

Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics
Volume [12] 2019, Pp. 124-130

**An Enquiry into the Choice of Language for Pursuing Education:
Ghettoization of Language in Academic Space**

Anshu Singh (PhD)*

Abstract

This paper presents a socio-linguistic perspective on the languages that are used in a university. Verbal interaction of students with each other varies drastically within the classroom and outside. The usage also changes with time and peer group. The primary intent of the paper was to find out the factors that motivate the students to change the language of use. The data were collected from two central universities located in Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia and University of Delhi. The data were analyzed qualitatively. The data reveals that there is a non-conducive culture of language policy in academic spaces that has its roots in social inequality. Given these circumstances the young adults segregate and classify the places to use different languages. This must be seen as a commentary on the requirement of language, a social capital tool, in gaining (or losing) social capital within the places of higher education.

Introduction

Conversation among the peers is one of many mundane activities of a university campus. Being a daily activity, this repartee follows an intricate system in the process of deliverance along with limitation to its occurrence. There are undercurrents of consideration that go into a person opening their mouth to say something (anything). This paper analyses the scaffolds that guide students to choose an appropriate language for interaction with a specific group of people. There are umpteen ideas of appropriateness and acceptability of languages in various domains that find space in the young minds when they speak. Due to these ideas some of the languages get a tag of being academic while others get sidelined or in some cases ghettoized in a very small group.

The academic spaces are seen to favor the dominant languages of the place of an academic institution. For instance, in Canada the public discourse in the study conducted by Lamothe (2019) shows a preference towards English and French. It also points towards the preferred language of the university for providing resources. As in Canada, English in India may also be seen from the lens of colonial educational policies. Research points towards an institutional favour towards English that dominates the academic space from school till higher education (Naregal 2001, Advani 2009, Kumar 2015, Pandey 2016, Mahapatra

* Delhi School of Economics| IIM Ahmedabad

and Mishra 2019). This dominance since childhood is the backdrop around which this study was conducted.

Since childhood the academic institutions play an important role in shaping up of language(s) used by individuals everywhere. This aspect of language is often controlled by socio-cultural and political factors. In multilingual societies students often tend to learn places where they can use different languages. As in Singapore, Bolton and Botha (2019) note that students form a system where they switch between various languages within and outside the classroom.

To make an easy switch, the students make some extra efforts to understand the usage. This involves extra effort from the side of a multi-lingual student who has to divide his or her attention to the content of the subject as well as the language in which it is being taught. Sari et al. (2019) has noted this in their study on the Indonesian students in the university. English came as a challenge in most of these contexts due to large amount of published available content. Jenkins and Mauranen (2019) has noted this trend amongst the universities in Asia, Australasia and Europe.

The extensive literature on the preference of English in higher education points to a systematic issue of a capital created by publication which will be pointed out in the discussion. The structure of the paper is such: At first the paper presents the methodology and the method of data collection in detail. This discussion brings out the physical setting in which the paper is located. The discussion part captures the socio-cognitive factors associated with language choice in academic institutions. It also includes the case of academic institutions located in Delhi. Finally, a conclusion is given to understand the findings of the study. The paper ends by commenting on language choice by institutional policy, it also gets affected by various political factors and results in ghettoization and language inequality.

Methodology and Data Collection

The study was conducted as a part of an ethnographic research in Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi. For this data set, regarding language usage in the university, a cross study was conducted in Delhi University. The sampling was done through snow-ball method. Seventy students were asked to fill the questionnaire followed by personal interviews. Twenty students from each university were interviewed in detail to understand about their preference of language in higher education institutions. The interviewees were purposely selected then from the questionnaires subjects were chosen for detail interviews. There was a consideration to interview students from different linguistic background to enrich the data. All the data was collected in English; it is presented in the next section.

Data Presentation

As expected hundred percent of the students agreed to have been using English as their academic languages. This is a trend that is also observed by Jayaram (1993) in his commentary on language usage in Higher Education institutions in

India. The concerns raised by him regarding the spoken language were also reflected by the students. Seventy-four percent students pointed out the need to go out of their ways to learn English language to access reading material in their disciplines, write examinations and interact with the professors. It is especially true for the students who have not studied English in their schools or have learnt it later in their lives.

In the questionnaires, it was found that most of the students (not of literature or language courses) recognize their mother tongue quite distinctly from the second language and the foreign language. About seventy percent of the respondents have a different mother tongue from Hindi and English. However, they said that in the university they mostly use Hindi and English. Mother tongue is only used for conversation in family and amongst a lingual group.

Some departments like sociology, psychology, mathematics, engineering, and almost all science departments discourage their students to use Hindi or any other language for academic purposes (Kaur and Kalra 2019). Hindi or the speakers of other languages find it difficult to adjust to this atmosphere. Without using English ninety-seven percent students argued that they feel under-confident in the class. Sixty percent of the non-speakers of English opined that their academic performance suffer due to the language barrier. Most of these students express that they are not comfortable with English but have chosen to use it because of lack of options.

All of the students noted to have used other language than English outside of their classrooms. For a general peer group, they prefer using Hindi. Seventy percent of the sample knows a third language other than English or Hindi; they have agreed to use it in a group that knows the language. The students who use a third language find it uncomfortable to use it as an academic language. Institutional policies are quoted as the reason to not use any other language, other than English, in academic spaces. The knowledge of the language is the only pre-requirement for students to talk in their mother tongue. For English however they choose to see the people around and the setting.

In personal interviews the students were asked to talk about the languages they use in the classrooms and at other places. The personal narration was given by the students who have faced difficulties in their academic life due to English. In the personal interviews students agreed to have faces humiliation for not using proper English words in the classroom. The embarrassment rarely comes directly from the faculty but mostly through classmates and peers who otherwise appreciate talking in any other language other than English. However, the strict policies of writing papers and tutorials in English automatically force them to learn a new language. For Hindi speakers it comes as a shock because they have written their entrance tests in their native language. While all the respondents believed that learning English is compulsory for the professional growth, they talk in their native language for talking in family. They feel more creative and comfortable in their mother tongue, then the regional language, then Hindi and then English. The observation is further discussed in the next section.

Discussion

Languages have medium to be expressed. They often find their space either in written or in spoken form. The students who suffer due to English find their own spaces to renounce it as soon as they can, it has to be seen in the context of formal necessity in comparison with acceptance as one's own. The mother tongue is the only contender for English. If given a chance it will be only language of learning for the students in question. The chances however are non-existent. English is required for higher education. The limited reading material and the institutional practices makes English inevitable for the students (Choudhary 2009). The hierarchy is an institutional term where through ways of formalisation one language becomes more important than all the others. There are hidden curriculum of the language where in higher education it is believed that the students who speaks English are more intelligent than others. It becomes, then a challenge for students who are not used to of the language to cope up. It is however compulsory to make it cognizable to themselves as it is imperative for professional success.

While the regional languages like Bangla and Marathi slips into the favour of their native readers, Hindi and Urdu seems to be losing its local base at all levels. Urdu especially is used in very small circles for limited purposes. In the research it is seen that some language like Urdu in the academic circles is ghettoized in certain circles. They seem to be belonging to one specifying group of people, in this case Muslims. Its growth can be traced as the language of *bol-chal* in Mughal Delhi. Urdu reached its heights of popularity during that time. The rich literature in the language on Delhi and the nation is evidence to that (Orsini 2010, Dalta 2013). We can argue that ghettoization of Urdu is because of two reasons. One is growth of English as the language for professional that affected Hindi and other regional languages too. One other reasons are its somewhat relation to Islam. Urdu now is seen as the language of Muslims; however, that was not the case since forever. In the current situation Urdu seems to cornered to either the language of Urdu course or the minority institute of higher education that is JamiaMilliaIslamia, in this case.

There is complete ignorance from the Hindi and Urdu literature in the students. Most of the students have just read then as a part of their textbooks. They have read many comics and novels in these languages. The interest of students in literature is restricted to English. The students who speak regional languages like Oriya also complain that apart from newspapers there is dearth of literature in their own language. They believe that literature may be a way to revive their language.

Ghettoization of languages must be understood in the context of the academic circles in the higher education that do not permit students to take a multilingual education. The students are forced to keep contact in one language only. Students have reported that even for talking in their own language in text messages or in popular social networking sites they use English script. If talking to friends and acquaintances that are unfamiliar to their mother tongue they prefer using English.

It is important to note that the languages then are used only in specific groups of people who are already related to the language. With lack of good literature in these languages they are unable to connect to larger community. Higher education is providing opportunity to people to move out of their places and explore opportunities but they cannot do it without compromising their lingual identity. These identities then are becoming small ghettos in themselves which have absolutely no connection with the outer world.

In line of the concept of Social capital as proposed by Bourdieu (Siisiainen 2003) language is seen as one of most important part of a person's social existence. While knowing regional languages give a person an access to that culture, English gives one a wider audience hence social acceptance. The most obvious connection to this can be seen the colonial importance that we as a country gives to English languages and mannerisms. It is also true that English has an appeal to be a general language of the masses world-wide. As the shift of academics is for a wider audience that is located in various locations other than India, it becomes a non-controversial, apparent necessity of the higher education circles.

An issue very closely related to this which is reiterated at many points is the availability of the published material in English that is limited in any other languages in India. Publication itself has a social capital and hierarchy that can be seen in close connection with the development of certain languages. In a post publication world, only oral languages have lost their viability due to the lack of formal structures that is only given by a written word. In the context of education where written word is consumed and reproduced at various levels, the potential of getting read (or may be published) is the ultimate test of a language.

As material gets readily available and it is accepted for publication, the languages gains a consumer base hence a social capital that connects everyone who know or want to know it. These formal relations are found in the regional level universities. The students who comes from there to Delhi University and JamiaMilliaIslamia under goes a cultural shock because English not only is the single formal language, it also is connected to the intelligence of a person. Despite going through several struggles the students find it difficult to convince their respective departments for a language diversity.

At the level of university, multi-lingual education is a hassle but for students it is more like a learning disability. By not recognising the discriminatory powers of languages exclusion universities make it difficult for these students to get accepted in their fields of education and grow. Lack of support services like of English education at higher level as an elective or educating services this divide creates a number of have-nots who are pushed backwards because of their inability to digress to the preferred language. The publication record is a kind of economy that is associated with the number of readers who are accessing a language and bringing up the academic contribution through publishing.

The need to create a publication related social capital to involve readers of all levels is observed by the respondents- the young adults in the university system.

The knowledge producers also must consider that academic discourses are guided by the publication politics. A bilingual publication is one way to remove ghettoization of a languages. Publishing in one's own language is to increase a reading base and create connections through the same. The students want to read same material in their own language so that they can form connections through their mother tongue. The mobilisation of the students, regarding, is often discouraged. A policy, at the level of higher education that constitutes various aspects of university learning, must address this discrimination.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data collected suggests that there is preference for English in the academic spaces within the university. This preference is seen in all formal communications like classroom interactions, applications, examination, tutorials, and projects. Even the semi-formal spaces like discussion or canteen banter with teachers. English is seen as a language of social capital, that gets students the desired recognition with in the campus. To improve their social stature students push to learn English and use as complex sentence formations as possible. It also is substantiated with excessive use of study material that is available mostly in English.

The preference of English is recognized by its excessive usage by the faculty and office bearers. There is however a tendency to use Hindi as a second language of communication in Delhi. In a peer group Hindi is used for formal and informal conversations. It is also a second preferred language in the classroom. To interact with the service providers like the rickshaw pullers, tea vendors and photocopy shops Hindi is extensively used. Though a preferred language, there is almost no academic communication in Hindi. Scarce reading material demotivates students to take up studies in any other language than English.

Any other language than English and Hindi is pushed to the side-lines of any interaction. Speakers of regional languages choose to speak with in a designated group. They feel extensive pressure to learn English and Hindi. Learning the other language is seen as the only ticket to success as the regional languages are not seen as suited for the academic purposes. The writing in these regional languages are less, and if available are not accepted in an academic discourse, if not for research. The languages are used in ghettoized spaces where they are produced and reproduced for a limited population. Other people are kept out of the loop. It will however naïve to club all languages- other than Hindi and English- in one group. There is a certain values attached to the regional languages which also has a hierarchy. The hierarchy depends on the written and research material produced in that specific language. This paper wants to bring the social capital that is formed by publication of material in a language to the fore as a concern for language policy in the university education. A 'publication economy' is seen as the only way to get the languages out of their respective ghettos, by bring them in a public domain for the people to consume them in any way possible.

REFERENCES

- Advani, Shalini. 2009. *Schooling the National Imagination: Education, English and the Indian Modern*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bolton, K., & Botha, W. 2019. Multilingualism and language mixing among Singapore university students. In *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2019* (pp. 43-61). Springer, Cham.
- Choudhary, Sujit Kumar. 2009. "Higher Education in India: a Socio-Historical Journey From Ancient Period to 2006–2007." *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 8: 50–72.
- Datla, K. (2013). *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Jayaram, N. 1993. The language question in higher education: trends and issues. *Higher Education*, 26(1), 93-114.
- Jenkins, J., & Mauranen, A. 2019. *Linguistic Diversity on the EMI Campus: Insider accounts of the use of English and other languages in universities within Asia, Australasia, and Europe*. Routledge.
- Kaur, G., & Kalra, H. P. S. 2019. Science Literature in Indian Languages: A Study of Punjabi Language. *Journal of Scientific Temper (JST)*, 6(3-4).
- Kumar, Krishna. 2015. *Politics of Education in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Lamothe, A. R. 2019. Usage comparison between English-language and French-language online databases in a bilingual Canadian university. *International Information & Library Review*, 51(1), 51-62.
- Mahapatra, S., & Mishra, S. 2019. Articulating identities—the role of English language education in Indian universities. *Teaching in higher education*, 24(3), 346-360.
- Naregal, Veena. 2001. *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Orsini, F. 2010. *Before the divide: Hindi and Urdu literary culture*. Orient BlackSwan.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 2016. "Dreaming in English: Challenges of Nationhood and Democracy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 51: 56–62.
- Sari, B. T., Chasiotis, A., van de Vijver, F. J., & Bender, M. (2019). The importance of language vocabulary and language usage for sociocultural adjustment among Indonesian adolescents from three bilingual ethnic groups. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 1-16.
- Siisainen, M. 2003. Two concepts of social capital: Bourdieu vs. Putnam. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, 40(2), 183-204.

