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> The choice of language and the use to which it is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe.
>
> Ngugi Wa Thiong'o
> *Decolonizing the Mind*
> (1986, p. 4)

When India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, characterized in glowing terms India's numerous languages and cultures as "unity in diversity," he was surely speaking in his colonial elitist voice, both literally as well as figuratively. Literally, Nehru was using his Oxford accent and register (as he did in his Independence Day Speech on August 15, 1947, "India's Tryst with Destiny"), acquired as a student of law at that famed university. Figuratively, he was hoping that the colonial ideology of patriotism, which he had also acquired in England, coupled with his own grandstand view of post-colonial Indian history, would carry the country through its immediate trauma. His view of a national culture, the "unity" of India, despite its 200-odd languages and cultures, was a gross simplification for the sake of political unity in its attempt to displace in the Indian psyche a pluralistic space bounded by different languages and cultures. Nevertheless, this imperialist representation served him well because it aimed to bring together a newly independent country which was, in Nandy's (1989) words, "not blessed with an authoritative cultural center" (p. 3) but with "mind-boggling amorphousness and diversity" (p. 4).

Pattanayak's introduction to his edited volume, *Multilingualism in India*, in contrast, argues that multilingualism is an asset, for the national culture that emerges from such a condition would have "an equilibrium [that] holds societies together" (p. viii). His rambling though passionate introduction sets the tone for the volume, especially his "anger at the subtle monolingual colonialism,

and anguish at the doubtful loyalty of the community groups in maintaining their languages and culture" (p. xi). He then works through the intricacies of reciprocal, transitional, monoliterate, partial, and full bilingualism in different countries and regions, including Wales, Scotland, South Africa, India, French-speaking Canada, and Spanish-speaking America. He concludes his introduction with his key idea that "the assumption that variation is disintegration is unfortunate. Such an attitude equates different with deficient" (p. xii).

Unfortunately, although Pattanayak's introductory essay correctly asks for respect and understanding towards multilingual societies from monolingual ones, the volume (with the exception of two contributions by Ajit Mohanty and Jennifer Bayer) is not grounded in systematic empirical research on multilingualism and its effects on Indian societies. Instead it advocates multilingualism per se, as a panacea for problems related to higher education, tribal bilingualism, school education, literacy, and language planning. Moreover, most of the papers discuss fundamentally controversial matters, e.g., colonial and post-colonial language policy and the Indian government's national language policy, to name just two, in a simplistic and unproblematic manner.

Two examples should make the above point clear. The first is Krishnamurthi's narrative history of language education, from the early 19th century to the present, based on secondary sources (most of them official British records). Throughout his article, Krishnamurthi comprehensively ignores recent subaltern studies of language planning and policy in colonial and post-colonial India which oppose imperialist representations and narrativizations of history (e.g., Cohn, 1981) as well as the spectacular work of a group of subaltern historians (Guha, 1985, 1988; Pandey, 1988; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1990; Chakrabarty, 1992), whose main goal is to retrieve the subaltern consciousness in an "attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis" (Spivak, 1988, p.13).

The second example of a too simplistic treatment of the complexity that is India's multilingualism is Srivastava's essay on multilingualism and school education, in which he argues for multilingualism with a fervor known only to fanatical religious leaders. Srivastava states categorically that India "has always remained culturally and linguistically united while maintaining her linguistic diversity" (p. 40) and then goes on to argue that in Indian schools "there is a very high motivation for learning languages and that is what sustains them in the face of difficulties which are certainly beyond solution" (p. 46). Finally, he uncritically accepts

the Indian government's imposition of the the requirement that every school student in the country be proficient in three languages.

With regard to the high motivation in schools, Srivastava is blind to the more probable explanation that most students learn three languages in schools because they are forced to, not because they elect to do so. With respect to the implementation of the three-language regulation, Srivastava glosses over the fact that only two languages are taught in all north Indian states (Hindi and English), while only Tamil and English are required in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. In general, Srivastava's essay is likewise colored by political considerations: he says little about recent violent cultural and linguistic conflicts, for example, between Kokani and Marathi speakers in the state of Goa or between radical supporters of Kannada as the sole language of instruction (in line with the Gokak Commission Report) and moderates in the state of Karnataka, or about anti-Hindi attitudes in southern India. Srivastava seems to support, quite unproblematically, the hegemonic and elitist view which the Indian government professes in its national language policy. His views, rather like Nehru's, display the persistent older mode of the exercise of power in which ruling classes (British rulers, upper-caste members, or political zealots) typically exercised their domination by marginalizing and suppressing insurgency movements.

In sharp contrast to the multilingual paradise Srivastava presents, Mohanty, in his interesting essay on mother tongue maintenance, states that of the 1,652 mother tongues in India only 47 are used as media of instruction, 87 by the print media, and 71 for radio broadcasting. He quotes Khubchandani's (1986) candid view of the language situation in India:

> In spite of the linguistic reorganization of Indian states in 1956 based on the language identity of the dominant pressure groups, language identity regions are not necessarily homogenous communication regions . . . Every state, apart from the dominant state language, has from one to six outside, or minority languages which are spoken by more than 20 persons per 1,000 population. (p. 20)

Given this linguistic pluralism but lack of support for indigenous mother tongues (particularly for "scheduled" castes and tribes), Mohanty examines Kui, the language of the Konds, a small tribal group (population: 511,000, according to the Census of India, 1961) in the state of Orissa. Based on several studies of

monolingual and bilingual Konds, Mohanty reports that maintenance of Kui by the Konds is "a desirable goal for positive integration in a multicultural and multilingual pluralistic society" (p. 63).

However, Mohanty's suggestion would not receive enthusiastic support from the contemporary national political leadership whose consciousness, in Nandy's (1989) words, "aggregates interests and subnational cultures" (p. 7) and takes "a more imperial and instrumental approach toward the peripheries [for example, minority languages like Kui] and views the center [the central government] as the ultimate repository of the principle of the civilization" (p. 7). This is especially true given the feudal and bourgeois modes of power that control a politically uncentralized society like the Konds who have to live in the shadow of Oriyan physical and capitalistic domination.

Other articles in the volume worthy of mention include Bayer's empirical study of language and social identity among Tamil speakers in Bangalore (the capital of the state of Karnataka where Kannada is the dominant language), Dua's reflective essay on multilingualism and language planning, and Annamalai's descriptive study of tribal bilingualism using demographic information. However, even these studies are ultimately disappointing because they are too academic in nature and so far removed from both the political and social arenas that they would be trenchantly criticized by commentators from those perspectives.

Unlike the authors in this volume, Nandy and the subaltern language policy historians (e.g, Cohn, 1985) and educational theorists (e.g., Giroux, 1992) pay close attention to language politics because language politics is an integral part of Indian politics, and that is the perspective which is chiefly missing from this volume. The emerging culture of any state needs to be understood and integrated into discussions of language planning and policy so that readers might better understand how an otherwise secular tolerant country could be turned into a hegemonic fanatical nation-state. It is unfortunate that this volume lacks a conceptual framework (and, as a result, coherence) which could have bound the papers together; instead it loosely argues a case for multilingualism that finds its way into every paper without sufficient discussion from all relevant perspectives. Future authors might find it more promising to incorporate cultural and language politics into discussions of language planning and policy. As Giroux argues, citing C. Mohanty (1989-90), "questions about education cannot be reduced to disciplinary parameters, but must include issues of

power, history, self-identity, and the possibility of collective agency and struggle" (p. 73).

For now, Indian multilingualism is doing just fine without having acquired the Tower of Babel syndrome which Western monolingual enthusiasts such as Pool (1972) have predicted. Multilingualism will also continue to flourish because it was guaranteed by the authors of the Indian constitution (e.g., Dr. Ambedkar). It was they who wrote in 1948 that all the major regional languages of India, including English and Hindi, are official languages, a position which reflects the spirit of Thiong'o (1986). However, if neo-colonial and right-wing political zealots work their way into the Indian political arena, as has often happened in the last two years, Hindi could be declared the sole official language, with English and the major and minor Indian languages relegated to the status of local languages--transforming India from its astounding heterogeneity and contradictions into a neo-colonial homogenous modern nation-state with "unity" but without "diversity." It is in just this political context, which could potentially come to pass in the event of social and political instability, that Nehru's flawed idealism, Pattanayak's passionate argument, and Thiong'o's post-colonial vision for a truly multilingual nation-state should be welcomed.

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