Language Revitalization: The NEP-2020

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Abstract

Language Endangerment is a fact of contemporary time, and it is the biggest threat to Indian multilingualism. Globalization has enabled English as a global language, and the space for local languages is diminishing in education, research, employment, etc. The process of implementing NEP-2020 has been initiated. Teaching through the mother tongue is a significant way of advancing language revitalization. This paper focuses on analysing the provisions related to regional languages and their teaching to revitalize Indian languages.

Keywords: Language endangerment, language revitalization, mother tongue education and NEP-2020

Introduction

Language teaching is essential for language revitalization (Hinton 2011a, 2011b; Czaykowska-Higgins et al., 2017). High-quality language teaching helps to stop language endangerment. However, the younger generations are being rapidly weaned away from their first language/ mother tongue due to a lack of appropriate pedagogy, inadequately trained teachers, lack of teaching resources, and a lack of confidence of guardians for a better career for the students through mother tongue education. With English medium education becoming dominant many students from the marginal sections and remote areas are dropping out of primary schools. NEP-2020 hopes to address this linguistic crisis by recommending the use of mother tongues as a medium of instruction.

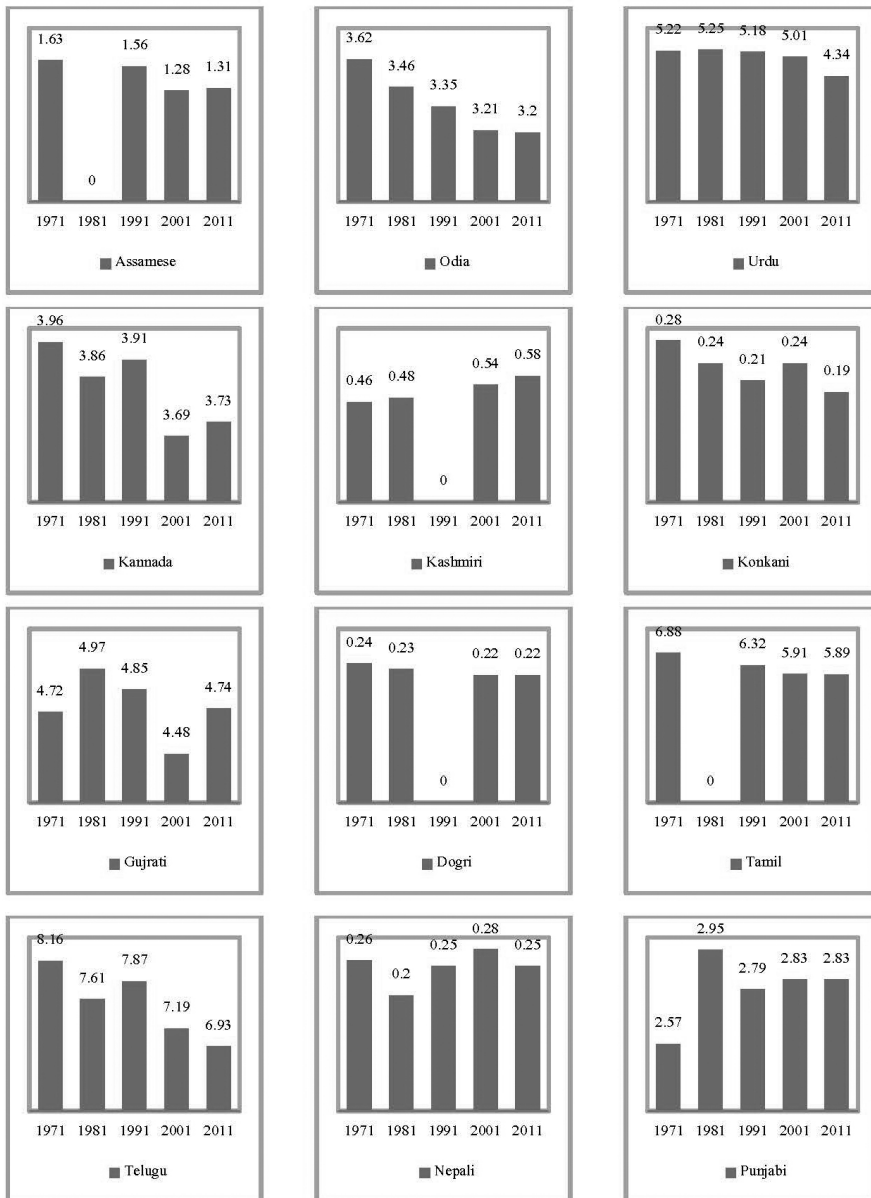## Linguistic Revitalization, NEP-2020 and Indian Multilingualism

National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 (NEP, 2020) attempts to consider Indian languages holistically at the national level. The centrality of language in this 66-page document is evident because the word 'language' has appeared 126 times in its plural form and 80 times in its singular form. The preponderance of its plural form emphasizes plurality in the country rather than focusing on one language and culture. The self-acceptance in the policy that "unfortunately, Indian languages have not received their due attention and care" (NEP-2020 para 22.5) looks like an important starting point in language-centred education policy. Further, it has directed that "teaching and learning of Indian languages need to be integrated with school and higher education at every level" (NEP-2020, para 22.6).
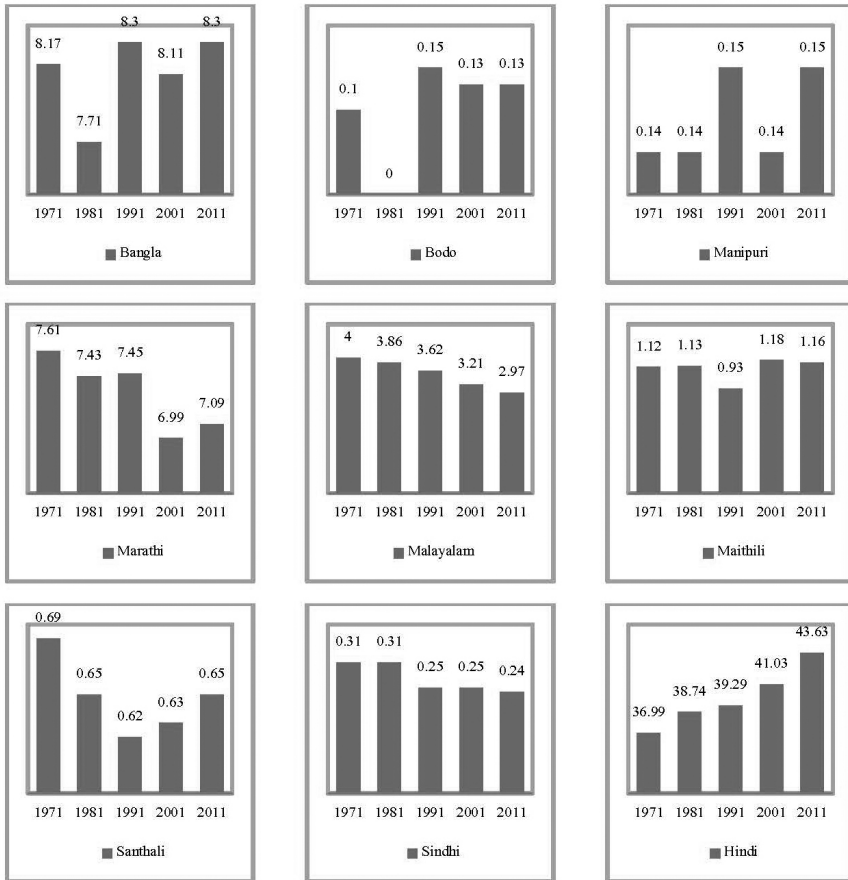
Multilingualism has always been an asset of Indian society, where there are many categories of language use like Official Languages, Classical Languages and Eighth Schedule Languages. However, the category "endangered language" appeared for the first time in NEP-2020. In this document, the concern for protecting and promoting unscripted and endangered languages in the light of the 197 endangered languages declared by UNESCO is quite clear. The linguistic distress in the country is evident in the statement that- "even those languages of India that are not officially on such endangered lists, such as the 22 languages of the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, are facing serious difficulties on many fronts" (NEP-2020, para 22.6).

Hence, the alarm is ringing for the tribal languages spoken in secluded areas and major Indian languages, including the Eighth Schedule languages and the designated Classical languages. The Census data for the last 30-40 years shows that out of 21 languages, the speakers of fifteen languages have decreased. From the graph given below, one can make the following two observations about the decrease:

1. Compared to the 1971 Census, speakers of Assamese, Odia, Urdu, Kannada, Konkani, Dogri, Tamil, Telugu, Nepali, Marathi, Malayalam, Santhali and Sindi have decreased in the 2011 Census.

2. Compared to the 1981 census, speakers of Gujarati and Punjabi have decreased in the 2011 Census.

Graph: *Percentage to total population*

Assamese — 1971: 1.63, 1981: 0, 1991: 1.56, 2001: 1.28, 2011: 1.31

Odia — 1971: 3.62, 1981: 3.46, 1991: 3.35, 2001: 3.21, 2011: 3.2

Urdu — 1971: 5.22, 1981: 5.25, 1991: 5.18, 2001: 5.01, 2011: 4.34

Kannada — 1971: 3.96, 1981: 3.86, 1991: 3.91, 2001: 3.69, 2011: 3.73

Kashmiri — 1971: 0.46, 1981: 0.48, 1991: 0, 2001: 0.54, 2011: 0.58

Konkani — 1971: 0.28, 1981: 0.24, 1991: 0.21, 2001: 0.24, 2011: 0.19

Gujrati — 1971: 4.72, 1981: 4.97, 1991: 4.85, 2001: 4.48, 2011: 4.74

Dogri — 1971: 0.24, 1981: 0.23, 1991: 0, 2001: 0.22, 2011: 0.22

Tamil — 1971: 6.88, 1981: 0, 1991: 6.32, 2001: 5.91, 2011: 5.89

Telugu — 1971: 8.16, 1981: 7.61, 1991: 7.87, 2001: 7.19, 2011: 6.93

Nepali — 1971: 0.26, 1981: 0.2, 1991: 0.25, 2001: 0.28, 2011: 0.25

Punjabi — 1971: 2.57, 1981: 2.95, 1991: 2.79, 2001: 2.83, 2011: 2.83

Bangla

Year	Value
1971	8.17
1981	7.71
1991	8.3
2001	8.11
2011	8.3

Bodo

Year	Value
1971	0.1
1981	0
1991	0.15
2001	0.13
2011	0.13

Manipuri

Year	Value
1971	0.14
1981	0.14
1991	0.15
2001	0.14
2011	0.15

Marathi

Year	Value
1971	7.61
1981	7.43
1991	7.45
2001	6.99
2011	7.09

Malayalam

Year	Value
1971	4
1981	3.86
1991	3.62
2001	3.21
2011	2.97

Maithili

Year	Value
1971	1.12
1981	1.13
1991	0.93
2001	1.18
2011	1.16

Santhali

Year	Value
1971	0.69
1981	0.65
1991	0.62
2001	0.63
2011	0.65

Sindhi

Year	Value
1971	0.31
1981	0.31
1991	0.25
2001	0.25
2011	0.24

Hindi

Year	Value
1971	36.99
1981	38.74
1991	39.29
2001	41.03
2011	43.63

Source: (2011, Statement 5, p. 16)

This decrease is a matter of concern because these are the Eighth Schedule languages, and five (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Odia, and Malayalam) have Classical language status.

In such a situation, the emphasis of the policy must be on the creation and dissemination of textbooks, videos, plays, stories, poems, dictionaries, novels, magazines, web materials, etc. along with the creation of high-quality printed materials, as well as the continuous expansion of vocabulary to develop all the languages for teaching and study. To achieve this, "languages must also have consistent official updates to their vocabularies and dictionaries, widely disseminated so that the

most current issues and concepts can be effectively discussed in these languages" (NEP-2020, para 22.6).

The policy has also proposed education in the mother tongue or first language up to a minimum of Class V level to help achieve 2030 goals, namely, "inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (NEP-2020, p. 3). Creating such education is challenging in many ways. The condition of government primary schools in the country is pathetic. The student-teacher ratio, infrastructure, inadequate laboratory facilities, lack of library, sporting goods, etc. make the situation unsatisfactory. Simultaneously a large part of the managerial skill and energy of the teachers goes into the arrangement of midday meals and other additional duties assigned to them by the government from time to time. Identifying a language as a mother tongue in a particular setup and managing a multilingual classroom is also a challenge, for instance, in the states like Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim or Nagaland. Emphasis has been laid on the three-language formula and multilingualism in the local education system. It is also essential to have a pool of well-trained language teachers with the ability to translate and interpret. All these must eventually lead to high-quality programmes in the conservation and development of art, literature, music, crafts, archaeology, and graphic and web design. When early childhood education is connected to these programmes, it helps build children's capacities.

The NEP 2020 also proposes connecting skills in these sectors directly with employment opportunities to develop the local culture and knowledge and create new areas of employment. Technology can be used to preserve and promote languages, arts, and cultures. The policy also proposes to connect all Indian languages with artificial intelligence to meet the timely challenges of maintaining linguistic and cultural diversities.

Language departments of various universities in the country are generally engaged only in teaching literature. However, this is inadequate. The curriculum should be restructured, focusing on the functional aspects of language, including grammar, vocabulary, and linguistic-based criticism or text analysis. The restructuring is essential because a cursory glance shows that doctoral students in language lack the proper knowledge of grammar, spelling, etc. Language teaching in universities should be like

teaching foreign languages, emphasizing literature, language structure, and extra-literary contexts.

Languages departments should not work in isolation. Classical languages, Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014) should be linked to universities. Emphasis should be placed on setting up new institutes for Pali, Prakrit, and Persian languages so that better education and research can be done on the country's art, history, and tradition. At the same time, the policy proposes to create a separate institute in the name of translation, which can bring the knowledge of Indian multilingualism to the fore. According to the 'National Knowledge Commission' (2007, p. 18), 'National Translation Mission' has to be given the form of an institute, where knowledge text can be translated not only from English to Indian languages but also from all Indian languages to English. There should be a comprehensive translation initiative from Indian languages to Indian languages. The knowledge-traditions inherent in remote tribal languages should also be brought to the national stage through translation and digitization.
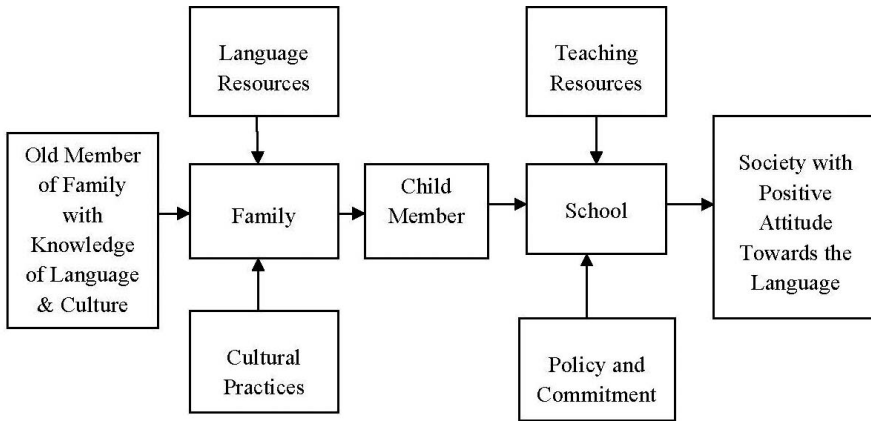
Language Teaching and Language Revitalization

The best way to maintain and revitalize a language is to teach a language to the wider society and transfer the knowledge of the language from one generation to another. Language teaching has always been instrumental in achieving the transfer. The approach to teaching endangered languages will be different from teaching the major languages. Teaching a major language may be done within the boundary of schools, but teaching the endangered languages will require the community's surroundings, the positive attitude of the language speaker, support from education and language policy, etc. The older generation's role is crucial for transferring language knowledge to the younger generation. According to Hinton (2011a, 2011b), teaching any endangered language requires the following:

1. To teach the language to those who do not know it.

2. To motivate the use of languages in a broadening set of situations.

Therefore, teaching an endangered language will need support from policies and practices. The following diagram details this idea (Diagram)

Diagram: *Language Flow for Revitalization*

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┌─────────────┐                    ┌─────────────┐
│  Language   │                    │  Teaching   │
│  Resources  │                    │  Resources  │
└──────┬──────┘                    └──────┬──────┘
       │                                  │
┌─────────────┐     ┌─────────┐     ┌──────────┐     ┌─────────────┐
│Old Member   │     │         │     │          │     │ Society with│
│of Family    │     │         │ ┌─────────┐    │     │  Positive   │
│with         │────▶│ Family  │ │ Child   │──▶ School──▶│ Attitude   │
│Knowledge    │     │         │ │ Member  │    │     │ Towards the │
│of Language  │     │         │ └─────────┘    │     │  Language   │
│& Culture    │     └────▲────┘     └────▲─────┘     └─────────────┘
└─────────────┘          │               │
                   ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────┐
                   │ Cultural │    │Policy and│
                   │ Practices│    │Commitment│
                   └──────────┘    └──────────┘
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The revitalization flow gives primary importance to the family, its linguistic and cultural knowledge, and the schools. Through language teaching, the spread of a language continues from generation to generation enabling languages to be connected with society. When a language is used in school at least till primary education and in the communication process, it strengthens the child's educational foundation. It helps language spread smoothly and contributes to increasing the life expectancy of that language. Further, even if children choose to study in a major language at the higher stages of education, they will continue to associate with their native language, thereby reducing the threat of extinction.

The participation of the society and cooperation of the government is critical for the revival of any language. Society and language planning are routed through government policies. Expectations from society for a language in its revitalization process are necessary, but it cannot be adequately done in the absence of a suitable policy. The case of Hebrew is an example, but the Indian context is diverse. The NEP-2020 has also supported minor languages in many ways.

Nevertheless, policies alone cannot make any change on the ground without their proper implementation. Government initiatives such as the Kothari Commission of 1966, the Three-Language Formula of 1968, the National Curriculum Framework of 2005 and the Right to Education Act of 2009 have supported local languages or mother tongues. However, expected results have not been archived so far. Instead, the threat to

the local languages has increased continuously, and the hegemony of English continues because the society did not implement the policies adequately. As education comes under the concurrent list, the roles of the central and state governments are vital in policy implementation.

Conclusion

"India is a treasure trove of culture, developed over thousands of years and manifested in the form of arts, works of literature, customs, traditions, linguistic expressions, artifacts, heritage sites, and more" (NEP-2020, para 22.1). These must be protected at the grassroots by drawing insights from our policies. NEP-2020 has sketched the direction and requires proper implementation. The policy has advocated education through the mother tongue, at least at the primary level. However, there should be no distinction between private and government schools as private schools use English as a medium of education and attract many students compared to government schools. It is, of course, not possible to get higher education, science and technology-based research, and employment in every mother tongue in the country. Nevertheless, using them as the medium of instruction at every possible level will revive them for the future, and thus speedy death of the marginal languages may be stopped.

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