Multilingualism, linguistic diversity and English in India: implications for education

Ianthi M. Tsimpli

Linguistic Diversity

- India is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world (Linguistic Diversity Index; 0.916; UNESCO (2009)).

- 22 official ('scheduled') languages recognised by the constitution; 462 different languages spoken in the country (Simons & Fennig, 2018)

- Primary level classrooms highly multilingual due to high levels of internal migration particularly in urban areas

(Census of India 2011 as cited in Educational Statistics 2016; Mahapatro 2012; Malhotra & Devi 2016)

English and Hindi

- 'Link' languages

- Hindi is the first language of around 527 million, i.e. 43.6% of the population,

- English is the first language of around 260,000 speakers which makes less than 0,02% of the population (Census of India, 2011).

- English is reported as the second language of only 30% of the population whose proficiency in the language varies widely while the indigenous L2 variety does not make its way as an official language in media or schooling.

Why is English so wanted in India?

Historical (postcolonial) decisions; most importantly, the public perception of English as the language of power and an opportunity for better life prospects.

The **elite minority** can afford **private education in English**-medium schools;

have English as (one of) the home languages;

in promoting English across the Indian society it is a way to **perpetuate their linguistic, and by extension, socioeconomic, leadership** among the multilingual, but not English-speaking, population of India

Multilingualism in India vs. English

Multilingualism in India:

a culture of linguistic accommodation,

an acceptance of *language mixing* in a variety of contexts,
a deeply rooted multilingual worldview

(Mohanty, 2006; Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004).

English in India is brought in as typically used in the Global North, i.e. through a language *separatist* approach.

Millions of children educated in an unfamiliar language

- Only a small proportion of children in India currently receive education in their mother tongue (Jhingran 2019)

- Scarcity of resources and trained teachers

- Parents and many educators believe that children need to be schooled entirely in a *socially high-value language* to increase their proficiency in that language and therefore their life chances

- Promoting Multilingual Education for all is the new NEP (2020) aspiration, but there are no guidelines on how to implement it.

- Education in India is heavily textbook-based

- In our MultiLiLa study, we found that reading comprehension was the biggest challenge:

Tasks		Year 4	Year 5
		Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)
Hindi literacy (% correct)(n=336)		76.83 (28.65)	87.04(21.78)
Hindi Reading comprehension(% correct) (n=336)		**69.49**(42.31)	**83.63**(34.12)
English literacy (% correct) (n=336)		57.99(27.04)	65.09(27.21
English Reading comprehension (% correct) (n=336)		**13.54**(25.39)	**22.32**(32.67)
Narrative comprehension(% correct) (n=267)		**68.83**(14.12)	**86.66**(11.94)

Intervention in schools

- **Aim**: To improve reading comprehension by encouraging a structured approach to oral **language mixing** *for* (English) language learning

- "Supporting the development of Indian primary school children's reading comprehension skills: A scaffolding-based intervention". *British Academy Humanities and Social Sciences Tackling Global Challenges Programme 2020*

- "Reading for comprehension in primary school children in India: A teacher training programme". *English Language Teaching and Research Partnerships Award, British Council.*

From left to right:
Lina Mukhopadhyay
Sabbah Quamri
Anusha Balasubramanian
Margreet Vogelzang
Sankrithi L.
Vrishali Ingle

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Further steps

- If the intervention works we need to:

- Disseminate results to stakeholders so that other states and the central government consider its implementation;

- Use language technology to develop online educational materials based on the multilingual approach to improve language and school skill learning.

- Train pre-service teachers to improve their pedagogies by including multilingual resources, understanding that English can be supported through learning from already familiar languages

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Teacher training course – February 2019 – Hyderabad –

GCRF classroom films project: Hyderabad

Multilingualism and Multiliteracy ⌃

Multilingual Education in Practice ⌃

GCRF classroom films project: Hyderabad

> Introduction
> Film 1
> Film 2
> Film 3

Introduction

This series of three films aims to demonstrate multilingual education in practice. It was conceptualised in response to initial findings from the MultiLila research project which highlighted the ubiquitous use of multilingual approaches in the classroom. Teachers in Hyderabad attended a two-day...

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Film 1

Film 1 Teacher : CH Jyothi School : Low-cost English medium private school, Hyderabad, India Class level: Grade 5 Subject / lesson topic : Social studies / Festivals Languages used : English, Telugu, Hindi Description : In this lesson, the teacher aims to focus on different festivals in India to...

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https://www.mam.mmll.cam.ac.uk/MultiinPractice/gcrfclassroomfilms

Higher Education in India is almost exclusively in English

- About six million students (40% of all enrolled students) from non-metropolitan India enter the system every year and fail to achieve their educational goals because they are unable to cope with English.

- Less than 15% of the relevant age group enters higher education, of which only 17% goes on to obtain a postgraduate degree.

- One of the significant reasons is the enormous linguistic divide within Indian higher education, a divide that has severe consequences for occupational, economic and social mobility, and the quality of life, of non-metropolitan students.

Niranjana (2013)

- Proposed steps for a multi-institutional project (Niranjana, 2013):

- A. Indian Language Materials Production Programme

- B. Teacher Education Training for Indian Language Use in HE

- C. Research Programme in Indian Languages and HE

- D. Digital Archives for Indian language resources

→ Language in HE in India aggravates social injustice since English dominates (secondary) and all of further education.

→ The role of English in primary education contributes to this picture as neither language nor content learning is supported to reach the relevant level for pursuing academic degrees excluding the majority of the populations from equal access to all levels of education.

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Theo Marinis
University of Konstanz/Reading

Jeanine Treffers-Daller
University of Reading

Suvarna Alladi, NIMHANS Bengaluru

Minati Panda, JNU Delhi

Lina Mukhopadhyay, EFL-U Hyderabad

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धन्यवाद

Thank you for your attention