Rethinking Language Education: The Case for Multilinguality

Repensar la educación en lenguas: el caso de la multilingualidad

Répenser l'éducation en langues : le cas de la multilingualité

Repensar a educação linguística: o caso da multilingualidade

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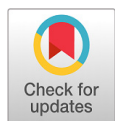https://orcid.
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Abstract

This article explores multilinguality as a fundamental human trait challenging traditional views that treat language as a discrete unit in both theory and pedagogy, focusing on India's language policies and practices. In view of India's Three Language Formula and the recent National Education Policy, which often reflect a global North-centric bias, marginalising the linguistic richness of the global South, this theoretical article argues for a re-evaluation of terms like "a language," bilingualism," and "multilingualism," while challenging perspectives of translanguaging, code-switching, and hyper-diversity. It advocates for a more nuanced understanding of language as multilinguality, highlighting how it is inherent in all educational settings and how the diverse linguistic resources learners bring to school can be used to enhance cognitive development and foster inclusive environments. By addressing the inequities perpetuated by dominant languages of power, this article suggests strategies rooted in multilinguality for teacher training, curriculum development, syllabus, and classroom processes. The aim is to promote a more inclusive, equitable, and globally relevant framework for education informed by multilinguality that values innate universal grammar, linguistic fluidity and social sensitivity. This would also bridge the purported gap between the global North and the global South.

Keywords: multilinguality, translanguaging, code-switching, language policy, India

Resumen

Este artículo explora el multilingüismo como un rasgo humano fundamental que desafía las visiones tradicionales que tratan el idioma como una unidad discreta tanto en la teoría como en la pedagogía, centrándose en las políticas y prácticas lingüísticas de la India. En vista de la Fórmula de las Tres Lenguas de la India y la reciente Política Nacional de Educación, que a menudo reflejan un sesgo global centrado en el Norte, marginando la riqueza lingüística del Sur global, este artículo teórico aboga por una reevaluación de términos como «una lengua», «bilingüismo» y «multilingüismo», al tiempo que cuestiona las perspectivas del

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translanguaging, el cambio de código y la hiperdiversidad. Aboga por una comprensión más matizada del lenguaje como multilingüismo, destacando cómo es inherente a todos los entornos educativos y cómo los diversos recursos lingüísticos que los alumnos aportan a la escuela pueden utilizarse para mejorar el desarrollo cognitivo y fomentar entornos inclusivos. Al abordar las desigualdades perpetuadas por las lenguas dominantes del poder, este artículo sugiere estrategias basadas en el multilingüismo para la formación del profesorado, el desarrollo de planes de estudio, los programas de estudios y los procesos en el aula. El objetivo es promover un marco educativo más inclusivo, equitativo y relevante a nivel mundial, basado en la multilingüidad, que valore la gramática universal innata, la fluidez lingüística y la sensibilidad social. Esto también serviría para salvar la supuesta brecha entre el Norte y el Sur globales.

Palabras clave: multilingüalidad, translenguaje, alternancia de código, política lingüística, India

Résumé

Cet article explore le multilinguisme en tant que trait humain fondamental, remettant en question les conceptions traditionnelles qui traitent la langue comme une unité distincte tant dans la théorie que dans la pédagogie, en se concentrant sur les politiques et pratiques linguistiques de l'Inde. Compte tenu de la formule des trois langues de l'Inde et de la récente politique nationale en matière d'éducation, qui reflètent souvent un parti pris mondial centré sur le Nord, marginalisant la richesse linguistique du Sud, cet article théorique plaide en faveur d'une réévaluation de termes tels que « langue », « bilinguisme » et « multilinguisme », tout en remettant en question les perspectives du translanguaging, du code-switching et de l'hyper-diversité. Il préconise une compréhension plus nuancée de la langue en tant que multilinguisme, soulignant qu'elle est inhérente à tous les contextes éducatifs et que les diverses ressources linguistiques que les apprenants apportent à l'école peuvent être utilisées pour améliorer le développement cognitif et favoriser des environnements inclusifs. En abordant les inégalités perpétuées par les langues dominantes du pouvoir, cet article propose des stratégies fondées sur le multilinguisme pour la formation des enseignants, l'élaboration des programmes d'études, les syllabus et les processus en classe. L'objectif est de promouvoir un cadre éducatif plus inclusif, plus équitable et plus pertinent à l'échelle mondiale, fondé sur le multilinguisme et valorisant la grammaire universelle innée, la fluidité linguistique et la sensibilité sociale. Cela permettrait également de combler le fossé supposé entre le Nord et le Sud global.

Mots-clé : multilingualité, translangage, alternance codique, politique linguistique, Inde

Resumo

Este artigo explora a multilingualidade como uma característica humana fundamental, desafiando as visões tradicionais que tratam a língua como uma unidade discreta, tanto na teoria quanto na pedagogia, com foco nas políticas e práticas linguísticas da Índia. Tendo em vista a Fórmula das Três Línguas da Índia e a recente Política Nacional de Educação, que muitas vezes refletem um viés global centrado no Norte, marginalizando a riqueza linguística do Sul global, este artigo teórico defende uma reavaliação de termos como "uma língua", "bilinguismo" e "multilinguismo", ao mesmo tempo em que desafia as perspectivas de translinguagem, alternância de código e hiperdiversidade. Ele defende uma compreensão mais sutil da língua como multilinguismo, destacando como ela é inerente a todos os ambientes educacionais e como os diversos recursos linguísticos que os alunos trazem para a escola podem ser usados para aprimorar o desenvolvimento cognitivo e promover ambientes inclusivos. Ao abordar as desigualdades perpetuadas pelas línguas dominantes do poder, este artigo sugere estratégias baseadas no multilinguismo para a formação de professores, o desenvolvimento de currículos, programas de estudos e processos em sala de aula. O objetivo é promover uma estrutura educacional mais

inclusiva, equitativa e globalmente relevante, informada pela multilingualidade, que valorize a gramática universal inata, a fluidez linguística e a sensibilidade social. Isso também preencheria a suposta lacuna entre o Norte global e o Sul global.

Palavras chave: multilingualidade, translinguagem, alternância de código linguístico, política linguística, Índia

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Introduction

Multilinguality is constitutive of being human (Agnihotri, 2021, 2022; Bagga-Gupta, 2013, 2023; Bagga-Gupta & Dahlberg, 2018; Bhattacharya, 2023, 2024; Mishra, 2023; Singh, 2010). It is conceptualised in the triangular space of Universal Grammar (UG), linguistic fluidity and the universal guardrail of human concern. Multilinguality is an innate potential of human beings. Conversely, "linguistic boundaries" are porous and the concepts of translanguaging (Garcia, 2009), hyperlingualism (Pauwels, 2014), code-mixing and code switching (Myers-Scotton, 2002; Sankoff et al., 1990), which are grounded in the concept of "a language" are not entertained (Agnihotri, 2010, 2014; Auer, 2007; Vashisht &Agnihotri, 2015). The concept of "a language" is a political assertion or a homogenised artefact with heterogeneity and meaning-making out of focus (Bagga-Gupta & Dahlberg, 2018).

Similarly, the concepts of bilingualism and multilingualism are rooted in the concept of "a language" and are generally seen in linear and additive modes. Additionally, we must bear in mind that the global South is not an object of wonder of multilingualism and backwardness, nor is the global North an ideal representation of monolingualism that is consistent with development. Sociopolitical injustice is as much a part of the global South as of the global North (Bahl, 2023; Chomsky, 1975, 1986, 1987; Freire, 1971; Mukherji, 2023). Against this backdrop, multilinguality has the potential to play a crucial role in addressing issues of inequity.

All societies and therefore all schools are characterised by multilinguality (Jhingran, 2009; Language and Learning Foundation, 2022, 2023, 2024). The verbal repertoire that learners bring to the classroom can be used as a resource for introducing learners to scientific inquiry leading to cognitive growth and social awareness (Agnihotri, 2021, 2022; Honda & O'Neil, 2008; Honda et al., 2007; Mangla & Agnihotri, 2011). Any voice that is not heard adds to the levels of silence in the classroom and increases the pushout rate in education.

According to the India's Ministry of Education's Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE, 2024, p. 107, Table 6.11) the overall dropout rate at secondary level in India is 10.9% and in a highly multilingual and socio-economically backward state like Bihar, it is 20.9%. In Bihar, even at the Middle School level it is 25.9% and at the Primary Level 13.7%. Since it is the languages of power that dominate the space of education, it is the underprivileged that are pushed out. Building on multilinguality will also create spaces for subversive discourses against the elite and promote equity, democracy and justice (Gupta et al., 2021; Mohanty et al., 2009). This article explores further the pedagogical and social advantages made possible by treating multilinguality as an individual and classroom resource.

This paper is arranged in five main sections. Section Global North and South shows how multiplicity of languages in society and school is the norm and educational policies invisibilise languages of marginalised people. Then, Section 3, Theoretical Underpinnings of "a Language," explores the theoretical underpinnings of the educational paradigm that is rooted in behaviourist psychology and structural linguistics and introduces the reader to the Chomskyan intervention and the societal sensitivity brought about by the socio- and psycholinguistic studies; Section 4, Multilinguality, outlines the theory of multilinguality and Sections 5— Language in Education—and 6— Multilinguality in the Classroom— are devoted to the discussion of a curriculum and pedagogy rooted in multilinguality.

Global North and South

The uncalled-for binary (Bahl, 2023) between the global North and the global South needs to be examined. While it is true that in Northern countries, common people's languages are more successfully suppressed, these countries are also highly multilingual. According to Ethnologue (2024), the number of living non-Indigenous languages in the USA is 40; in Britain, 13; in Germany, 20; and in France, 19. The multilingual fabric of

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these countries would look richer if all the indigenous and heritage languages are also included. As Tollefson (1991) points out, many countries, such as the USA and Britain, are classic cases of linguistic hegemony "where linguistic minorities are denied political rights and where multilingualism is widespread but officially invisible in the major mass media, government, and most public discourses (e.g., radio talk shows and newspapers)" (p. 201). Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2017) show how Europe's intense multilingualism is beginning to be noticed.

Irrespective of whether we are talking of the North or the South, it is monolingualism (often English or some other colonial language) that prevails in the spheres of education and power. However, English itself is an example of multilinguality *par excellence*. In addition to its Germanic roots, it has a strong influence of Latin and its descendent languages—such as French, Spanish, Italian—in its vocabulary and syntax; also, it borrows heavily from other languages, including Greek, Dutch, Arabic, Sanskrit, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, various American Indian languages, among others. And this process continues. Add to this the large number of varieties often subsumed under World Englishes, such as Indian English, Sri Lankan English, Australian English, New Zealand English, Singapore English, American English, British English, etc. (yes, they all have a comparable syntax, despite some differences in vocabulary and phonology, see Agnihotri & Singh, 2012; Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008). Furthermore, English flows effortlessly into conversations of the urban young breaking all boundaries presumably associated with "a language" (Agnihotri, 2007).

Despite universal diversity, it is the languages of the elite and the powerful that dominate the world of education and social mobility in all societies. Colombia has over 60 Indigenous languages, but Spanish and English seem to dominate the Colombian public scene. As Miranda et al. (2024) argue despite public policy efforts in favour of multilingualism, in Colombia prevails a homogenised bilingualism with the dominant presence of Spanish and/or English. Other languages get diminished in status resulting in linguicism or language loss; such processes stigmatise the status of speakers' languages even in their own eyes (Gallegos, 2023; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988).

Keeping things in perspective, this reality does not sound very different from India. In a country of 1652 mother tongues according to the Census of India, 1961 (Nigam, 1971, p. xvi), English, Hindi and sometimes a powerful regional language, dominate. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* conducted during 1903–1928 had already reduced the Indian linguistic diversity to 179 languages and 544 dialects; it was extensively used by all census surveys. The 2011 Census of India counted 19,569 mother tongues. These were reduced to only 1369 rationalised mother tongues. Only those languages are counted which have more than 10,000 speakers, and several languages are subsumed under some major language for political reasons. This is how minority languages are invisibilised by the authorities.

According to language tables in the Census of India (2011, p. 6), Hindi is shown to have over 528 million speakers, but it subsumes over 55 languages including such major languages as Bhojpuri (over 50 million speakers), Rajasthani (25 million), Chhattisgarhi (16 million), Magahi (13 million), among others. In fact, the actual number of people claiming to have Hindi as their language is only 322 million. Following these demarcations, the language count of India was reduced to 121 in 2011, 22 of which are the ones listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, most of which are powerful regional languages like Tamil and Bangla, and 99 other classified languages (Abbi, 2022).

In the case of India, Pallavi (2023) points out, "despite the recognition that the diversity of languages has been given in the domain of education, educational policies, pedagogies and practices that are followed within classroom situations have

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not been pluralised" (p. 60). In fact, despite all the efforts made to celebrate multilingualism (India, NCERT, 2005; India, MHRD, 2020; UNESCO, 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas et al., 2009), policy-makers and scholars have stuck to the concept of "a language" and have in general advocated bilingualism or exposure to three discrete languages, as in the case of the Three Language Formula (TLF) of India (Ministry of Education, 1966).

The TLF itself was born not out of any sound linguistic or educational theory but out of a compromise between the chief ministers of the states of India largely imposing "a language" paradigm on the linguistic fluidity of India. All students were supposed to learn their first regional language in addition to English as a second language; for the third language, it was proposed that students of South India would learn Hindi and students of North India would learn a South Indian language such as Tamil. All policy documents including the current National Education Policy (NEP) (India, MHRD, 2020) since 1966 have reaffirmed the TLF. In general, North Indians see no merit in learning Tamil and South Indians see no usefulness in learning Hindi. South India largely sticks to their regional language and English; in North India, Sanskrit is often allowed as a third language, in addition to Hindi and English.

NEP 2020 has introduced some flexibility suggesting that the first two languages must be Indian, the third can be any other language. The history of the implementation of TLF shows that most states have compromised the original spirit behind TLF (Aggarwal, 1991). South India in general rejects TLF, but natural multilinguality ensures that some South Indians speak mixed Hindi and taxi drivers of Bengaluru in Karnataka in the South, for example, speak several languages including Hindi.

In its rhetoric, NEP 2020 is a great celebration of education in the mother-tongue and of multilingualism. However, it fails to arrive at any suitable definition of mother tongue. In section 4.11, NEP argues that nontrivial concepts are best understood in the mother tongue but it uses this term with several slashes such as mother tongue/ home language/ language spoken by a local community. Furthermore, the use of the mother tongue is recommended with several riders such as "wherever possible", "until at least Grade 5", "but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond" and here regional language is added to the list of slashed languages. The simple fact that several students with different linguistic backgrounds will be sitting in the same class is not even entertained. Sections 4.11 to 4.22 of NEP 2020 focus on "Multilingualism and the power of language". Multilingualism is understood in linear and additive terms as L1+ L2 +L3, etc.

The dominating power of English and Hindi is not spelt out. In fact, the policy celebrates the status quo. It is substantially a repetition of the National Education Policies of 1968 and 1986 (revised 1992) so far as the issues of mother tongue, TLF, regional languages and such languages of power as Hindi and English are concerned. South India's opposition to the imposition of Hindi was visible in the Constituent Assembly Debates itself (Agnihotri, 2015) and yet the present government has been trying to impose Hindi on the non-Hindi speaking states (*The Wire*, 2025). NEP 2020 refuses to look at even the National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) which was a major attempt against the instrumentalization of education; NEP 2020 trivializes both, multilingualism and the power of language. As Sengupta (2021) has argued, NEP 2020 encourages the privatization of education, making it inaccessible to the marginalised. Unless we conceptualise language as multilinguality, there is no way out of this *cul-de-sac*.

Theoretical Underpinnings of "a Language"

The liberation from the concept of "a language" and monolingualism has not been possible because of the traditions in linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis and socio-political manoeuvres. Languages other than the socially empowered languages of the elite are generally used out of a sense of helplessness

rather than out of any conviction that languages learners bring into the classroom can be useful. Typical classroom transactions are crafted around the paradigm of *a textbook*, *a teacher* and *a language*. Students' levels of proficiency in any language remain miserable (ASER, 2023).

The traditional structural perspectives in linguistics (Bloomfield, 1933; Sapir, 1921) located in the techniques of segmentation and classification and behaviourist psychology located in the work of such psychologists as Pavlov (1849–1936) and Skinner (1904–1990) dominated language education before the Chomskyan intervention. Skinner's (1957) model of Operant Conditioning was extensively used in education till *verbal behaviour* was reviewed in Chomsky (1959). Most language teaching methods, materials, teacher capacity building and classroom processes were dominated by segmentation and classification and by S-R association.

Beginning with Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), many linguists and most teachers fell prey to the theory of interference and contrastive analysis and the teaching materials were often prepared based on such a comparison between the first and target languages. It was the work of Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1953) that provided a different lens on languages in contact where the focus was on familiarity with different languages rather than on the first language interfering with the acquisition of the second. Newmark (1966) insightfully pointed out that it was best not to interfere with the processes of language learning. Yet, most of the early methods of language teaching including the grammar-translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method among others were rooted in the concept of "a language," "a first language" and "a second language."

Chomsky (1959, 1987) argued that language acquisition was not at all a problem of S—R association and reinforcement and that it comes as naturally to humans as walking; the environment acts only as a trigger. He called the problem of language acquisition Plato's Problem *i. e.* how come given so little,

children acquire so much. Chomsky argued that this could be possible only because human beings are born with a genetically endowed innate language faculty and that this faculty was available irrespective of the number of languages one may acquire (Chomsky, 1975).

The sociolinguistic and social psychological perspectives on language brought into focus the human face of language learning; learners were after all living in different communities and had different attitudes and motivation for learning a given language. The work of Hymes (1971) focused on communicative competence suggesting that it was not enough to talk about the formal nature of a learner's output; it should also be communicatively appropriate. The work of several sociolinguists (Fasold, 1972; Labov, 1966, 2018; Trudgill, 1974; Wolfram & Fasold, 1974) demonstrated the inherent variability of language and argued that what were hitherto dismissed as stigmatised varieties of language were linguistically as systematic as the so-called standard and prestigious varieties. Labov himself served as an expert in a court before the U. S. Congress to testify the systematic nature of African American English. But in schools, the concept of "a language" reigned supreme and languages of learners were pushed under the rug.

Multilinguality

In addition to the innate biologically-determined UG, multilinguality subsumes the mental representation of the multiplicity of languages, fluidity of linguistic behaviour in today's life, and a concern for social justice. It does not exclude what are geerally dismissed as dialects, pidgins or creoles, sub-standard varieties or such forms of linguistic behaviour as sign language or the articulations of those who may have been termed as "mad" by the society.

At a formal level, the notion of multilinguality respects the constraints imposed by UG, not the ones formulated by linguists for "a language" or a set of languages (Chomsky, 1975, 1986). It works

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not in terms of the lexicon of an individual language but in terms of constituents that draw freely on what are construed as discrete languages. Even when confronted with such enormous diversity in human linguistic competence and behaviour, most scholars have not been able to walk out of the shadow of "a language". The world of geosemiotics, hoardings and peer-talk are most vigorous illustrations of transcending boundaries of a language and a script. Work on code-mixing and code switching (e. g. Kachru, 1978; Pfaff, 1979; Poplack, 1980; Sankoff et al., 1990; Myers-Scotton 1993, 2002) has been marked by a search for constraints which are often violated. It is not only that speakers frequently violate the determiner and conjunction constraint, they also violate such strongly asserted constraints as "structural equivalence" and "free morpheme" constraints (Agnihotri, 1987; Kak 1995; Agnihotri, 1998; Kak & Agnihotri, 1996; Auer, 2007).

When Labov (1971) was confronted with what he called "irregular mixture" of languages in Creole speech, he said that such irregular mixture of languages would defy any concept of "a system." As Muysken (2000) points out, speakers decide what they wish to do with their languages; their speech acts embody their attitudes and ideologies. A distinction is made by Bagga-Gupta and Dahlberg (2018) between the "emic" and "etic" perspectives on language. The "emic" perspective focuses on languaging where boundaries between languages and scripts are blurred; the "etic" unit remains the joy of the linguist and envy of political start-up.

More recently, linguists and educationists have responded to overwhelming linguistic fluidity in terms of such concepts as super diversity (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007), translanguaging (e.g. Canagarajah, 2011; García, 2009) and hyperlingualism (e. g. Pauwels, 2014). However, all these perspectives maintain the of concept "a language" intact. For example, Garcia (2009, p. 128) says, translanguaging "is the act performed by *bilinguals* of accessing different linguistic features or

various modes of what are described as *autonomous languages* in order to maximize communicative potential" (my italics). Language is being considered "autonomous" and only bilinguals can engage in translanguaging.

We need to appreciate the fact that those whom the linguists classify as "monolingual" engage in languaging all the time as they travel in trains and buses, meet at religious festivals and during rituals and festivities that accompany weddings across different areas. The unique gathering of millions of people at such religious festivals as the *Kumbh-mela* (Mehrotra & Vera, 2017) where millions of people arrive from across India and abroad during January-February every 6 or 12 years to have a holy dip at Prayagraj at the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati or the *kanwarias* from different regions walking together every year to get water from the Ganges for Lord Shiva's temple in their villages/ towns (Jha, 2024) are instances not of breakdowns in communication but illustrate the fluid and porous nature of what are construed as different languages. Such periodic communicative encounters are in fact the norm rather than exceptions across the world.

Human communication systems do not break down in such gatherings because variability in communicative behaviour is a facilitator rather than an obstruction in human interactions (Pandit, 1969, 1972). Hindi/ Urdu stands out as classic cases of multilinguality. Socio-politically, they stand out as two distinct languages; Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and Hindi is the official language of India. However, before 1947 when the Indian subcontinent was partitioned into two separate countries, most people in North India shared the same verbal repertoire, some writing it in Devanagari and others writing it in the Perso-Arabic script (Rai, 2001; Agnihotri, 2002). Across the world, languages have often been implicated in the nation-building exercise and single languages are imposed on communities that are marked by linguistic diversity (de Varennes, 1996).

Language in Education

Talking of language implies the whole education system as all forms of knowledge are coded and transmitted through language; new knowledge is also articulated through language. Consequently, it is imperative to provide the content knowledge through languages students will understand. Banishing their languages from the classroom ensures exclusion from the educational discourse. If we propose to make any changes in our education system and classroom practices, it is imperative that we abandon the concept of "a language" along with the purity and prestige that it has managed to get attached to its nomenclature. Named languages get associated with specific social groups and over time create uncalled-for binaries (Bahl, 2023) that deny the "yardstick of parity" to other named languages. One should therefore not be surprised that reports from across the world indicate low levels of achievement in language proficiency among many students. We need to adopt curriculum, syllabus, teaching materials and protocols for teacher capacity building and learner assessment that are rooted in multilinguality rather than "a language."

A focus on diversity and fluidity is in no way inconsistent with enhanced proficiency levels in the named languages. It also does not violate issues of identity since the verbal repertoire of all students is treated as equal. The privileged languages always come with a history that has isolated them from the communicative fluidity of routine activities and they are frozen in dictionaries, reference books, newspapers, journals, and literary works, grammars, and textbooks. The education system then falls into a vicious cycle of perpetuating the status-quo where the marginalised get engaged in a protracted pursuit of the elite (Fisher, 1958) but are never allowed to get there. As various contributions to Gupta et al. (2021) show, the students from marginalised backgrounds are kept out of the education system. Furthermore, the urban-rural divide gets accentuated further in such moments as COVID-19 or major economic crisis (Agnihotri, 2021, 2023).

Cummins (1984, 1989, 2021) has been concerned with bilingual proficiency, education of bilinguals and their linguistic assessment. He proposed the concept of Common Underlying Language Proficiency (CULP) which constituted the basis of both Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). He suggested that once the BICS level proficiency was ensured in a L2, the CALP level abilities tend to get transferred from L1. This proposal has an obvious implication that all education systems should try to first ensure academic proficiency in the languages of learners. Cummins (2021, 2022) also engages with Garcia's concept of translanguaging, unitary translanguaging theory, and crosslinguistic translanguaging theory.

Irrespective of whether you walk with Garcia or with Cummins, you need the concept of "a language" intact. Multilinguality rejects the concept of "a language" as it does not explain any of the following: linguistic similarities across languages, frequent fluidity across languages at all levels, language mixing that violates all hitherto proposed constraints on language-mixing, language-power nexus and the potential use of linguistic diversity in a classroom as a resource. Multilinguality subsumes all linguistic competence and performance. That is the only way to account for UG and our fluid linguistic behaviour, on the street, in the classroom, in the case of a celebrated poet or novelist, or social justice issues.

Multilinguality is also the only way to bring socio-political issues into the classroom for debate. As Anyon (2011) argues, it should not be our project to educate students in a kind of "neutral" space and then invite them to join political action. There is no neutral space; in fact, the hegemonic discourses of the school obliterate class, caste, colour and race issues to silence the underprivileged. The discursive patterns of the underprivileged need to be brought into the classroom and the issues of social justice examined through asset and power mapping (Anyon, 2011). The default multilinguality

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of classrooms is further accentuated by, as Herzog-Punzenberger et al. (2017) note,

> 1) the presence of historical non-dominant language groups, which are being revitalised; 2) the growing mobility between countries which results in a variety of new languages and skills in the classrooms; and 3) changing educational and labour market demands that favour multilingual and multi-literate citizens. (p. 5)

They also note that multilingualism is associated with cognitive, social, personal, and professional growth. Yet, this perspective on multilingualism is constrained by discrete L1+L2+L3 etc. Thus, multilinguality is to be seen as synchronically and diachronically pervasive.

Multilinguality in the Classroom

Languages then are not islands and discrete to themselves; they are fluid. They flourish as they cross boundaries. They follow indeed the constraints demanded by the UG but other than that it cannot be predicted from where the various constituents may come. Multilinguality allows to bring the verbal and cultural repertoire of learners into the classroom and enhance their confidence levels. With an increased focus on different languages in the classroom, learners gain the confidence to reflect on their own sociolinguistic situation, analyse patterns of language use in their community, spelling out in the process how their languages and culture suffer a constant threat of erasure, and also engage in a comparative cognitively challenging analysis of structural patterns in different languages noticing that their languages are as systematic as any other (Agnihotri, 2007, 2010, 2014).

There is a need to synchronize our theory and practice. Dewey (1915/ 2019) was uncomfortable with a split between theory and practice and between materials and methods. It is true that students learn through transmission of knowledge and their experiences, which are rooted in their societies and communicative encounters, but they learn as much through their innate creativity and experimentation. What will be the nature of the

curriculum, materials, methods, teacher education and classroom processes that are rooted in multilinguality? None of them can be conceptualized as a closed box complete unto itself. Their nature will parallel the nature of conceptualizing language as multilinguality.

Curriculum

A language curriculum based on multilinguality will have its goals defined in a matrix of universal human values of justice, equality, inclusion and freedom. It will treat the languages, howsoever unwieldly, mixed or non-normative they may be characterised as, and knowledge systems, howsoever deviant they may be from the textbooks, on equal footing and will attempt to use them as resources for negotiating more knowledge through dialogue. Work privileging learners' funds of knowledge (Wolf, 1966) has shown that community knowledge can be an important part of education. Deficit theorizing blames the underachievement of oppressed and ethnic minority groups in schools on perceived deficiencies related to minority students themselves, their families, and their cultures (Bishop, 2001; Moll et al., 1992).

By using the lens of multilinguality, we can leverage the funds of knowledge learners bring to school from their communities and theorize from the classroom practices rooted in them (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Throughout time, scholars (Cummins, 1984, 1989; Cummins and Swain, 1986; Garcia & Wei, 2014) have advocated a bilingual approach in the classroom. NEP 2020 of India also says: "Teachers will be encouraged to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction" (India, MHRD, 2020, p. 13). Such bilingual approaches inevitably diminish other languages present in the classroom.

It is eminently possible to use all the languages available in the classroom as resources for language

proficiency and cognitive growth. The curricular framework should aim at fostering positive attitudes among students towards all articulations in language available to learners. It includes their own languages and the languages of their peers and of power; it is equally important to focus on the languages of the material world, the linguistic landscape around the community from which students come and the language of emails and other digital messaging. The easily available digital platforms make it possible to access all kinds of texts, verbal or visual, to all students and teachers. It should also be ensured that classes are not sanitized evading issues of state policy and injustice. For example, the TLF of India, sustained for decades without any rationale, has not resulted either in higher levels of language proficiency or cognitive abilities of a higher order. Similarly, the American policies of No Child Left Behind or Race to the Top have not brought about any socio-economic transformation (Anyon, 2011).

Syllabi

A syllabus that will follow the above curricular framework will not look like the currently available syllabi lists that contain a set of discrete objectives, items to be covered and methods to be used. A syllabus (such as the NCERT syllabus for English Class VIII —NCERT, 2005) is generally laid out in terms of its objectives, tasks a learner will be able to carry out after the middle school, language items i.e. grammar topics such as determiners, voice and speech that will be covered and methods and techniques such as role play, recitation, debates etc. that will be used as methods and techniques.

A comparable list is prepared for each language with its own specific textbooks. Since in the case of India, there may be three or four languages involved, same issues are covered several times. Classroom teachers and students have no role to play here; nor is there any place for different languages that are available in each classroom. Most of all what is missing is a cross-linguistic perspective

on language. Why should one not begin with languages learners bring to the classroom? A syllabus that is rooted in the kind of curriculum outlined above would evolve in each school differently using languages, literature, and folklore of the learners as resources. There will not be separate grammar and literature classes for each language but only Language classes and Literature classes in which the languages and literatures of the learners will be privileged (Agnihotri, 2009, 2012, 2021, 2022). The structure and contours of the syllabus will constantly evolve as the texts are brought by the students and teachers; they are not handed down as a pre-packaged set of lessons in a textbook which leaves very limited space for the creativity of learners and teachers. It is through such a process that learners will gain autonomy and become independent readers and writers, reading new texts, and writing creative pieces. They will be able to draw upon community's funds of knowledge and bring texts into the classroom that would otherwise be either forbidden or treated with disdain by teachers. They will be able to examine language structure across languages. They will notice, for example, that sentences, irrespective of which language they belong to, show agreement between subject and verb in some way and that Noun Phrases and Verb Phrases behave in comparable ways across languages. Such activities will open new paths of rational enquiry which must be at the centre of all syllabi.

Sociological discussions at such points are of paramount importance. Leaners from privileged backgrounds will begin to see that languages of the underprivileged which they had so far been taught to treat as inferior are as systematic as their own languages; learners from minority backgrounds will notice that they have no reason to be ashamed of their funds of knowledge. They will together through scaffolding and in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1934/ 1962, 1976) begin to explore the socio-political reasons for privileging certain languages and cultures and stigmatising others. With the help of the community, community leaders, artists and artisans, local

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funds of knowledge and languages of learners will become an integral part of the syllabus.

Teacher Education

By recognising multilinguality, teachers learn to leverage the diverse linguistic repertoires of students as resources for cognitive and social development. Multilinguality creates spaces for teachers to be empowered to become agents of social change. As Batra (2005) argues, NCF 2005 fails to engage with the agency of the school teacher which is a necessary condition for the teacher to participate in the processes of ensuring social justice. Languages teachers bring to the capacity building programmes will be treated as resources and used for comparative linguistic analysis for their cognitive growth. They will then not be just "meek dictators" (Kumar, 1990) in the classrooms but become agents of change undertaking similar exercises with students.

12   As in the case of students, we tend to treat teachers as empty receptacles (as they then treat students) who are ready to consume modules institutions of higher education have prepared in utter isolation from the context and cognitive abilities of teachers. Secondly, we need to examine why certain patently wrong information/ concepts and stereotypes about language (and other domains of knowledge) get transmitted from one generation to another without any reflection. A few examples will clarify the issue. Teachers (and hence students) in general are taught that there are five vowels in English, namely, "a, e, i, o, u" without ever clarifying that these are only "letters" and that there are 21 vowel sounds in English; the number may vary depending on the variety one is talking about. The placement of articles is also taught in terms of "a, e, i, o, u" ("an" before them and "a" elsewhere); the set of expressions such as "an honest man" and "a university" are taught as exceptions.

If instead of this we can share with teachers the fact that across languages, vocalic sounds, unlike consonantal sounds, can be produced for a long

time, many problems will get resolved. Teachers and therefore eventually students would be able to figure out the often arbitrary/ changing relationship between script and sounds. It will become clear that speech changes must faster than script; since script cannot keep pace with speech, several writing representations that now appear arbitrary may not have been so earlier. Consider the two sets of words: "cut, shut, but etc" and "put, pull, bull etc"; the same letter "u" has two different sounds in the two sets, an "a" like sound in the first and an "u" sound in the second set; in the past, and in the North of England, even today, the two sets have only the "u" sound. There is no "put/ but" problem in Yorkshire!

There is another stereotype that is transmitted from one generation to another. It makes people believe that there is an inevitable tie between a given language and its script i.e. there is "a language-a script" equation. Teachers and students believe that English, for example, can be written only in the Roman script and Hindi only in the Devanagari script. A simple demonstration in the teacher education programmes can rectify this stereotype and as we will notice in the discussion on classroom processes, such an awareness can constitute the basis for undertaking many cognitively interesting tasks. Focusing on the innate potential of learners and on the community's funds of knowledge is central to teacher capacity building. Early experiments in this area were undertaken during 1980s and 1990s in Cape Town, South Africa (see Achmat, 1992) and at Eklavya in Madhya Pradesh, India (Agnihotri et al., 1994). The primary education programme (called Prashika) of Eklavya remains a benchmark even today (n. d.). The capacity building programmes rooted in multilinguality were undertaken at various other organizations such as Language and Learning Foundation (2022, 2023, 2024).

The spaces of teacher education are kept as sanitized as the schools. Issues of linguistic and social injustice are supposed to be kept out. In Agnihotri

(2009), I examine various stereotypes teachers and students nourish about language and examine the ways in which we can address them. These stereotypes among others include issues concerning language and dialect; Sanskrit being the mother of all Indian (some even maintain, all the world) languages; and errors as major obstacles in learning. Bruner (1966) reminds us that when children give what we identify as wrong answers, they may be answering another question. Our project should be to identify that question. Bruner also tells us that students have the capacity to engage in a variety of activities that involve enactive (dance, music), symbolic (language, poetry) and iconic (painting, sculpture) aspects simultaneously.

Teacher education programmes should enable teachers to create activities that would engage students along the iconic, symbolic, and enactive dimensions, located as much in the community's funds of knowledge as in the new knowledge that is planned to be shared with the learners. While working with the teacher-students, linguists alone cannot do justice to this project. We will need to invite scholars from other fields of knowledge such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, education, history etc. to be on board. Like the syllabi for the students, the programme for teacher education will evolve in each cycle; teachers will not be following a straight-jacket module that lasts decades without their active participation. Language is what helps teachers and students to map the trajectory from the enactive to the symbolic. It is through language that you learn that the world is there even when it is not there (in front of your eyes).

Teaching Materials

As compared to teacher education, agencies concerned with schools spend a lot of time, energy, and money on producing textbooks and Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs). The paradigm suggested by Elphinstone for producing textbooks in India in his Minute of 1823 has not changed substantially today. Based on several studies, Busan and Krashen (2020) show that reading comprehension reduces significantly when students are tested on the texts prescribed for their examination. They should be reading texts they really enjoy; the focus on the prescribed texts, in fact, reduces comprehension levels. The indigenous oral and written texts students may bring into the classroom from their community's funds of knowledge can constitute authentic reading and teaching materials. Most of all, their languages can be used as resources for cultivating analytical skills and rational enquiry; such privileging of their languages also leads to enhanced levels of social tolerance (Agnihotri, 1995, 2007, 2010). Languages that are kept out of the classroom tend to become endangered over time; with the loss of languages, we often lose a whole cultural and knowledge system. Computers and technology have now made it possible to make these languages far more easily accessible in the classrooms. However, the access to digital material may remain limited, particularly in the underprivileged world. We need to create an ecosystem of reading where age and grade-appropriate books are available in plenty and where leaners can keep and share books they like.

Classroom Processes

The kind of comprehensible input in anxiety free situations that Krashen (1982, 1985) referred to is possible only if the languages of learners in the classroom are respected. Multilinguality that is easily accessible in the homes of the learners and in the geosemiotic spaces around them can be brought into the classroom and analysed not just for its intricate and dynamic articulation in terms of words and phrases but also in terms of its use of colours and layout. A detailed analysis of some hoardings and billboards in the material world are available in Scollon and Scollon (2003), McCormick and Agnihotri (2009), Agnihotri and McCormick (2010) and Vashisht and Agnihotri (2015) among others. These studies clearly show that the languages and scripts of the geosemiotic space cannot be understood in terms

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of "a language"; they make sense only in terms of multilinguality. Badrinathan (2022) shows that an exploration of the learners' Linguistic Landscape contributes to language enhancement at a conceptual and performance level. Kaushik (2019) also shows how classroom processes built on the languages and experiences of learners can be creative engaging teachers and children collectively in talking, reading, and writing. She says: "multilinguality is not merely about providing labels to things in different languages. Language Experience Approach (LEA) embraces the use of non-school languages not just in their oral forms but also in reading and writing" (p. 46).

When all classrooms are constituted by multilinguality and when we are ethically and socially committed to give space to the voice of each child, there is no question of treating what has been termed "multi-dialectism" or "non-operational languages" as problems in any classroom. White (1990) tells us that an education system which seeks autonomy for only some debarring others is unethical. The work of Dkhar and Kakoty (2023) is an effective demonstration of why Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is not possible in areas like the Northeast. There are over 200 languages spoken in the North East; of these only 11 languages are used as medium of instruction. Unless we adopt pedagogy rooted in multilinguality as a norm, we will not be able to do justice to the languages of learners. For example, if instead of teaching singular-plural in each language separately, we handle the issue of number in different languages in the classroom through peer group work, students will find the task interesting and engaging. They have all the data they need in their minds. They can also be easily trained in writing all the languages in a single script so that all data is accessible to all the students, and, also the teacher, who is now himself a learner (Achmat, 1992). The metalinguistic awareness and cognitive enrichment such activities lead to are now well documented (see for example, Honda and O'Neil, 2008; Mangla and Agnihotri, 2011; Agnihotri, 2022).

Assessment

The kind of threatening environment all testing situations create for the learner is against all principles of knowledge construction and it should be summarily dismissed. What is fundamental to learning is that learners should be able to defend their claims, individually or collectively irrespective of the languages they employ to do so. Issues should be formulated in terms of multilinguality and should be examined in that frame as well. Can we consider to what extent students can play a role in the processes of assessment? Consider issues of metalinguistic awareness through analysis that is not bound by the concept of "a language". Consider the teacher sharing the following two simple sentences in the classroom:

1. Mohan is playing football.
2. Mohan is not playing football.

It will not be difficult to explain to the students that 2 is the negative of 1. Task of the teacher is over. She can retire to the back of the classroom. The teacher is also a learner now. Students are asked to translate these sentences into all the languages that are available in the classroom. Discussions in the peer groups will bring out the metalinguistic fact that the negative in most or even in all the languages available in the classroom stays close to the Verb Phrase. Many such examples may be found in Agnihotri (2007, 2010, 2016). Agnihotri (2000a) locates teacher's space in the classroom and Agnihotri (2000b) shows what can potentially be done with a text. Online methods of evaluation may be used for assessment at all levels but these should not be in the form of MCQs and other similar formats. They must encourage the participants/ students to explore reading material and talk to each other in peer groups. Assessment should explicitly prioritise learners' reasoning processes and problem-solving skills over rote correctness, emphasising exploration, multilingual engagement, and metalinguistic awareness.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have suggested that the state of our language teaching and education is not likely to improve unless we recognize that multilinguality is constitutive of being human and we privilege the languages of the marginalised in the teaching-learning process while raising issues of social justice at all levels, irrespective of whether we refer to the global South or North. I have also tried to show that it is eminently possible to locate all aspects of teaching in multilinguality. There is an urgent need to recognize the innate potential of the learner, value her experiences in the community and her surroundings, and locate as far as possible our curriculum and syllabi, teaching-learning materials, classroom processes, and teacher capacity building programmes in multilinguality.

This may herald a new world order that would be marked by peace and harmony (Agnihotri, 2014). We should be prepared for institutional resistance in this innovative project as all institutions of education and teacher capacity development have so far been governed by privileging a handful of languages of the dominating elite under the concept of "a language." It must be acknowledged that limited amount of work has been done in the implementation of the idea of multilinguality in different aspects of education including language acquisition, cognitive growth, inclusion of community's funds of knowledge, development of curricula, syllabi, and materials and assessment procedures.

Acknowledgements

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