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Language Text Books for Border Areas of Multilingual India - Issues Related to Learning, and Strategies for Evaluation and Rectification

Dr. Sam Mohan Lal

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Interwoven to Form More Than 100 National and International Borders

Among the multilingual countries of the world it is a blessing in disguise that India tops the list and it has more than 400 active languages to interact with and 22 official languages which are recognized by the Constitution of India as official languages of India. These languages are included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This means that in these 22 languages there are textbooks, well developed written literature, and there is a State (province) in the Indian Union where one of these scheduled languages is spoken and it is the official language of that state. For instance, Tamil is one of the scheduled languages of India and it is also the

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official state language of the state of Tamil Nadu. All these states are closely interwoven to form more than 100 national and international borders.

This geographical reality makes a good number of people in India to know more than one language to interact with the immediate neighboring states and even across the international borders.

Language Is a Natural Source

From various platforms often we discuss the natural resources of the nations which are the major contributors for the growth of any country. But, many of us ignore or do not give serious thought to the issues of languages. We need to recognize that it is the multilingual and multicultural resources of the country which are the primary roots to support and explore the other natural resources of a nation. This is possible only if there is linguistic, ethnolinguistic and cultural harmony and active cooperation between the different linguistic communities of the country. We could utilize the potentiality of multilingualism to build the other natural resources of the country. This is possible only if there is a systematic effort to learn other's language and culture. This effort can be more successful if proper textbooks, teaching methodologies and testing strategies are developed at the school level especially in the border areas of the country.

Some Success, Some Failures in Language Planning

The education system in India does try to take care of this problem by developing appropriate syllabi, text books and teaching strategies in various bi/multilingual borders of the country. Also there is Constitutional provision for this. In spite of all these efforts there is an overall failure in achieving the desired result. This needs to be looked into more seriously and appropriate steps need to be taken for rectification.

Focus on Two Issues in This Article

With the above primary objective in mind this paper tries to identify the existing problems. To start with the primary focus is on the following **two** issues. **First**, the paper tries to raise some issues which have pedagogical implications for the secondary school level textbooks

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prepared for the border areas of India. **Second**, the paper aims at identifying the main reasons why there are no expected learner achievements while using the prescribed textbooks. This paper will also try to suggest some guidelines for rectifying the existing problems. In order to illustrate the points discussed in this paper I focus on the trilingual area of Kuppam, which is in the tri-junction meeting place of the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Geographical, Linguistic and Cultural Structure of Border Areas

Most of the border areas of India border two states or three states. This means that the border areas have the linguistic composition of bilingual speakers or speakers of three languages. These languages are the official languages of the concerned areas. (It may be noted that there may be many other minor group mother tongue speakers also who live in the same area, but we are concerned here only with the dominant state languages of the area.). For instance, in Kanyamumari District in Tamilnadu, the languages used are mostly Tamil and Malayalam both in the schools and also during various social interactions. This is because of the fact that the official language of the state of Tamil Nadu is Tamil and the official language of the neighboring Kerala State is Malayalam. As a result, most of the natives of this border district have some competence in both these languages. Similarly, the place selected for the current study Kuppam is in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The official language is Telugu. But, this place is bordering Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states. As a result the languages spoken in this area are Telugu, Kannada and Tamil.

In addition to this sociolinguistic composition, there is also an inherent fluidity in using alternatively the languages of the area as well as practicing the cultures. This may result in linguistic and cultural conflicts among the people living in the area which is natural in every multilingual areas of the country.

Linguistic and Cultural Conflict

Linguistic conflict may be defined as the societal choice of the language which is often situation-specific such as informal and some of the formal functions involving official meetings, functions, etc. **Cultural conflict** may range from the identification and selection of the time for

the identified social function, appropriate order to follow during religious worship or intercultural functions, ceremonies, etc.

In order to balance and normalize these linguistic and cultural conflicts, it is suggested that we identify and rectify from the grassroots' level the reasons for the problems.

One of the primary reasons identified is the issues related to pedagogy and language text books.

School Level Education System in Bi/Tri-Lingual Areas of India

In almost all the bi/tri lingual areas of India there is provision for people to choose any one of the concerned languages of the area at the primary school level depending on the mother tongue of the concerned student. This means that in Kuppam a primary school student whose mother tongue is Tamil has the liberty to choose Tamil in the primary school level in spite of the fact that the official state language of Kuppam is Telugu. But, the question here is whether the language education in the other state language is appropriate and useful to the students or not.

Two Pertinent Questions

In order to answer this important question it is necessary to evaluate the whole education system of bilingual areas. In order to evaluate the education system it will be academically relevant to ask the following **TWO** pertinent questions and these questions need to be evaluated and answered academically before answering or trying to rectifying the flaws.

1. Whether the syllabus followed to teach the non-state language is exclusive to the concerned bilingual area or not?
2. Which text books are followed to teach Tamil, a minority language? Are the textbooks the same that are used in Tamilnadu, or whether there are specially prepared textbooks for this particular trilingual area?

Issues Related to Pedagogy

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With reference to the two questions raised above, following are the **THREE** major issues which contribute for the cultural and linguistic conflicts in bi/tri lingual areas.

1. In most of the cases the syllabi and textbooks followed for the non-state languages are the syllabi and almost the same textbooks used in the neighbouring state in which the concerned language (for example, Tamil) is the major dominant language. For instance, in Kuppam the Tamil speaking students will be taught Tamil as per the syllabi followed by the Government of Tamil Nadu. The textbooks are also the same as used in Tamil Nadu. Same strategy is followed for the students from Kuppam schools who learn Kannada
2. There is no change in the teaching methodology and evaluation strategy.
3. Need-based eco-friendly lessons are totally absent.

Existing Textbooks and Their Structure

As stated above, in most of the cases though there is no change in the content of the textbooks, in some textbooks we could observe the inclusion of certain personalities who have regional significance. We have every reason to believe that this type of inclusion may have some political agenda too. Except for these area-based changes, there is no other uniqueness or specificity observed in the school level textbooks used in the border areas. In other words, most of the lessons, exercises and even the teaching strategies adopted and followed in the border areas are similar to those of the methodologies and strategies followed in the State in which these languages are dominant.

This needs to be evaluated critically by contrasting the prevalent linguistic situation in various domains of language use by the non-state language speakers of the border area. This kind of contrasting is essential because there are differences between the sociolinguistic and cultural behavior of the Tamil speakers and Kannada speakers who have settled in Kuppam as opposed to the sociolinguistic and sociocultural behavior of these language speakers living in the above two States respectively.

Examples of Specific Problems

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In addition if we compare the script systems used, Kannada and Telugu have similar arrangement of letters in their scripts whereas Tamil has a different set of letters with Tamil specific phonemic and allophonic patterns. There is difference between Kannada and Telugu in terms of allophonic distribution of their phonemes. The similarity in the script system between Kannada and Telugu offers some relief to Kannada children who are also required to learn Telugu at some stage. On the other hand, such relief is not available to a Tamil child who will be required to learn Telugu script and its phonology at a later date. There are specific morphological, morphophonemic and syntactic issues. For example, language-oriented gender distinction followed in Telugu is somewhat different from the system followed in Tamil.

Do the textbooks in Telugu (the dominant state language), Kannada and Tamil take care of these issues? As of now no such strategy is obvious in the textbooks.

Domain Based Existing Language Situation

When we undertook a study to understand the domain based language use of the migrated Tamil speaking population living in Kuppam, their linguistic competence in different languages of the area and their own mother tongue, we observed the following.

1. There is an **existential bi/multilingualism** prevalent in the border area. This means that the Tamil speakers are bilinguals in Telugu but their competence in Telugu is certainly not very good when compared to the native speakers of Telugu.
2. The Tamil speakers' competence in their mother tongue Tamil too is not equal to competence of the Tamil speakers of Tamil Nadu. There are several sociolinguistic and geographical reasons for this.
3. There is cultural fluidity in using the cultural features during the sociocultural events.

Existential Bilingualism in the Society vs the Impact of the Languages of the Textbooks

In the schools the non-state language learners often experience a **progressive transition** both in language performance as well as in adhering to language loyalty and language identity with reference to their mother tongues. This is mainly because of the following important reasons.

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Existential bi/multilingualism does not demand anything in particular from the interlocutors and it is more natural. There are no selection restrictions while choosing a particular language in a social domain or style of the language. These are mostly natural and followed as per one's own will and knowledge whereas there is policy level as well as pedagogical restrictions while formally studying and using any language in the school situation. Subsequently, the former is spontaneous and uncontrolled whereas the latter is controlled and more systematic and transitional in its achievement. Unless and until this reality is properly identified and treated, the learner level achievement in their mother tongues (Tamil or Kannada) will be hampered. Hence, this needs to be the first strategy for text book preparation, selection of the relevant content, evaluation and the process of rectification in the border areas.

To quote one example, we can identify **script conflict** (briefly stated in an earlier section) as one of the pedagogical issues in a border area. For instance, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada scripts have differences as well as similarities. Owing to this the learners will have mostly problems related to spelling, pronunciation, identification of the scripts, etc. Similarly in other levels of language too we can identify various stages of conflicts. For instance, conflicts related to the use of lexical choice from one language to another, conflicts related to semantic overlapping between the languages, etc. These need to be microscopically researched, identified and rectified.

Developing Suitable Teaching Strategies

On the basis of the identification mentioned above, the teaching strategies need to be modified and, most importantly, appropriate exercises should be included in the textbooks for the process of rectification. If these pedagogical processes are systematically and scientifically approached, the learners will pass from the stage of **progressive transition to progressive achievement to totally fulfill the pedagogical needs**. Failure to focus on the needs of the students from border areas may only accentuate the problems created by language loyalty, cultural conflicts, learning difficulties, etc.

Suggested Areas for Pedagogical Rectification

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1. Identify the grey areas of the textbooks of the minority languages by contrasting the features of the language of the majority and take appropriate steps for proper achievement. The grey areas can be in various aspects of language and culture. (In many border areas the languages concerned could be mostly cognate languages. This means there will be lot of similarities in various aspects of the languages concerned. However, there are also borders in which non-cognate languages are widely used).
 2. We also need to consider that there may be contacts between languages both of which have pre-literate origins. In addition, there are also borders in which contacts between a well-established literate language and preliterate language/s of the area.
 3. In order to learn the language and culture systematically care should be taken while selecting the content of the lessons.
 4. Modify the teaching strategies to accommodate the minority students and make them more familiarize with their language (Tamil or Kannada).
 5. Appropriate testing and evaluation strategies need to be followed. Focus on the problem areas of script and spelling errors and morphological and syntactic categories. Focus also on the pronunciation difficulties.
 6. There should be an exclusive syllabus for the students of the border areas which can cater to the needs of the students on the lines mentioned above.
 7. Teachers also should be given systematic training so that they can fulfill the objectives of the students living in the border areas.
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