Language Endangerment of Mewari: Study on the Changes in Speakers Attitude

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Abstract

Mewari is the language of Mewar region of Rajasthan. This region includes four districts, which are, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara and Udaipur, and other than that, a few nearby parts of Madhya Pradesh. Among these, pure Mewari is spoken in Chittorgarh. Although the total population is as high as 17, 410, 568 (according to Census 2011), there is a rapid change in the attitude of its speakers, especially within the younger generation. One of the main reason observed is the dominance of Hindi, in terms of economic status, education qualification and home location (whether rural or urban). Moreover, Mewari does not have a script. As a result of which, although rich in folklores, these are nowhere documented. One reason for this is seen as unawareness of its speaker. According to a native speaker of Mewari, residing in Chittorgarh, the earlier edition of RBSE textbooks of EVS had a chapter on the Mewari language in Class 3, but the recent edition has removed this chapter. Thus, for the younger generation, they do not get to see any significant written work related to their language; as they see in other languages of their immediate environment, like Hindi and English. This paper studies the reason behind this change in attitude of the speakers, based on some observations and conversations with local people of Chittorgarh.

Key words: Mewari, Language Attitude, Economic status.

Introduction

Mewari, the language spoken in the Mewar region of southeast Rajasthan, belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of language. Mewari being the first language of this speech community, the second language for them is Hindi. The Mewar region includes four districts of Rajasthan, which are, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara and Udaipur, and other than that, a few nearby parts of Madhya Pradesh. Among these, pure Mewari is spoken in Chittorgarh (Koshy, Abraham and R. Raj 2012). The following table gives the population count of each of these districts as per Census 2011.

POPULATION, CENSUS 2011			
Chittorgarh	**Rajsamand**	**Bhilwara**	**Udaipur**
1, 544, 3388	11, 56, 597	359, 483	451,100

This language does not have a script. Therefore, although rich in folklores, there is no documentation of its tales, songs or myths. According to Koshy, Abraham and R. Raj in *Sociolinguistic Survey of selected Rajasthani speech varieties of Rajasthani*, it is hard to find any literature of recent publication in Mewari. Some audio materials of cultural songs are found. Earlier, Mewari articles were published regularly in Hindi newspapers, but in the recent times, such articles are no more published anywhere.

This paper studies the change in the attitude of the speakers of Mewari and tries to find the reasons behind this change. The observations stated here are from Chittorgarh, a small town in Rajasthan.

Language Attitude of Mewari Speakers

Language endangerment can occur due to various reasons. There might not be just one reason for a language to be declared as endangered. Among these reasons, one of it is 'language attitude'. Language attitude is the speaker's attitude (whether positive or negative) towards his/her native language. Speaker's positive attitude towards its language makes a language flourish, whereas, a negative attitude bring crisis of survival. In this case, sometimes having a healthy population, does not guarantee that the language is safe. As David crystal in his book *Language Death* states that speaker's population is not the exact indicator for marking a language as endangered. Thus, although the total population count of the Mewar region looks good from the data received from Census 2011; however, the total number of people speaking Mewari as their first language is less (according to a native speaker). Other than Mewari, people uses Hindi as their second language and most of the times, they learn it parallel to Mewari. Thus, using Mewari and Hindi alternatively, according to the demand of a situation.

Crystal (2000) suggests that many-a-times, it is not the number of speaker but it all depends on other factors like:

> "…rate of acquisition by the children, the attitude of the whole community to it, and the level of impact of other languages which may be threatening to it."

Likewise, Mewari witnesses a noticeable change in the attitude of its speakers, as a result of which, there is a noticeable variation in present generation children acquiring Mewari as their first language from their Mewari parents under the impact of Hindi as the threatening language. Preference of using Mewari as the first language varies from one situation to the other. Based on the above statement by Crystal, the use of Mewari

and its acquisition by children are mainly influenced by three main factors, as observed- location, education and economic status. An attempt has been made to see all these three factors distinctively, even though they are interrelated and influences each other to a great extent, as we would see in the next part.

With location we can say that the speaker's residence, whether in a rural or an urban area is a huge factor for him/her to use the language with the fellow speakers. In rural setup, people still uses Mewari as their first language, including the youngest present generation. Although the youngest generation learn Hindi as their second language, but many of the elderly people still uses only Mewari; with some of them being able to comprehend Hindi and some being not able to comprehend. For example, one of my acquaintance here in Chittorgarh, resides in a rural location. His mother, who is more than 75 years old, speaks only Mewari, but understands us when we answer her or ask something to her in Hindi. She even tries to use broken Hindi, while talking to us. The children from rural background learns Hindi in their school; using it and associating it as the language of the learned folks. As the children of my same acquaintance, talks with us in Hindi, fluently. The two younger among them three goes to a Hindi medium private school in the village itself and the older one goes to a separate Hindi medium private school a little bit far from the village. These children use Mewari in the village, but Hindi outside of the village. Even in our presence, they talk in Hindi with their father when we visit their home and vice versa. They aspire to come out of the village, study further and do something better.

As a part of my job, I get to visit Government schools established in different locations. In rural locations, it is commonly found that a child who begins to go to school as a 4-5 years old, uses only Mewari to communicate with his/her friends and teachers because that is the home language. The teachers share that those of them who get posted from a different language location, need to learn Mewari to communicate with these children. Gradually, as these children grow and spend more time at school, they start learning Hindi and using it in school. They begin to see Hindi as the language of schooling and education, as they become fluent in the language. And thus, comes the second factor, that is, education.

As children move out of their rural settings to attend school in the city, their language environment changes from Mewari to Hindi. As they grow up and pursue higher studies, they find the relevance of Hindi more in their professional life than Mewari. Even those children who attend government schools located in their village, see textbooks written in Hindi, although the teachers use Mewari as the medium of instruction with those who has just began to come to school (as mentioned above). Therefore, learning Hindi becomes important to be called a literate person. As these children grow up to get accepted for government services and settle in the city, they

use Hindi in their home and Mewari is used only with a selected few member of the family; mostly, with the older generation. Thus, whenever I have witnessed any government teacher speaking with their own children, they would use Hindi and at school, they would use Mewari, whenever the situation demands. It is not just with teachers, but anyone pursuing any profession in an urban region uses Hindi over Mewari. Both of my landlords, who own businesses, uses Hindi with their respective children. In the house of my previous landlord, there had never been any scope of Mewari. Both uncle and aunty were educated up to college level, so they talked in Hindi among themselves, and with their daughter and other members of the family. In my seven month's stay as their tenant, I have never heard them use Mewari even once. My present landlord uses Mewari with his wife who is not much educated, and with his parents who live in their nearby native village. However, with his children who are in their twenties now, he uses Hindi. And if he is not using Hindi sometimes, then it would be a mix of Hindi and Mewari where the primary structure of the language remains that of Hindi, including a few Mewari words. The children, two of whom have completed their higher education and the youngest of them three one who is pursuing his graduation, always talk in Hindi among themselves. Aunty speaks completely in Mewari with her husband (my present landlord) and the part-time house-help, but in a mix of Hindi and Mewari (like uncle) with her children, and completely in Hindi with the other ladies in the neighbourhood. Thus, after this, economic status becomes the third factor influencing a shift of speakers towards Hindi.

One of my close Mewari acquaintance living in Chittorgarh said that as speakers rise high in their economic status, they tend to move towards Hindi because the question of prestige comes in. Many people living in the city and doing financially well, neither teach Mewari to their children, nor use it among themselves because they consider Mewari to be the language of the backward folks; or, more than that, they see the relevance of Hindi more in their lives rather than Mewari. According to him, irrespective of their profession, people living in urban spaces use Hindi with their younger generation. Here, we move back to the first factor, that is, location. Some people use Mewari with their house-helps, vendors or anyone whom they see as coming from an economically lower status than them, but not with those who are economically at their equal level or higher than them. Another of my acquaintance, who lives in the urban side, says that in his family, nobody uses Mewari, not even his parents. He is in his early twenties and accepts that they have always used Hindi among the family members, except he sometimes uses Mewari with a selected few of his friends in rare occasions for fun. He also says that even in his neighbourhood, he has seldom heard anyone using Mewari. Instead, everyone prefers to use Hindi, although they know Mewari. Hence, except

for remote areas, Mewari is struggling to survive among educated and economically well-established speakers living in urban areas.

Conclusion

We can clearly see from the statement that Crystal (2000) made stating that rather than the number of speakers in a language, it is the rate of children acquiring the language, attitude of the present speaker community and the presence of a language threatening its existence, which determines whether a language is prone to endangerment or not. Thus, in the case of Mewari, we can see Crystal's statement being absolutely true. The three factors, location, education and economic status, influencing change in the attitude of the Mewari speakers are in a continuum, where each factor is intertwined with the other. Among the speakers, as there is no realisation of the language losing its importance, a rapid shift towards Hindi is strongly felt parallel to urbanisation. Unaware of the critical situation the language is in, the speakers make no effort to preserve the language and its literature. Hence, the attitude of the speakers is not in support of Mewari. As can be seen for the present generation, especially those who are living in urban areas, Hindi is gradually taking the place of their first language.

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