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Languages in India and their Mixed Use : A Sociolinguistic Study

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ABSTRACT

India is home to 22 scheduled languages, 100 non-scheduled languages and more than 1500 dialects. This linguistically highly diversified country is divided into 28 states and seven union territories on linguistic lines. The plural nature of the Indian society has given rise to a plurality in linguistic behaviour amongst its citizens. The use of two or more languages during interpersonal communications, particularly verbal ones, is already a prevalent sociolinguistic phenomenon although varying region-wise. But it is observed that language change during speech is not merely a matter of habit alone, there are specific intentions behind the shift as well. Apart from listing the Indian languages, the paper attempts to find out the reasons why the people of India talk in two or even three languages in a single conversation. The excerpts of various conversations made under different situations recorded through participatory observation and non-participatory observation are given and examined for the purpose.

KEYWORDS: Indian languages, scheduled languages, non-scheduled languages, code-switching

Introduction

The second most populous country in the world India is perhaps the most linguistically diverse country with more than 1500 dialects. According to the 2001 Census, the country has a total of 122 languages of which 22 are scheduled[1] and 100 are non-scheduled[2] but recognized languages. The same census reports that there are 234 mother tongues with over 10,000 speakers. In this regard, Vanishree (2011) comments, "However, this is a serious under-reporting of the actual number of languages as well because the Census also recorded over 1,500 'mother tongues' used in India" (*Census India*, 2010-2011). When the country was reorganized under the *States Reorganization Act of 1956*, provinces named states and union territories were demarcated based on linguistic dominance. This flared out to be the most acceptable basis for the purpose in a country where more than 2000 ethnic groups live. A number of changes have taken place in the state boundaries since its original implementation, but the Act still is considered the least disputed basis. Three new states were added in November 2000, viz., Chattisgarh, carved out of Madhya Pradesh, Uttaranchal out of Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand out of Bihar.

The Indian Languages

The 122 scheduled and non-scheduled languages of India originate from the five language families : Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Bruman and Semito-Hamitic. The number of languages under each family along with its speakers and percentage of total population is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Family-wise Grouping of the 122 scheduled and non-scheduled languages

Language families	Number of Languages	Persons who returned the languages as their mother tongue	Percentage to total population
1	2	3	4
1. Indo-European (a) Indo-Aryan	21	790,627,060	76.86
(b) Iranian	2	22,774	0.00
(c) Germanic	1	226,449	0.02
2. Dravidian	17	214,172,874	20.82
3. Austro-Asiatic	14	11,442,029	1.11
4. Tibeto-Burmese	66	10,305,026	1.00
5. Semito-Hamitic	1	51,728	0.01
Total	12	1,026,847,940*	99.82*

(Census of India 2010-11)

* The balance of 1,762,388 (0.17%) population out of total Indian population 1,028,610,328 comprises 1,635,280 speakers of those languages and mother tongues which were not identifiable or returned by less than 10000 speakers at all India level and the population (127,108 persons) of Manipur which was not included in language data since the Census results were cancelled in 3 sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur.in 2001. (Census of India, 2001).

The languages falling under each family are given in Table 2:
Table 2

INDO-EUROPEAN			**DRAVIDIAN**	AUSTRO-ASIATIC	TIBETO-BURMESE		SEMITO-HAMITIC
Indo-Aryan	Iranian	Germanic					
1.Assamese(S), 2.Bengali(S), 3.Bhili/Bhilodi, 4.Bishnupuriya, 5.Dogri (S) 6.Gujarati(S), 7.Halabi, 8.Hindi (S), 9.Kashmiri(S),	1.Afghani/ Kabuli/ Pashto, 2.Persian.	1.English.	1.Coorgi/Kodagu, 2.Gondi, 3.Jatapu, 4.Kannada(S), 5.Khond/Kondh, 6.Kisan, 7.Kolami, 8.Konda, 9.Koya,	1.Bhumij, 2.Gadaba, 3.Ho, 4.Juang, 5.Kharia, 6.Khasi, 7.Koda/Kora, 8.Korku, 9.Korwa,	1. Adi, 2.Anal, 3.Angami, 4.Ao, 5.Balti, 6.Bhotia, 7.Bodo(S), 8.Chakesang, 9.Chakru/Chokri,	34.Lushai/Mizo, 35.Manipuri(S), 36.Maram, 37.Maring, 38.Miri/Mishing, 39.Mishmi, 40.Mogh, 41.Monpa, 42.Nissi/Dafla,	1.Arabic/ Arbi.

10.Khandeshi, 11.Konkani(S), 12. Lahnda. 13.Maithili(S), 14.Marathi(S), 15.Nepali(S), 16.Oriya(S), 17.Punjabi(S), 18.Sanskrit(S), 19.Shina, 20.Sindhi(S), 21.Urdu(S).			10.Kui, 11.Kurukh/Oraon, 12.Malayalam(S), 13.Malto, 14.Parji, 15Tamil(S), 16.Telugu(S), 17.Tulu.	10.Munda, 11.Mundari, 12.Nicobarese, 13.Santali(S) 14.Savara.	10.Chang, 11.Deori, 12.Dimasa, 13.Gangte, 14.Garo, 15.Halam, 16.Hmar, 17.Kabui, 18.Karbi/Mikir, 19.Khezha, 20.Khiemnungan, 21.Kinnauri, 22.Koch, 23.Kom, 24.Konyak, 25.Kuki, 26.Ladakhi, 27.Lahauli, 28.Lakher, 29.Lalung, 30.Lepcha, 31.Liangmei, 32.Limbu, 33.Lotha,	43.Nocte, 44.Paite, 45.Pawi, 46.Phom, 47.Pochury, 48.Rabha, 49.Rai 50.Rengma, 51.Sangtam, 52.Sema, 53.Sherpa, 54.Simte, 55.Tamang 56.Tangkhul, 57.Tangsa, 58.Thado, 59.Tibetan, 60.Tripuri, 61.Vaiphei, 62.Wancho, 63.Yimchungre, 64.Zeliang, 65.Zemi, 66.Zou.	

(Census of India 2010-11)

Official Languages in India

During the British regime, English was the only official language of India. With the adoption of the Constitution India, Hind was made the official language of the Union under Article 343(1) with the provision that it would replace English over a period of 15 years. Under pressure from the non-Hindi speaking regions, the *Official Language Act 1963* was enacted through which Hindi in Devanagiri script was declared to be the official language of the country with English as *subsidiary official language*. However, as the first Prime Minister of the country Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru patronized, the country continues to adopt three-language policy, i.e., Hindi, English and the regional language or mother tongue. However, in the states and union territories, the respective regional languages are used as official languages apart from Hindi and English.

Languages in Social Circles

The human society will be lifeless without a link media for making expressions and interactions and so will be the language without its users. This means that language and society are inseparable from each other. This idea was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in his work *The Course in General Linguistics* published posthumously in 1916 where he stated that language is primarily a "social activity" and "language is socialized at every level, from the production of phonemes to the interpretation of complex meaning". Scholars thereafter have carried out a number of research works on language in relation to society and have brought to light interesting socio-cultural elements underlying language use. According to Krishnaswami, Verma and Nagarajan (1992, 13), "Language is essentially a social phenomenon since language lives in the minds and tongues of its users". Language, therefore, reflects a wide range of human behaviour both at the interpersonal and inter-group levels. It is being viewed and studied from different perspectives and the frontiers of the subject, therefore, are continuously and steadily moving forward. One of such frontiers is 'sociolinguistics', the study of language in relation to its users who live in society.

Sociolinguistics deals with the social function of a language and in doing so it shows the multiple meanings of language use. The use of language symbolically represents fundamental dimensions of social behaviour and human interactions. "The ways in which language reflects human behaviour can often be complex and subtle because the relationship between language and society affects a wide range of encounters – from broadly based international relations to narrowly defined interpersonal relationships" (Wolfram acc. 2001, 1).

In plural societies today, socio-cultural convergence leading to linguistic convergence is a common phenomenon. Through various social and professional activities, the speakers of one linguistic group often acquire some amount of knowledge on the languages of other groups that are active in the social or professional circles. This acquisition leads to the creation of a linguistic repertoire in the minds of the individuals which they use in various situations as required. It is often seen that individuals in such societies speak more than one language in a single conversation switching back and forth between these languages. Researchers have termed this phenomenon as a case of code-switching or language alternation or language shift. Crystal (1987) states that code or language switching occurs when an individual alternates between two or more languages during his/her speech. The code-switching may be in varying degrees depending upon the speaker's education, interest and general linguistic proficiency. In such a communication, the switching may take place in different forms such as phrasal, clausal or even at length in full sentences for a longer narrative. For the present purpose, we will use the term code-switching (CS) for all forms of language change.

Approach and Scope

The study of code-switching, that is, use of two or more languages in a conversation, has developed in two directions : structural and sociolinguistic. The structural approach primarily deals with its grammatical and syntactical aspects while the sociolinguistic approach is primarily concerned with the social and cultural meanings and motivations associated with code-switching and the discourse functions it serves. Although these approaches are complimentary to each other, they are distinctive in their research fields. In this context, Myers-Scotton suggests that "Researchers on CS fall into two groups, (a) those interested in the social motivations for and/or the functions of CS, and (b) those interested in characterizing or explaining the grammatical structure of CS, e.g., what are the constraints on employing two language varieties in the same clause?" (Myers-Scotton 2007, 1). Further, Boztepe says that "The structural approach tries to identify the structural features of morphosyntactic patterns underlying the grammar of code-switching, whereas the sociolinguistic approach builds on this in its attempts to explain why bilingual speakers talk the way they do" (Boztepe 2005, 3). The present study focuses on the use of two or more languages in a single conversation from the sociolinguistic approach. It will also take a look at the language change in intra-sentential and inter-sentential switches. Let us examine the following excerpts :

Excerpt 1

Setting : On a busy city highway, a flying officer of the Indian Air Force is stopped at a police check post on the Western Express Highway in Mumbai. The road is scheduled to be taken by a VVIP motorcade shortly. The policeman on duty stops the car driven by the officer (in civvies) with his friend in the other front seat, and interrogates him. (English portion of the speech is in italics and the English translation of the Hindi speech is in brackets):

Table 3

1 Policeman :	Aap kahan se ayen hein, yeh koun hein? (Where are you coming from, who is this man?) (The Pilot Officer shows his identity card)
2 Policeman :	*You are a Pilot*. Thik hei, jao. (Okay, go).

(Observed by the author in Mumbai)

This is an example an intra-sentential code-switching that takes place within the boundaries of a sentence. This type of code-switching includes bilingual constituents within a clause which is called an intra-clause switching. But such a switch too is regarded to be a specific sub-type of intra-sentential code-switching. In India, pilots or flying officers are considered to be an especial group of people occupying positions of international nature whose general mode of communication is English. This general assumption prevails in the mindsets of the general people that can be regarded as a *social* norm. In Mumbai, in normal situations, policemen interact with commuters in Hindi or Marathi. The same happens in the above example in Sentence 1 and the speaker switches over to English in Sentence 2 apparently in consonance with the general feelings. Therefore, the switch is indexical of the existing social norm.

Excerpt 2

Setting : The office chamber of the head of an institution. The boss tells one of his subordinate officers that it is his (the officer's) duty to own the responsibility of a mistake found to have occurred in the section of which he is the head.

Table 4

Boss :	Bhool tu apunar *section*-ot hoise *and you are the head of the section*. *Train accident* hole, Lalu Prasad-e dayittya grohon kori *resign* dibo lage buli koi. Hei buli teun nije *train* khon solai accident ghotaisile neki ?
English Translation:	The mistake has occurred in your section and you are the head of it. When a train accident occurs, Lalu Prasad (the Railway Minister of India) is held responsible and has to resign (people demand his resignation). Does it mean that he was driving the train himself and caused the accident ?

(Observed by the author at Tezpur University)

This is a typical situation of a formal office environment. A mistake has been detected in a particular section of an office and the head of that section is being reminded that he has to own the responsibility irrespective of who has committed the mistake. This is an authoritative expression by the boss and the portion "and you are the head of the section" of the general Assamese sentence is said in English. This clausal code-switching is intended to put emphasis on the matter of moral responsibility. In order to supplement his argument, the speaker gives an example of the Railway Minister who is asked to resign owning moral responsibility in case of a rail accident.

Excerpt 3

Setting : The front sitting room of RD's in-laws' household. RD comes from the wash basin after breakfast and he is slightly in a hurry to go out. He quickly uses a part of his dress for drying his hands rather than looking around for a napkin when his sister-in-law comes to him with a napkin in her hands :

Table 5

Sister-in-law :	Aap apna haat *dress* pe kiyon poonch diya? (Why have you dried your hands with your dress ?)
RD :	Kiyon ki, tumne *napkin* diya hi nahin. (Because, you didn't give a napkin.)
Sister-in-law :	Old habits die hard.

(Observed by the author in Guwahati)

In this example, two things emanate from the sister-in-law's switchover from Hindi to English. First, the sister-in-law is trained to understand the meaning and use of the popular English proverb "Old habits die hard". Therefore, it is a habitual practice for her and also in her circle to use it in such a situation. Second, she uses it because she thinks it is the most effective way to convey her message to the addressee (to remind her brother-in-law of his habits in a teasing manner). Here, there is a fear that the message may get distorted or lose its original effectiveness if said in Hindi, the language in which the conversation originated. Sometimes, the ability to switch codes controls the ability to switch roles. In bilingual or multilingual settings, code-switching is regulated by stylistic considerations apart from the topic of discourse. "Some speakers acquire the habit of speaking of topic X in language A partly because that is the language in which they are trained to deal with the topic, and partly because language B may currently lack as exact and as many terms for handling topic X as language A has" (Krishnaswami, Verma & Nagarajan 1992, 46). In such contexts, the speaker will use words, clauses and even sentences of language A even when their equivalents are available in language B. Some of the formulaic expressions in some language are so deeply embedded in some societies that they become part of their trait.

Excerpt 4

Setting : The foreground of the grocery shop of Tularam Mili (51) at Village Gomari. Although Mili's main occupation is cultivation, he also runs a small grocery shop in the village. A group of college students approach him for financial donation which, they say, is a part of their fund-raising exercise for observing their annual conference. They hand over a money receipt counterfoil with Mili's name and a pre-written amount on it. Reacting to it, Mili says (Assamese portion italicized and English translation of Mising portion in brackets):

Table 6

1 Mili :	Nolu édémpé lula kapiyen, bipénédé ngoluminé! (What if you say so, we are the ones to give the donation!)
2 :	*Aru emahot keita donation tula manuh ahe*? (Further, how many donation seekers come in a month ?)
3 :	*Ami dibo poratuhe dim*! (We will donate only the amount we can.)

In the above example, apparently, Mili is fed up of paying donations. Annoyed and anguished over the present manner of seeking donations, he emphatically tries to make the students understand the general feelings of the people of his class against such demand of donation seekers who often approach them with pre-fixed amounts. All the words he uses are instinctual and naturally flown from a matured base of mental constitution. He spontaneously switches to Assamese while expressing his unhappiness and anguish in Sentence 2 and 3. This is an example of one's switching to the dominant or academic language under an instinctual state of mind.

Conclusion

In multilingual societies like India, code-switching is used as a verbal device to fulfill several purposes. Although the choice of language in such expressions seems individual, it carries a variety of symbolic socio-cultural meanings also. The language varieties used in the code-switching often express the socio-psychological values associated with the in-speech change of language. The bilingual speakers take advantage of this notion when they speak one variety rather than another in the same speech. Myers-Scotton suggests that these values mostly come from two general sources , "(a) the settings or situations in which a particular variety is habitually used in the community; and (b) how different persons use the varieties so that their use comes to reflect relationships of power or solidarity" (Myers-Scotton 2006, 28).

While using different languages or varieties, bilinguals or multilinguals produce a chain of codes, such as, from L1 to L2 and again from L2 to L3 and it goes on depending upon the repertoire of the speakers. This linguistic chain is the reflection of a chain of social relations already existing in the society. Language choice is done during conversation mainly to meet the requirements of different verbal situations because speakers know that certain topics are handled better and more appropriately in some language than in another in a particular situation or context. But, this knowledge of the functions of different languages is acquired from the social environs in which the speakers have been living. It is interesting to note that in many cases, the speakers are unaware of the implications that their choice of language is making.

NOTE

1. Languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

2. Languages not included in the Eighth Schedule comprising 100 languages.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. CS is the abbreviation of Code-switching.
2. L1 = First Language one, L2 = Second Language, L3 = Third Language

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