

The 21st European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies

Bonn 2010

Panel 15:

Modern languages in South Asia: their place in the culture

Introductory notes

South Asia as a universe of languages has been often compared – and may indeed be meaningfully compared – with Europe, at least with Western Europe. Such a comparison brings into relief some of the most important features of the South Asian linguistic history.

In both subcontinental areas there are, on the one hand, the so-called classical languages, older in age, pan-areal (“universal”) in their spread and paradigmatic for their respective cultures (civilizations), and, on the other hand, modern languages (“vernaculars”), younger in age, regional or even local in their spread and modeled in many ways after their elders.

The major classical language of Europe is of course Latin, with Greek looming behind it (and Hebrew looming at some distance behind both Greek and Latin since the adoption of Christianity). In the second millennium AC (the “vernacular millennium” according to Sheldon Pollock) Latin was gradually superseded by modern European languages (“vernaculars”), first as the media of poetic (literary) and religious expressions and later as the instruments of state power, scholarship and science. The growth of modern European languages has been closely connected with the growth of modern European states, both “national” and “imperial”. In today’s globalizing world English seems to become a kind of “universal” language almost for the whole of human universe. But in the united Europe individual languages seem to retain their importance, even if English is considered *primus inter pares*.

The situation in South Asia has been and remains more complicated.

In the first place, there have been there, in the second millennium AC, at least two or three classical languages, even though the spheres of their influence were mostly separate. One of the South Asian counterparts of Latin has been of course Sanskrit. But later Arabic and Farsi also became classical languages for many people in the subcontinent. Like in Europe, modern (non-classical) languages in South Asia grew mostly during the second millennium AC (even though some of them “had been born” earlier). Like in Europe, where Romance languages were a kind of descendants of Latin, while some other languages (Germanic, Slavonic, Celtic, Finno-Ugrian) might be called Latin’s “adopted children”, some languages in South Asia were a kind of descendants, or distant relatives, of Sanskrit, while others might be called Sanskrit’s “adopted children”. But, rather unlike Europe, some languages in South Asia have had a kind of double parentage: descending from Sanskrit, they have become “adopted children” of Farsi and Arabic (e.g. Urdu and Sindhi). Probably, a

comparison might be made here with the influence of Turkish (and, through it, of Farsi and Arabic) on some Eastern European (Balkan) languages. What is probably more important, in South Asia, unlike Europe, during the second millennium AC there appeared no “national” states which would foster the growth of new (regional, local) languages. On the contrary, up to the 20th century imperial “projects” prevailed: first the Mughal (with Farsi and Arabic as classical and imperial languages) and later the British (with English as the language of the Empire). In the 19th and 20th centuries South-Asian “vernaculars” did undergo a kind of modernization comparable to the modernization of their European counterparts since the 15th century. But as South-Asian “vernaculars” were modernizing themselves within the framework of the British Empire, with English as the dominant imperial language, they could not possibly grow to the same extent as their European brethren.

Now in the independent states of today’s South Asia various languages face various kinds of problems. English seems to get the upper hand in India and Pakistan to the detriment of other languages. The case of Bangladesh, practically a monolingual state, similar in this respect to “national” states in Europe, must present different problems. Nepal, Shri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives must have problems of their own.

This panel of the 21 ECMSAS is going to discuss problems of modern South-Asian languages from the view point of cultural, social and political history.

The keynote address titled

“The Erosion of the Cultural and Linguistic Base in South Asia”

will be delivered by Professor Udaya Narayana Singh (Santiniketan, India).

Abstracts of the papers to be read at the Panel:

[№1]

Boris Zakharyin (Moscow, Russia)

Changes in sociolinguual position of Sanskrit in ancient and medieval India and their reflections in grammatical texts

The linguists' general views on correspondences between Vedic and Sanskrit might be shortly formulated like this: (a) the language of Ṛgveda, being the most ancient form of Vedic, was nearer not to Sanskrit, its implied successor, but to Iranian Avestan; (b) Vedic and Sanskrit, though differing chronologically, geographically, socially and structurally, still, in the broader perspective, were representing the two successive stages of evolving Ancient Indo-Aryan (AIA); (c) the main preservationists of the ancient religious and cultural traditions at the period of the *Sam·hitās* and the *Brāhmanas* were the brāhmanas, and all the main pre-Pān·inian grammatical speculations and discoveries belonged to them.

In spite of the supposed existence of grammatical works anterior to Pān·ini's '*Asht·ādhyāyī*' (the 4th – 5th centuries B.C.), in reality we have in our disposal only the text of his grammar serving as a starting point of the long-time linguistic tradition. Pān·ini was differentiating between *chandās* (the language of Vedic *mantras*), *bhās·ā* (the colloquial language of the educated elite) and a number of spoken regional varieties of AIA – such as, e.g., the prestigious *udīcyā* – the 'northern (dialect)' and the substandard *prācyā* – the 'eastern (dialect)'. However, the main attention in his grammar was given to *bhās·ā*, though the most important peculiarities of *chandās* were also marked. As brāhmanas of those times were the preservers of dominant ideology and thus enjoying superiority inside the society, it is no wonder that Pān·ini treated both the languages perfectly mastered by him, the everyday Sanskrit and the ritual bound Vedic, as stylistic variants only. It is also supposed that due to his origin Pān·ini probably was the native speaker of a certain Prakrit, the predecessor of the later 'Middle Indian Gandhari'. Being a brāhman, Pān·ini was not only fulfilling all the daily religious duties, but also, as is well known from Patañjali, strictly following the prescriptions of *dharma* during his teaching hours.

As the data from the works by early commentators on '*Asht·ādhyāyī*' show, the situation changed already at the time of Kātyāyana (the 3d century B.C.) and still more at the time of Patañjali (the 2d – 1st cent. B.C.). Both the scholars, not much bothered by the status of Vedic, were giving comments on Sanskrit proper, stressing that its grammar was to be learned not only because it allowed to preserve the Vedas and to provide communication between the educated strata of the society (*śīs·t·a-*), but because it was the means of

reaching Salvation. It is also clear, that for Patañjali Sanskrit was a very important language but not the primary one; this latter role was played either by one of the Early Prakrits or by a certain colloquial (and probably substandard - *apaśabda*-) form of Sanskrit. The main reasons for all those changes in the grammarians' positions were: (a) the appearance and spreading of non-orthodox religions, the propagation of which was done not in Sanskrit but in Prakrits (in Ardhamagadhi by the adherents of Jainism, in Māgadhi by the followers of Buddhism); (b) the gradual displacement of ideological and socio-political activities in the direction from West to East; (c) the general shift of power from brāhmins to kshatriyas, the most evident sign of which was the creation of the Empire of Mauryas'.

During the next (Early Medieval) period of Indian history (the 1st millennium A.C.) the conservative brāhmins managed to restore their positions in the ideological and scholarly fields, sometimes even grasping the political power as well (e.g., under the Shungas). Correspondingly, the importance of Sanskrit increased. Even the adherents of non-orthodox faiths under the pressure of the dominant Brahmanism started using Sanskrit in their treatises (in Mahāyāna Buddhism and in Later Jainism). A kind of equilibrium was reached between the two upper *varṇas* in social life: authority was enjoyed by brāhmins, while power remained concentrated in the hands of kshatriyas. The situation of the achieved balance between Sanskrit, culturally prestigious but limited socially, and widely used Prakritic vernaculars got depicted (though rather artificially) in works of arts, especially in dramas, where the representatives of upper classes were communicating in Sanskrit, while the rest were resorting to different Prakrits. Intrusions from outside and internal wars caused migrations and other mobility processes, thus stimulating language contacts and growth of bi- and even trilingualism in the population. The importance of purely religious values was decreasing with the simultaneous growth of political and economical institutions. The latter factor might be well illustrated by such examples as the rise of the Empire of the Sattavahanas and the coinciding advance of the Mahārāshtri Prakrit in South-Western India or by spreading of Rajputs' economic dominance and political rule in Western and Northern India together with Apabhramsha's gaining force and the official status. This extra-linguistic situation was reflected, in the field of grammar writing, in the appearance of numerous descriptions of Prakrits, e.g., in the grammars by Hemachandra or by Nemisandhu, where the general model of description still remained approximately the same as in Pāṇini's '*Aṣṭādhyāyī*'.

[№2]

Zdravka Matišić (Zagreb, Croatia)

Language Attitudes in India

For European language specialists the language use in India after 1947 is at least amazing. Coming from a different historical environment they are surprised that none of about twenty modern Indian languages, despite their long and fruitful literary traditions, was able to start functioning as a modern standard language at the moment India acquired independence. Even more amazing is the fact that today, after more than 60 years of big efforts, both intellectual and financial, the situation is not radically different. Looking for the reasons and causes of the present language use distribution in India, and the role of English in it, this paper suggests that they are to be found mainly in the traditional Indian language attitudes which have been prevailing on the Subcontinent through at least two and a half millennia. The paper describes and analyzes these language attitudes diachronically.

[№3]

Udaya Narayana Singh (Santiniketan, India)

The evolution of Bangla as a literary language: the socio-historical context

The text-book histories tell us that *Bangla* branched off by 900-1000 AD, and that it has three typical historical stages – Old, Medieval and Modern. It appears too neat to be true. The earliest Tantric Buddhist text (*Charyapada*) is claimed also as Old Maithili, Assamese or Oriya, as it was a formative period when the split was happening. During 900-1100 AD, the region was ruled by the *Karnata* kings of Dravidian origin who brought in ritualism and Classical Sanskrit practices with them, which led to the Sanskritization of Bangla. It is generally believed that Medieval Bangla was a period of Islamization of Bangla. It is argued here that this was rather the time when a secular Bangla emerged, and so this period should rather be described as the *Secularization of Bangla*.

The Muslim rulers of the Hussein Shah dynasty (1493-1538) did patronize Bangla, but this was when both Hindu and Muslim poets began composing lyrics in Brajabuli, following the narrative style of Maithili poets like Vidyapati. These were based on the story of Radha and Krishna. Other Muslim poets should also be recalled: Kanka (*Vidyasundar Kahini* in

praise of Satya Pir; 1502), Shah Muhammad Sagir (c 1400; *Yusuf-Zulekha*), Jainuddin (*Rasulbijay*), Muzammil (*Nitishastravarta*, *Sayatnama*, etc), Sheikh Faizullah, and Daulat Uzir Bahram Khan (*Laily-Majnu*). Among the later poets, Donagazi (mid-16th century) and Sheikh Faizullah showed influence of Prakritization. The Arakan rulers of Gaud also patronized Bangla, with Daulat Qazi's (1600-1638?) and Alaol (1607-1680) having emerged. It is shown here that although the Muslims poets wrote narrative and religious poems, and poems on cultural links, dirges, astrology and musicology, their greatest contribution was been two-fold - in widening the content (narrative and romantic poems) through free translations or adaptations of major Arabic and Persian tales, and also in creating a language that was close to the people's speech, and yet quite lyrical.

[№4]

Malavalli S. Anitha (Mysore, India)

Languages in Mysore State from 1799:

Unifying, Dividing and Fusing the Tongues of the People

The Royal State of Mysore was one that received much attention from and was greatly influenced by the British during their rule. May 4th, 1799 was a turning point in the region's political history, when Tippu Sultan's kingdom was destroyed and power was returned to the Wodyars, with the British keeping a watchful eye on the proceedings. 1831 saw the direct rule of the British, which lasted until 1881 (the Commissioners Age) when power was again returned to the Maharaja with the British Resident and the Diwan sharing administrative power with the Maharaja.

The British Administration throughout the period had a great need of functionaries for their vast administration, and they wanted only those who could speak, read and write English. Since such individuals could not be found in Mysore, the British began to seek assistance from amongst the Brahmin community in the Madras Presidency. This was not acceptable for the local Brahmins who began in earnest to learn the English language.

The sacred and administrative language, Sanskrit, and the language of the common people, Kannada, were both eclipsed by the new and attractive language, English. Those who adopted this new language became a new breed of society, educated, enlightened and modern in the eyes of the lesser mortals who had not learnt the foreign language. The view society had of the holy keepers of Sanskrit took on a new perspective as these fierce adherents of their sacred tongue turned their backs upon their well guarded language for the opportunity to speak English and become paid servants of the new British masters.

Non-Brahmins as well jumped on the bandwagon and adopted the language which brought with it style and panache to such a degree that caste became almost a secondary factor. The effect of English irreversibly changed the status of Sanskrit and Kannada, pushing them to the second and third places in rank and importance.

The social impact of this switch-over to English was not confined to the cities. The desire of the Brahmin community to learn English and secure their place in the new administrative system was such that rural Brahmins now wanted to move to cities to learn English. The main factor preventing them from leaving the countryside was their land. So they sold it to workers and moved out. This changed the social status of the working class people (Vokkaligas and Lingayats) to that of landlords. The jump up in social and financial status led the Vokkaligas and Lingayats to want English education for their children as well. These newly educated non-Brahmin children followed the migrating Brahmins to cities and began an educational rivalry with them. Other, now wealthy, lower caste families paid to have teachers come to their homes or at least to their villages and teach English to their children. The linguistic changes that this upheaval introduced to the society were immense. The effect of these changes is in evidence to this day!

In view of the foregoing, how did these three languages (Sanskrit, Kannada and English) interact and vie for the attention of the governing administration and the common people? What fusion and adoption of words between the languages occurred? How did society and the very fabric of culture evolve with the languages? How did the political situation contribute to adoption and/or rejection of these languages? And what is the present scenario, pointing to what future outcome?

These are the points my paper will address using archived correspondence and records, contemporary book references, oral interviews, and old newspaper documentation.

[№5]

Pritipuspa Mishra (College Station, Texas, U.S.A)

The Institutional Life of the Vernacular: Oriya and the Making of Orissa

*If any nation in India has ever cast its lot with the aborigines
and lived its life with the aborigines it is the Oriya.*

From the “ The problem of Aboriginal tracts” in
Memoranda to the Orissa Boundary Commission, 1931.

This paper calls for a revision and expansion of our assumptions about the implications of the term ‘vernacular’ in the political rhetoric in Colonial India. In contemporary scholarship on vernacular language based politics in modern India, there are two paradigms for understanding the term vernacular. The understanding of vernacular as a diminutive scalar *other* of more dominant cosmopolitan languages such as Sanskrit, English or Latin dominates the scholarship on early modern literary history of India. When it comes to the study of language politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the term vernacular marks the subalterneity of Indian languages in relation to English. While both these paradigms pose the status of the vernacular as a subordinated language, they do not account for the institutional power of the term in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Through a reading of the institutionalization of Oriya as the basis of regional community during of the formation of Orissa as a separate province in the 1930s, this paper will trace the emergence of institutional hegemonic power of Indian vernacular languages in the making of modern Indian regional and national geographies. In particular, the paper will focus on the deployment of comparative philology and ancient historiography by the Oriya speaking elite in order to produce a historically unified Oriya linguistic community despite the uneasy presence of non-Oriya speaking ‘tribal’ communities within the boundaries of the proposed province. Based on readings of philological debates, vernacular histories and colonial papers on Orissa boundary commission of the early 1930s, this paper will trace how Oriya came to form the basis of regional community through an elision of the tribal heritage in the making of modern Oriya culture.

[№6]

Tatiana Oranskaia (Hamburg, Germany)

Language, Cultural Heritage and Politics in South Asia: the case of Bundeli

It is obvious that most South Asian languages with official status do not answer the famous definition of a language vs. a dialect. However, though they do not have an army and a navy, they enjoy a close connection with political power and economic advantages on a subnational level. No wonder that communities are interested in promoting their mother tongue to the official status. Apart from the number and political vigour of the native speakers the cultural heritage of the idiom is of utmost importance. In this paper, those language related cultural factors which are relevant in obtaining an access to political power will be considered using the pertinent data of Bundeli.

Bundeli, or Bundelkhandi, which is viewed as a dialect of Hindi, is connected with the territory of Bundelkhand, a cultural region in central North India (southern districts of Uttar Pradesh, northern districts of Madhya Pradesh, and two easternmost districts of Rajasthan) with no administrative status of its own. Relations between Hindi and its dialects are the second issue which will be discussed in this connection.

[№7]

Claus Peter Zoller (Oslo, Norway)

The languages of West Pahari: their linguistic and cultural genesis, and their threatened future

Traditionally, the Pahari languages have been divided into the three groups of West Pahari (spoken between Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand), Central Pahari (spoken in Uttarakhand), and East Pahari (spoken in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan). The division was based on geographical considerations. Now it has become clear, on the basis of new linguistic evidence, that there exist only two subgroups which one might call West and East Pahari (the border is the Yamuna valley). Most of the West Pahari languages belong to the category of *unwritten languages* and have therefore frequently been termed as mere dialects despite their rich and complex oral traditions. Meanwhile the UNESCO has characterized most of the West Pahari languages as *endangered* to various degrees. Even though they have been influenced over centuries by languages of the North Indian plains –

which can be seen in various linguistic stratifications – the cultural and linguistic impact of modernity has become a serious threat.

The paper consists of three parts:

- An outline of the linguistic genesis of West Pahari. It will be proposed that West Pahari, together with the Dardic and Nuristani languages, belongs to a separate (third) subgroup, different from the so-called Inner and Outer Subgroups of Indo-Aryan, originally proposed by Abraham Grierson and recently revisited by Franklin Southworth. This new subgroup may be called the North-Western Subgroup.

- An outline of the cultural genesis of the West Pahari language area. One finds in this area a number of cultural features in religion, mythology and traditional institutions which have parallels only in the Dardic and Nuristani language areas and which suggest the former existence of a fairly cohesive cultural realm. This is one more reason for postulating the separate existence of the North-Western Subgroup of Indo-Aryan.

- Looking at the present fate of some low-case professional performance groups in this area, the question will be discussed what future awaits these vulnerable regional traditions.

[№8]

Ram Prasad Bhatt (Hamburg, Germany)

Some Lexical Features of Garhwālī

This paper attempts to examine some of the lexical features of Garhwālī, a Central Pahārī Language, in their historical, cultural and semantic context. One of the unique lexical features in Garhwālī is the use of different terms for perception. A particular perception is denoted according to the kind and quality of the object. For example the smells of the burning of different sorts of fabric is denoted by separate terms. Burning of a cotton fabric is 'kutr· ṅ', burning of a woollen fabric is 'kikry· ṅ' and the burning of a woollen-cotton fabric is denoted by 'kully· ṅ'. Various pleasant and unpleasant smells, too, are denoted by different terms, e. g. 'mutr· ṅ' is a bad smell of urine and 'fyōlāri' is a fragrance of a particular flower. Similarly the physical sensations of pleasure and pain are strongly differentiated. Denotative expressions like 'ka|ka|ī' (compassion) and 'khud' (longing or desire), as well as figurative words like 'phunḍu phūkā' (let it go!) are unique in Garhwālī.

In Garhwālī, there is a tendency to put together words from different languages or “tatsama” and “tadbhava” words, thus creating new ‘paired’ words, e. g. ‘dhāṇ-dhandā’ (work), ‘sevā-saūli’ (greetings), ‘jagwāl-bhagwāl’ (protection), ‘khāsi-bāsi’ (signal or warning), ‘gāli-maiki’ (to abuse) and ‘hoṇi-khāṇi’ (prosperity). In the process of subordination the cognitive semantics of two terms is changed, and as a result there appears the broader denotation of the word-pair. The paper also discusses the kinship and time related lexis in Garhwālī which is more elaborated than e.g. in Hindī.

[№9]

John Peterson (Leipzig, Germany)

Language contact in Jharkhand –

Linguistic convergence between Indo-Aryan and Munda in eastern Central India

In my talk I will discuss the linguistic situation in Jharkhand, India's so-called "tribal state". With ca. 30 languages traditionally spoken within its borders and many more which have recently appeared on the scene due to immigration into this area, Jharkhand is one of the linguistically most diverse regions of the subcontinent. Languages belonging to three families are found here: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Munda (Austro-Asiatic).

Due to its geography and traditional relative isolation, Jharkhand may be considered an "accretion zone" in the terminology of J. Nichols (1997), one in which there is also a high degree of multilingualism, which has led to a number of convergences between these languages, above all between the Indo-Aryan and Munda languages of the region. These include a number of typologically quite unusual traits, including apparently ambiguous categories denoting both 'begin' and 'keep on', or 'from' and 'to', as well as a number of interesting developments of the genitive which are quite unusual from a typological perspective but quite common within Jharkhand.

I will also argue that due to the high degree of multilingualism in Jharkhand and the many convergences which have resulted from this situation, studies dealing with historical aspects of these languages must constantly take into consideration the other language families of the region, as a considerable number of grammatical markers as well as many morphological marking patterns can properly be understood only against the backdrop of the neighboring languages and language families.

[№10]

Annie Montaut (Paris, France)

Gandhi's neologisms in 'Hindustani'

A number of now widely accepted words and concepts have been coined by M.K. Gandhi during the "freedom fight" between the 1920s and the 1940s. Words like *swadesh*, *satyagrah*, *charkha*, *ahimsa*, either newly coined (the first two) or re-semanticized out of different meanings in Sanskrit, bear a strong imprint of Hindu traditional culture. However, if we study the political and social context of their creation, along with Gandhi's commentaries on these neologisms, we find different influences at play, particularly the strong yet indirect answer to the modern Western concept of *nation-state*, as well as a dialogue with Christianity. The way Gandhi reshaped the term *hindustani* is also quite significant in this perspective. This interplay of Indian and Western meanings is a good example of how lexically invisible hybridisation (or inclusion) may come to create an entirely original concept and, for that matter, a new vision of politics and history.

[№11]

Liudmila Khokhlova (Moscow, Russia)

New trends in Hindi-English bilingualism

The linguistic situation in India provides a lot of data for research in all types of bilingualism known to sociolinguistic theory: 1) *productive* vs. *receptive* bilingualism, 2) *recessive* vs. *ascendant* bilingualism, 3) *coordinate* vs. *compound* bilingualism, 4) *sequential* vs. *simultaneous* bilingualism.

All these types of bilingualism are interacting in India, the patterns of language usage being determined by the social status of communicators and by a number of other social and psychological factors.

This paper will concentrate on the Hindi-English bilingualism of educated people in three cities of India. The author has studied the Hindi-English bilinguals in twenty families in Delhi, Chandigarh and Hyderabad.

Hindi-English bilinguals may be considered one of the most successful groups of Indian society. Unlike native speakers of small dialects who are often blamed for the communication impairment and are encouraged to abandon their bilingualism in favor of a majority language (such as Hindi), educated speakers of Hindi with good command of English enjoy a double privilege: their mother tongue is the national, official, and main link language of India and their second language, being formally an associate official language, in practice fulfills functions of the main language of science, higher administration, education, business, judiciary, broadcasting, journalism etc.

Hindi-English bilinguals usually learn two languages *simultaneously* inside the family, and their bilingualism, displayed in everyday life, may be defined as *productive* because they have equally good command of the two languages in the domain of the '*restricted code*'. As for intellectual and professional life, i.e. the domain of the '*elaborated code*', the majority of engineers, scientists, high level lawyers, educationists are *monolingual*, not being able to express themselves in their mother tongue as they get both general and professional education through English medium. Culture in general is the domain of human life which is most endangered by the development of Hindi-English bilingualism.

[№12]

Indira Gaziyeva (Moscow, Russia)

Can Hindi possibly compete with English in today's India?

In today's India English is widely used along with native (autochthonous) Indian languages and dialects. For some Indians English is even the mother tongue, for many others it is the second language. A person who knows English is considered better educated. Such a person has a higher social status and may aspire for a better job. If we ask the question: "Can Hindi possibly compete with English in today's India", the answer may be "Yes, but..."

Hindi may be considered the mother tongue for about 42% of India's population. But this figure is deceptive in a number of respects. One important respect is the difference between the standard literary Hindi (spoken e.g. at the parliament) and the Hindi which is spoken by the people who really use it in their daily life. This Hindi is actually a kind (or various kinds) of mixture of Hindi and English. Hence the name "Hinglish", which is often attached to this spoken idiom. The emergence and popularity of this idiom may be explained as the combined effect of at least two factors: on the one hand, many Indians do not know

English well enough (if at all); on the other hand, many essential concepts and even material things in today's world are more easily named in English than in any autochthonous Indian language, including Hindi.

In the paper it is argued that it is exactly this mixed language, Hinglish, which does have chances to compete with English in India. This thesis is substantiated with the data from available published sources, as well as with the results of the author's own research work in India.

Unfortunately the author of the planned 13th paper, Khawaja A. Rehman, will not be able to attend the conference. Anyway, his full paper will be available for interested people in printed version during the panel.

Khawaja A. Rehman (Islamabad, Pakistan)

Language Shift in the Kundal Shahi Community

The Kundal Shahi language (henceforth KS) is the ancestral language of a community of about 3370 people in the village of Kundal Shahi in the central Neelam Valley in Pakistani administered Kashmir. The language is closely related to Shina and has borrowed heavily from Kashmiri and Hindko. The latter is the dominant language in Kundal Shahi village and the region.

Until about fifty years ago, members of the community were bilingual, using KS within the community and Hindko with non-KS speakers, a few of whom are reported to have learnt KS. Exogamy, education, increased mobility of the community (within and outside the Neelam Valley), new modes of employment, and government language policy have precipitated an overwhelming shift to Hindko over the last two generations.

Of the 150 respondents, selected for the interview, 43% claimed to be bilingual in Urdu. Further investigation showed a correlation between the loss of language proficiency in KS and the gain of language proficiency in Urdu. The two phenomena arise from related causes, but neither causes the other; an equal level of Urdu proficiency exists in the Hindko community living around Kundal Shahi.

The paper will also analyze the negative stereotypes the Hindko community attributes to the language and the KS community. These stereotypes have influenced the community's self image, resulting in an identity shift along with the language loss.

My study shows that KS is no longer used in functional domains other than 'secret talking'. Hindko has become the mother tongue of almost all members of the KS community,

with only around 700 elderly native speakers remaining, although some younger people understand a little or have picked up a few KS words and phrases. Only 4 of the over 500 households in the community use KS with children at home, and only 13% of the respondents aged 8-20 years claim to have the knowledge of KS, compared to 87% of those above 60. Urdu is the language of instruction at schools, although Hindko is also sometimes spoken there.

Assessed against the nine factors proposed by UNESCO, KS is classified as 'severely endangered' (cf. *Brenzinger M. et al.* Language Vitality and Endangerment. Document submitted to the International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme 'The Safeguarding of Endangered Languages'. Paris, 2003: www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00120-EN.pdf). At the current rate of shift, I estimate that there will be no native speakers of KS within two decades.