RESEARCH NOTE

PLANNING MAITHILI FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN NEPALESE CONTEXT

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"To plan language is to plan society"   Cooper, R.L. (1989:182)

Language situation in Nepal

There are various versions regarding the exact number of languages spoken in Nepal. The Population Census (2001) mentions 92 languages spoken in the country, while Malla (1989) and Toba (1992) enlist 70 and Grimes (2005) estimates 126 languages. However, it is a fact that the country has the possession of a lot of variety of languages. Out of 92 languages recorded in the Population Census (2001), 13 languages are foreign ones, mostly spoken in India (Yadav 2002: 140). Among the rest, Nepali (48.61% speakers), Maithili (12.30% speakers), Bhojpuri (7.53% speakers) and Awadhi (2.47% speakers) from Indo-Aryan, and Newari (3.63% speakers) and Limbu (1.47% speakers) from Tibeto-Burman language families have a long tradition of written literature with a great deal of codification while the others are uncodified. Some languages spoken in Nepal are also found spoken in India with a high degree of mutual intelligibility. The two important languages of Nepal- Nepali and Maithili- have also got the constitutional status equal to the other 20 languages of India like Oriya, Tamil, etc, all being included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India.

As languages are potential societal resources, those spoken in the country need to be planned and mobilized properly in order to achieve the goals towards educating the citizenry, accelerating the economic pace and promoting the democratic processes and national cohesion. If, only in the education sector, the indigenous languages are exploited fully, they can eliminate illiteracy, spread mass education and achieve the goals of "Education for All" (MOES 2003: 4) by virtue of which all kinds of national development can be secured. Such a language planning will ensure "people from different language backgrounds" to "have equal access to the national system" (Eastman 1983: 35) and will also "permit them creative fulfilment" (Pattanayak 1976), resulting in effective participatory democracy and social inclusion.

Since the unification of Nepal in the 18th century, only Nepali language has been protected and promoted by the state to develop as a lingua franca. Under "One nation-one language" policy, it has been made the sole medium of communication for administration, education, mass media, etc. The pursuance of a monistic, monoligual policy in a multi-lingual, multi-cultured

and multi-ethnic country like Nepal has hindered its all-round development. The majority of the speakers of non-Nepali languages, especially, the people of lower castes and ethnic groups, find themselves linguistically handicapped in entering the threshold of education and, in job opportunities, they 'feel discriminated (Toba 2002) on account of the monolingual policy of the state. In mass media, too, the function of other languages is a mere cipher.

Further, owing to the monolingual policy more than 60 indigenous languages are on the verge of endangerment with varying degrees and some are even on the verge of extinction. People, mainly in the hills, shift to the dominant language, Nepali, for education, job prospects, wider communication, prestige value, etc., causing their language loss. Out of 6703 languages estimated by Grimes (2000) spoken in the world, Krauss (1992: 7) guesstimates that 90% of them will die by the end of 21st century. Nepal is not immune from this global trend. The endangered and the seriously endangered ('moribund') languages of Nepal have to be conserved from obsolescence because "we need diversity", because 'languages express identity and are repositories of history" and "human knowledge" and are also "interesting in themselves" (Crystal 2000: 27-67)

Thus, the persistent neglect of all other native languages except Nepali by the state has created unhealthy conditions in all spheres of national life. There is a need to shift from the policy of linguistic monism to the policy of linguistic pluralism targeted at the promotion of all kinds of indigenous languages. In the context of Maithili, a well-documented language with a rich literary tradition, occupying second place after Nepali in terms of number of speakers in the country, it is absolutely necessary to identify the viable domains for its extended use and to develop, accordingly, its corpus (form/structure) for the effective function in those domains. In another word, for making a coherent, deliberate policy for Maithili, it is essential to focus on both its 'status' and 'corpus' planning. Though some sociolinguistic study is required to determine the authentic status and corpus planning of Maithili, some assumptions can tentatively be made on them.

Status Planning of Maithili
Besides, family and intra-community's communication, the three functions-educational, official and mass media- mentioned in the list of language functions identified by Stewart (1968:531-545) and Cooper (1989:118-119) are very central in which the use of Maithili should be allocated.

Educational: Maithili has not got the due place in education because of which even most educated Maithili speakers are, ironically, illiterate in their own language. For some years, Maithili, as an optional subject, has been introduced at the primary education but because of the lack of textbooks, teachers and proper management, its implementation has been very weak and

ineffective, inspite of the growing demand for it. At the secondary level, too, Maithili language is optional. It is selected as one of the requisites for the completion of secondary level education but at the same time student are likely to opt for subjects like Mathematics, in which case they will not be able to opt Maithili language. And, at higher secondary levels, Maithili is not the part of curriculum, however there is the provision of Maithili being an optional subject at Proficiency Certificate levels and Bachelor of Arts in the faculty of Humanities. At the same time, it has been found that students are not interested considering Maithili as one of the required subject to get through the given level, as, they think, there no bright future after studying Maithili. Hence, there is the need to re-organise, strengthen and extend the teaching of Maithili from the primary to the university levels.

Inspite of the decades old recommendation of UNESCO (1951) and those of the World Conference of Education for All (1990: 2) and World Bank policy paper on primary education (1990:38), supporting the view that the mother tongue is psychologically, culturally and pedagogically the most appropriate and effective medium of instruction for primary education, there has been much dilly-dallying on the part of the government in implementing it. It is, now, very urgent to utilize Maithili as a medium at the primary level of schools of Maithili speaking community. This will make education accessible to all sections of this speech community, especially, the lower section and will help achieve the objectives of Education For All. At the later stage, Maithili as a medium of instruction can be extended from primary to secondary level and the rest.

From primary to higher education, either compulsory Nepali should be split into two parts, one part having the half weightage for compulsory Nepali and the other part with the half weightage for other indigenous languages of the students' choice or there should be a separate course for the students to choose one language compulsorily from the various indigenous ones. This kind of arrangement, found in India too, will offer the students for all streams including PCL Science and Management to study their mother tongue. In such a course, only those indigenous languages which are codified and have the literary tradition should be included. In the case of those indigenous languages which are uncodified and are facing endangerment of varying scales, they have to be documented and codified and be provided with revitalizing measures to bring them back to a 'safe' position by acting on the proposals put forward by Fishman (1991:87), Crystal (2000: 127-143), Yamamoto (1998: 213) and others and when they gain the strength, their function should extend to the domain of education also.

Official: During the Middle Ages, Maithili had the privilege of being the official language of larger Mithila under the Karnat dynasty ruling from the capital Simrangarh of the present Bara district. Considering its enhanced

prestige, even the kings of the Sen dynasty of Makwanpur and of the Malla dynasty of Kathmandu valley duly recognised Maithili as an official language. But, with the unification of Nepal by Prithvinarayan Shah, its position was undermined and, under the policy of "one language- one nation", its function as an official language got prescribed. Even during the periods of democratic regime, its position did not ameliorate. The newly promulgated Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) has ordained the use of all indigenous languages, including Maithili, at the local development bodies and local government offices, directing them to get the documents written in non-Nepali languages translated into Nepali also. This is, surely, a step forward towards elevating the indigenous languages, including Maithili, to some 'symbolic' kind of official status at the local level.

As specified in the Interim Constitution that the nation is to be progressively restructured, switching from centralized, unitary structure to federal structure through the verdict of the Constituent Assembly, there is a great prospect for Maithili to assume the official language of the province under the federal structure. In this changing scenario of democratisation process, it is no wonder if Maithili and the other major indigenous languages, besides Nepali, are promoted to become the official languages of the federal government, adopting the policy of linguistic pluralism. If ten languages in South Africa and four languages including Romansh- a language spoken by one per cent population- in Switzerland can be the official languages of the respective federal governments, it is a legitimate question to ponder why Maithili and other indigenous languages with rich literary tradition cannot be the official languages of the federal government of Nepal. With the elevation of its status in the domain of administration, it can be presumed that Maithili will soon find its due place in the curriculum of Public Service Commission of Nepal. Here, it must be reckoned that Maithili, as a subject, is also included in the curriculum of both Union Public Service Commission and Bihar Public Service Comission.

Mass Media: In mass media, the function of Maithili has remained very insignificant but, from few years on, some encouraging development is noticeable, particularly, in audio-electronic media, run privately. While Kantipur FM and Sapta Koshi FM must be credited for launching programmes in Maithili for an hour or so on four and three days respectively in a week and so has Image FM been conducting for an hour a day. Janakpur FM, Radio Mithila and Radio Janakpur established at Janakpur have initiated various programmes for 18- hour- service in Maithili every day.

Barring 'Madhesh Special'- a programme consisting of Maithili News and Maithili and Bhojpuri songs televised from Nepal- 1 between 8 and 8.30 every evening, no any other regular Maithili programme is televised from the privately controlled channels or from the government controlled channel

called NTV. Even Radio Nepal airs only a single programme of five minutes everyday, that is, for news reading in Maithili.

In print media, there is no any daily magazine in Maithili. In addition to publishing *Vani*, a yearly journal, Maithili Sahitya Parishad, Rajbiraj- a very vibrant organisation for the promotion of Maithili language, literature and Culture- has been regularly publishing *Mithila*, a weekly, for ten years, and *Simanchal*, another weekly, is being published from last year in Janakpur.

Inspite of these efforts by non-governmental agencies, a lot has to be done for strengthening the functional roles of Maithili in mass media. Pressure has to be exerted on the govrenment to accommodate Maithili programmings in a proportionate manner in the Government's controlled media like NTV and Radio Nepal and to publish a daily in Maithili like the *Gorkhapatra*. Even the privately managed TV Channels should take keen interest in conducting Maithili programmes to cater to the demands of Maithili speaking community and the radio FMs run from Janakpur should be made powerful enough to be received by the entire target group. Similarly, efforts should be made at publishing a daily magazine in Maithili by some private managements, and the quality of *Mithila* and *Simanchal* should further be enhaned together with the increase in their circulation to make them reachable to the entire speech community.

Corpus planning of Maithili

That the targets of the status planning of Maithili should mainly consist of functions extended to the domains of education, administration and mass media has also been the conclusion reached by Yadav (1990). After determining the targets of the status planning of Maithili, there is the need to make its corpus planning for empowering the language for the extended use. As a great building is constructed according to its use and utility, in the same way, the corpus of a language is developed according to its function. The dictum that "form follows function" derived from the theory of architectural aesthetics is also true in the case of the corpus planning of a language (Cooper 1989: 122-123). Inspite of the various confusing terminologies given by different linguists with regard to the corpus development of a language, the tripartite model-graphization, standardization and modernization-envisioned by Ferguson (1968:28) is very much widely accepted. Here, the tripartite model will be exploited for setting the targets of the corpus planning of Maithili.

Graphization: Graphization refers to the developing of a writing system. It involves determining the script, spelling (orthography), rules of punctuation, word-division, etc. Without a script no language can develop, no literary creativity can flourish and no language can find any function in literature, education, media, etc.

Although Maithili has its own script called 'Tirhuta' or 'Mithilakshar', Devanagari script is most widely used in it. As Devanagari is used in Hindi, Nepali and other closely related languages, its use in Maithili has been accepted for the ease in writing, for the use in carrying over other languages and for the ease in using computer and other printing techniques. Inspite of these reasons in favour of Devanagari script, Mithilakshar has to be conserved by allocating certain specified domains or contexts for its use. Further, Devanagari script needs to be reformed and renovated. For an instance, a special letter is required to be coined for a vowel sound found in the final position of the Maithili word/mæ/ ('mother') for removing the problem in writing (Jha 1999, VII).

Standardization: Standardization refers to the processes in which a particular existing variety or an amalgam of various varieties is selected to be developed into a standard one, which is codified by its written dictionary and grammar so that every one agrees on what is correct, which is elaborated (extended) in various functions like education, literature, office, media, etc. and which is accepted by the speech community. Thus, standardization involves four steps- selection of norm, codification of norm, elaboration of function and acceptance of norm-as delineated by Haugen (1966: 32-34). So far as the standardization of Maithili is concerned, the dialect used by the elite group has already been recognised as a standard one, whose function is also extended to literature, education, media, etc and whose native speakers are found within the radius of five miles of Madhubani (Bihar) and in the area of Rajbiraj (Yadav 2000). From the beginning of the 19th century till now, abundant studies mostly written in the melalanguage of English have been done on the syntax, phonetics, lexiography, etc. of this variety by native as well as foreign scholars. For the further corpus development of Maithili, the research work should be extended, especially, to those unexplored areas like Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, etc. On the basis of all these research studies, descriptive reference books and pedagogic texts related to the various aspects of this language should be prepared together with the basic wordlist of Maithili for teaching purposes. There is also a demand for the standardization of non-elite variety of Maithili for which efforts have to be exerted towards codifying and extending it to various functions.

Modernization: Modernization, in the sense of corpus planning, refers to the development of expanded vocabulary to equip the language so as to communicate about modern topics and forms of discourse. As a language is extended for new functions and topics, its resource should expand to meet the new demands. New knowledge and technology demand new terms. This process provides ease in intertranslatability among the languages. This

process is not confined to the languages of developing, modernizing societies but occurs also in the languages of developed, modernized societies (Cooper 1989: 149).

With the extension of Maithili functions in education, office, mass media, etc. its resources need to be expanded further. It can enlarge its vocabulary in two ways- (a) by building new terms from its own sources either by giving new meanings to the existing terms or by creating terms based on the roots of Maithili and (b) by borrowing words from foreign languages. If the latter is done, in that case, the loan words can be indigenized by changing their pronunciation, their spelling or their affixes to suit the structure of Maithili, as we find in the case of words borrowed from English like 'station' , 'class', etc. Maithili language planners can turn to Sanskrit for borrowing terminology for literature, culture and scholarship and can turn to European languages, especially English, for borrowing terminology for modern science and technology, as we find the processes adopted for expanding the vocabulary of Hindi, Nepali and other related languages.

Thus the targets of the corpus planning of Maithili can be achieved by following the tripartite model suggested by Ferguson. For the successful implementation of its corpus planning, the government of Nepal should set up Maithili Academy, which can play a key role in carrying out the research studies and other related activities in the language, exploiting also the recent information technology for preparing Maithili corpora. Keeping in view its present strength, it is absolutely necessary to extend the functions of Maithili to the domains of education, office and mass media before entering into any corpus planning of Maithili. Only after using Maithili in these domains, we have to develop its corpus according to its requirements. In this context, Cooper (1989: 171) rightly suggests:

> "Corpus planning proir to changes in the functions for which a language is used is unlikely to be effective. It is only after a language begins to be used for new functions that corpus planning on behalf of those functions is likely to be effective."

Conclusion

To sum up, the status of Maithili should be elevated by using it in various domains outlined above and its corpus should, accordingly, be developed to meet its requirements conducting various research and other activities in the language. Such a planning of Maithili will definitely bring about a great change in the Maithil society. It can help educate the Maithils by virtue of which their socio-economic mobility can be geared up. Also, it can help manage conflicts by eliminating linguistically based inequality and discrimination fossilized in Nepalese context and by fostering instrumental attachments to the nation, create job opportunities for the Maithils in the field of education and in the government and other offices, promote creativity, and

open the door to a decent life. All these can happen only when the entire Maithili speaking community shows its genuine loyalty towards the language and its awareness of the linguistic rights and only when "language...becomes something to love, to fight for, to die for, something to safeguard, to develop, to enrich" (Fishman 1965:182).

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