

# Rajesh Sachdeva (RS) Talks to Hans Raj Dua (HRD)

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Professor Hans Raj Dua is a prolific writer in the field of language studies. After getting his doctorate from York University and having taught for a few years in the linguistics department at Aligarh Muslim University, he joined CIIL, Mysore in 1974. As a member of the Sociolinguistics Unit, where he led and guided research, he produced some outstanding work which brought him worldwide recognition. Some of his significant works are *Language Planning in India*, *Hegemony of English: Future of Developing Languages in the World* (1994), *Science Policy, Education and Language Planning* (2001), *Language Education: The Mind of Society* (2008), *Ecology of Multilingualism: Language, Culture and Society* (2008); *Language Mind and Cognition* (2010) and *Cognitive Foundation of Mother Tongue* (2017). He was invited to be the editor of a special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language IJSL*, on language politics and policy.

Rajesh Sachdeva retired as Director of Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore. His professional trajectory includes serving CIIL as a Professor for nine years and as an Associate Professor at North-Eastern Hill University, for fifteen years. His research interests include sociolinguistics, literacy, adult education, language policy and multilingualism. He has worked for the promotion of mother tongue, development of the languages of the Northeast, and has created a data bank on the Naga Languages. He has several publications to his credit.

The following dialogue captures very briefly some of the recurrent themes that have engaged Dr Dua's attention over the years, arousing his passion, even now. That is why he has been regarded as one of India's most relevant voices in critical socio linguistics.

**RS:** Professor Dua, right at the outset, we would like to thank you for your agreeing to have a dialogue even in these very difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic. We know health issues are now of prime importance as our collective survival is at stake, but we do want to talk about education, for that has been affected adversely as well, and we want to place on public record your views on language education, which is of interest to educationists at all times.

**HRD:** These are indeed very difficult times and I can't even sit too long to discuss the issues. I have already written on most subjects and I would like you to keep those in mind. While some ideas may sound dated now, the same have been modified in my later writings, though there is continuity too. The present situation is very saddening and has affected education badly. Many children have no access to any education; the school opposite our house is closed for over one year. Our social divide compounded with [the] digital divide has only grown further and despair is evident in all circles.

**RS:** We could commence the dialogue with your pioneering work on [sic] Language Planning in India, where language planning is a problem-solving interdisciplinary field [sic]. Looking back, how do you see the relevance of this work to the present society?

**HRD:** Looking back can be useful, but in the process, you are digging up corpses, I feel. The problem is different now. After decades of observations, I regret that the country has no language policy in place, no language planning has been done or is being done. All our efforts have remained at an academic level, no one has paid heed. Even the Institute (CIIL), where you and I served for years, and where stalwarts like Drs Pattanayak and Annamalai reaffirmed faith in mother tongue education, we have all failed to raise our voice. The entire discourses [sic] on language planning have [sic] been buried somewhere under the pressure of [the] elite and upper classes. English hegemony has made all planning redundant. I see no resistance to this from any quarters [sic]. Our institute too has lost its relevance, its presence is ignored, and there is no leadership of ideas.

**RS:** Sir, your concern is understandable and the despair natural, but the academic community should be reminded of the effort you continue to make through your writings. The New Education Policy has [a] special mention on mother tongue and multilingualism. Could you reiterate your views on mother tongue education?

**HRD:** I have not studied the New Education Policy. I also don't think we can reverse the shift of choices, but let us acknowledge that we have sabotaged [the] mother tongue education ideology. Mother tongue is the voice of humanity and the expression of the visible and the invisible dimensions of human thought and creativity of mind. Any constraint on the "use-value" of mother tongues on the grounds of planning is the death-knell of language identity, the existence of communities and their cultures.

The realization of the conceptual potential of mother tongues demands engagement and commitment from all of us and space of reciprocity and action. The cultural vitality and creativity of mother tongues are essential for protecting the ecology of language diversity and the semiosphere (to use Yuri Lotman's concept) of humanity. Our discourse is about language right, about the egalitarian order that we had envisioned and striven for; but the social order is perpetuating inequality.

**RS:** But, what about our Constitution? Isn't there a case for all mother tongues as medium implicit in all that is articulated, isn't there a directive to safeguard our cultural and linguistic collective heritage?

**HRD:** Even the constitution has now become a party to the perpetuation of inequality. English and Hindi are given more importance than other Indian languages. Yes, there is a mention about [the] rights of minorities and one can ask the states to initiate some measures, but the policy is of inequality. Even major languages listed in the eighth schedule are reduced to minority status as a result. Hindi too is playing second fiddle to English; no one is resisting; also, the rivalry is sometimes between Indian languages when they need to work together [sic]. I have critically examined what we have done; what errors of decision and action we have made even in our Three Language Formula. Setting aside cynicism, I have suggested how we can move forward to link our present with the future in search of truth and identity at [a] global level, but I am not sure if what I have written and published will ever influence the decision-makers. For instance, I have reasoned that the distinctions between corpus planning and status planning, or between nationalism

and nationalism (to use Fishman's distinction) and even the idea of a language of wider communication have all supported the policy of English-medium education that has resulted in the erosion of multilingualism. It has hampered [the] development of Indian languages through mutual enrichment. We need new conceptual tools and [a] new commitment to charter a new destiny.

**RS:** In a seminal work of yours in 1994 on Hegemony of English, you discuss at length how the education system has reproduced inequality, legitimized hegemony of English, lead to brain drain, and marginalization of Indian languages. Could you elaborate on the English hegemony?

**HRD:** Maybe, one could foreshadow even then . . . I stated, "The English education both in historical perspective and in the contemporary context is found to be enmeshed with cultural politics and ideological control. Despite [its] spread and its dominance in education, publication and media, it has failed in [the] cultivation of creative intellectual life. . . ". And as a language planning measure I had suggested that, and this is important even now for it remains undone: "There is an urgent need to restrict the use of English as a complementary language in education for the development of indigenous and cultural resources. . . ." But what one sees instead is a proliferation of [the] so-called English medium schools, none of which strengthen the children in English, and of course, do incalculable harm to mother tongue. . . . Who will change our mindset?

**RS:** Your views on English hegemony remind me of the views of the Ghanaian

sociolinguist, Gilbert Ansre, on linguistic imperialism (who coined the term)(Ansre, 1979, p.12 quoted in Skutnabb-Kangas and Philipson, 1994).

... "the phenomenon in which the minds and lives of the speakers of a language are dominated by another language to the point where they believe that they can and should use only that foreign language when it comes to transactions dealing with the more advanced aspects of life [emphasis added] such as education, philosophy, literature, governments, the administration of justice, etc... Linguistic imperialism has a subtle way of warping the minds [emphasis added] attitudes and aspirations of even the most noble in a society and of preventing him from appreciating and realising the full potentialities of the indigenous languages".

**HRD:** Yes, many have raised issues over the hegemony of English, but the warped thinking continues to date and that disturbs me. I hope the elite or a counter elite will have a realization and turn things around and instead constructively engage with [the] promotion of our languages and promote new forms of multilingualism.

**RS:** In 2008, you published two more works in which your concern for other tongues, Indian languages, linguistic minorities and the responses of the state are noted in detail. The first, on the all-engaging field of Language Education, *The Mind of Society* and the other on Ecology of Multilingualism, *Language Culture and Society*. You have an interdisciplinary approach in both, and you note the influence of several scholars in your thought process. Would you like to dwell on that just briefly?

**HRD:** I am an avid reader and have been working on all sorts of issues that have cropped up in literature. To that extent, all the literature available in English to the global community is a resource. My idea is to further this understanding and to explore solutions for unresolved issues. I look upon our entire multilingual society and assess the linguistic health of diverse communities in different contexts. Linguistic minorities and endangered languages engage my equal attention . . . there is so much potential of exchange and growth between our languages, but the institutions are working against [the] realization of that potential. We are promoting multilingualism in the official languages, not between and across other languages. We are squandering opportunities even in practical areas like translation involving our own languages and not building on what we have. . . . We present English as the language of knowledge-based texts and so on. Our writers are not generating original texts in our languages.

I feel drawn to all disciplines. I openly acknowledge many great minds that are around and have left the seeds of their thinking for us to utilize. Collectively we have to promote critical awareness.

I was fascinated by the idea of social order and came across the work of Bohm and Peat, and my book (*Ecology of Multilingualism: Language Culture and Society*), begins with the chapter on "Multilingualism as an Implicate Order". Bohm is a physicist interested in the idea of order and chaos. They consider an implicate order "to have a broader significance not only in physics but also in biology, consciousness and the overall order of society and each human being."

The attempt in the ecology of multilingualism is to lay grounds [sic] for the development of a new order for [the] cultivation of multilingualism. I reason,

language is an implicate order in the sense that meaning is enfolded in the structure of language, which unfolds into thought, feeling[s] and other forms of expression and communication. I have tried to show how language ecology and [the] vitality of cultural ecosystems constitute the foundations of multilingualism. I have dwelt on multilingualism as a resource, economics of language and [the] value of linguistic diversity, language equality and linguistic human rights with [a] special focus on [the] ecology of minorities; and a special discussion on endangered languages is included.

The lesson for us is: only we have to decide whether we want to live with the present as it has been historically constituted, or whether history would teach how we link it with the future in terms of perpetual conversation, engagement with our languages, cultures and history.

**RS:** I was fascinated with that and hope to read [it] in greater detail. What about your second work around the same time *Language Education, The Mind of Society?* Can you talk about this work?

**HRD:** In that work, along with practical matters of concern, I have ventured to explore uncharted areas—the relationship of language to consciousness, conceptualization and creativity on the one hand, and to mind, society and culture, seen as dynamic and constitutive of one another.

The internalization of the language system takes place in interaction with cognitive and other innate abilities. Both language and consciousness arise basically in communication and interaction in a social context. I felt the work of Bakhtin (1984) offers new insights

in his statement: "No Nirvana is possible for a single consciousness. A single consciousness is a contradiction in terms. Consciousness is essentially multiple. I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. . . ." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 288) One begins to understand inner speech, the semiotic material for the inner life. Our consciousness appears to be dynamic, not a static witness. In this perspective, engagement with different languages becomes an intriguing area of work.

I also draw on other thinkers like Fauconnier (1997), who asserts that "understanding is creating. To communicate is to trigger dynamic creative processes in other minds and in our own (p. 182)"

I suggest the effectiveness and success of language education depend on how it makes a constructive contribution to dialogic interactions between languages and cultures, human minds and social perspectives and the extent to which it supports enrichment, vitality and dynamics of multilingualism.

**RS:** In your work *Language, Mind and Cognition*, you deal with issues like brain, mind, attention, memory and cognition in language acquisition and how teachers can gain from understanding them. Since the issues are so many, how do you think one can work out the connections between them and how they fit into language acquisition?

**HRD:** I have viewed language holistically and besides the biological foundations for language, the sociocultural factors, and the cognitive aspects engage my attention. The rapidly growing fields of cognitive linguistics, cognitive

neuroscience and neurobiology of language represent current trends in research on language, brain and mind. One is intrigued by the complex relationship between the inner architecture of the mind and brain. I tabled some theoretical and empirical research and dwelt on the interaction of emotions on [the] brain, cognition and reasoning; the highly distributed cognition in the context of language use.

I have tried to argue that the fundamental issues in language acquisition research serve as the testing ground for the adequacy of linguistic theories. I am exploring the nature of our language faculty, the dynamic relation between language, and between [the] brain and [the] mind. Let me read out some viewpoints of researchers that have informed my thinking. Ellis (1998, p. 655) makes a pertinent remark about the interaction between language and other cognitive abilities: "One cannot understand language acquisition by understanding phonological memory alone. All the systems of working memory, all perceptual generation systems are involved in collating the regularities of cross-model assumptions under-pinning language use."

We are reminded that a complete understanding of language or language acquisition cannot come from any single discipline. Take Cook and Seidlhofer (1996, p. 4) who say that: "Language can be viewed as a genetic inheritance, a mathematical system, a social fact, the expression of individual identity, the expression of cultural identity, the outcome of dialogic interaction, a social semiotic, the intuition of native speakers, the sum of attested data, a collection of memorized chunks, a rule-governed discrete combinatory system, or electrical activation in a distributed network. We do not have to choose. Language can be all

these things at once."

Thus, anyone engaged with language at any level must have a feel of the complexity of issues involved, for there is no trivial work in the language.

**RS:** It calls for increased awareness and enhanced commitment to deal with language!

**HRD:** I have examined both inside-out and outside-in theories of language acquisition and shared significant research.

To sum up, after having reflected on various issues, I have tried to show how the cognitive-functionalist usage-based model provides an explanatory account of the complex process of language acquisition, a broader view of language faculty, and interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic factors.

**RS:** That sounds like a fascinating piece of work . . . [a] testimony to your growth as a researcher; and you have ploughed all your thinking back into your work on Cognitive Foundation of Mother Tongue, from where we began our dialogue. What are your last remarks for us?

**HRD:** Our commitment is motivated neither by some abstract ideal of future state nor by a set of principles justified outside history without understanding how we are particularly situated concerning our language, culture and history. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004), "we take our fate in our hands, we become responsible for our history through reflection, but equally by a decision on which we stake our life, and in both cases, what is involved is a violent act which is validated by being performed" (p.98). This implies, we arrive at meaning through a historical account and give

meaning to it through our engagement with history and commitment in action. We in India have seen how English medium education has attained [an] unassailable position; whereas the status of mother tongue education is deplorable. Further, we also do not have adequate information on reality.

How should we turn things around? We may not be able to reverse societal patterns easily, but we can create new pathways; still, we need to work out ways of enriching our multilingualism and create counter elites—new pressure groups—who situate mother tongue in the centre of their thought processes and work with other Indian languages in a supportive ecology, propelling their use outside comfort zones. This calls for creative and intensive labour; we need the

joining of hands and raising of voices; new pedagogies that awakens [sic] a new social order; a critical consciousness that provides multiple perspectives on the teaching of all subjects including science in multiple languages; a new idea of culture formation; liberation of voices to participate in nation-building. No language or speaker should feel left out; no one's woes unattended. We can go down fighting but battle we must. There is too much at stake for the generations that follow and we can't afford to squander away our linguistic resources. The language teaching community must challenge itself to take a lead in the matter and not be dissuaded by difficulties or failures. The destiny of our languages awaits our endeavour!

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