**Different ways of dealing with linguistic diversities**

Linguistic diversity is a world-wide phenomenon. Every country houses multiple languages. At the societal level, education is one strategy that countries use to deal with linguistic diversities. This piece of writing attempts to give a glimpse into the ways education is used to deal with linguistic diversity. Specifically, it looks at what the strategy is, the goal of the strategy, whose needs does the strategy serve and the underlying perspective it holds about linguistic diversity. Most of the strategies discussed here are either at the policy level or at programmatic level with the intention of feeding into the policies while we also touch on an informal strategy. One also should note that many countries simultaneously follow some of these strategies while others have changed their strategy of dealing with linguistic diversities over time. It is not the purpose of this paper to go into the historical details for changes in strategies. This discussion is limited to the currently followed strategies. The discussion is also not intended to highlight all the strategies; it is limited to giving a flavour of the substantial ones.

**The use of multiple languages in education**

Many colonized countries, like India, Africa, Malaysia, and Singapore house a variety of languages. These countries are generally referred to as multilingual countries. They use multiple languages in education to accommodate linguistic diversity. The three language formula is a policy level example of addressing multiple languages. The policy advocates the use of mother tongue as the educational medium along with the study of English as a subject (second language) and another language (eg: Hindi, Sanskrit etc.,) depending on the geographical region within the country. The situation in other colonized countries is more or less the same. Similarly, In Singapore, Malay, Chinese Mandarin, and Indian Tamil are recognized as the official languages. Every child is expected to study two languages, namely English (which is considered to be the first language) and either Malay or Mandarin or Tamil (which is treated as the second language). In Malaysia from the time of gaining independence, Malay language was the sole national language and English was used for official purposes. In 1967, the government passed a declaration of using the language as the medium of instruction in schools. By the end of 1982, all schools followed Malay as medium and the hitherto English medium schools were converted to Malay medium schools. Malay medium schools teach English as a subject. The National type schools follow Mandarin and Tamil medium and teach both Malay and English as subjects (Chan and Abdullah, 2015). In Kenya, according to the language policy, Kiswahili and other indigenous languages are used as the medium of instruction from classes 1 to 3. Where English is used as the medium of instruction at all levels of education and Kiswahili is taught as a subject.

There is an informal strategy that is used in some of these countries and deserves a mention. In both India and Kenya, in the English medium schools, teachers use mother tongues to explain concepts in Mathematics and Science. The reason for the informal strategy of multilingual education is two folded – the first relates to teacher’s inadequate competencies in English. The second is that most teachers feel that explaining concepts using mother tongue facilitates understanding. This practice is widely prevalent in public schools, particularly in the rural areas. Oduor (2015) refers to this practice as a pragmatic approach to teaching.

In all these countries, the goal of the language policy is, on the one hand, to foster a sense of nationalism and unity and on the other to ensure access to social and economic opportunities associated with learning of English. There is a constant tension between the two goals with the balance tilting in favour of English many times. In Singapore for instance, Chinese form the largest ethnic group with more than 76% of the population belonging to this ethnicity. But not all Chinese are Mandarin mother tongue speakers. Their mother tongue consists of dialects like Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hainanese, Hakka, Hokchiu, Henghua, and Shanghainese. These linguistic groups prefer the use of English thus contributing to the dominance of English – contrary to the aim of the policy as promoting ethnic national languages. (Dixon, Q.L. 2005). This policy serves the needs of speakers of the major languages (including Urdu in the Indian context). It treats all varieties of a language as homogeneous and assumes that the issues related to varieties will be taken care of at the curricular level. The perspective it has on linguistic diversity is that of giving educational space to the needs of multiple languages. There is a continuous attempt to include many other mother tongues (that have hitherto not used) in the domain of education and also to strengthen the use of mother tongues that are already in use. In India, for instance, more and more mother tongues are being used as the medium of education at primary and secondary levels of education (Koul and Devaki 2001). The entire thrust of such a strategy is that of maintaining linguistic diversity.

**The use of mother tongue as a bridge to a dominant language**

There is a shared understanding that when children are taught through a dominant language (which is generally, but not always English) learning does not take place because children do not understand the dominant language. This situation obtains in the context of multiple languages. One way of addressing this problem is to initiate initial literacy through the mother tongue. In the second year, the dominant language is introduced and used to the extent of 25% and the mother tongue is used for 75% of the time. In year 3 the proportion gradually tilts in favour of the dominant language. It culminates with the use of the dominant language as the sole medium of instruction (second language is used for 100% of time). Such a strategy is called the *transitional bilingual education*. Countries like Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Ecuador are known for large scale transitional bilingual education. Let us see how this works taking the example of Guatemala in South America. Here children whose mother tongue is Mayan (an indigenous language) begin literacy through Mayan. By grade 3 or 4 they transition to Spanish-only as a medium of education. Similarly, in Mexico, children study through Hispanic or other indigenous mother tongues and gradually transit to Spanish medium (Rainer 2015). There are two versions of this program, the early and the late exit programs. The difference between the two is the duration of studying through the mother tongue. In the early exit, the transition to the dominant language is completed by the end of grade 3 where as in the late exit model children have access to their mother tongue for a period of 5 to 7 years.

On the face of it, such a strategy is problematic because access to mother tongue is limited. Nevertheless, findings from research shows some advantages of this strategy, as below:

* If one compares learning of children who study only through the dominant language (which is not their mother tongue) to children who study through their mother tongue and to learning of children whose mother tongue is the dominant language, findings show that the second and third group of children do not differ much while the first group of children differ a lot from these two groups.
* Another finding is that studying through the mother tongue (the second group) does not hamper their learning of the dominant language.
* On the other hand, a comparison between the early and late exit program shows that children who have more access to multilingual education show better learning compared to children who study through the early exit program.

The findings show advantages of the prolonged use of mother tongue as medium of instruction.

The transitional bilingual education programs are aimed at indigenous language speakers. Its purpose is to use mother tongue as a bridge to facilitate better learning of the dominant language. The goal of the program is to help children transition to the mainstream. This strategy holds an instrumental value of mother tongue because mother tongue is seen as a bridge to reach the second language. The orientation of the program is to assimilate indigenous mother tongue speakers to the mainstream. There is almost no attempt to ensure that the many mother tongues are maintained. There is a danger that the continued use of this strategy will eventually minimize the linguistic diversity.

**Mother tongue based multilingual education**

The strategy of mother tongue based multilingual education is supported by *SIL International*, a non-profit organization, whose main purpose is to study, develop and document lesser known languages. This strategy is different from the earlier strategies. It emphasizes on beginning literacy through the mother tongue, on the use of two languages as medium of education and also uses another language as a subject. This strategy takes care of some concerns raised by the previous one. The strategy is followed in parts of Africa, Eastern Europe, North and South America, several countries in Asia. In India this program is followed in Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, and Assam. In Orissa, the program was piloted in 2007, in some blocks and implemented in 10 tribal languages, namely, Sura, Juang, Munda, Santhali, Bonda, Koya, Munda, Kissan, Oram, Kuvi and Kui. Since 2012, the program has been extended to preschool education in the Anganwadis serving tribal children. This strategy is aimed at tribal languages. Detailed documentation of the program is available in addition to the evaluation report of the program by NCERT (2011).

The mother tongue education program is noted for four features

1. The use of two languages as medium of education
2. The curriculum
3. The pedagogy
4. The recruitment of teachers
5. Involvement of the Community
6. Multiple languages are taught in the program. The tribal language and Odia are used as medium of education and English is taught as a subject. The mother tongue education follows the plan of teaching as below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| K1 | K2 | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 |
| **Build fluency in oral L1 (Mother tongue)** | L1 for teaching Continue oral L1 | L1 for teaching Continue oral & written L1 and Oral L2 | Continue oral & written L1, L2 | Continue oral & written L1, L2 | Continue oral & written L1, L2, oral L3 | Continue oral & written L1, L2, L3 | Continue oral & written L1, L2,L3 |
|  | **Begin written L1** | **Begin written L2 (late in the year)** |  | **Begin Oral L3 (English)** | **Begin Written L3** |  |  |
|  | **Begin oral L2 (Odia) (late in the year)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| L1 for teaching | L1 for teaching | L1 for teaching | L1 for teaching | L1-L2-L1 for teaching | L1-L2-L1 for teaching | L1-L2-L1 for teaching | L2-L1 for teaching |

1. The curriculum plays a significant role in mother tongue education. Two features of the curriculum – the content and the way it is developed provide important insights into the nature of mother tongue education. The content is contextualized in the local – so that children are able to connect to it and find education relevant. The curriculum is based on thematic approach. A theme web was designed for each tribal community to ensure that the curriculum was culture based and contextual. The themes to be taught were selected from this and the curriculum was woven around these. The thematic curriculum and teaching and variety of learning materials (Word web, Alphabet Book, Picture Dictionaries, Grammar books, Big Book, small book, story charts, with stories on community life, etc.,) were developed as a package in both tribal languages and in Odia. The second language is not developed in isolation, but is integrated with the mother tongue through the bilingual big and small books and integration of the text with the rich illustrations. The program follows two approaches. It aims at promoting the use of languages as medium of expression. This was done through the use of the experiential knowledge of children in social context. It also aims at promoting language as an object of thought through the skills of reading, writing and numeracy.
2. A lot of emphasis is placed on making the classroom a dialogic space with both teachers and students contributing to the pedagogy. The teacher explains a concept, provides concrete examples from everyday lives of children and reiterates the examples through questions. An Illustration of pedagogic practice is provided by Manochi and Panda (2015) (See appendix 1)

An observation made by the authors is that the class as a whole tended to answer simple questions in chorus and did not wait for turns. This suggests that the process of learning is also localized by children.

1. Teachers play a critical role in implementing the curriculum. Where existing tribal teachers were inadequate or not available, teachers were recruited from the pool of unemployed tribal youths from the tribal community to teach the learners in their own language. These language teachers, called, Bhasa Sikshaks, work with primary teachers in tribal areas. Where tribal language teachers were available, they were deployed from existing primary schools to act as the Mother tongue language education teachers. A package of training program was developed and implemented to develop the capacity of the mother tongue teachers.
2. The tribal community is closely involved in taking decisions on the program and its implementation. The community participation is by way of involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI). Their opinion was sought about the use of mother tongue and the program.

The members of the community were also involved in preparing culturally and contextually relevant theme based curriculum. The community was also involved in the functioning of schools through programs like Srujan‟ a community based child centered, teacher' supportive, culturally appropriate program for retention and achievement of the tribal child. As a part of Srujan, the community was involved in organizing events like story telling‟, songs, dance, art and craft, quizzes and debates. The community participation was not limited just to acceptance but extended to include an active engagement to promote the program.

The program has had implementation issues in some districts (eg: materials delayed). On the whole, the confidence of children is shown to increase (in addition to increased enrolment and decreased drop outs) and the Government of Orissa is planning to extend the program to other blocks and include other tribal languages as well.

The program is aimed at non-dominant or indigenous languages. Unlike the transfer approach, the mother tongue program aims at developing mother tongues. It is used with the second language and not abandoned as soon as the second language is acquired. The aim of this program is to promote the growth of the two languages through its use as a medium of education. This brings in another difference when compared to the first two strategies. Even though the transitional or transfer model is called bilingual model, many scholars do not consider it to be bilingual because of its goal. At the minimum, it is considered to be a weak form of bilingual education. This strategy, on the contrary, refers to a strong form of multilingual education because of its continued use of two languages as medium of education. This larger aim of this strategy is to promote linguistic diversity among non-dominant language speakers.

Neither the first strategy nor the second talks about the curriculum. These strategies use the curriculum that is used in the case of dominant language. In the Indian context, both mother tongue medium (Kannada, Gujarati etc.,) and the English medium follow the same curriculum. The mother tongue pedagogy does not leverage the knowledge of the language that children bring – even if it is Kannada speaking children studying through Kannada medium. The pedagogy of literacy does not make any cognitive demands on children. Consequently, regardless of the medium, mother tongue or the second language, learning of children is of poor quality. In contrast to this practice, in the mother tongue multilingual education, the notion of linguistic diversity is expanded to take cognizance of cultural diversities through the contextually relevant curriculum.

**Multiple languages as a resource**

We shift our attention to similar strategy widely implemented in many countries of Europe and implemented at the formal policy level. Like the mother tongue based multilingual education, this strategy is also aimed at fostering mother tongues while at the same time promoting diversity. It is formal because the policy is binding on all signatory countries. The Common European Framework of reference for languages- learning, teaching and assessment (CEFR) is an instrument that assists member states to develop a policy of pluralilingualism. Spain is one of the signatory nation. The bilingual education in Andalusia in Spain is an example of how linguistic diversity is promoted as a part of this policy. Schools in Andalusia offers Spanish-only, French- Spanish and German –Spanish medium of education in a graduated manner. A minimum of 40% instruction is through Spanish. In these schools, English is studied as another language. The bilingual sections / schools have assistants who are experts in the second language and these assistants work with subject teachers for teaching those subjects through the second language.

An important feature of multilingual education in Andalusia (and other signatory countries in Europe) is the curriculum, which is the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Its main feature is its dual focus. It aims at developing content and language simultaneously without preference for either. For instance, in the French-Spanish classes, students learn Spanish and French and some subjects through Spanish and some through French. The method of learning is integrated and holistic. In the process of integrated learning, learners learn to zero on content-focussed and language-focussed aspects. In the process of engaging in tasks which require complex language for dealing with complex curricular concepts and relationships, learners learn to use language for complex thinking.

This strategy of dealing with diversity recognizes multilingual education as the use of two or more languages as a medium. The strategy explicitly promotes linguistic diversity. The European Commission and the Council of Europe see diversity and knowledge of multiple languages as assets. The strategy is influenced and informed by two shifts in multilingualism. The first shift relates to the way one looks at multilingual education. For long, bi or multilingualism was considered in the quantitative sense - additions of language(s). In this perspective, a bilingual, consists of a native speaker of language one and a native speaker of language two. Several research studies that looked at learning of two and three languages note that this is not a tenable position. These studies highlight the view that multilingualism is qualitatively different from monolingualism. Using the ‘qualitatively different notion’, the second shift looks at the multilingual repertoire not as compartmentalized knowledge of language but as a repertoire where language boundaries are extremely fuzzy with code switching as a norm of language use. This view led to the second shift and the idea of “translanguage” – a process that indicates that multilingual speakers utilize their languages as an integrated system.

There is very little philosophical differences between mother tongue based multilingual education and multiple language as a resource approach to linguistic diversity. Both are aimed at promoting linguistic diversity and both follow an approach that integrates content and language. The main difference comes from the fact that mother tongue based multilingual education is aimed at tribal population whereas the multiple languages as resource is meant for all those who reside in countries that have signed up to the CEFR. This difference has implications for the curriculum and teacher recruitment and deployment. Since mother tongue based multilingual education has emerged from a cultural perspective, the emphasis on cultural elements is very high. In the CEFR approach, cultural elements are not identified and included specifically; rather these are a natural part of the curriculum.

**The Immersion Strategy**

The Immersion strategy is one of the most widely used strategies for dealing with linguistic diversities. Fortune and Tedick (2008) discuss immersion strategy succinctly. In immersion strategy, about 50% of instruction time is through the use of L2 from preschool to grade 5 or 6. The curriculum focuses on both content and language components. Immersion programs are not to be equated with any program that use second language as medium of education. It is a choice-based public education system where the first language or mother tongue is developed. In this sense, immersion programs are additive. It is this aspect that distinguishes immersion programs from those that use second language as medium without any thought to developing mother tongues.

Three practices are associated with the immersion strategy. The first is the one-way immersion where students are educated through the second language. The one-way immersion is followed in Canada, Finland and parts of United States. Finland has two national languages – Finnish and Swedish. About 6% of the population speak Swedish. There is a gradual decrease in Swedish language proficiency and this became a matter of concern for Finland. Recognizing the value of Swedish and the role that education could play in increasing the vitality of language, the Finnish government took steps to promote education through Swedish. Provisions were made for Finnish children to study through Swedish medium right from preschool. These children develop literacy in both Swedish and Finnish. Underlying this practice is the notion that deliberate attempts need to be made to ensure languages from dying out.

The second practice is the two-way immersion program (or the dual language immersion). In this strategy, native language speakers of two different languages acquire academic content through both the languages. To illustrate, native Spanish and native English speakers study together – some subjects through Spanish medium and some through English medium. This strategy is used in several parts of United States. While English-Spanish combination is predominant other language like Arabic, Chinese, Hawaiian, Japanese, and Korean are also used with English. The strategy recognizes the value of knowledge of multiple languages for all and not just a section of a population like the speakers of indigenous, minority languages or non-dominant languages. The purpose of this practice is enrichment.

The third practice of the immersion model is the indigenous language immersion. In this model, indigenous language speakers are educated through their mother tongue, with English as a subject. There are variations in the level of schooling at which English is introduced and the duration of its study. Like the mother tongue-based multilingual education, the indigenous immersion also emphasized on the use of culturally relevant curriculum. This practice is in several parts of United States. I take the example of the Navajo community school of Rough Rock in Arizona. These schools are organized by the Native family groups and elders. The program emphasizes on the use of culturally relevant curriculum. Total Physical Response (TPR) is the primary methodology for the Native language immersion classrooms, camps and projects. The schools are built and furnished after "gramma's home" (On Top, n.d). The emphasis is on using the native ways of learning and knowing. Learning by doing, learning through oral literature and history, learning through naming traditions, learning from older siblings, learning from parents arranged apprenticeship with a master to acquire special knowledge, intergenerational workshops and so on. The teachers come from diverse backgrounds – ranchers, drivers, teachers, activists. The indigenous language immersion program is meant for indigenous people. The purpose of the program is to reverse the trend from dying languages to language revival. At the level of student, the kind of learning is seen as affirming, validating and giving expression to indigenous identity and shared knowledge.

**Conclusion**

This discussion has touched only on the major strategies that have been used to deal with linguistic diversities. The differences in strategies provide insightful learning. A critical question for us to reflect on is our view on linguistic diversity – do we see it as something of a burden, or as a fact that we have to live with or a valuable asset. The answer will help us think through the strategies. Another important learning is that linguistic diversity is not just about diversities in language and so it cannot be dealt in isolation. The educational, the cultural and the socio-political contexts in which diversity is embedded forms a part of diversity and needs consideration when we think of dealing with linguistic diversities.

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Appendix 1

Reproduced from : Manochi and Panda (2015)

*In an EVS lesson (in Saora classrooms) which aimed to help children to understand the difference between ‘living’ and ‘non-living’ things, the teacher started the activity by making children explore their surroundings. They looked at, touched, smelled, tasted, differentiated and collected various things. The teacher, instead of using abstract concepts, generated curiosity in the children by using objects available in their surroundings as threads to knit the academic web of environmental sciences. Analysis of the discourse of this class revealed that activity building started with creating room for the children to collectively explore their surroundings, engage in discussion and dialogues, and collect local artefacts that were a part of their everyday life. While collecting things, the children talked to their friends in Saora, discussed the characteristics of the things that they were collecting and used their exploratory skills to their best. These discourses entered the classroom along with the children; they not only discussed who had brought what but also engaged in discussions about the shape, size, colour and classification of plants and other characteristics of the things that they had collected. Children talked about their surroundings and local artefacts in the classroom as if they were discussing these things in the playground. The exchange of knowing laughter, casual body language, running around and social language used in the classroom all resonated with what one witnesses in the playground. Thus, the world of activity built by the children in the classroom was not very different from the world that they created for themselves in the playground. From time to time, in order to reinstate discipline in the classroom, the teacher asked the children to settle down and attend to her. The teacher, instead of taking a lead from the children’s discussions, started the class by reading from the textbook and then, speaking in Saora, explained to the children the characteristics of living and non-living things, as can be seen in Data Extract 1.*

***57. T: Things that can breathe are called living things.***

***58. T: See, you are living because you can breathe.***

***59. T: Things that cannot breathe are called non-living things. Like, pot, stones, soil. They are non-living things.***

***60. T: Can they breathe?***

***61. S (A) (high pitch) No didi4.***

***62. T: Can this stone breathe?***

***63. S (A) (high pitch) No.***

***64. T: Can date seeds breathe?***

***65. S (A) (high pitch) No.***

***66. T: That means they are non-living things.***

***67. T: Which things are called living things?***

***68. T: Human beings, goat, hen, ox and ...?***

***69. S (A) (high pitch) Buffalo, pigs, dog, lizard ...***

***70. T: Kartik, leave that lizard. See it moves from there.***

***71. T: That is called living thing. Things that have life, they can move from one place to other place.***

***72. T: Now we will know about non-living things.***