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CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE CHANGE AND MAINTENANCE:
BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND CONCEPTS

1. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss the concept of linguistic change, its typology and the views on language change in various disciplines. Special attention has been given to discuss the concept of geographical analysis of linguistic change over the space and time. Secondly, a theoretical understanding of linguistic diversity along with language association and language dependence have also been discussed. Thirdly, an effort has been made to explain the processes such as language contact, colonization and socio-economic and cultural change through which linguistic change is taking place.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It is said that change is the law of nature. Everything in this world is changing. Language like everything else, joins in this general flux (Humboldt, 1836). The famous Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure noted that "time
changes all things: there is no reason why language should escape this universal law". (cit. Aitchison, 1981).
Historical accounts make it clear that language change occurred repeatedly in all parts of the world and the process continues. (Susan, 1979: 1).

Language like other social phenomena is subject to change but the change is not abrupt, not through an explosion but it is gradual (Rubenstein, 1957: 286). Language changes with cultural change. Language change is likely to be rapid in those areas where mobility and social stability is high (Milroy and Milroy, 1985: 380). On the other hand, it tends to slow down where the cultural change is relatively static or slow. Rapid cultural change may be followed by rapid changes in linguistic system. (Hoijer, 1948: 340). Its pace is fast in urban than in rural areas where people are more conservative and isolated and less inclined to accept any change. (Fishman, 1976: 315). In general, women are linguistically more conservative than man in both urban and rural settings. Language change is a continuous process and, therefore, does not wait for new generation.
2.1 TYPES OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

Language change may be of different types. Language change has been identified as both natural and non-natural. The natural change is also known as divergent change and non-natural as convergent change. Natural change refers to the change occurring in all linguistic systems. It is a process of historical change. Such change is not dependent on contact. It operates within a system and is largely observed to produce systematic change between two historical stages of the same language, or to produce bifurcation of an ancestral proto-language into descendent daughter languages. The other type of language change, on the other hand, may be relatively 'non-natural'. It takes place mainly as a result of language contact between two linguistically different societies. Language contact between them results the transfer of elements from one language to other by the process of borrowing or diffusion and produces a systematic change. This is known as convergent change since it involves merging of two separate systems (Diebold, 1964: 495-96).

2.2 CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

Since language change is a much more subconscious process and much harder to explain as to how, why, when and where it starts (Trudgill, 1974: 225) requires not only a
linguistic accounting but a social description and explanation also (Blount and Sanches, 1977). The phenomenon of language change has long served as foci for varied research interest in linguistics, anthropology, sociology, etc. But their studies are diverse in scope and nature as well as in significance and explanation. Linguists, while studying language change are concerned basically in phonological, lexical, and grammatical systems of language whereas socio-linguists are primarily interested in tracing the change occurring due to the complex nature of the society among the castes, classes, age, sex and religious components. The main focus of anthropologists is on language change through language variety, heterogeneity and diversity as well as they try to integrate internal and external processes of language change (Hymes, 1964 : 450). Psychologists while dealing with language change mainly study the attitude of speakers towards the changes from time to time because of the socio-economic and political change. The study of linguistic change in geography, no doubt, is a recent phenomenon but linguistic geography as such is already about a century old and owes its origin to the comparative method started by Bopp and his close successors. To geographers, language change refers to language shift which can be studied both diachronically as well as
synchronously. The main task of the geographers is to carve out the areas of linguistic shift and to see its regional distribution with the help of maps. They try to establish not only the causes of particular geographical distribution of language shift but also to find out the possible reasons for the change as well.

The importance of geographical analysis of language change is an important dimension as it helps in understanding the regional variation of changing linguistic identity of population from time to time. Such studies also become a strong base not only to understand language dynamics but also help in language planning in a multilingual country like India. While highlighting the importance of geographical studies of language change, Peng suggested historical linguists to take assistance in their researches from linguistic geographers in the provision of advice and materials. "Historical linguists must actively seek more cooperation from linguistic geography......dealing with the dynamics of change among other things" (Peng, 1979: 121).
3. LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AMONG THE TRIBES

The tribal people of India have constantly been interacting with the non-tribal population over a long period of time. In the process, many tribal groups have been exposed to the non-tribal cultures, particularly, their dialects have been exposed to exogenous influences. The degree of linguistic exposure among the different tribal groups in India may be well understood while studying linguistic diversity, language association and language dependence. It is assumed that higher the degree of exposure more will be the degree of linguistic diversity. On the other hand, if a tribal group is linguistically more homogeneous, it may be assumed to have been least exposed to other influences. Secondly, the linguistic association indicates that a tribal group is closely associated to its parental or traditional language, meaning thereby that the group is less exposed. On the other hand, if a group is associated to the languages of other tribal/non-tribal groups it will receive more exposure as compared to the former group. For example, the Oraons by and large have been least associated with other groups of the Dravidian family. They are closely associated with Indo-Aryan languages and Austric languages in the Chotanagpur region which has resulted in a high degree of their linguistic exposure.
Earlier studies show that the Oraons were more exposed than the Mundas and the Santals in Chotanagpur region (Ishtiaque, 1985: 75). Thirdly, the language dependence indicates that if a tribal group for all practical needs i.e. education, literature, vernacular, and medium of instruction, etc. depends upon a language, other than its own the degree of exposure of that group will be more than those groups who have somehow depended on their own language.

Languages spoken by people are diverse. Language has not been uniform through time and space (Bright, 1969: 160). Moving from country to country region to region, class to class and caste to caste we find variation in language. Linguistic diversity apparently is related to social interaction which is sharpened by differences in habit and traditions grown over ages (Tripp, 1976: 65). Every area identified with the predominance of a particular racial element, have developed a language of its own. Language diversity in a multilingual society helps in identifying the size of language groups, their extent and their socio-cultural situations (Dasgupta, 1970: 69).

India is considered a very fertile region of linguistic variation such as regional, social, and stylistic. Regional
variation is known from the Ashokan inscriptions of the 3rd century B.C. The existence of social variation is shown, for example, in the Sanskrit drama in which lower characters use Prakrit. Stylistic variation, i.e., the use of different varieties of the same language in different social contexts, is also known from early grammatical works (Southworth, 1972 : 30). Diversity of languages in India may be identified with different languages in different geographical areas with different traditions of their own (Roy, 1962 : 160). The magnitude of linguistic diversity in India is obvious from the fact that in 1961 the people of the country registered 1,652 mother-tongues with a total population of 438,936,918. However, this estimate of extreme diversity of languages gives us an insight into the development of parochialism within the Indian civilization (Dasgupta, 1970 : 21).

4. PROCESSES OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

The processes of language change may be studied both synchronically as well as diachronically (Crystal, 1971 : 158). Synchronic study of language change refers to the changes at one point of time. The study includes degree of variation from place to place and between various age and sex groups, etc. On the other hand, diachronic study of language change
indicates the change in historical perspective. According to Chambers and Trudgill (1980: 88) synchronic study of language change is a change in Apparent time while diachronic study of language change may be seen in Real time. There is a number of processes influencing changes in language but all of them do not function simultaneously; rather some are active in some region whereas others are dominant in other regions depending upon the socio-cultural environments. The difference in the degree of variation of these processes may also be noticed in the different time-periods. Thus, time factor has been considered an important aspect to see the process of linguistic change (Prabhoo, 1980: 262 and Weinreich, 1953: 103). The processes which have been instrumental for bringing about linguistic change may broadly be classified as language contact, colonization and socio-economic and cultural change.

4.1 LANGUAGE CONTACT

Contact provides dramatic instances of linguistic change. It can also lead to extensive rearrangement of languages (Blount and Sanches, 1977: 16). For example, Finnish American language is an outcome of the long contact between English and Finnish in the United States. In India too Sadri/Sadni may be taken for instance which is spoken in
the Chotanagpur region. Although it has been classified under the Indo-Aryan languages, it is a composition of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Austro-Ayn languages.

Historically the contact between the two systems has not been reciprocal because of various socio-economic reasons. Normally in a contact situation one group becomes superordinate who imposes its language on other group which may be called as subordinate group. It is also to be noticed that subordinate migrants appear to be more rapidly assimilated than those of subordinate indigenous population. (Liberson, 1977:53). In fact, our contention is that interaction of the tribes with the non-tribes is a matter of the interaction between an active culture and a culture which is more simple and passive in values. (Rajora, 1987: 39). When indigenous population communicate regularly in the languages of economically and politically dominant groups a pidgin language may result which has been instrumental in fostering language change.

In India, tribal culture appeared either full or partial incorporation. Those groups who have been fully incorporated into the non-tribal culture have also registered non-tribal languages as their mother-tongue. On
the other hand, those who have been partially assimilated became bilingual or multilingual. Besides these there are groups who live in relative isolation are mono-lingual and speak their traditional tongue only. Fishman has suggested that one of the factors affecting language shift is a social setting. In every geographical area there would be people of different linguistic affiliations and they may pick up the local language without giving up their own. Thus, assimilation of different linguistic groups is natural and cannot be denied (Roy, 1962: 160). Historical facts revealed that inter-cultural contact is correlated with linguistic change.

As far as linguistic contact is concerned it is found that those tribes who live in urban and industrial complexes have greater chance of language change. On the other hand, tribes living in rural areas experience low order of language contact facilitating the indigenous people to continue their own traditional dialect.

4.2 COLONIZATION

Colonization has been found to be an important mechanism in the process of language change in historical perspective. Migration is an inherent quality of human
beings which takes place either in search of food and shelter or to conquer territory. In these processes, a bulk of population migrated from one region to another and carried along with them their culture and civilization which is, in most cases, imposed on the new area which they occupy. The imposition of new culture becomes difficult if there is an indigenous population who show some kind of resistance to the alien culture. Since the conqueror's superior culture dominates in all spheres of life including socio-economic and political, the conquered people, in due course of time, adopt it. Those who do not accept the new culture, are generally pushed to the interior parts of the forest and highlands where they live in isolation and preserve their traditional cultural values. The conquered population depend upon the conqueror for all technological and socio-economic advancement resulting gradually in the adoption of the new culture especially the language of the alien group. The language of alien people which receives the patronization of administration becomes prestigious and expands and replaces the less prestigious indigenous language (Fishman, 1976: 321 and Southworth, 1974: 221). This phenomenon is found more effective especially in the multilingual countries where economic necessity and need for
lingua-france for communication can reinforce the prestige factor.

Recent history shows that Europeans who have colonized Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia imposed European languages, such as English, Portuguese, Spanish, French etc. These languages serve the needs of education and economy while the local population generally speak local dialect. Christian missionaries who operated in these countries attracted local population towards Christian fold leading to change not only in their religion but also in the whole sphere of life style including a change in their language attitude.

The Indian sub-continent, though protected by natural boundaries has been invaded by outsiders from time immemorial. The Aryans, Pathans, Mughals and Europeans came in sequence. It is believed that before the Aryans probably the sub-continent was occupied by the people of Australoid origin who spoke various forms of Austric. The Aryans pushed them into the forest and the hills of the central India. After the emergence of state, Sanskrit received royal patronage and became the medium of Brahminical education. During the Sultanate period Persian was introduced as the
court language. It remained the language of elites and was used for official and literary purposes only. Although it never became popular among the masses, its presence brought about drastic changes in the linguistic patterns. One consequence was the emergence of Urdu. Today, about 15 crores people of India constituting about 6 per cent of the total population registered Urdu as their mother-tongue. (Hindustan Times, 15 Sept. 1989), while as subsidiary language, it is used by more people who are distributed over every corner of the country. English was declared as an official language during the British rule in India. It is needless to point out how much we depend on English for our communicational needs, particularly in science and technology. Though the British have already left India yet English has made its roots in Indian soil which may be noticed from the fact that about 2.4 lakh people declared it as their mother-tongue and 25 per cent of the total bilingual population in India belongs to English (Khubchandani, 1972).

4.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Cultural change determines the degree of change in language since language is an important aspect of cultural pattern. There is a number of observations which suggest
that periods of change in culture are roughly coincident with shift in linguistic structure (Hoijer, 1948: 339). The transformation of traditional societies into modern political systems has been accompanied by linguistic modernization and change (Dasgupta, 1970: 17). Detribalisation and assimilation of tribes by their neighbours are taking place and as a result the tribal dialects are dying as natural death (Burdhan, 1973: 80). In the absence of frequent contacts between tribes and non-tribes until the British period, the degree of acculturation was insignificant but whenever the tribes lived in proximity and prolonged contact with the Hindus, they were gradually assimilated into Hindu culture. Independent India heralded a new era for them and the development of communication facilities, extension of schools, hospitals and banking facilities, to the tribal areas accelerated the process of modernization. The development of communications led to an increase of contacts. Following improvements in transport, industrial development and increase in population, the non-tribal people started invading the habitations of tribals in search of agricultural land, minerals, forest resources and new avenues for trade. Such gradual transformation of tribal areas since independence, has by and large exposed the tribal groups to a series of social, economic and cultural
changes. The planned intervention as a process of regional development in the country resulted in overall social transformation which is accompanied with linguistic change of varying degrees.

The traditional tribal activities such as food gathering and primitive forms of agriculture (shifting or sedentary) have undergone a series of changes. It led to structural change in tribal economy and society. With the establishment of mining and industrial plants in tribal areas, a new demand for land begins and the tribal land and forest are encroached. Consequently the primary work force alienated from its traditional land and moved out to urban centres where they are absorbed in low-paid jobs, or falls back on the scarce land resources in the interior tribal villages as wage-labourers. Those who moved to urban centres had greater chance of interaction with the non-tribes and it may lead to dialectal change among the migrated tribal population.

The growth of literacy brings about a methodical linguistic change among the tribes. Barring a few exceptions, the medium of instruction is in a language alien
to the tribes. The growth of literacy and education results in their alienation from their own mother-tongues.

The process of social mobility has also been considered a powerful force to bring about linguistic change. Some major tribal communities, such as the Bhils, Gonds, the Mundas etc. have revealed a strong tendency to get themselves assimilated into the dominant regional cultures by declaring a shift in their own language. Evidently, it shows an inner urge to rehabilitate and attain a viable social status within the dominant culture groups in their neighbourhood. Such a shift may also come as a result of the compulsions of the existing social reality.

It is possible that language change can be interrelated with pattern of social change. It is considered that there is a complex interplay between language change and the economic, political, social and educational context. Till the fifties a majority of tribals in Central India adopted Hinduism or Christianity. "Many of the Dravidian and the Munda tribes get permanently transformed into Hindu castes" (Volchok, 1964 : 108) some of them were assimilated and lost their identity while others are trying for the preservation of their culture. According to Doshi "Indian tribes by and
large are assimilationist society and Hindustani or regional language is taken up as means of interaction" (Doshi, 1972: 471). Chatterji referred this process as Sanskritization of the tribes in India (Chatterji, 1969: 14).

REFERENCES


