Multilingual Education for Indigenous Children: Escaping the Vicious Cycle of Language Disadvantage in India

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POVERTY AS CAPABILITY DEPRIVATION

INDIAN MULTILINGUALISM & THE CYCLE OF DISADVANTAGE

LANGUAGES IN INDIAN EDUCATION

TRIBES IN INDIA: LANGUAGE, EDUCATION & POVERTY

MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION FOR THE TRIBAL CHILDREN: STATUS, INITIATIVES & PROSPECTS

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS
Poverty as Capability Deprivation & ‘Unfreedom’
(Amartya Sen)

- Capability = Range of Options & Choices
- Social discrimination → lack of opportunities → lack of freedom → capability deprivation → poverty
- Enabling role of education for economic development
- The problem of ‘voicelessness’ & language disadvantage with educational barriers for the Tribes (indigenous peoples) in India
INDIAN MULTILINGUALISM

- **3372 MOTHER TONGUES** (1576 listed, 1796 as ‘other’ languages)
- **300 – 400 LANGUAGES**
- **22+1 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**
- **87 LANGUAGES OF PRINT MEDIA**
- **104 FOR RADIO BROADCASTING**
- **81/41 IN PRIMARY EDUCATION** (1970/98)
- **MINORITY LINGUISTIC GROUPS >20%** in half of the Districts

Relationship between Language, Power & Hierarchy:

“Multilingualism of the Unequals” (Mohanty, 2004)
THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF LANGUAGE DISADVANTAGE

JUSTIFICATION OF FURTHER NEGLECT

INDIGENOUS/MINORITY LANGUAGES

WEAKENING OF LANGUAGES

EDUCATIONAL & SOCIAL NEGLECT

THE VICIOUS CYCLE

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Languages in Education in India

- Declining number of languages/media in schools
- MT education for tribal (indigenous) children < 1%
- English Medium schools - Indian Language(s) taught as subject(s)
- Regional language medium schools – English as compulsory second language by grade 4
- Hindi NOT taught as a compulsory subject in most states or taught as a third language from grade 5
Educational neglect of languages leading to:

- Illiteracy & relapse to illiteracy
- Poor educational performance
- Subtractive language learning in forced submersion programs
- High ‘push-out’ rate
- Capability deprivation & Poverty
- Loss of diversity
Tribal Languages, Education & Poverty

- Tribal population: 84.3 million (8.2%) [ST: 16.23%]
- 623 Tribal Communities (ASI); 573 notified or Scheduled Tribes
- 218 languages (159 exclusive to the tribes)
- Most tribal language do not have a script; written in major regional language scripts
- Wide spread adult bilingualism (500 of 623 communities classified as bilingual)
Tribal Languages in Education

- 13 tribal languages used in various programs (12 in NE States only)
- Only 3 to 4 used as MI in regular school programs
- Less than 1% STs have scope for MT medium schooling

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Tribal Children in Schools

- High proportion of STs in Primary Schools (Grades I to V)
- 58,343 schools – above 90%
- 76,458 schools – above 75%
- 103,609 schools – above 50%
- Tribal children taught in forced submersion programs in $L_2$ (majority language) medium
The burden of non-comprehension (Mohanty, 1999, In press; Jhingran, 2005 etc)

Low literacy, high push out rates (Table 1)

Poor Classroom Achievement (see Table 2)

Higher rate of school failure & low achievement level (see Table 3)

Low enrolment in higher & technical education (see Table 4)
Gross Enrolment Ratio & Drop Out Rates

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High School Performance of SC, ST & Others

- Fail (<30%)
- 3rd Division (30-44%)
- 2nd Division (45-59%)
- 1st Division (>60%)

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Educational Failure of the ST Children: Consequences

- Limited chance for upward socio-economic mobility
- Low quality employment which does not require formal education/training
- Only 4% of STs are regular workers
- 31.1% are marginal workers (<6 months a year) [SCs 27%, Others 19.8%]
- Capability Deprivation & Poverty
Poverty among the STs

- Proportion of population below the poverty line: STs: 44%; SCs: 36%; Others: 16%
- Decline in the percentage below the poverty line between 1993-94 and 1999-2000: 7% STs 12% SCs 9% other categories
- Approximately 50% of the ST households in rural areas belong to the consumption class of less than 340 Indian Rupees (approximately $7.80). The corresponding figures for the SCs, other backward castes (OBC) and others are 40%, 30% and 17%, respectively.
- The picture of economic development is even more dismal for the STs outside the North Eastern States in India.
Exclusion of MT from schools is problematic

- Children do not learn (capability deprivation, poverty)
- Loss of Identity
- Weakening of languages (the vicious cycle of disadvantage)
- Subtractive language learning (Loss of MT)
- Loss of linguistic diversity – Language Death, Murder, Genocide. (Suicide?)
- Marginalization, domain shrinkage
- Unimplemented (passive) state policies, statutes
  (Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009)
Achievement of ST Children in Mother Tongue Medium Schools

- Tribal children in MT medium schools perform better than those in L₂ medium schools (Saikia & Mohanty, 2004; Sema, 2008)
- Other Indian studies also show better performance in MT medium schools when SES differences are controlled (Nayak, 2007; Patra, 1998 etc)
Why must Indian Education be Multilingual?

- Mother Tongue + Languages for regional & national communication + LWC
- MT → Regional Language → National Language → English
- Meaningful participation in the wider democratic, socio-political, economic system
- Empowerment
Multilingual education (MLE):

“use of two or more languages as media of instruction in subjects other than the languages themselves and with (high levels of) multilingualism and, preferably, multiliteracy, as a goal at the end of formal schooling” (Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009).
Multilingual Education for the Linguistic Minorities

Effective Instruction in MT Medium
(at least for 5-8 years)
\[ \downarrow \]
MT + L₂ (both as MI)
\[ \downarrow \]
L₃ (& other languages)
\[ \downarrow \]
High Multilingual Proficiency
MLE as an intervention strategy
SSA (EFA) Program for Tribal Education – Orissa, India

MLE:
10 languages;
195 schools;
April 2007 (first batch in Grade II)

MLE+:
2 Languages (Saora & Kui)
8 schools from the MLE program
**MLE PROGRAM IN ORISSA**

- Curriculum & material development in Tribal languages with cultural content
- Tribal MT (L1) as Language of Instruction (MI)
- L2 (Oriya) conversational fluency development
- L2 as partial MI from Grade III, 100% from Grade V (Hindi and English as language subjects)
- Teachers from among Tribal community, multilingual with Tribal MT, Oriya and at least communicative Hindi & some knowledge of English
MLE Plus INTERVENTION

FRAMEWORK: CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY
(Macro & Micro)
Focal Curricular Areas: Language, Math & Environmental Sc.
Classroom Approach & Community level interventions: CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity)
MLE Plus Intervention

Strategies:

- Ethnographic Survey: Documenting Cultural Practices
- Developing Innovative Activities based on Cultural Practices for Teaching
- Reading corner in the Classroom
- Synergistic ‘Read Together’ Program for the Community
- Books with Community Authorship
## Preliminary Evaluation of MLE+ (Achievement Scores %) (Saora Schools only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Subject</th>
<th>MLE+ Schools (N=74)</th>
<th>MLE Schools (N=47)</th>
<th>NON-MT Schools (N=45)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>55.36</td>
<td>36.59</td>
<td>37.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>58.29</td>
<td>38.95</td>
<td>40.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVS</td>
<td>65.10</td>
<td>54.62</td>
<td>47.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note: Higher attendance rate for MLE Plus Children**

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MLE in India: Some Observations

- Experimental MLE programs more effective than traditional submersion programs; Expansion into new states
- Lack of methodological groundings & systematic evaluation
- Gap between theory & practice (Early-exit models instead of more successful late-exit models)
- Absence of Policy & Material Support; Lack of long term Government Commitment

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Thank You