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# Possible Arguments Against a Multilingual Policy

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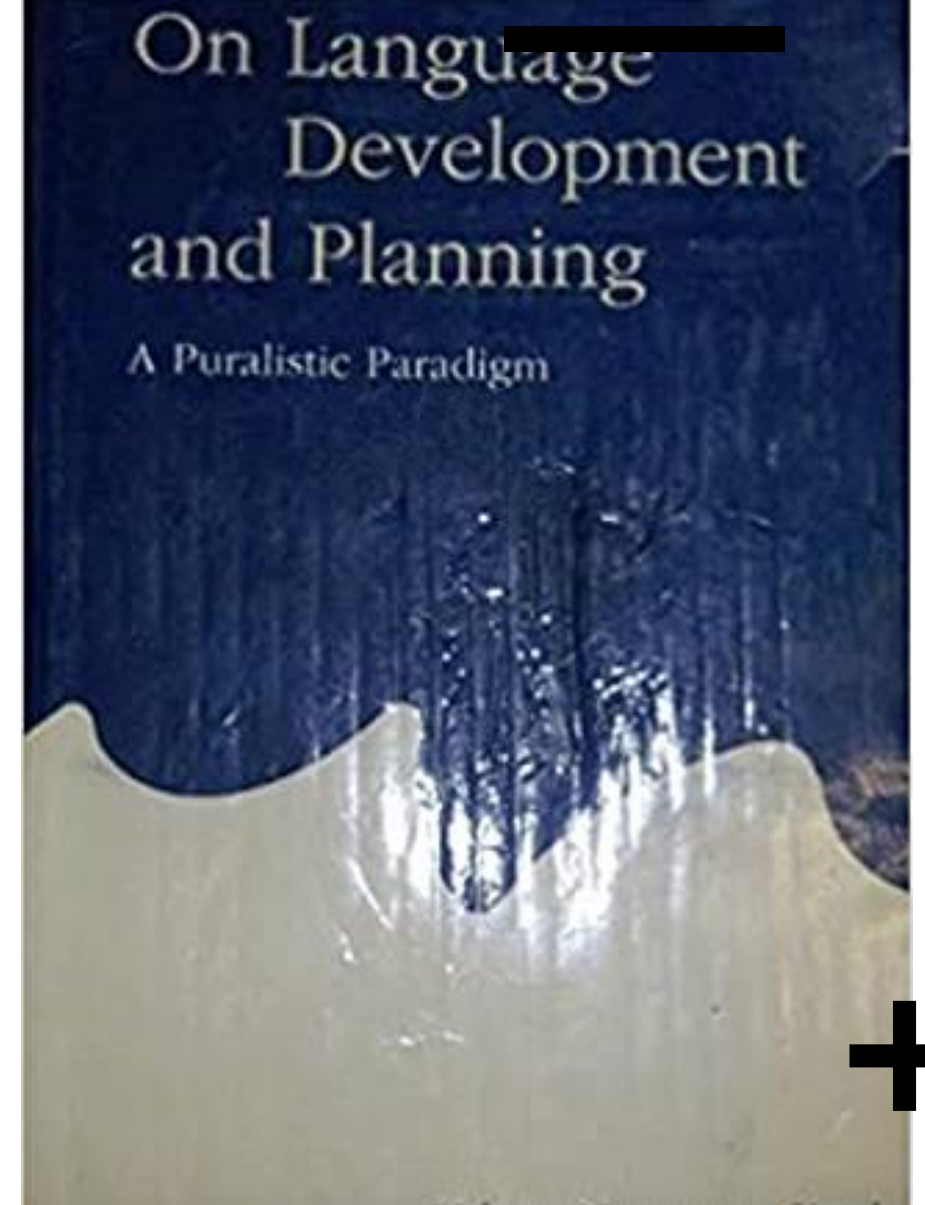
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# The Context

- In my book, based on a series of talks at the IAS, Shimla in 1989, titled '*On Language Development and Planning: A Pluralistic Paradigm*' (Munshiram Manoharlal, 1992), I had proposed a model of language development that drew strength from the typical third world postcolonial context of 'Multilingualism.'
- There, I argued Multilingualism to be an asset rather than a burden.
- But we still hear from various quarters that plurality of languages and cultures is the root cause of under-development.
- In this paper, my thrust will be to explore what could be possible arguments against a multilingual or Pluralistic language policy. Why is it that one nation state should have mainly one national and official language.



# EU & UNESCO on Multilingualism

- Contrast the **Monistic position** with what various other agencies have so far propagated.
- For instance, we are aware that both EU and UNESCO documents and websites shower praise on '**Multilingual Policy**' being followed in many nation-states.
- The basic thrust is that “**languages unite people, render other countries and their cultures accessible, and strengthen intercultural understanding.**”
- Also, experts such as Nancy Hornberger (2002: 27) explain why multilingual policies “**open up new world of possibility for oppressed indigenous and immigrant languages and their speakers.**”
- My talk is like a **soliloquy** that tries to unearth the benefits of ‘homogenization’ and ‘globalization.’ **Are there benefits that override the advantages with or justifications for a Pluralistic Policy?**



- To summarize, **my earlier work (Singh 1989/1992) was an attempt to present an alternative view on language planning problems from an essentially Indian perspective.**
- There, the arguments were based on the assumption that **problems facing the developing nations were of a different order than those faced by the developed polities.**
- It is, therefore, necessary to
  - (i) visualize a different **typology of language problems,**
  - (ii) redefine the **concept of language problems,**
  - (iii) sharpen our understanding of what can be **possible planning goals** and decide on **strategies to be applied** to nations that are linguistically heterogeneous and culturally multieistic, and
  - (iv) finally, suggest a **pluralistic planning paradigm** that can accommodate both monistic and pluralistic goals of language development.







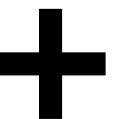
- In all, to my mind, **nine possible arguments** could be culled out from hints, comments, talks and unspoken beliefs:
- **One** is (i) the cost factor of a multilingual policy, relating our choices with **economics of language planning**;
- (ii) Then, there is an issue to check: Are we to understand ‘**multilingual**’ as a **sum-total of several monolinguals** in one person;
- (iii) What is its connect with the ‘**Ideal**’ **speaker-listener** of the Generative Grammar paradigm, or with the the **ideal competence or intuition** of a ‘**native speaker**’ or a ‘**native like command**’? Does that suggest preference for a Monolingual Policy?
- (iv) Language Studies have had the terms ‘**Standard**’ vs. ‘**Deviations.**’ Also, a “**Pure speech**” vs. “**Vulgar tongues.**” Do they argue in favour of doing away with what is impure or deviant?
- **Let me elaborate on these four first.**

# The Cost-Benefit Question

- We know that the **management** of a **multilingual space** is hugely **expensive and messy**.
- What a government could do by working on graded teaching materials in **one language** would now have to be done for so **many languages**.
- Thus, getting the **researchers to work on gradation or material developers sensitive to the lexis, sentential patterns, rhyming structure, and imageries** associated with particular cultures related to these languages would not be easy.
- Similarly, one would need to **train the teachers** who would have to face a multilingual classroom.
- **Decisions** on their strategies and actual day-to-day operations **at the ground levels will not be easy** to handle.



**But the moot question is: Do we erase other languages only because of the cost involved?**



# Is 'Multilingual' a Sum-Total of Many Monolinguals?

- One could argue that a 'Multilingual' is essentially a sum-total of several monolinguals in one person.
- Pursuing this line of argument, if a school teaches an individual in one of the many (or several) languages she knows, even if that language is not her mother tongue, it should be fine.
- After all, her 'multilingual self' will replicate the knowledge in the other languages she knows.
- So, the education managers would argue that if a student has a working knowledge of the other language or medium of instruction, let's go ahead.
- But when someone is educated in one's mother language, acquiring another one or two languages in course of higher education could give her a near-native competence in the other tongues. One may even use those languages as library languages – to read up or gather knowledge.
- But if the student has to 'perform' in those languages academically, from the beginning, there would be an unfair and stiff competition from the mother-tongue speakers of such languages.
- This Grosjean (2008) calls a 'Monolingual bias,' evident in such multilingual learning situations.
- There, one assumes that monolingualism is the ideal and default method of human communication (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011), whereas in reality that is a bad policy decision.



# Who is a Native Speaker?

- On the question of 'Ideal' speaker-listener of the Generative Grammar paradigm, **the native speaker 'is expected' to have the ideal competence and intuition** in one's own language.
- Yet, **in real life**, we all have experiences of so-called native speakers of a speech: **they have very little intuition**, which comes out while making grammatical and acceptability judgments.
- The whole field of Second Language Acquisition is willing to fall into this **trap of Comparative Fallacy**, as Bley Vroman (1983) warns us.
- The problem is in the practice of taking the idealized competence of native speakers as the **benchmark for investigating linguistic development** in a second (or additional) language.
- Andisheh Saniei (1911: 74) makes an interesting observation in 'Who is a native speaker?' He says:  
"**...native speakers do not always speak according to the rules of their standard national languages. They display regional, occupational, generational, and social class-related ways of talking that make the notion of an ideal native speaker controversial.**"
- It is often the case that a **so-called non-native speaker teaching a language in a formal setting** for a long time is able to help children eliminate all those styles and registers of the target language that display marks of a class or a particular dialectal space.
- There is a misplaced idea of a **"completely homogenous speech community"** which **is a fiction**.
- In an interesting review of the book *Intonation, Perception, and Language* by Philip Lieberman (1968) in the *Journal of Linguistics*, Vanderslice says that the **native command** of a language would imply that one has a **control of all heterogenous structures of the given language** as well.



# What is a 'Pure' or 'Standard' Speech?



– The terms **'Standard' vs 'Deviations'** in language studies and the idea of accepted speech form all flow from this line of argumentation against Pluralism.

– As time evolves and as Sociolinguistics gains more maturity, one begins to **doubt the grammarian's myths of 'Pure' and 'Standard' language.**

– The system had been telling us that **monolinguals were pure and multilingual were somewhat deviant.** The blame goes to the Tower of Babel perhaps because the **Gods** in all scriptures are monolingual who **speak in a completely unambiguous speech form.**

– **The ambiguities, synonyms, and confusions are a creation of linguistic tradition that continues to borrow from the other tongues constantly.**

– Farah Akbar (2013: 43) makes a very pertinent comment here: **"Multilingualism, in and of itself, is no panacea, and is always bounded contextually** for the multilingual vis-à-vis their existing, current, and future language experiences and expectations, as well as the functions their language varieties may play in their daily lives."



– It is much safer to assume **linguistic plurality to be a natural phenomenon.**

# The Other Issues



## Learning Time Issue & Diversity leading to

- (v) Wouldn't there be a **wastage of learning time, efforts or talents** to master in **multiple fields** or **many languages**, and not be "focused." If so, why this policy?
- (vi) The relationship between **Multilingual Policy** and the **questions asked by the surveyors** of all hues shows that there is an inherent fallacy here: How can you count 'one' and 'many' at the same time? Or, is there a demonstrated bewilderment towards the **linguistic diversity** prevailing in many nation-states "**as a form of chaos requiring taming** through the drive towards classification' (Bhatti 2015, as quoted in Kulkarni-Joshi & Hasnain 2020)," as in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India?
- (vii) Many minority language **parents are skeptical** about the intent of a Multilingual Policy. They are also hostile towards the idea of a '**Public Multilingualism**' (Stephen Mey 2014);





# Counter-arguments: Policy Options

- (viii) How are **freedom and democracy** possible to be guaranteed in a monistic world? [Answer: Negative]
- Should, or shouldn't there be a **respectable place** for ideas based on '**narrow nationalism**'? [Tagore's Answer: Negative]
- Finally, (ix) what is the connect between the models we choose and the guarantee for the smaller language speakers in 'wealth creation' of any type? [Answer: No Guarantee]
- Could we store information and knowledge in smaller languages and retrieve from their own languages?
- Or, could it be easily done from the other-tongues, as many multinational houses do? Many mass producers believe in that.

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# Evaluating Merits of a Multilingual Policy

- Recall that in celebration of plurality and orality, Saussure took a position that writing has a corrupting influence on speech, and hence in his scheme of things, *the Oral* has primacy over *the Written*.
- In his classic essay ‘Plato’s Pharmacy,’ Derrida argued that Plato had a deep mistrust of writing, influenced by his teacher Socrates, who made a virtue of writing nothing.
- Once again, the basis of their belief was that the written word had a corrupting influence on spoken language and, through that, on the “**truth-seeking exercise of human reason**”.



# Smaller Speech Communities & Writing

- Is it a curse for the smaller languages and dialects to remain unwritten?
- If so, what does it entail? On the contrary, one could also ask: Is it or isn't it a boon for dialects and speech varieties to remain largely spoken? The spontaneity and originality lied only in the Oral, and not when we pin it down to writing.
- Must all “languages” be chiselled, polished, perfected, and written down, removing all traces of spontaneity and outbursts of instant thoughts of the indigene? Is that the ultimate height that a Speech could strive to achieve?
- Recall Ghalib: *To be consumed by ocean is the droplet's ecstasy - Ishrat-e qatraa hai daryaa m'e fanaa ho jaanaa?*
- But it is also true that there is a joy of being able to put out our thoughts on visual & virtual spaces, or in being able to express one's own feelings or wishes.
- More and more languages are slowly coming into the orbit of the literate world.





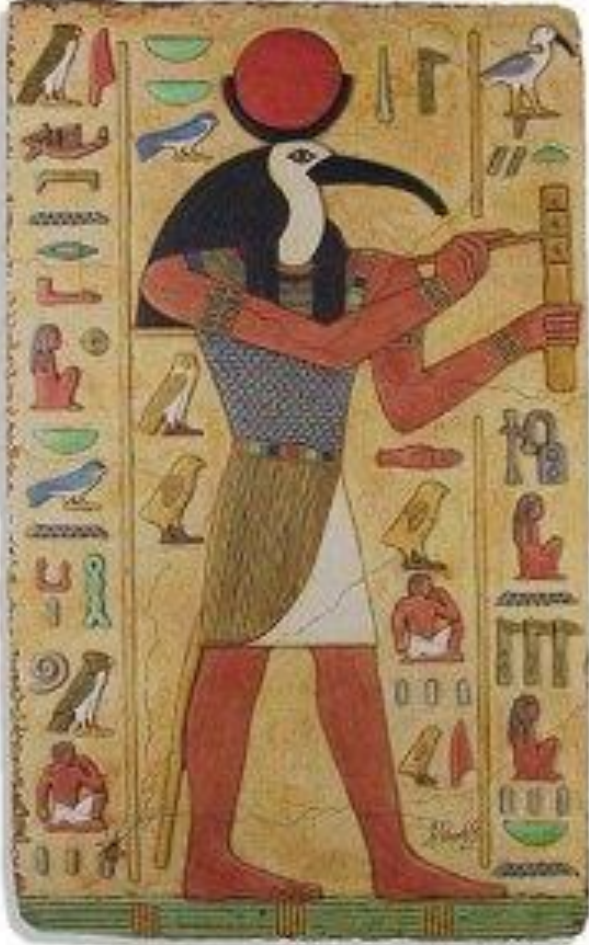
# From Derrida

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida **first admits** that speech/writing opposition was central to all binary distinctions - between nature and culture, philosophy and literature, reason and rhetoric, concept and metaphor, male and female.

Then, he **claims** that spoken language would always presuppose the possibility of writing which is destined to be the only way human speech passes through, from being natural to being 'cultural'.

It is parallel to Rousseau saying that that the French music of his day had become unduly elaborate, ingenious, complex, and 'civilized' (artificial), whereas the Italian music of the time was still close to heart, full of passion, spontaneous, and authentic with intense vocal gestures.

The binary distinction Rousseau was hinting at was between being 'Melodious' and 'Harmonious.'



## Plato's Pharmacy

<https://lillith19702004.wordpress.com/2011/10/20/platos-pharmacist-thoth/>



# Writing - a Technology? A Tool for Oppression?

- Could 'Writing' be called the destiny of Speech, or was it only a 'technique' of rendering the Spoken Word as it appeared “to have been evolved from an extension of *Picture Signs* (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).
- A time comes when a Speech Community resorts to the technology of Writing that replicates – albeit inaccurately, what is being said, or what could have been said.
- Otherwise the words would remain submerged under the millions of thought particles in our mind.
- But Rousseau and others were highly suspicious of 'Writing' as they thought it to be “an instrument of oppression because its various powers and capacities ... exercised by the few at the expense of the many.” (Christopher Norris: 'Derrida and Orality: Grammatology revisited'

<http://www2.lingue.unibo.it/acume/acumedvd/zone/research/essays/norris.htm>).



# Should we leave Smaller Languages at the mercy of fate?

- In 1909, Feb 20, the Italian poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti penned 'I manifesti del futurismo', or '**Futurist Manifesto**' where – at the turn of a century– he advocated *rejection of the past* to bring in **modernisation & cultural rejuvenation** – in celebration of speed, machinery, violence, youth and industry.
- The Futurist Manifesto said things in 1909 when one could neither imagine the two World Wars nor the Russian Revolution, but this was an attempt to push the limits of literature (and languages) to accept modernity.
- Unfortunately, it also eulogised the hygienic properties of wars and violence through which cleansing and purification happen.
- Even if we do not agree with it 100 years later, we cannot leave the smaller speech forms at the mercy of fate.
- All languages, including the indigenous languages, need to taste the fruits of development.



# New Manifesto of the Unwritten II

- The calm and composed life of the '*bhadralok*' in India penning insipid poetry far removed from reality, or a relaxed civilized existence of the gentry in Europe perpetuating its colonial rule in different parts of the world before 1900 AD - gave rise to such texts and attitudes.
- But a more relevant question today would be: **Would the new Manifesto of the Oral Literature like to create new genres and narrative structures in defiance of the ways known so far in the written world?**
- Also, since all unwritten languages give primacy to speaking or emitting meaningful noises, all their creativity have to do with deployment and manipulation of noises and performances accompanying them?
- What could one say about the art and aesthetics of noises?
- The new kinds of poetry, songs, films and theatres are all displaying such potentialities.
- Shouldn't a Pluralistic Policy encourage this novelty? The answer from my end would be: **An overwhelming 'Yes'!**



# Multilingual Policy Planning: Recommendations

- All languages, including the Indigenous and numerically weaker languages have right to receive the fruits of modernization. Our policy planners would have to make them technology enabled.
- New modes, channels and platforms be made available for indigenous languages to show or make heard their noises, voices, melodies and visuals – usually unknown to the so-called ‘civilized’ languages.







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