The Way we Talk as a Representation of the Way we Think: An Analysis of how the Government is Speaking to the Masses

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Background

All languages around the world find themselves ranked in the same hierarchies of power and politics, as do other systems of society. For example, in India, it is acceptable for a fluent speaker of English to not know Hindi, though the opposite scenario is a reflection of poor skills of an individual. Even within the same language, the differences in the way that people use the language tend to be on a continuum and may range from negligible variations to significant differences. This paper focuses on 'Hindi', which is one of the national languages of India. Hindi also has considerable variations when placed on the continuum of language variation. There is one end of the continuum, which is 'shudh' (pure) Hindi. Das Gupta (1970) has termed the pure end of the continuum as 'literary' languages and the popular variants used in daily communication as 'native' languages. This paper will use the same definitions (literary and native) for the types of variations within the same language. The 'literary' standard of Hindi, which is rarely used in everyday communication, continues to be used in all Government communication. This paper seeks to explore the implication of this style of communication on the relationship that the Government maintains with the masses, which points to a larger, all-pervasive adult-child/giver-receiver relationship across all systems of our society, including education. In this exploration, I have referred to historical work that throws light on the evolution of the system of governance and of education, and have shown how, the way in which we use language is a reflection of an obsession with bringing people up to a certain level of civilization or development, or on the contrary, to bring people down and to discriminate.

The evolution of the 'adult-child' relationship

Castes, languages and the segregations among people based on the hierarchies of these and other factors, existed in India from before the arrival of the British colonial regime. The pre-colonial Indian society was divided into 'varnas' or classes- i.e. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras- and the educational system of the country was also a representation of this system. The indigenous education system derived knowledge from the existing social structure and imparted skills that were necessary to organize people into these existing structures (Acharya, 1996). For example, the trading class or Vaishyas would train their children in arithmetic and commerce. The government system in pre-colonial India thrived on the 'varnas' and the existence of the ruling classes and the ruled classes. The pre-colonial Indian society did not have a standard of 'ideal' that every person aspired to reach. For example, it was never the intention of the Brahman class to encourage all people to aspire for Sanksrit knowledge or the place that Brahmins enjoyed in the social structure.

The segregation of castes in pre-colonial India came with its own superiority-inferiority

quotients that divided people by rank. However, when the Britishers arrived in India, they brought with them a different kind of race-based division that represented the Orientalist thinking, propounding the moral, ethical and intelligence-based superiority of the British colonists. Thus, under the colonial rule Indians came to be seen as a unified, immoral and uneducated lot that needed raising-up, irrespective of what caste or varna they belonged to. Englishmen considered it their duty to raise the moral, ethical and intelligence standards of the natives.

This point of view meant that native Indian masses were seen as lacking the capacity to know what is good for them. The English colonizers, at the head of the Government in India, saw their relationship with the native population as an adult-child relationship (Kumar, 2005). Just as adults feel that it is their moral and social responsibility to monitor children and to tell them what is good or bad for them, similarly the English colonizers saw it their responsibility to introduce the native Indians to a better way of life.

This Orientalist perspective was also translated into action with the proclamation of the education policy of the British colonial rule in India through the *Woods Despatch* of 1854. The British colonial rule had a choice between reforming the existing indigenous education system into a national system of education and introducing a new system of education. Colonial officials such as William Adam were in the favour of building a national education system on the foundations of the existing system but this did not happen (Naik, 1974/2004). Instead, the education system was evolved as seen fit by the British rulers, in order to provide the moral and intellectual values that they saw missing in the natives and to create a mass of Indians who would serve the clerical requirements of the British Raj. English-medium education came to be regarded as superior in quality to the education imparted in the vernacular languages.

How is the Government talking to the Masses?

The trends from this Orientalist perspective, as seen in the context of Government and Education continue to be shared by a lot of Indian leaders who view development from their own set of experiences. When India gained its independence, the foundations of this new nation were laid within the realms of existing structures of education, power, status and appearances. Languages too, were engulfed in these structures and have become another parameter for discrimination. In his work, Das Gupta (1970) discusses national development and how viewing the sub-national loyalties as anti-patriotic, is an unreasonable take on governance of a diverse population. However, his idea is that the mark of a modern society leads a region towards standardization of language, so that the difference between 'literary' languages and 'native' languages is reduced. By the above logic, it is expected that with the spread of education the 'polished' or refined mannerism of conversation and the 'literary' variants of Hindi will become a part of people's language use.

Even those who are not yet educated or have not acquired that level of comfort with literary Hindi should aspire to reach there.

The language that the Government uses in its communication with the masses, through public service announcements and publicity material are a good source of analysing this point. I use the example of one poster from a local Community Health Centre in Uttarakhand to observe the style of language. This poster is aimed at families with expectant mothers, urging them to use hospital care during delivery of child. It begins with heavy, Hindi words "surakshit matratv ke liye kritt sankalp: Uttarakhand sarkar", which roughly translates into the idea that the Government of Uttarakhand is committed to ensuring safe motherhood. It uses unfamiliar words like 'prasav' (labour/ delivery), 'shulk' (fees), vyavastha (arrangement), chikitsalay (hospital) and others. Interestingly, the posters uses the term 'sarkari aspataal' (government hospital), which is a colloquially familiar phrase for the free services that are provided by the Government. But when it is promising arrangement for transport to a better-equipped (and probably expensive) hospital in case of an emergency, it uses the terms 'bade chikitsalay' (big hospital).

But what does this analysis or the preceding discussion tell us? If we condense the preceding discussion, we arrive at two important statements:

1. The Government is talking to the masses in a variant of Hindi that is alien in the common parlance in most areas.
2. This variant of Hindi is being looked at, as the ideal state of language as achieved through education or exposure to a certain manner of living.

If the above two statements be true, then the implication of the subliminal messages through the Government's way of talking to the masses is that most people who find this variant of 'Hindi' alien are not in the ideal state of development and standard of living. Here, one can find replication of the same Orientalist perspective of 'adult' and 'child' (Kumar, 2005) where the masses do not know what is for their own good and for their own development, and therefore must be led towards development by the Government. It is for this reason that a multinational corporation looking to initiate mining activities in a tribal area receives Government support since it is the view of the Government too that industry equals development, without regard to the definition of development that people from this area may believe in.

Pedagogical implications: A Case for Equality

Friedrich Nietzsche said, "There are no facts, only interpretations." When a group of individuals are seated at the head of a country, their perspective about its people and their needs will determine what policies are formulated, how they are implemented and what structures are established by the Government to enable its people to access the basic necessities of an adequate standard of living. Many words and phrases in this previous statement are based on perspective: access, basic necessities and adequate standard of living.

Here if I focus on what I had previously discussed about education, it will become easier to see the substantial pedagogical implications of my arguments. When the British colonizers established the modern system of Indian education, they did so with their own perspective that said Indian natives are morally and intellectually inferior, and therefore not capable of judging what is good for them. The system of education that required rote learning, written examinations to test student knowledge, determination of a student's aptitude through academic performance alone and other such

methods continues to flourish today. English is the preferred medium of education.

When the English colonizers left India, they left the Orientalist perspective behind. It permeated into our education system as well and continues to show its traces all across the education systems in our country. There is an inarguable inferiority in the quality offered by public institutions such as Government schools and Government hospitals as compared to their private counterparts.

Another evil of this idealized standard of being is the issue of stereotyping. When there is a rigid definition of what development is, and what a successful, educated person is, the existing variations in society create stereotypes. For example, the 'native' variants of Hindi and its speakers are subjected to much ridicule and stereotyping. In his inspiring work 'Multilinguality and the New World Order', Agnihotri calls for action against stereotypes that are an inherent part of the nature of society and the individuals forming it. These individuals include our political leaders, educationists and all other people engaged in policy-formulation and its implementation (Agnihotri, 2009).

My submission is for all teachers, students, academicians, policy makers and everybody else. Only in continuously questioning what we know and in unlearning at a pace almost as fast as learning, will we be able to dream of realms beyond the existing world and the 'new world order' that Agnihotri (2009) calls for. It starts with honestly making efforts to eliminate the underlying element that exists in all of us: discrimination and the superiority quotient. The pedagogical implications of my submission are philosophical to some extent but also a practical reality in that they call for a change in mind-sets of each of us. There is no scope for the policy maker or the head of a school or the teacher or an academically-sound student to feel that she/he is above somebody else or for any of them to feel that somebody else is above them. An effort to establish an egalitarian environment such as this is where diversity will thrive in all forms: as multilingualism, in the form of 'gender anarchy', as religious tolerance, in encouraging varied paces of learning in the classroom and in the vast multitude of diversity present everywhere in the world.

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