the first language which may be the mother tongue in the traditional sense of the term. In terms of 'role', 'status', and 'setting' your mother tongue or language first acquired may have the value of a second language. What is really important here is the fact that socio-politico-economic pulls and tugs and the philosophy underlying the 'melting-pot' can make your mother tongue and your other tongue your mother tongue (refer to the report in The Straits Times, 24 December 1983: "All pupils will be taught English as their first language by 1987. In this new 'national stream' mother tongue will be the second language.").

The theoretical point that emerges out of this is that terms like Mother Tongue L_1, L_2, L_3, and Foreign Language can be defined meaningfully only in terms of a functional feature matrix. A country may decide to give the status of 'official language' to all the major languages of the country and of 'national language' to all the major languages of the country and of 'official language' to only one of them, with a rider that a non-native language will be used as 'an associate official language'. The first model is represented by the linguistic scene in Singapore and the second one by that in India. Note again that the terms 'national language' and 'official language' derive their meaning from the setting in which they are used. Note also that a country may find it useful to give the status of 'first language' to non-national language. 'Link language', 'linguafranka', 'library language', and 'language for specific purposes' are useful, purpose-based terms.

It is generally said that 'any language learnt by a child before the age of instruction, from parents, from others, such as nurse looking after it, or from other children, is an L_1 (Halliday et al, 1964, p. 78). 'This language he learns from his older siblings, parents, other children and other adults with whom he comes into contact' (Halliday et al, 1964, p. 224). In native language learning, it is largely outside the class that children extend their control over the language; at least outside the English class. The point I would like to emphasize here is that the foreign system has given us a new insight into the concept of L_1. We must subcategorize L_1 into Home L1 and school L1. These underlying features of 'language ordering' suggest that the standard definition of mother tongue may be grossly inappropriate for some sociolinguistic settings.

**Highlight the Fact that Changes in the Role of any of the Languages
in the Network can Create Problems for Planners**

It has already been said that languages in a multilingual setting (and also languages in a monolingual setting – the term 'language' used ambiguously) form a system-determined value. It may be useful to look at this system network from the points of view of individuals and societies or governments. Individuals play a variety of institutionalized roles in their lives – some of these roles are fast changing because of the changing universe around them.

They have therefore to 'plan' their language –use and language choice in terms of topic of discourse', 'addresser-addressee relationship', and 'socio cultural setting'. The success of an individual depends on his ability to switch his linguistic gears as many times as he plays different personal, interpersonal, and institutional roles. Whenever two or more languages are actively involved in a setting, the nation concerned has to 'plan' the roles of languages by answering the following questions:

- What will be the medium of instruction at primary, secondary and tertiary levels? Will there be one medium or two?

- What will be the language of administration – at the national level, at the state level? Which one or ones? Native or non-native or both?

- Will the international link language be also the international link language? Which one? Native or non-native?

- What will be the role of minority languages – minority languages at the national and state levels?

- How many languages should be taught at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels?

All these and many more questions come up before planners who must take carefully thrashed out decisions and assign roles to different languages. Once a new role is given to a particular language, the roles of all the other languages in the setting are bound to be affected. What is role expansion for one language is role-restriction for other languages. Role restriction if not controlled in time, may lead to attrition, which in its turn may lead to language tension, rivalry and violent outbursts. These are not hallucinations of an ivory-tower linguist. These things have happened in India. The Indian linguistic scene clearly demonstrates that attempts to further the use of any language (native or non-native) are considered to be efforts to reduce the political, social, cultural, and economic rights of all or some of the other language groups. Civil riots and bloody clashes in Sri Lanka were generated by an attempt on the part of Singhalese-speaking majority to make their language the only official language.

The decision to assign a new role and hence a new value to a language in a multilingual setting entails a number of responsibilities on the planners: (i) creating an atmosphere in which the language can exploit its resources to play its new roles effectively; (ii) ensuring that the other languages will be able to play their roles in their own domains without any fear or hindrance. We must remember that a new decision can be taken by issuing a circular, but a new register cannot be created overnight by issuing a circular. These discussions lead us to a position from where we can look at language not simply as a lump on a dissection-table but as a meaning potential and also realize that its resources can be tapped to their fullest extent by working it, i.e. by pushing it into role-playing situations. Our slogan is: give your language a good hand and it will never let you down. It will externalize its latent powers to prove itself able to deal with, what may appear to be, difficult tasks.

Language planning and related issues have generally been examined in terms of policy formula to highlight the fact that changes in the role of any of the languages in the network can create problems for planners; and (iii) to prove action, codification, elaboration, and implementation. The focus in my paper is on 'language interaction' and 'creativity' seen in the context of language maintenance, language choice, and language shift and language elaboration. Another point that I would like to emphasize here is that effective bilingualism or trilinguialism or even multilingualism may be a powerful way of enriching the linguistic repertoire of individualism may be a powerful way of enriching the linguistic repertoire of individuals. Indian loan words in English and English loan words in Indian languages can be used as an illustration of this bilateral enrichment. In the process of creating new registers to play new roles, one of the common strategies used by a language is to borrow words from languages in contact. Another strategy used is language zoning: using L_1 for humanities and L_2 for science and technology or vice – versa. We should now look at some of the languages in South Asia and examine the mechanisms employed to make the best use of the resources of bilingualism and multilingualism in order to play a variety of new roles.

Examined Languages and its Mechanisms

South Asia, which has been described as an area of staggering linguistic diversity, has been in a state of creative tension for quite some time. Political independence has brought with it a strong feeling of nationalism and a realization that the languages in these countries have to play new roles, meet new demands, and fulfil the needs and aspirations of their users who find themselves sandwiched between two clutters. As a result of this new function they have been experiencing a pull in two directions in South Asia and 'westernization'. 'Nativization' in this context refers to the exploration of native resources – resources offered by the native languages (including classical languages) and dialects. 'Westernization' refers to the processes by which technical words and phrases representing Western concepts (derived from Western languages, especially English) are being built into the native Asian language (Verma, 1982, pp. 1-23). Since English and the Asian languages have been in a state of interaction for a fairly long period of time, it is natural for English based bilinguals to use code switching and code mixing as a mechanism for enabling their languages as a mechanism for enabling their languages to function effectively in new situations (Verma, 1976, p. 161). For Haugen (1966) these 'elaboration of function'. I would like to call it 'register creation', i.e., creation of new topic based language varieties to meet the demands of rapid technical innovation[1].

The key concept here is that of 'developing language' by making it function in new situations and in the process of enabling it to create new registers. What do we actually mean by 'developing language'? Does it imply that the languages of Asia are under-developed? In fact, an underdeveloped language is a language that has been deprived of its right to perform certain functions in its own society. The history of languages demonstrates convincingly that there is no such thing as an inherently handicapped language. There is no such thing as a language more suited, by its nature, to science and technology. We would like to maintain that any language is as good as any other language in the sense that every language is well adapted to the uses to which the community puts it. The notion of developing a language means adding to its range of functions which is achieved by creating new registers. "The register-range changes as the society changes and one of the most important aspects of this change is the development of new registers, part of the process of modernization." (Ellis and Ure, 1982, p. 7).

Explaining the different aspects of the theory and practice of translation as a process of language development. Catford says: "One of the problems of translating scientific texts into certain languages which have recently become National Languages such as Hindi, is that of finding, or creating, an equivalent scientific register". Catford has indirectly emphasized the need for creating new registers in languages which have recently become national languages and hence have to play new roles. How do we create scientific registers? We do it by using our languages as tools of scientific knowledge. This may necessitate adding to the symbolic resources of the language which can be done in a variety of ways: (i) by the development of new discourse, registral, and stylistic forms, (ii) by the expansion of its lexicon by new words and expressions which come from the language's own word-churning processes or from extensive borrowing from other languages (Ferguson, 19968, p. 32), (iii) by expanding the semantic range of existing or borrowed lexical terms.

Michael West presents a different approach to this question in his monograph on Bilingualism (published in 1926). According to him: "Man needs two kinds of language: he needs an expression of the 'dear and intimate things', a language of the home, the fireside, the motherland – a language of emotion and of unexpressed associations. He needs also a language of fact, knowledge, exact argument, and scientific truth – a language in which words are world current and steadfast in their meanings. The small languages of the world fulfil the first purpose, but as time goes on they prove more and more insufficient for the second, insufficient for the complexity, the variety, and the international teamwork of languages".

It must be emphasized here that the notion of 'insufficiency' has no value in sociolinguistics. Languages which have been characterized as 'small' and 'insufficient' by West have grown into effective national languages, playing a variety of complex roles in their countries by expanding their vocabulary, standardizing their spelling and grammar. There is no evidence whatever that one language, or any one variety of a language, can be more efficient than other. In his inaugural address delivered at the University of Malaya on 29 December 1969. Fernando stated emphatically that "the advancement of knowledge is not the prerogative of one language alone, however influential or overwhelming it may seem. We can no longer sustain the belief that the rationalizing techniques developed in English and European languages represent a goal to which South East Asian languages must necessarily aspire in full. Nor need we believe any longer that the present widespread use of English due to any special mark of its superiority over other languages" (p. 10). It has been rightly said that the choice of an international language, r lingua franca, is never based on linguistic or aesthetic principles but always on extra-linguistic considerations political, economic and demographic.

All human languages keep on modernizing their lexical, registral, stylistic and discoursal mechanisms. Modernization is a cluster concept: it represents a multidimensional and interlocking network of processes and mechanisms by which languages augment their repertoire of registers to cope with the changing social, cultural, economic, industrial, and political needs of today. At the conceptual level modernization represents our interactions with new ideas, new attitudes and new interpretations. It also refers to the interplay of the patterns of thinking and feeling as they obtain in the East and the West. At the formal level it represents those linguistic strategies which languages use to express new meanings and new modes of communication. At the educational level the introduction of regional languages as official state languages and as media of instruction represents a marked move in the direction of modernization. Modernization should not be mistaken for westernization. 'West' is a point in space and 'modern' a point in the time which is present and also 'past in present'.

The modern man, whether that belongs to the East or to the West, must keep pace with a reality that is dynamic and constantly changing. I would like to say that the modernization of Asian and African languages is an external manifestation of language change, language identity, and language status – a marker of the vitality and adaptability of the languages to the changing needs of its speakers. After the Japanese invasion Indonesian was employed not only in the writing of public laws and official pronouncements but in all official correspondence between government organs and between the government and the people, as well as in all educational institutions. Historical factors have promoted the language planners to make Malay the lingua franca of Indonesia where the majority of the population are Javanese

The Indian linguistic scene has tempted researchers to call India 'a sociolinguistic area', 'a linguistic giant', and 'a language laboratory'. The Indian Government supports a trilingual policy for education called the 'three-language formula' – regional language, Hindi as a national language, and English as a world language. This formula is important for it enables all the major languages to function and grow as vehicles of modern thought and English to serve as our international link language. This also reinforces the thinking that in multilingual societies we need an intra-group link language. The constitution of India has given the status of national language to all the major languages of India and official language to Hindi (and also to English for a period of fifteen years). English it has been said in government documents on language policy, will continue as an associate official language.

The major languages, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Punjabi, Oiya, Kannada, Malayalam, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Assamese, and Urdu, function as official languages have to meet new challenges: the demands of new mass media, urbanization, industrialization, mass education, business, commerce, law and administration. As has already been said, languages draw on their own resources and also borrow from languages in contact to create a set of new registers

appropriate to their new roles. It is 'new meanings' and 'new organizations' that constitute the core of 'registers'. In the process of surfacing new meanings, languages, languages make use of a variety of mechanisms to expand their lexicon.

The pattern of social and economic life in India has been changing at a fast pace for quite some time. Carefully planned efforts made by academics and artists have created an atmosphere which has enabled the major Indian languages to articulate those ideas, views and visions which are characteristic of a brave new world.

It has been said again and again that English has a large stock of words and phrases to express complex and subtle notions in the fields of science and technology, law and administration, trade and commerce, politics and international relations. Indian languages are not yet fully developed for expounding these ideas. Our assumption (as stated earlier) is that all human languages are equally capable of being developed for all purposes. Languages grow and develop by being made to function in newer contexts and newer interactional networks. No language is any less qualified to be the vehicle of modern science and technology than were English and Russian some centuries ago.

The linguistic repertoire of a community is derived from the range of uses that language is put to in that particular culture. The point that here I am making is that language is a meaning potential: it is what its speakers can make it do. What a particular language is actually doing now is a context governed and use – determined externalization of what it can do. Hindi has exploited the resources of bilingualism (by borrowing from languages in contact and using a mixed code) and created a network of styles (Persianized, Sanskritized and Anglicized) to play a variety of roles in new domains. In his reflections on language education in multilingual societies, Halliday has clearly stated: 'It is not to be wondered at that a language that is subject to pressures of rapid change tends to become mixed in the process.' I will give a few examples to illustrate these mechanisms.

Mixed Code: ise dissection table par le jaanaa, pahleise dissect karnaa, phiriskii veins and arteries nikaalnaaauruski microscopic examination karnaa. Note that a mixed code is rule-governed system. The grammatical frame of the sentence listed above is that of Hindi and all lexical fillers have been derived from English. This is how Hindi is moving English out of science classes. Hindi-English mixed phrases in the language of banking: aadarsh deposit, pragati cash certificate, savings bank Khaataa, 'own your own home'yojnaa, bacat bank Khaataajamaaparchi (for savings Bank Account pay – in - slip).

Borrowing: Quite a large number of English words from the domains of science and technology, sports, business and commerce, mass communication, law and administration have been borrowed. Typewriter, wristwatch, cabin, phone, dinner, airbus, tape-recorder, T.V., doctor, nurse, driver, car and so on. Here interesting is that if you go toa modern doctor he may tell you that you are suffering from asthma (or its Hindiaized version), but a Hakim will use damma andVaidya svaasrog for the same disease. These are context-based stylistic variants.

Extending the Semantic Range of Words: 'Bathroom' in English refers to a room in which there is a bathtub (and usually a wash-hand-basin). In Hindi it is also used to mean a lavatory. Camcaa is a word borrowed from Urdu to mean a spoon. In non-formal varieties of Hindi it is used to mean 'trying to win a favor or approval by using flattery'.

Advertisement: Syntactic mechanisms like topicalization, compounding, and gapping have been used (i) to mark certain items of news as prominent, (ii) to compress a number of items into one phrase for precision: Hiirejaisidhaarvaala blade: Erasmic Stainless Supreme. These examples can be multiplied. They prove that a code's capacity can be elaborated by making it function in new situations.

CONCLUSIONS

Since English has been assigned all the major roles in foreign, the problem here is not that of creating new registers as in the case of Hindi, but of helping children and also adults handle technical and nontechnical registers effectively. This can be achieved by doing the following:

- Shifting the focus from literature – centered teaching (in the traditional sense of the term) to language-sensitive teaching.

- Exposing students to a variety of marked registers in modern English.

- Helping them reorganize register-based materials in the light of local demands, and

- Introducing a massive programme of textbook writing and teacher training, and producing new courses designed to meet the requirement of the foreign setting.
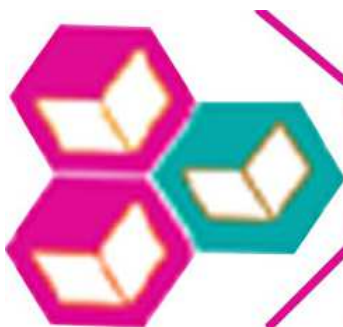
We must remember that we are teaching English in a foreign setting: it is the setting that gives a language its distinctive colour and flavor. There is no reason to feel that English in foreign is or will be less effective or less efficient as a system of communication but there is every reason (linguistic or sociolinguistic) to say that it is and will continue to be different from the other varieties of English (Verma, 1982a, p. 185).

Notes

- On the notions of 'register' and 'register-range', see Halliday et al: The Linguistic Science & Language Teaching (1964); Ellis Ure (eds): Register Range and Change, IJSL, Vol 35, 1982; Verma, S K: "Towards a Linguistic Analysis of Registral Features", Act a Linguistic, 1969, Tomus 19:3-4.

- On Modernization, see Verma (1982)

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