Conservation of Language Ecology and Indigenous Cultures

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What do we mean by Language Ecology?

• **Variation** as the fundamental trait of language-we are concerned as in how many ways languages of our country vary across regions and across the social structure.

• **Diversity** of languages is a sign of ancient civilization and sustainability. India houses 1369 Mother Tongues, out of which around 1000 are preserved in oral tradition, out of which 197 are endangered.

• Language Ecology is concerned with the **sociology of language**: peoples’ attitudes towards their and other’s languages.

• An **inextricable relationship between language and its environment**, as destruction of one leads the loss of the other and vice versa. Language is **embedded in its environment**.
• Language **encodes** our culture, beliefs, world-view, sense of right judgement, plethora of information regarding disaster management, and extensive knowledge-system.

• Language is **inherent part of our culture**. In fact, they constitute ONE ENTITY. It represents a way of life.

• Tsunami in Andaman, Distance markers in Nicobarese, Varieties of wheat preparation in Northern India
Language is a bio-cultural Hybrid: Co-evolutionary Approach

• A product of intensive gene : culture coevolution over perhaps the last 200,000 to 400,000 years.

• The main reason why we are so much concerned of the fact that the linguistic diversity is decreasing at an alarming speed.

• Every fortnight a language dies. It is somewhere taking away plethora of knowledge-system along with it.

• Reasons for diversity: Historical and Contact.
Language Ecology explains fundamental differences in how languages work, with long historico-cultural roots that explain the many divergences. The diversities of languages points to the general importance of technological and cultural adaptation.

- **Language influences your thought** which itself is energized by your culture. It is our specific culture that we derive certain meaning (cognition) of a word or linguistic structure (untransability of Expressives in Khasi, echo formations, second person pronouns).

- **Language produces an organization of experience.** [Names of birds in Great Andamanese, Wheat preparation in Northern India].
Khasi (Austroasiatic) *yaid* (v) 'go, walk, proceed'

- *bak'-bak'* 'go hurriedly'
- *bian*-bian 'walk continuously'.
- *bran*-bran 'go very fast'.
- *brum*-brum 'go with heavy steps'
- *hai*-hai 'walk shakily as if very heavy'
- *han'*-han' 'walk like a duck'
- *kep'-kep' 'go slowly not sure to keep the equilibrium'
- *ker'*-ker' 'walk trembling'
- *khne?*-khne? 'walk like a lame man'
- *khniŋ*-khniŋ 'walk lamely' as if very tired or there is a stone in the sole
- *khrup'*-khrup' 'walk quickly and stamping the floor with the steps --
- *kjik'-kjik' 'walk as if on pins'
There are 9 (nine) different words in Maya for the colour blue. This was to denote six species of butterflies in the forest. In the comprehensive Porrúa Spanish-Maya Dictionary only three Spanish translations occur, leaving six butterflies that can be seen only by the Maya, proving beyond doubt that when a language dies, six butterflies disappear from the consciousness of the people.
Be ware of Great Vocabulary Shift in early stages of learning

- stunts the cognitive growth (color terms, numerals)
- Produces bad translators in children
- Increases the rote memory rather than understanding the concepts
- Induces inferiority complex regarding ancient language and culture
- Produces second rated literate children
- Induces amnesia regarding indigenous knowledge
• Each language is **unique** as it constrains the interpretation of a particular linguistic structure with a specific semantic domain. For example, English constrains the interpretation of the gender of the 3rd person while Hindi does not. Conversely, Hindi constrains the male/female distinction, but Bangla does not.

• Great Andamanese has Past and Non past. The former is also of three types: immediate past, remote past and narrative past. This experience and transmission of experience across generations is part of the culture of the Great Andamanese society.
Language families of India

1. Indo-Aryan
2. Dravidian
3. Austroasiatic  
   in the Mainland
4. Tibeto-Burman
5. Tai-Kadai
6. Great Andamanic  
   in the Andaman Islands
The Census 2011

• The Census 2011 reports there are 1369 \textit{rationalized mother tongues} out of which 270 are spoken by more than 10,000 speakers but 1099 are spoken by less than 10,000 speakers. Around \textbf{1000 mother tongues are not written down} but have been passed on by inter generation transfer for hundreds and thousands of years. Heritage of India.

• Since the Census 2001, we lost 266 rationalized mother tongues or unwritten languages

• Varieties of Hindi: \textbf{57}

• Hindi + Urdu constitutes more than \textbf{51\%} of population.
Oral Tradition: Beauty of unwritten languages

• Oral literature is the repository of the critical knowledge and philosophy for non-literate societies and serves as a vehicle for artistic creativity of great value and beauty. This literature through narrative, poetry, song, dance, myths and fables, and texts for religious rituals provides a portrait of the meaning of life as experienced by the society at a particular time and place with their existential challenges. It encapsulates the traditional knowledge, beliefs and values about the environment and the nature of the society itself. It is intertwined with performing arts.

• **Performing arts** are embedded in oral tradition. They represent Indian culture which has withstood foreign invasion and is constantly evolving.
Multiplicity of languages

• An average Indian is a bilingual. Bilingualism among tribes is 50% more than the national average bilingualism.

• Bilingualism is our second Nature. Evidence lies in India being considered as one Linguistic Area.
Semantic Unity in Linguistic Diversity

Despite the diversity our languages share so many features among themselves that India can be considered one ‘Linguistic Area’. In fact we can think of writing one CORE GRAMMAR of Indian languages.
Some Select Indian Areal Features

• Retroflex Sounds \text{र्त ण लङ्क्त}

• Morphological Causatives

• Word Reduplication

• Expressive morphology

• Echo formations

• OV word order

• Conjunctive participles/Converbs

• Non agent experiential constructions

• Negation used as a tag for confirmation

• Three-way distinction in 2\textsuperscript{nd} person pronoun

• Marked +/- honorific features [pronoun/verb morphology]

• Extensive kinship terminology

• Explicator Compound verbs
Two important **conclusions** can be drawn here:

**One**, the use of similar **word formation** presupposes sharing of cognitive environment and conceptual space by the speaker and the hearer. Unless the cognitive environment and the conceptual space is shared the range of meanings and associated semantics of each of these formations will be misinterpreted leading to communicative chaos.
Secondly, the use of similar structure exhibits intense and stable language contact that marks the age old and strong bilingualism, tolerance for other languages, **social solidarity** and living in social cohesion.
• Genomic studies reinforce convergence and contact between languages.

If this is true then we are perfectly suited for multilingual education system that NEP 2020 provides for.

We have to decide the modalities of this system so that the learners grow respecting other’s languages while exceling in his own.
Language and Environment

An *Inextricable relationship between the two*

Indigenous languages store information on conservation of environment
Some varieties still in the memory of the tribes of Koraput, Odissa

- Baunsunimundi
- Haldi-dhaan
- Gadaakutta
- Sapuri –dhaan
- Betra-dhaan
- Kolarikuji
- Laakdikuji
- Umriachuri
- Limchuri
- Asamchuri
- Bagurichuri
- Mayer-dhaan
- Patraa-dhaan

Originally 1700 varieties of rice were grown. The Green Revolution made the soil irretrievable for such varieties. Indigenous knowledge of rice cultivation was lost subsequently.
Family name: Barringtoniaceae
Botanical Name: Barringtonia racemose (L.) Sprenger

Indigenous knowledge of Nicobarese (Sanenyo speakers):

- Used for fishing. Powder of the bark is strewn on the water so that fishes faint and float up.
- Bark Powder is used for treating sprain or dislocation of a joint
- The milky sap is used for treating snake-bite.
Ku:me (mushroom)-1
study made by Jaykrishanan
As of today, we have more than 1000 languages which are spoken and not written down engulfing a vast amount of secrets of human nature, human tolerance for others, and survival. Some of these languages are on the brink of extinction.

The New Education Policy 2020 may help us reverse this process.

Interactive multilingual dictionaries with sounds and images should be produced to record culture and indigenous knowledge through words.
For under-resourced and Indigenous communities, a dictionary contains crucial historical, cultural and territorial information. When languages become endangered, dictionaries become primary tools for language learning, world-view of the bygone civilization.
Solution lies in Multilingual Education in PHASES

➢ WHY LEARN HINDI?

➢ Not imposed but suggestive.
➢ Learning of Hindi as a subject is essential as this is the only link language that is used by urban masses all over India.
➢ Tribes across the country use Hindi in its non-standard variety for intercommunication more than any other group. It has produced unprecedented social cohesion. (ICSSR Report, 1997-98.)
➢ Hindi gives mobility across the nation and enhances possibility of employment and social acceptance. (Migrant labour)
WHY LEARN ENGLISH?

• No need to learn from the day one in the school.
• First as a subject then as a medium of education if so desired by the States and Union Territories of India.
• Learning of English in higher education is necessary for various reasons including preparing us to compete in the world.
• New pedagogical and curricular structure of school education (5+3+3+4): 3 years in Anganwadi/pre-school and 12 years in school.

• MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN PHASES is the answer.

• I am using the term ‘local language of the place’ rather than ‘mother tongue’ as it creates confusion. It is to be noted that the local language is generally the dominant minor language of the large population base.
FOUNDATIONAL
Phase 1

➢ Ages 3-6. Anganwadi, Balvatika, Preschool (Home language, Local language based oral learning, plays, songs, mimicry.) Develop power of expressions. No emphasis on writing till the age of 4+ preferably till 5.

➢ Local Language may be taught only up to Preparatory (Class V) School.
**Foundational** Continued: First two years in school  
(Phase 2)  
Ages 6-8. Class I and II

**Hindi States**

1. Local Language as the medium of instruction. This can be either a SL or Non-Scheduled Language

2. Standard Hindi [as a subject]

**Non-Hindi States**

1. Local Language as the medium of instruction. This can be either a Schedule Language or Non-Scheduled Language

2. Major State Language [as a subject]
**Preparatory Stage**

**Phase 3**

- *Hindi States*
  1. English [*as a subject*]
  2. A South Indian language [*as a subject*]
  3. Other two languages continue, i.e. [Hindi and Local language]

*At this stage there are four languages in the verbal repertoire of a child with MT as the medium of instruction*

- *Non-Hindi States*
  1. Hindi [*as a subject*]
  2. English [*as a subject*]
  3. Other two languages continue, i.e. [State language and Local language]

*At this stage there are four languages in the verbal repertoire of a child with MT as the medium of instruction*
Preparatory Stage  
Class V  
Phase 4

• **Hindi States**  
  - Standard Hindi as a medium of instruction  
  - Other languages as subject  
  - Local languages are taught as subjects

• **Non-Hindi States**  
  - Major State Language as a medium of instruction  
  - Other languages as subject  
  - Local Languages are taught as subjects
Middle school
Phase 5
Class VI- VIII

- Hindi States
  - Hindi medium, if at all, may be replaced by English.
  - Other languages as subject should be taught
  - Local Language may be dropped after class V
  - Any Classical language may be introduced

- Non-Hindi States
  - Major State Language, if at all, may be replaced by English.
  - Other languages as subject should be taught
  - Local Language may be dropped after class V
  - Any Classical language may be introduced
Secondary school
Phase 6
Class IX-XII

• **Hindi States**
  • Hindi medium or English Medium.
  • South Indian language may be dropped
  • Any foreign language may be introduced as a subject
  • Other languages as subject should be taught [=English, Classical Language]
  • If English is chosen as the medium Hindi may be taught as a subject

• **Non-Hindi States**
  • Major State Language or English Medium
  • Hindi may be dropped
  • Any foreign language may be introduced as a subject
  • Other languages as subject should be taught [=English, Classical Language]
  • If English is chosen as the medium the State language may be taught as a subject
• Let us see how would this work in Indian situation.

• I have divided the country in two-the Hindi-Belt [comprises 12 states and Union territories] and Non-Hindi states [comprises test of the states and Union territories] for ease.
Hindi state: Rajasthan (Local Language : Marwari)

• Phase 1 (Ages 3-6) Anganwadi/ Preschool: Marwari medium - FOUNDATION

• Phase 2 (class 1,2) Marwari medium + Hindi as a subject - FOUNDATION

• Phase 3 (class 3, 4) Add English and South Indian language as subjects. Marwari medium and Hindi as a subject continues - PREPARATORY

• Phase 4 (class 5) Standard Hindi medium + other languages as subjects (English, Marwari, South Indian languages) PREPARATORY

• Phase 5 (class 6-8) Hindi or English medium + other languages as subject. Marwari may be dropped. Classical language Sanskrit/Persian/ Pali may be introduced. - MIDDLE

• Phase 6 (Class 9-12) Hindi or English Medium continues. Any foreign language may be introduced as a subject. Classical language, English as subject continues. South Indian language may be dropped. - SECONDARY
Non-Hindi State: Karnataka
Dominant State language: Kannada: Local language: Tulu

• Phase 1 (Ages 3-6) Anganwadi/ Preschool: Tulu medium- FOUNDATION
• Phase 2 (class 1-2) Tulu medium + Kannada as a subject- FOUNDATION
• Phase 3 (class 3-4) Add English and Hindi as subjects. Tulu medium and Kannada as a subject continues- PREPARATORY
• Phase 4 (class 5) Kannada medium + other languages as subjects (English, Tulu, Hindi)- PREPARATORY
• Phase 5 (class 6-8) Kannada or English medium + other languages as subject. Tulu may be dropped. Classical language such as Sanskrit/Persian/ Classical Tamil/ Classical Kannada may be introduced.-MIDDLE
• Phase 6 (Class 9-12) Kannada or English Medium continues. Any foreign language may be introduced as a subject. Classical language, English/Kannada as subject continues. Hindi may be dropped. SECONDARY
Why multiple languages?

Need to teach Hindi as it is the lingua franca of the country and allows mobility across the country. The widely accepted language especially among the tribes and minority groups.

Need to teach English despite English is considered a “killer language”. The use of English from class II is essential for globalization and progress in the world.

Mother tongues or Local Languages should attain formal recognition in schools. This will aid the economic factors and further bolster the use of the languages.
The proposed policy and measures take care of the fact that all learn the major lingua franca of the country, i.e., Hindi. All are given opportunity to receive basic education in mother tongue and thus also build respect for it. No one is deprived of learning English, the basic demand made by minority communities of India. Classical language is taught at higher levels to introduce the cultural heritage through ancient texts.
Institutional support for Mother Tongue/Local language Teaching

• Necessary learning of mother tongue till the stage of class V will give employment facility to the speakers of minor languages.

• Will inculcate the sense of pride and urge to retain the language outside home environment, will be informed of Indian culture.

• The cognitive abilities of children are best enhanced if early education is imparted in Mother tongue/Local language.
Thank you