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Impact of Linguistic Imperialism on Marginalised People in Nashik District

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Abstract: In the present scenario of India, every state has its own official language, although the presence of some indigenous languages. Therefore, in India, Linguistic Diversity is one of the important traits associated with the term Unity in Diversity. However, due to the language hierarchies and linguistic imperialism, the trait is disappearing quickly. This paper focuses on the Indigenous languages of the Nashik district, which are losing their native roots. Although the tribal people understand the variety of the Marathi language, they are not comfortable using it effectively and appropriately in communication and education. Simultaneously, they are being fascinated by the Hindi and English languages, which leads to a shift in their language as well as their cultural identity. Here, the language hierarchy instils in tribal people a sense of superiority and inferiority complexes, which reinforces their beliefs in the concept of language as a form of power. So the central problem of the present study is that the tribal people are getting in trouble in terms of their language and cultural identity due to linguistic imperialism, especially of Hindi and English, directly or indirectly. This results in a decaying process of rich culture, which can be handed down from generation to generation. Therefore, modifying linguistic policies in education (for example, offering courses in local tribal languages) can enhance their participation in the learning process, which may lead to the academic, social, cultural, and economic growth of tribal students.

Keywords: Linguistic Imperialism; Language Hierarchy; Indigenous Languages; Multilingualism

Introduction

The term 'Linguistic Imperialism' was coined by Robert Phillipson, who used the book to discuss the spread of the English Language as a Global Language and how it becomes the dominant one. According to him (2009), "linguistic imperialism" is the notion that specific languages dominate internationally over others. It is the way nation-states privileged one language, and often sought actively to eradicate others, forcing their speakers to shift to the dominant language." (Phillipson, Linguistic Imperialism). Even its title (the use of 'imperialism' in the phrase 'linguistic imperialism' is intentional) and the above-given definition, the concept is strongly linked to colonialism and colonial issues. As countries conquered others, they also imposed their languages on the native masses, thereby erasing native languages or at least undermining them. Phillipson has argued that the spread of English, specifically, is a form of neocolonialism and linguistic imperialism. (Phillipson, Linguistic Imperialism). English affects Marathi (Nemade). The famous Marathi Novelist observed the impact of English on the Marathi language and its severe effect on Marathi culture, as Marathi people shifted their interest to English. English has weakened Marathi culture and identity, the book claims. The individual fears that English's development in education, literature, and speech would marginalise Marathi. Linguistic imperialism has far-reaching consequences on indigenous communities, leading to the loss of cultural identity and linguistic diversity. (Ahmed)

Rationale and Aim of the Study

An analysis of the literature reveals that a limited amount of research is carried out on the Kokna language from a perspective of language imperialism.

This research aims to explore the impact of language imperialism on various aspects of marginal society.

Methodology

This research follows a descriptive survey method. Data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork in the tribal area of the sample provided primary data. It includes interviews and discussions with two generations about languages (both local and dominant), which have yielded valuable insights into the research topic. Secondary data has been collected from literary and linguistic works on the Kokna language that are relevant to the research topic.

Discussion: Complex Language Dynamics in Maharashtra

Marathi is the official language of Maharashtra and is widely spoken across the state. In urban areas like Mumbai and Pune, English and Hindi are commonly used, particularly in professional and educational backgrounds. Additionally, Urdu is also spoken by significant populations.

According to the 2011 Census of India, the **Language Hierarchy in Maharashtra** is as follows:

Sr. No.	Language	Percentage (out of total population)
1	Marathi	68.84%
2	Hindi	9.70%
3	Urdu	6.71
4	Gujarati	2.06%

Although the language hierarchy is determined by population, the priority order of languages should be: English, Hindi, and Marathi. Again, it shows the importance given to the International language and the National language of India. Those who are unable to speak the given language have their social status value become very low, which creates social stratification. Apart from this, Tribal communities in Maharashtra speak various indigenous languages, such as Gond, Madia, Korku, Pawri, Mavchi, Bhili, and Kokani.

Language Shifting in the Sample Area:

In the Nashik district, major tribes are Kokna, Bhil, Thakar, Mahadev-Koli, and Warli. Among them, Kokna is the dominant tribe because of its population. Their Local language is Kokani, which is a blend of Marathi, Ahirani (a Dialect of Marathi), Hindi, and Gujarati languages. Considering language as a tool of power, people are shifting to another language to prove themselves in language competency, which gradually changes their cultural and linguistic identity. Of course, they are in search of a New Identity. Tribals are fascinated by Hindi and English directly or indirectly. In a World of information, again, English is a default language which indirectly forces them to overshadow their own language and culture, and the same is with Hindi (as a National Language). Nowadays, the importance of using national and international languages is in its hype, so everybody is trying to be part of the global world. Moreover, the result is an increasing number of English-medium schools not only in urban areas but also in rural and tribal areas. Even Government Marathi Schools are shifting to English and semi-English medium, which reinforces the concept of linguistic imperialism, thereby strengthening the notion of hegemony and Monopoly in language use. However, the concept of unity through language appears smooth, but at the same time, it also dominates and compels the demolition of indigenous culture and language. For example, in the state of Bihar, the Maithili language was spoken, but it has now almost disappeared, and Bhojpuri has emerged as the dominant language. Even the Britishers ruled over India for 150 years, which was a long span. In those days, they used Hinglish (Hindi + English) instead of the English language for the medium of instruction, and they still survived in India, considering us as 'slaves' and themselves as 'rulers'. So as part of this, here, marginalised people are going through the same trauma, but instead of imperialism, they are in a cage of linguistic imperialism.

Factors Responsible for Language Shifting in Tribal:

1. Literacy Rate: Literacy rate among tribes in India is a key indicator of the development of tribal society. Earlier, due to certain factors, the literacy rate was very low, but it is now growing, hopefully in an ascending order. The literacy rate of tribes was only 8.53 per cent in 1961, which has increased to 59 per cent in 2011. However, female literacy of tribes is only 49.40 per cent compared to male literacy of 68.50 per cent. (India)

Literacy Rates among STs			
Year	Persons	Male	Female
1961	8.54.	13.83	3.16
1971	11.30	17.63	4.85
1981	16.35	24.52	8.04
1991	29.60	40.65	18.19
2001	47.10	59.17	34.76
2011	59.00	68.50	49.40

(Source: Annual Report 2019, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI)

Awareness among tribes about education led them to seek a standardised life through the power of language, ultimately affecting their roots. Acquiring knowledge of Hindi and English has changed their psyche and perspective on the great tool, i.e., the dominant language. This also helps them overcome their 'inferiority complex'.

2. Language Policy and Planning

Evaluating, planning, and implementing language policy is a crucial factor in the perpetuation of linguistic imperialism. Language policies can contribute to linguistic imperialism by imposing a single language, often through coercion, due to the authority's power, which impacts linguistic diversity. For instance, policies that prioritise a single language for all areas can marginalise people who speak other languages and limit their opportunities, as well as their rights. Moreover, the result is the shifting of the native language to the dominant one. Nowadays, in a state like Maharashtra, the government is attempting to introduce Hindi as a third language from the first standard of schooling. However, many linguists oppose this move due to concerns about the decline of Maharashtra's rich culture and its linguistic diversity.

Impact Areas of Language Imperialism

Language Imperialism has been strongly affected in some of the areas of marginalised people's lives, and these are as follows:

Cultural Identity: The Imposition of a dominant language has strongly affected local languages, resulting in the loss of a rich culture. Here in the sample area, the Kokna

tribe has its own language, where rapid transformation in the use of words is occurring. For instance, a word 'kange' /k[^]nge/ means 'where' in English, but in the present scenario, a word from Marathi 'kothe' /kothe/ is in practice. As a result, unique cultural practices of the indigenous community are lost.

Education: Linguistic imperialism influences language in education because those who are entangled in the language shift get more access to education. So, because of the dominant language, they have social and economic power, and with this, they are dominating their brotherhood, which creates social inequality among themselves. 'Killer language' has created a 'new class' of indigenous people who are signs of power, control, and leadership.

Social Justice: The dominance of one language is perpetuating social inequalities, restricting access to resources and participation in public spheres for speakers of minority languages.

Customs:

Customs play an important role in preserving and shaping culture, identity, community, and cultural heritage. However, due to the language hierarchy among tribal people, the rules of cultural norms are being undermined by the imposition of foreign languages. For example, 'food', earlier products which had been given by 'Mother Earth' or nature, were a part of their life, but when the killer languages entered their life, the cycle of life was changed. Now, tribal people can easily consume Chinese food instead of jowar, Bajra, and Ragi (Nagli in the local language, which is also called Kansari). tribal people swear by the Kansari (goddess of Grain), but because of the language imperialism tribal way of living changed significantly, which signifies the breakdown of culture due to the intrusion of 'different languages'

Conclusion:

The tribal communities in India, particularly in the Nashik district, are participating well in the process of civilisation due to the increasing number of enrollments in education. However, they are not yet proficient in linguistic competence. However, awareness about the importance of the Hindi and English languages creates a perception that language is a tool of domination. Moreover, this domination leads them into the turmoil of 'Linguistic Imperialism'. Policy makers impose a single language under the name of 'unity.' Unfortunately, while implementing such policies, due to some loopholes, indigenous languages are disproportionately affected. In this research, the Kokani language is presented in a clear and well-presented manner. Some tribal regions of Kalwan and Dindori tehsil use the Marathi language for communication instead of their own local language, and as a result, they are losing hold of their local language and culture. Learning a new language is a precious thing for anyone, because through which we try to know a new culture. However, care should be taken that the new language does not destroy the culture of the root language. Therefore, the Government or policymakers should think about the rejuvenation and preservation of indigenous languages through incorporating tribal culture in the

syllabus. Thereafter, only indigenous people can transmit their culture from generation to generation.

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