

Anglicisation of Hindi

The Official Perspective

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The enrichment process of a language happens in proportion to its wide use: the more a language is used in various domains, the more it will be equipped to meet the challenges posed by academic and technical advancement. Hindi certainly needs to break free from the shackles of rigidity and meaningless complexity in the name of the “dignified” and the “standard”, but we must not look for quick, superficial measures. What is needed is a very critical review of existing administrative and academic terminology with a willingness to accommodate not just English, but also Urdu and other languages spoken in the Hindi belt.

In a linguistically rich country like India, one of the most important factors that can harm a language is the excessive emphasis on the notion of standardisation and uniformity. It leads to the development of stilted and artificial language that is not a part of any native speaker’s linguistic repertoire. Obsession with standardisation is reflective of an attitude that is anti-democratic and judgmental because it is based on the assumption of sanctity of a single form and rejection of others.

Language is a perennially evolving and changing phenomenon and instrumental behind this process are the people – the native speakers of a language. The contours and character of a language are constantly being defined and redefined by users of a language. The regions with a colonial past borrow freely from the language of the colonisers too. Then there are many other languages known as dialects that supplement the vocabulary of a language: but this goes on unnoticed and unacknowledged. In a multilingual country like India, which is a linguistic area in itself, the situation is even more interesting: we also borrow from geographically contiguous languages across language groups, i e, from other Indian languages and “dialects” of various language families. This is true of Hindi as well which is situated in a multilingual context surrounded by dominance of English and people’s aspirations for it.

Need for Expansion

There is no denying the fact that the academic need to expand and enrich the lexicon of Hindi in respect of various subject disciplines has always been there, and when Hindi became an official language (along with English as an associate official language), it became necessary to promote the use of Hindi for administrative purposes too. To fulfil

these needs, the government had set up various departments, bodies and commissions that are a part of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The government agencies like the Central Commission for Scientific and Technical Terminology (CSTT) have been producing volumes of technical terminology, glossary, definitional dictionaries and encyclopedia in Hindi and other major Indian languages that covered all the sciences, social sciences and humanities and the vocabulary pertaining to the administrative register.

However, in this process a very unnatural and staid Hindi has evolved in the past few decades, which is often low on communicability. Even the government notices and advertisements published in newspapers carry similar Hindi though such texts aim to reach out to and communicate to the general public. We know that innumerable examples of ludicrous Hindi coinages like *lauh path gaamini* (“one which runs on an iron track”, i e, train) have been cited innumerable times in formal-informal public conversations.

What is it that characterises the Hindi used in official domain? What is it that makes this Hindi terse and heavy? It is not just the terminology (which is mostly constructed and derived from words of Sanskrit origin), but the sentence structure is also artificial because it is often a literal translation from English. While translating texts into Hindi, so much importance is given to remain loyal to the original text that in spite of the language and the script of the documents being Hindi and Devanagari, respectively, their syntax remains essentially English.

This makes the language artificial, heavy and difficult to comprehend for an average native speaker of Hindi. So much so that words like *hetu*, not *ke liye* are used for a simple word like “for”. Somewhat similar is the situation of academic technical terminology. In order to equip Hindi to deal with modern academic discourse and new area of epistemology, lakhs of new words were coined and the process still continues. However, the strategy invariably has been to resort

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to a Sanskrit word to create a new word even though there may be better options available in Hindi, Urdu, English or other languages known as “dialects” which are in sync with the idiom of the language and are easy to understand. For example, people would rarely be able to understand *parimaarjan kalaayen* for “performing arts”. Why cannot we use *manchan kalaayen* instead which rings some familiarity in a reader’s mind because most of the, if not all such arts are performed on *manch*, i e, stage (even though it may not be a literal and exact translation)! There has to be a balance of preciseness and communicability. However, informal domain mostly *tatsama* words are acceptable as “standard”.

Sarkari Hindi

The notion of a “standard”, Sanskritised Hindi is not restricted to the official and academic sphere; its dominance in the education system has had a deeply negative influence on both educational perspectives and pedagogy. Any good teaching-learning practice must link to what the learner already knows. Learners play an active role in the process of learning and “constructing their own knowledge by connecting new ideas to existing ideas” (NCERT 2005: 17).

Learning cannot happen if there is a huge gap between what we know and what we need to know; at best, it would be memorising without understanding, and not learning in true sense of the term. The same is the case with teaching-learning process of languages. The Hindi used in classroom transaction, in textbooks and the Hindi which students are expected to master is the same *shuddh* and “high” Hindi characterised by *tatsam* words and avoidance of Urdu words at the cost of aesthetics, rhythm and communicability of language: this Hindi is far removed from the language heard and used by students in various life domains.

Of course, a language has many forms, styles and registers and this is one of the styles or registers, which students must become familiar with gradually. However, the approach should be to move from the known to the unknown without forcing things down children’s

throats prematurely. However, the dull nature of the language of a limited number of texts, which are provided to students mainly through a single textbook, deprives them of the richness and aesthetics of the language. While this has serious repercussion on students’ linguistic knowledge, it also convinces them that Hindi texts can never be a pleasure to read. Eventually, they develop a huge disinterest for the language and become wary of it.

Coming back to the much-ridiculed sarkari Hindi, it needs to change drastically and come closer to the language of the people. Recently, on 26 September 2011, a circular was sent by the secretary of the Department of Official Languages to all the concerned departments giving them instructions to use easy and natural Hindi in government functioning. That the government has woken up to the need must certainly be welcomed. Apparently such orders had been issued many a time in the past three decades or so as the letter mentions. Then why is it that the official Hindi continues to remain heavily Sanskritised, insipid and complex?

Language has always been a political issue in any society. It is an effective weapon to maintain the class hierarchy. At one point in history we had “Hindi ideologues” who had hegemonic intentions to become the ruling class through “the politico-cultural weapon” of Sanskritised Hindi (Rai 2000: 8). And today, due to the persistence of that Hindi, which has no relevance to the literary world and to people’s everyday linguistic sphere, the language is unable to face the challenges of global imperialism of English.

On the one hand, Hindi is and has been a source of a power struggle, and on the other, advocating sanskritised Hindi (or other Indian languages for that matter) in the name of nationalism is a garb for maintaining the status quo and proving that the complex character of Hindi cannot compete with lucid, user-friendly English. The existing official ideology is not a post-1961 phenomenon when CSRT was formed as a part of promotion and expansion of Hindi and other Indian languages. It goes back to the pre-independence era with its roots in the “romantic-ethnic” idea of nationalism

and one national language. Though Hindi was deemed to be the most suitable language for this role by many, what kind of Hindi it would be – was a contentious issue. While Gandhi, Nehru, etc, favoured “people’s vernacular Hindi” characterised by “its diverse borrowings, its flexibility, its local sensitivities, its enormous geographical and social reach” (Rai 2000: 109), there were others who consistently tried to promote *rashtra-bhasha* Hindi marked by “its uniformity, its absence of local colouring” (ibid 2000: 109).

Eventually, the people’s Hindi or Hindustani was pushed away by Sanskritised Hindi. Later, the recommendations of the Constituent Assembly’s sub-committee on language chose Hindustani written in Devanagari or Persian script as the national language and English as the second official language. This, however, was vehemently opposed by the intolerant group in favour of only Hindi and only Devanagari. Eventually, the compromise decision taken was that Hindi would be the official (not national) language and English would be used for official purposes for 15 years after the Constitution came into effect, i e, till 26 January 1965.

Implications

If we read the fine print of the directive from the Department of Official Languages, it involves many problems both in terms of the understanding about language as reflected in the letter and long-term implications of it for the Hindi language, if it is implemented religiously. At the same time, the letter also creates a context to contest and discuss some issues about which vague public perceptions exist. To begin with, the letter proclaims that any language has two forms: “literary language and functional language”. “If literary words are used in functional domain, people lose interest in the language”. However, we know that any language has many forms linked to the social context, purpose and domain of its usage. Every speaker has, if not all, then multiple varieties in her linguistic repertoire, irrespective of class, gender, education, etc, the same person may use different kinds of Hindis in

different domains with different people for different functions and purposes. What the letter sweepingly calls “literary” is actually something heavily dominated by Sanskritised jargons, and hence, complex both lexically and syntactically. As a matter of fact, literary forms of a language are often rich, aesthetic and nuanced.

Who Speaks and What?

Advocating the use of easily comprehensible Hindi – the letter says if (the) “internationally popular language English” could change itself over the years, then the functional form of Hindi must also modify itself and come closer to the *bol-chaal ki bhasha* (spoken language). While overtly this sounds fine, the model examples quoted and endorsed in the letter are indicative of a different subtext to it. In these examples which have been taken from sources of newspapers and magazines not mentioned in the letter, words like “awareness” (*jaagrakta*), “regular” (*niyamit*), “programme” (*kaaryakram*), “international business” (*antarrashtriya vyaapaar*), “higher education” (*uccha shiksha*), etc, have been opted for even though the Hindi equivalents of these words are quite popular or are commonly used in the written mode of Hindi.

The letter says that since contemporary Hindi magazines can use sentences like – *college me ek re-foresation abhiyan hai jo regular chalta rahta hai. Iska is saal se ek aur programme shuru hua hai jisme har student ek per lagaayega* – adapting official Hindi in this fashion would help in wider popularisation of the language. Further, the Department of Official Languages suggests that “store” instead of *bhandar*, “apply” instead of *aavedan* and “para” instead of *anuched*, “lunch” instead of *dopahar ka bhojan* should be preferred in translations to simplify Hindi.

The subtext emerging from these examples is that “changing times” (*badalte maahaul*) being referred to is the era of globalisation, where English is the language of the dominant powers, of market and of technical advancement. The issue of whether and how English is an international language and what the whole politics behind it is, has been much

debated and challenged by linguists, educationists and social scientists alike (Pennycook 1994; Phillipson 1992). It has been asserted that global, social, political and economic forces have been working “ruthlessly and doggedly for extending and intensifying the use of English” (Agnihotri 2008: 24).

The letter implies that it is in the interest of Hindi to mould its idiom and flavour to accommodate the strokes of the international lexicon. The problem may also be ascribed to the linguistic behaviour and attitude of the educated elite who are the native speakers of Indian languages; they have “mortgaged the cognitive sector of their verballity to the techno-industrial leviathan (i.e., English)...” because a fairly large section of them have “an investment in that language as a definer of the functioning and reproduction of the entire elite” (Dasgupta 2008: 71-72). Thus, without even making a sensible and creative effort to put Hindi to discursive and register-specific use, we seem to be resigned to the perception that Hindi cannot develop reasonably good discourses that are the need of the day.

And then the question arises as to whose spoken language are we talking about. The Hindi belt is spread in a large area comprising seven states and each area has its own region-specific texture of the language. The kind of Hindi the concerned ministry is trying to promote is the conversational style of the metropolitan city Delhi and it certainly does not represent the entire Hindi belt. You go to any hinterland of the Hindi belt and you will find people using words mentioned above in the spoken mode too. Even in Delhi, in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha debates, politicians’ statements and spontaneous speeches and panel discussions by many of the experts on television news channels are ample evidence that chat style Hindi is not the single most popular variety of Hindi. Spoken language is a broader category and conversational form is a sub-category of it. Also, there is always a difference between the spoken and the written form of a language. In the field of language education it is a well-established fact that acquisition of various registers

(varieties) of a language is a part of the language learning process.

‘Easy’ and ‘Difficult’

In this context, we also need to discuss the notion of “easy” and “difficult”. Artificiality of language apart, what is easy and what is difficult often depends on the frequency of usage. Words like *mudrika* (bus service in Delhi that plies on Ring Road around the city), *aatankavaadi*, *vishwavidyalaya* (one of the metro stations in Delhi), *pehchaan patra*, *tatkal seva* (train reservation facility on making extra payment) are some of the words which are of Sanskrit origin, but are commonly known to people. The semantically self-explanatory nature of words also helps in guessing or deducing the meaning of words. In a leading private school of Delhi which has Hindi as the medium of education (and of course, in all the government schools in the Hindi belt) children in primary classes understand the maths terminology such as *vibhaajyata niyam* (divisibility rule), *guranphal* (product of multiplication), etc, because they are introduced to the concepts through these words. Similarly, in science, *vaashpikaran* for them is as difficult or easy as “evaporation”. Also, words often are semantically transparent: one needs little bit of observation to identify the words *vibhaajan* and *guraa* in *vibhaajyata* and *guranphal*. However, developing the skills of linguistic observation and prediction are not a part of our language pedagogy.

So where does the problem lie then and how does one resolve it?

It is a well-proven fact that all languages, including those known as dialects, are rule-governed and are potentially capable of meeting the demands of their speakers. The enrichment process of a language happens in proportion to its wide use: the more a language is used in various domains, the more it will be equipped to meet the challenges posed by academic and technical advancement. Hindi certainly needs to break free from the shackles of rigidity and meaningless complexity in the name of the “dignified” and the “standard”, but we must not look for quick, superficial measures.

What is needed is a very critical review of existing administrative and

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academic terminology with a willingness to accommodate not just English, but also Urdu and other languages spoken in the Hindi belt. Promoting the use of Hindi (and other Indian languages) should not be a ritualistic affair confined to Hindi Diwas, *Hindi Pakhwaaraa*, etc. In fact, if it has to be there then why Hindi Diwas, why not *Bhartiya Bhasha Diwas*? Concrete and pragmatic strategies should be worked out to encourage the use of Indian languages in public and academic, educational domain. As far as education is concerned, drastic reforms are needed both with respect to pedagogy

and perspective. People can be convinced about the worthiness of a language if it is actually a part of their life in informal as well as formal domains.

Should instructions given in the orders be followed in letter and spirit, it will do as much damage to Hindi language as obsession with standardisation and uniformity has done. After all Hindi does not exist in two extremities of “high” Hindi and bazaar Hindi’s “grotesque cousin Zee Hindi” (Rai 2000: 119). However, Zee Hindi, we apprehend, may soon become G-Hindi or the government Hindi.

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