

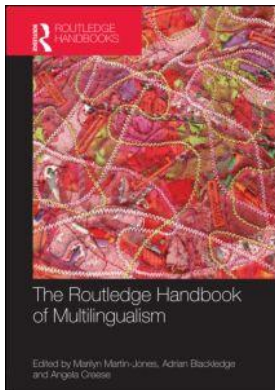
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Lessons from pre-colonial multilingualism

Suresh Canagarajah and Indika Liyanage

Introduction

Multilingualism is often celebrated in the communicative context of late modernity, where languages come into contact in contexts of transnational affiliation, diaspora communities, digital communication, fluid social boundaries and the blurring of time/space distinctions (see Rampton 1997). However, this is not a new phenomenon. There is a small but growing body of scholarship on the types of multilingualism found in pre-modern and pre-colonial times. Scholars are using a different term for the type of multilingualism practised then: plurilingualism. Some believe that colonization and the influx of Western European language ideologies led to the suppression or distortion of the vibrant plurilingual practices in the pre-colonial southern hemisphere. An understanding of the pre-colonial language practices will help us to appreciate communicative practices in contemporary times.

It is important to distinguish multilingualism from plurilingualism. Plurilingualism has recently received some attention in the scholarly literature due to the promotion of plurilingual competence by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe (2000). According to the Council of Europe, plurilingualism is:

The intrinsic capacity of all speakers to use and learn, alone or through teaching, more than one language. The ability to use several languages to varying degrees and for distinct purposes is defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as the ability 'to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural action, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures'. This ability is concretized in a repertoire of languages a speaker can use. The goal of teaching is to develop this competence (hence the expression: plurilingualism as a competence).

(2000: 168)

Some aspects of this definition will sound unusual from the perspective of traditional orientations to multilingualism. In plurilingual competence:

- Equal or advanced proficiency is not expected in all the languages.
- Using different languages for distinct purposes qualifies as competence. One does not have to use all the languages involved as all-purpose languages.
- Proficiency in languages is not conceptualized individually, with separate competencies developed for each language. What is emphasized is the repertoire – the way the different languages constitute an integrated competence.
- Language competence is not treated in isolation from intercultural competence.
- There is a recognition that speakers may develop plurilingual competence by themselves (intuitively and through social practice) and not only through schools or formal means.

How is plurilingual competence different from multilingualism? Societal multilingualism refers to languages having their separate identities in (sometimes) separate areas of a geographical location. Individual multilingualism similarly refers to separate, whole and advanced competence in the different languages one speaks – almost as if it constitutes two or three separate monolingualisms. In both forms, the construct *multilingualism* keeps languages distinct. Plurilingualism allows for the interaction and mutual influence of the languages in a more dynamic way. For example, multilingual competence conceptualizes one language being added to another (in additive bilingualism), or supplanting another (in subtractive bilingualism). However, in plurilingual competence the directionality of influence is multilateral. Also, the languages may influence each other's development. More importantly, the competence in the languages is integrated, not separated. In plurilingual communication, diverse languages may find accommodation in a person's repertoire. The person may not have any advanced proficiency in all the languages, and yet mix words and grammatical structures of one language into syntax from other languages to form an integrated composite. In societal plurilingualism, speakers of language A and language B may speak to each other in a lingua franca mixed with their own first languages and marked by the influence of these languages. Without accommodating to a single uniform code, the speakers will be able to negotiate their different languages for intelligibility and effective communication. It is an intersubjective construct, in the manner similar to lingua franca English (LFE) as Canagarajah (2007) has defined it elsewhere.

The difference between multilingualism and plurilingualism is largely theoretical. These are not different practices. The terms connote different ways of perceiving the relationship between languages in society and individual repertoire. The dominance of monolingual assumptions in linguistics has prevented scholars from appreciating plurilingualism. For this reason, the understanding of multilingualism in the field is coloured by monolingual biases and fails to go far. Critical scholars have discussed the motivations in promoting values based on homogeneity, uniformity and autonomy in linguistic sciences. They have pointed out how there has been an ideological bias in European history toward unifying communities and identities around a single language (Singh 1998), treating multilingualism as a problem (Ruiz 1984) and establishing nation-states around the language of a dominant community (May 2001). These values are informed by the social conditions and ideologies gaining dominance since the rise of the nation-state, seventeenth-century enlightenment and the French Revolution in Europe (Dorian 2004; May 2001). As Dorian (2004: 438) reminds us, 'Monolingualism, now usually considered the unmarked condition by members of the dominant linguistic group in modern nation-states, was in all likelihood less prevalent before the rise of the nation-state gave special sanction to it'. Mary Louise Pratt (1987) interprets the imposition of homogeneity and uniformity in language and speech community as signifying the construction of *linguistic utopias* that serve partisan interests. Constructs based on monolingualism and homogeneity are well

sued to communities that desire purity, exclusivity and domination. Acknowledging the heterogeneity of language and communication would force us to develop more democratic and egalitarian models of community and communication. Enabled by such historical processes as colonization and modernity, linguistics has reproduced its underlying enlightenment values elsewhere and hindered the development of plurilingual practices and knowledge.

Our theorization of plurilingualism is influenced by other well-known formulations of this practice in applied linguistics. The notion of *disinventing languages* (Makoni 2002) calls into question the separate labelling and study of languages, ignoring the ways that languages always come into contact and influence each other. If Makoni and Pennycook theorize the implications for the societal life of language and disciplinary discourses, Ofelia García's (2009) notion of *translanguaging* captures the implications of plurilingualism for one's own communicative repertoire and use. The term captures the ways multilinguals treat languages as a continuum and shuttle between them fluidly. There are other terms used by scholars to label what we theorize here as plurilingualism. Bakhtin's (1981) heteroglossia, Rampton's (1995) crossing, Jorgensen's (2008) polylingualism, Gutiérrez's (2008) third spaces, Blommaert's (2008) heterography, and Young (2004) and Canagarajah's (2006) code-meshing share many things in common. Their terms arise from different domains and contexts of consideration. Rampton, Jorgensen and Gutiérrez develop their notion in relation to multicultural youth in urban contact situations. Blommaert, Young and Canagarajah develop their terms in the contexts of literacy. As we argue in a later section, there should be greater articulation between these constructs to tease out the differences and similarities to further theoretical and empirical exploration.

In this chapter, we wish to focus on the plurilingual tradition in pre-colonial South Asia, the region where we come from. However, plurilingualism has existed in other pre-colonial communities too. Although we do not have adequate scholarly descriptions of them in our field, these practices are not completely lost in these communities. We are beginning to see descriptions of such practices from Africa (Makoni 2002) and South America (de Souza 2002), among others (Dorian 2004). We are not arguing that plurilingual practices existed only in pre-colonial times. They are evident in today's society too. However, modernist linguistic constructs that value the separate identity of languages have resulted in a suppression of plurilingual practices. We focus on pre-colonial times, as plurilingual communication was practised more spontaneously and was uninhibited before the advent of modernist ideologies via colonization in this region. We are also not arguing that plurilingual communicative practices are not evident in communities in the northern hemisphere. Scholars are beginning to study such practices in Europe and the USA, as we noted earlier. In the past, these practices were overlooked or interpreted differently by scholars influenced by modernist ideologies. It is also possible that such practices have been suppressed to a greater degree in the West due to policies of linguistic purism and standardization. Plurilingualism is evident to a greater degree in non-Western communities, even in contemporary times, as the different language ideologies and values that still exist there sustain plurilingual practices. We need more research on plurilingual practices in both Western and non-Western communities to say if the differences are only in degree and not kind.

We do not discuss early developments in this chapter as this area of study does not have a long history. As is evident from our discussion above, the study of plurilingual practices is recent. Even scholars from non-Western communities are only now rediscovering the Indigenous communicative practices, having practised in the past modernist linguistics, which failed to encourage them in this study and worked actively to suppress such practices. We begin with the description of South Asia as a plurilingual region, analyse its plurilingual practices and

explore the way they shaped language planning and education in this region. These plurilingual practices are striking in their differences from the dominant constructs in linguistics, and raise further questions that need exploration. We next explore the ways pre-colonial plurilingualism challenges the foundational constructs of linguistics. We go on to consider the implications of this communicative practice for language-in-education policies and outline areas of future research.

South Asia as a plurilingual region

Diversity, in all its multifaceted forms meshed in with thousands of years of sociopolitical history, is at the heart of the Indian subcontinent. Amidst all forms of diversity, linguistic diversity occupies a central place as it contributes to the rich complexity not just of India but also of its adjoining country, Sri Lanka. People who grew up in multilingual societies in this part of the world developed multiple memberships, both linguistic and otherwise, and their memberships overlapped and interlocked in amicable and productive ways to create fluid and hybrid identities (Canagarajah 2007). Not only the people but also the linguistic codes these people shared, grew amicably and in ways complementing each other; the complementarity was such that there is a strong and mutually identifiable lexico-grammatical affinity among these languages. For example, Khubchandani (1997) describes how many Indian languages belonging to different language families exhibit parallel trends of development over time.

In pre-colonial India and Sri Lanka, linguistic diversity and the resulting complexity of speech communities and societies have been so rich that researchers have not always appreciated this complexity. What the modernist scholars brought with them did not help them to understand the particular realization of multilingualism in this area. Even local historiographers were influenced to perceive the local plurilingualism through modernist interpretive spectacles. For example, Gunawardana (1990) believes that modern Sinhalese nationalism is a product of the British ideology introduced to the country during the late nineteenth century. On the other hand, others (Dharmadasa 1989; Rogers 1994) think that pre-colonial racial identities had to be rearticulated into models acceptable to scholars both during and after the British rule. These interpretations assume that multilingualism is a phenomenon within which different linguistic codes and communities who spoke them competed with one another for recognition and acceptance – a form of competitive multilingualism highlighting the differences and uniqueness of individual linguistics codes and communities who use them.

Even more damaging was the way modernist constructs helped Europe to establish its dominance over the communities it colonized in the nineteenth century. Local scholars point out that constructs like essentialist linguistic identity and homogeneous speech community were put to use in lands such as India to categorize people for purposes of taxation, administrative convenience and political control. In a very subtle way, these constructs have begun to shape social reality there with damaging results. Khubchandani observes:

Until as recently as four or five decades ago, one's language group was not generally considered as a very important criterion for sharply distinguishing oneself from others. ... Following Independence, language consciousness has grown, and loyalties based on language-identity have acquired political salience.

(1997: 92)

We can imagine how exclusive categories of identification can lead to ethnic and linguistic sectarianism. Furthermore, people have started to perceive themselves according to singular identities, lost their heterogeneity, and initiated conflicts and rivalries with members of what

they perceive as alien language communities. Although we cannot blame colonialism for all the present-day evils in South Asia, we can understand how the ethnic and linguistic conflicts are partly attributable to the alien ways of perceiving group relationships introduced during colonial times.

Modernist scholarship has disregarded the fact that in the Indian subcontinent communities using different linguistic codes lived in harmony for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, before they witnessed forces of colonialism in modern history. What has also been forgotten in these discussions is the richly complex, constructive, amicable and complementary plurilingual ethos that existed during pre-colonial times (see Suseendirajah in Balasubramaniam *et al.* 1999: 272–80). The knowledge and ability to use languages other than one's mother tongue were considered to be resources that contributed to the amicable coexistence of speakers of different languages. They communicated with each other, perhaps in the most subtle ways, and established relationships in personal, social and administrative spheres (see Peiris 1969; Peter 1969; Rogers 1994, 2004 for examples of these in the context of Sri Lanka). The age-old folklore literacy traditions associated with different linguistic codes were enriched with religious ethics of people who practised them and, together, these bred mutual respect, uplifting the quality of life. People were not sharply distinguished from one another in terms of the linguistic codes they used (Khubchandani 1983; Wijesekera 1969) and, thus, 'a pluralistic world-view and the relativist approach in interpreting heritage and culture have been characterised as the essence of Oriental life' (Khubchandani 1998: 12).

Although plurilingualism is promoted by policy intervention or treated as an effect of atypical social conditions in present times (as in the European community), local scholars consider plurilingualism as 'natural' to the ecology of South Asia. Bhatia and Ritchie (2004: 794) state: 'In qualitative and quantitative terms, Indian bilingualism was largely nourished naturally rather than by the forces of prescriptivism.' As evidence for this, scholars point to the status of the whole of South Asia as a *linguistic area* – 'that is, an area in which genetically distinct languages show a remarkable level of similarity and diffusion at the level of grammar' (Bhatia and Ritchie 2004: 795). This linguistic diffusion they consider inordinate in comparison with other regions of the world. Pattanayak (1984: 44) notes: 'If one draws a straight line between Kashmir and Kanyakumari and marks, say, every five or ten miles, then one will find that there is no break in communication between any two consecutive points.' Many scholars attribute this linguistic synergy to language attitudes in the region: that is, an 'accepting attitude, which has brought about the assimilation of features from Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Islamic, and even Christian and European cultures into a single system, complex, but integrated' (Bright 1984: 19). Such features are a testament to the adaptive strategies of the local communities, which develop multilingualism when they come into contact with a new language, rather than rejecting or suppressing the language. The dominance of modernist constructs in linguistics has prevented scholars from understanding the communicative practices involved in plurilingualism. Despite the view of the aforementioned scholars that South Asia is a linguistic area that features a shared plurilingual tradition, we have to be wary of generalizing the communicative practices of diverse language and cultural groups in Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, let alone the diverse groups within India and Sri Lanka. More research is needed to tease out these differences.

Theorizing pre-colonial plurilingual practices

We will use Khubchandani's (1983, 1997) accounts to reconstruct the plurilingual tradition in South Asia. Although other scholars in the region apply plurilingualism to specific areas of

interest (see Annamalai 2001; Bhatia and Ritchie 2004; Mohanty 2006; Pattanayak 1984), Khubchandani's is the most thorough and comprehensive theorization of this practice.

Khubchandani believes that plurilingualism (and cultural pluralism) comprises three salient features that in turn help define non-plurilingualism. These features are relativity, hierarchy and instrumentality. Relativity refers to the organization of verbal repertoire in relation to functional heterogeneity, a characteristic that is in contrast to the homogenized societies where promotion of a supreme benchmark for a linguistic code is sought through attitudes to usage. Hierarchy is a system of linguistic organization that uniformly promotes speech diversity in everyday use of language through aspects such as bilingualism, codeswitching, codemeshing and diglossia. This is in contrast to the selective promotion of certain linguistic codes at the expense of others. Instrumentality refers to the variation in speech in everyday settings by delineating interlocutor relationships as necessitated by speech contexts and purposes. In this process, the affiliation with a linguistic code is taken as assigned and the projection of its linguistic repertoire is flexible and adjustable to situational needs. In contrast, in non-pluralistic contexts, affiliation with a linguistic code is a 'defining' characteristic. The contribution of relativity, hierarchy and instrumentality in the use of language fortifies a plurilinguistic society as an organic whole. In such a society, affiliations with linguistic codes are not necessarily criteria for membership in select social groups; in such societies groups formed by linguistic affiliations are blurry and liquefied.

People in a plural society fit in with different identity factions that are formed around sociolinguistics and sociocultural characteristics such as cast, creed, religion, dialect and language. There is stupendous cultural and linguistic variation in everyday life and people who live in plural societies, according to Khubchandani (1998), develop common ways of thinking and interpreting life around them. The unity that develops out of this diversity and continuity of affiliations Khubchandani (1998: 84) calls a 'superconsensus'. Unlike other communities where individual differences have to be sacrificed for group identity, South Asian communities preserve their group differences while also developing an overarching community identity with other groups. Khubchandani (1983, 1997, 1998) uses a traditional Indian concept called *Kshetra* (approximate translation 'region') to encapsulate the wide sociocultural and sociolinguistic variation found in a plural society. According to him, this concept represents 'the feeling of oneness among diverse people in the region, creating in them "a sense of collective reality"' (1998: 9). He sees the concept of *Kshetra/region* as distinctly different from the modern Western model of *region*, which refers to an amalgamated area with diverse people yoked together by statutory policy.

Khubchandani (1983, 1997, 1998) further distinguishes between two types of pluralism: organic and structural. In organic pluralism, 'two identities are simply two sides of the same coin' (1983: 169). In an organically pluralistic society, individuals belonging to different ethno-religious and ethnolinguistic backgrounds have an integral relationship that can be represented as $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. Structural pluralism as it exists in the Western world is based on the premise that different primary groups are separate in terms of their ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious affiliations. This premise can be represented as $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, which is a combined relation (see Khubchandani 1997: 92 for a detailed discussion of organic and structural pluralism). Structural pluralism may be compared to the melting pot phenomenon in the West, characterized by ethnic enclaves. However, the pluralism in pre-colonial South Asia melded the different communities into a richer and integrated whole.

The above aspects of plurilingual ethos began to degenerate as 'language consciousness has grown and language loyalties have acquired political salience' (Khubchandani 1983: 9) after countries gained political independence. According to Khubchandani, the replacement of

Indigenous education systems with modern education systems and the introduction of compulsory bilingualism mandated by politically oriented language planning have expedited the substitution of grass-roots pluralism with modern bi- and multilingualism. He also believes that ‘One of the most radical turnabouts in recent history transforming the concept of language pluralism on the subcontinent, has been the explicit recognition of language claims over “exclusive” territory’ (Khubchandani 1983: 175). As he suggests, this is an attitude and practice alien to this region.

What are the implications of this plurilingualism for communication? Because of such intense social contact, languages themselves are influenced by each other, losing their ‘purity’ and separateness. Many local languages serve as contact languages, and develop features suitable for such purposes – that is, hybridity of grammar and variability of form. Khubchandani (1983: 80) says: ‘Many Indian languages belonging to different families show parallel trends of development ... [They] exhibit many phonological, grammatical and lexical similarities and are greatly susceptible to borrowing from the languages of contact.’ He goes on to say that differences ‘between Punjabi and Hindi, Urdu and Hindi, Dogri and Punjabi, and Konkani and Marathi can be explained only through a pluralistic view of language’ (1983: 91). Having been in close contact for many years, these languages have adopted many lexical and grammatical structures from each other, losing their respective family differences. Communities are so multilingual that in a specific speech situation one might see the mixing of diverse languages, literacies and discourses. It might be difficult to categorize the interaction as belonging to a single language. Khubchandani explains: ‘The edifice of linguistic plurality in the Indian subcontinent is traditionally based upon the *complementary* use of more than one language and more than one writing system for the same language in one “space” (1983: 96, emphasis in the original).’ If social spaces feature complementary – not exclusive – use of languages, mixing of languages and literacies in each situation is the norm, not the exception.

It is clear that this linguistic pluralism has to be actively negotiated to construct meaning. In these communities, meaning and intelligibility are intersubjective. The participants in an interaction produce meaning and accomplish their communicative objectives in relation to their purposes and interests. In this sense, meaning is socially constructed, not pre-given. Meaning does not reside in the language; it is produced in practice. As a result, ‘Individuals in such societies acquire more *synergy* (i.e. putting forth one’s own efforts) and *serendipity* (i.e. accepting the other on his/her own terms, being open to unexpectedness), and develop positive attitudes to variations in speech (to the extent of even appropriating deviations as the norm in the lingua franca), in the process of “coming out” from their own language-codes to a neutral ground (Khubchandani 1997: 94, emphasis in the original).’ ‘Synergy’ captures the creative agency subjects must exert in order to work jointly with the other participant to accomplish intersubjective meaning. ‘Serendipity’ involves an attitudinal transformation. To accept ‘deviations as the norm’ one must display ‘positive attitudes to variation’ and be ‘open to unexpectedness’. Subjects have to be radically other-centred. They have to be imaginative and alert to make on-the-spot decisions in relation to the forms and conventions employed by the other. It is clear that communication in multilingual communities involves a mindset and practices different from those in monolingual communities. We can also imagine the way the South Asian orientation to language departs from the tenets of modernist linguistics, which treats languages as pure and distinct products rather than fluid and hybrid social practices.

There is evidence that local communities began to appropriate and mix English with their other languages very early in the colonial period. This realization is sometimes missing in the World Englishes (WE) scholarship, and this omission makes it appear that the appropriation of English is a post-colonial development. The WE perspective is a natural outcome of the

modernist focus on stabilized forms of language. However, there were occasions of very spontaneous borrowing and mixing much earlier than post-colonial development. Such practices occurred despite efforts by the British to keep the language from mixing and (from their perspective) impurity. We have records of English education in the region where students were kept in boarding schools so that their acquisition of English (and presumably British culture and knowledge) would be preserved from contact with their home culture and home language of the students (see Chelliah 1922). Students were also fined for each occasion of non-English language usage. However, we see references to some ‘unruly’ students who were dismissed from the boarding schools for escaping at night to attend Hindu temple festivals, maintaining secret miniature shrines for Hindu deities in their cupboards or desks, and surreptitiously practicing what are called ‘heathen’ songs and dances (ibid.). It is clear that students continued contact with the vernacular despite their isolation. That mixing of languages occurred and that students retained their vernacular and plurilingual competencies at that time is also evident from oral history and narratives (as Canagarajah 2000 recounts).

Manique Gunasekera (n.d.) notes that, soon afterwards, the British administration itself began to acknowledge this mixing of languages. It appears as if local people constructed texts that mixed English and Tamil or Sinhala in their official writing. The administration started to publish guidelines on the appropriate usage and spelling convention for local languages used in English texts. In 1869 the British administration published a *Glossary of Native and Foreign Words Occurring in Official Correspondence and Other Documents* (see Gunasekera 1893). Since then, there have been revised and updated glossaries to ensure a uniform policy on the spelling and meaning of Sinhalese and Tamil words in official English. Through these glossaries, even the British administration implicitly recognized the fact that language mixing was an Indigenous phenomenon.

As has been discussed earlier, plurilingualism is a way of life and it finds expression in various social institutions such as administration, religion and education. In a truly plurilingual context, people with their different religious and linguistic identities mesh in while respecting and accommodating the differences between them. In other words, in such a context people enjoy differences found in social institutions in terms of language, religion and ethnicity, paving the way for an ideal of ‘live and let live’. The powers that rule such communities facilitate and implement policies to protect such ideals. We are, however, cognisant that eccentricities existed within ethnic groups that led to the development of Sinhalese and Tamil group identities in Sri Lanka. In particular, claims of descent – that Sinhalese were from the Aryans and the Tamils were from the Dravidians – were enshrined in Sinhalese and Tamil consciousness (Samaraweera 1977). Samaraweera also believed that eccentricities existed within the two groups that led to the development of Sinhalese and Tamil group identities. However, they did not produce ongoing tensions or clashes in society. According to Samaraweera, beneath the occasional bickering was a strong ethnocultural and ethnolinguistic ambience that promoted firm social and economic relations between the two groups. The Moors also had harmonious relations with Sinhalese Buddhists who spoke Sinhala and with Tamil Hindus who spoke Tamil. The Moors were in fact protected against the atrocities committed by the Portuguese and the Dutch by the Sinhalese, who purposefully integrated them into the former Kandyan Kingdom where ‘they retained their religious and cultural identity’ (De Silva 1977: 392).

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the fact that there were power differences between language groups, despite plurilingualism. The biggest difference was between Sanskrit, the cosmopolitan literate language, and the regional vernaculars. The reason power is not accentuated in the

South Asian descriptions of conversational interaction is because vernaculars were only spoken, not written, for a long time. They all had relatively equal status in their own local domains. The written language, which enjoyed power in pre-colonial and pre-modern times, was Sanskrit. Pollock (2006) argues that the hegemony of Sanskrit was different from the power exerted by Latin or English. The latter imposed themselves on other communities through military might or political force. Sanskrit existed on a parallel plane to that of the vernaculars, but as the universally accepted written language. Other communities used Sanskrit if and when they wanted to write. As time went by, the vernaculars developed a written medium when they mixed with Sanskrit in their own literary, political or religious literature, around the sixth century. This unique form of writing, known as *manipralava* in South India (see Pollock 2006; Viswanathan 1993), is a linguistically hybrid form. This strategy of negotiation in literacy was not unlike the one discussed earlier for conversational interactions. Local communities merged their codes, made impure the dominant code and democratized the literate system.

Also, we must not ignore the fact that there are now heightened differences, even conflicts, between language groups in South Asia – such as between Hindus and Muslims in India, or Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. How do we explain this inconsistency with the collaborative and accommodative practices of plurilingualism?

To answer this question we have to ponder the implications of Western European colonization since the sixteenth century. South Asian scholars have pointed out that colonization had dire implications for language and social life in the region. Mohan (1992) documents how unitary constructs of linguistic identity and speech community were put to use in colonies to categorize people for purposes of taxation, administrative convenience and political control. The stock question in the censuses about one's native or mother tongue was, and still is, confusing for local people when their mother speaks one language, father another and the family a third for domestic communication. In fact, the mother herself may have grown up with that level of multilingualism in her childhood, making 'mother-tongue' even more plural. For people who grow up with multiple languages in their everyday life, unitary notions of identity are reductive. Worse still, from the introduction of language censuses these notions of identity and community began to reproduce social life in the region.

Policy issues

What are the implications of pluralism for language planning and educational policy in present times? There is a general recognition in many communities nowadays that it is important for citizens of late modernity to shuttle between languages and develop plurilingual competence. However, some of the assumptions of traditional linguistics and education stifle efforts to develop this competence in language classrooms. In mainstream educational curricula and policy, models of subtractive or additive bilingualism are promoted. As we saw in the first section, these models develop language competence one at a time, in isolation from other languages and sometimes at the cost of the others. This is especially evident in Western communities, which treat multilingualism as a problem rather than a resource (see Hornberger 2003; Ruiz 1984). Other policies, such as treating the native speaker as the target for proficiency and treating additional languages as interference in developing proficiency (which Phillipson 1992 calls 'native speaker fallacy' and 'monolingual fallacy' respectively), also militate against plurilingual education.

Nor is this a problem only for countries in the northern hemisphere. South Asia itself finds it difficult to implement plurilingual policies in the aftermath of colonization and modernity. Ajit Mohanty (2006) feels that the modernist approach based on centralized languages and/or

a hierarchy of difference (such as the three-language policy in India), are alien to the South Asian tradition. He argues that Indian pluralism works most effectively through functional distribution of languages, not hierarchies. What is conducive to the region is how individuals, families and communities assign different languages for different domains of communication without treating one as better than the other. He also argues that the imposition of English in colonial times and its glorified current status as the global language have also upset the plurilingual balance in South Asia. These issues have led to social and educational policies based on a hierarchical relationship of languages, resulting in the denigration of minority languages, language attrition and even language death. These post-colonial developments Mohanty finds damaging to the language ecology of South Asia. Drawing an analogy from his personal life to illustrate the complementary relationship between languages, Mohanty says: ‘These languages fit in a mutually complementary and non-competing relationship in my life. Under such conditions of multilingual functioning individuals naturally need and use different languages because no language is sufficient or suitable for meeting all the communicative requirements across different situations and social activities (2006: 263).’ Mohanty argues that such patterns of individual and community bilingualism at the local or regional level constitute ‘the first incremental step towards concentric layers of societal multilingualism’ (ibid.).

To some extent, certain non-Western communities (India, Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei, and some countries in the Middle East and North Africa), have adopted forms of education that provide a complementary relationship to languages. García calls this *multiple multilingual education*. These programmes

use more than two languages in education and often have moveable parts—that is, languages are weaved in and out of the curriculum as needed. Multilingualism is considered a resource for all children in the society. As a result of the inclusion of all children, there is considerable variation in bilingual proficiency; translanguaging is therefore a common feature of this education. Transculturalism is promoted, as not only languages, but also cultures, are blended.

(2009: 283)

We can see how the practices promoted in this form of education go against dominant policies. Students may learn different subjects in different languages. The goal is not to develop parity of competence in all languages. Switching and mixing languages in classrooms is permitted. Language awareness is combined with intercultural competence.

We have to also consider the implications of plurilingualism for language teaching. Already communities in Europe are promoting plurilingual competence, as evident from our mention of the goal of the Council of Europe in the opening section. There are mixed reviews on the effectiveness of this pedagogy in Europe (for a critical review, see García 2009: 197–216). The problems include lack of training for teachers who have not transitioned from traditional pedagogical practices; lack of new teaching materials that promote plurilingualism; and the de facto dominance of certain languages and communities, which stifle the development of proficiency in less prestigious languages. The more pressing question is whether the type of spontaneous negotiation of languages that we see in face-to-face conversations can be taught in the somewhat constrained context of the classroom. What we need is a paradigm shift in language teaching. Pedagogy should be refashioned to accommodate the modes of communication and acquisition seen outside the classroom (see Canagarajah 2005a for a more elaborate pedagogical discussion). Rather than focusing on a single language or dialect as the target of learning, teachers have to develop in students a readiness to engage with a repertoire

of codes in transnational contact situations. Whereas joining a new speech community was the objective of traditional pedagogy, now we have to train students to shuttle between communities by negotiating the relevant codes. To this end, we have to focus more on communicative strategies, rather than on form. Students would develop language awareness (to cope with the multiple languages and emergent grammars of contact situations), rather than focusing only on mastering the grammar rules of a single variety. In a context of plural forms and conventions, it is important for students to be sensitive to the relativity of norms. Therefore, students have to understand communication as performative, not just constitutive. That is, going beyond the notion of constructing prefabricated meanings through words, they will consider *shaping* meaning in actual interactions and even *reconstructing* the rules and conventions to represent their interests, values and identities. In other words, it is not what we know as much as the versatility with which we can do things with words that defines proficiency. Pedagogical movements such as learner strategy training and language awareness go some way toward facilitating such interactional strategies and repertoire development.

New directions in theoretical and disciplinary constructs

There is a need to theorize linguistics in more complex ways to accommodate the insights from plurilingual practices. The plurilingual view of language departs from many of the assumptions of modernist linguistics, posing questions such as the following: How do we classify and label languages when there is such mixing? How do we describe languages without treating them as self-contained systems? How do we define the system of a language without the autonomy, closure and tightness that would preclude openness to other languages? This perspective also challenges many dichotomies in modernist linguistics that need to be re-examined:

- Grammar versus pragmatics: is one more primary in communication, and are these in fact separable? Would pragmatic strategies enable one to communicate successfully irrespective of the level of grammatical proficiency? (House 2003).
- Determinism versus agency: are learners at the mercy of grammar and discourse forms for communication, or do they shape language to suit their purposes? (Canagarajah 2006).
- Individual versus community: are language learning and use orchestrated primarily by the individual even when they occur through interaction? Or do communication and acquisition take place in collaboration with others, through active negotiation, as an intersubjective practice? (Block 2003).
- Purity versus hybridity: are languages separated from each other, even at the most abstract level of grammatical form? And how do they associate with other symbol systems and modalities of communication? (Khubchandani 1997; Makoni 2002).
- Fixity versus fluidity: what is the place of deviation, variation, and alteration in language, and can a system lack boundedness? Similarly, is acquisition linear, cumulative, unidirectional and monodimensional? (Kramsch 2002; Larsen-Freeman 2002).
- Cognition versus context: do we formulate and store language norms detached from the situations and environment in which they are embedded? Is learning more effective when it takes place separately from the contexts where multiple languages, communicative modalities and environmental influences are richly at play? (Atkinson *et al.* 2007; Lantolf and Thorne 2006).
- Monolingual versus multilingual acquisition: how do we move beyond treating learning as taking place one language at a time, separately for each, in homogeneous environments (Cook 1999)? How do we explain the acquisition of multiple languages simultaneously?

It is now well recognized that the dominant constructs in linguistics are founded on monolingual norms and practices. We are also beginning to see a realization among mainstream scholars that their dichotomous constructs are misleading and distorting, especially for an understanding of plurilingual practices in non-Western communities (see Dorian 2004 for a discussion). McLaughlin recounts the belated recognition during her fieldwork in Senegal that a local collaborator whom she discounted as an informant of a language because he was associated with another language was in fact a proficient insider with authoritative knowledge (McLaughlin and Sall 2001). Her unitary assumption of 'native speaker' did not let her accept her informant as having native proficiency in more than one language. Similarly, Makoni (2002) has described how colonial practices of classifying and labelling languages distorted the hybrid reality of South African languages.

These limitations derive from the dominant assumptions of linguistics, informed by the modernist philosophical movement and intellectual culture in which they developed. To begin with, the field treats language as a thing in itself: an objective, identifiable product. The field also gives importance to form, treating language as a tightly knit structure, neglecting other processes and practices that always accompany communication. Scholars have traced this development to Saussurean linguistics and the structuralist movement (Lantolf and Thorne 2006). Other biases follow from this assumption. Khubchandani (1997) has pointed out the inordinate emphasis on the temporal life of language, motivating linguists to chart the linear stages by which imperfect forms develop to a stasis, at which point they become fully fledged forms. Inadequate attention is paid to the way in which various language forms and varieties are embedded in diverse environments, perfectly adequate in their own way for the functions at hand.

Therefore, Kubchandani (1997) calls for a spatial orientation. Such an approach would also rectify the lack of attention to the ecological factors of language. We have to understand how language is meshed with other symbolic systems and embedded in specific environments, both shaping and being shaped by these. Mainstream linguistics also fails to give importance to attitudinal, psychological and perceptual factors that mould the intersubjective processes of communication. This failing is partly due to the primacy of cognition and reason in communication. There is also a resultant lack of appreciation of the complexity of human communication, marked by indeterminacy, multimodality and heterogeneity. Mainstream linguistics prioritizes the homogeneity of community, competence and language structure, treating it as the basic requirement that facilitates communication. Even when diversity is addressed, it is treated as a variation deriving from a common form or shared norms.

However, in the context of post-modern globalization, as all communities become increasingly multilingual with the transnational flow of people, ideas and things, scholars are beginning to question the dominant constructs in the field. Even Western communities are beginning to acknowledge the diversity, hybridity and fluidity at the heart of language and identity. The struggle now is to find new metaphors and constructs that would capture plurilingual communication. How do we practise linguistics that treats human agency, diversity, indeterminacy and multimodality as the norm? As the constructs of modern linguistics are influenced by the modernist philosophical assumptions, some scholars are exploring alternate philosophical traditions to conceptualize the emerging realizations. Phenomenology (Kramsch 2002), ecological models (Hornberger 2003), chaos theory (Larsen-Freeman 2002) and Vygotskian social cognitive theory (Lantolf and Thorne 2006) are some such attempts.

Scholars from post-colonial and non-Western communities are also beginning to represent their communicative practices in scholarly literature from the evidence they still find in their communities. This articulation is of course influenced by a world view and culture that differs

from modernity. As we saw in the previous section, Khubchandani resorts to Indian spirituality and philosophy to represent what he perceives as Indigenous language practices. He uses metaphors like rainbow, symbiosis, osmosis, synergy and serendipity to describe a multilingual reality that lacks a suitable language in mainstream linguistics. Although these lesser known publications of periphery scholars are full of insight, they still lack elaborate theorization to produce sophisticated alternate models. There are other difficulties in working from untheorized local knowledge. One has to break the dominant hermeneutic moulds offered by modernism in order to interpret this knowledge. Modernism has denigrated local knowledge, and provided negative interpretations. Furthermore, local knowledge is not pure or whole, as dominant knowledge systems have appropriated it. At any rate, we must not glorify non-Western traditions. The local can contain chauvinistic tendencies, especially as the onslaught by modernity has been forcing the local to retreat further into more recalcitrant positions in a desperate attempt to maintain its independence. Also, although there are certain egalitarian practices at one level, inequalities in terms of caste, clan and gender have to be negotiated at other levels of communication.¹

New research directions

What we know currently about pre-colonial forms of plurilingualism are derived from brief glimpses in archival records, incidental descriptions in literary works and theorization by informed scholars. We have to search for more in-depth descriptions of plurilingual communicative practices from archives. This is especially difficult because the knowledge of many colonized communities was suppressed or lacked the means for representation. However, without more evidence of plurilingual practices, discussions related to pre-colonial plurilingualism face the danger of being treated as figments of scholarly imagination.

A way to gain more empirical evidence of plurilingual communicative practices is by observing and recording vestiges of pre-colonial practices still found in many non-Western and traditional communities. We need more ethnographic research in these contexts to bring out the language practices and attitudes of people towards these practices from insider perspectives. Imposing mainstream linguistic perspectives on these practices has led to the distortion and suppression of local plurilingual practices in the scholarly literature.

Plurilingual practices are also found in contemporary youth and child communication in Western communities, especially motivated by digital and new media of communication. Not only do we need more studies of language negotiations in these contexts, we have to compare also how these practices are similar or different to pre-colonial plurilingual practices.

A particularly important area of study is plurilingual negotiation strategies. If speakers retain their own codes and depend on negotiation strategies to achieve intelligibility and meaning, we need a fuller description of the array of strategies used by multilinguals. This, again, requires more data-driven studies so that the negotiation strategies can be interpreted and explained for the functions they perform in context. The negotiation of English in transnational contact situations has generated some useful data for the study of plurilingualism (see House 2003; Meierkord 2004; Roberts and Canagarajah 2009).

As we gain more empirical data on these practices, we have to begin to compare how plurilingualism in different communities is similar or different. Although we generalize now to all communities because of a paucity of data, we should try to understand the community-specific nature of plurilingual practices and consider the strengths and limitations of these diverse traditions. Even within pre-colonial contexts, we know of plurilingual communication in Africa (Makoni 2002) and South America (de Souza 2002) in addition to those in South

Asia. There may be interesting differences between these traditions that will help us to develop a sharper understanding of plurilingualism in diverse communities.

In the same vein, we have to develop a better articulation between theorizations of plurilingual communicative practices by different theorists. There has been a proliferation of terms that need more clarity. We now have terms like code-meshing (Canagarajah 2006; Young 2004), third spaces (Gutiérrez 2008), crossing (Rampton 1995), polylingualism (Jørgensen 2008), translanguaging (García 2009) and heterography (Blommaert 2008). They need to be interrogated to examine their similarities and differences. We have to consider if these terms refer to plurilingualism in different contexts and domains of communication, or whether they mean the same thing in all contexts.

Conclusion

Plurilingual linguistic practices and the sociocultural values emanating from them existed long before countries such as India and Sri Lanka witnessed the forces of colonialism. The existing approaches that primarily interpret multilingual practices through modernist stances seem to be inadequate mainly because of their limited foundational assumptions. An understanding of the pre-colonial plurilingual ethos requires investigative approaches that treat language as an intersubjective social practice with a grammar that is emergent, hybrid and multimodal.

Plurilingual practices in pre-colonial societies have immense potential to inform post-modern multilingual practices. If unplanned language policies of the pre-colonial times bred social equality, intercultural contact and language maintenance among different linguistic communities, what led to the failure of planned policies that resulted in civil wars, social unrest and, in certain cases, the death of languages? Perhaps a comprehensive understanding of the differences between the multilingual practices during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times may help to explain and perhaps inform us of their potential strengths, weaknesses and applications.

Related topics

Discourses about linguistic diversity; multilingualism and religion; rethinking discourses about the 'English-cosmopolitan' correlation; multilingualism in education in post-colonial contexts; codeswitching; heteroglossia; crossing.

Note

- 1 For a detailed discussion of the difficulties in rediscovering local knowledge of non-Western communities in our profession, see Canagarajah (2005b).

Further reading

Blommaert, J. (2008) *Grassroots Literacy: Writing, Identity and Voice in Central Africa*, London: Routledge.

(*Grassroots Literacy* addresses the relationship between globalization and the widening gap between 'grass-roots' literacies, or writings from ordinary people and local communities influenced by pre-colonial practices, and 'elite' literacies. The literacy practices of local communities involve multimodality and code-mixing, helping us to develop the notion of heterography. Jan Blommaert considers how 'grass-roots' literacy in the Third World develops outside the literacy-saturated environments of the developed world. In examining documents produced by socially and economically marginalized

writers, Blommaert demonstrates how the plurilingual practices of these writers are disqualified in contemporary institutions.)

Canagarajah, A. S. (2007) 'Lingua franca English, multilingual communities, and language acquisition', *The Modern Language Journal* 91(5): 923–39.

(This article brings out the unique features of language acquisition and communicative practices in multilingual communities. The article advances the ideas that language proficiency is adaptive and emergent and that language learning and use work through social negotiations in fluid communicative contexts via performance strategies.)

Pollock, S. (2006) *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

(The book shows how Sanskrit as a cosmopolitan language in Asia had a relationship with diverse communities and languages that was markedly different from the relationship of other lingua francas like Latin or English. It also shows how local communities mixed their languages with Sanskrit to develop plurilingual communicative practices and literacies. The book helps us to understand the differences of pre-colonial plurilingualism from language practices in contemporary times.)

García, O. (2009) *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

(This book critically challenges prevailing monolingual ideologies in bi- and multilingual education and advocates alternative pedagogical orientations. It acknowledges linguistic diversity as the norm and argues for a heteroglossically informed bilingual education.)

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