

Subject name: Language and Society
Professor name: Prof.Rajesh Kumar
Department: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Institute name: IIT Madras
Lecture number: Module -09
Lecture title: Language & Power / Politics

Today we will understand the relationship between language and politics in order to understand the complexities between the relationship and our understanding of language and society. Society has many aspects in which Politics happens to be one of the most significant aspects. We call it one of the most significant aspects because it impacts our lives in a variety of ways it impacts current situations it impacts future generations its a very significant aspect of human life its very significant aspect of life in the society.


At the same time, it is an important part of the structure of society as well. So we see that we can count endless reasons why politics is significant and important in society. And we have seen so far how complex is the relationship between language and society so to develop our understanding, we will be looking at the issues concerning politics and from the perspective of language, we want to see how language works vis a vis power and politics.

There are certain things that we need to clarify before we move to that point. There are lot of ways in which this topic would be addressed. However, we will focus only on two aspects. We will be looking at in this section politics of language and language in politics. In other words, we will look at how language becomes tool for politics? How people structure their political arguments around language? And then we will see, how they use language to deal with ha political advantages or political situations? So, these are the two things we will be looking.

Refer Slide Time: 3:00

Language and Politics

- Two aspects of the topic that we will discuss in this section:
 - Politics of Language
 - Language in Politics



Refer Slide Time: 3:03

Language

- It is a very powerful tool of communication.
- It is a tool for power and identity.
 - Power is ability to control or influence
- Sometimes language is more sensitive a tool than religion.



We have looked at language as one of the rule governed system. We have seen it as a very structured system, its sophisticated part of the human mind. We have looked at the in depth analysis of how human mind plays a role in acquisition of language and how is it structured around sounds, words and sentences and discourse. When it comes to understanding of society today, we want to emphasize on the point that language happens to be one of the powerful tools of communication.

One of the things that we do with language is communication. And there are other ways of communication. Language happens to be one of the most powerful tools. One of the ways of underline communication is nonverbal language, nonverbal communication where language is not primary language and is not significant. And such a thing is called body language. Such a thing is also called nonverbal communication where verbal symbols are not used. Nonverbal communication system has been studied and its claimed that it plays a huge role in communication. Sometimes they could be more powerful than verbal tools.

However, we will focus on verbal communication. So, when we say language is a powerful tool of communication, we mean, verbal communication. And it happens to be one of the most significant markers of our identity. We have defined language in terms of how language is constitutive of humans, how language constitute us, how it defines us being humans. In fact language, has been argued to be the only thing which separates humans from other species. Therefore, the question of identity is very significant while it comes to humans and to make the point precise I want you to underline and re-look at the point that language is a very powerful marker of Identity (Refer Slide Time: 5:57)

If we are saying it is powerful, we need to define power, in short. And when we mention power here, we mean that power is the ability to control and influence. Therefore, basically it is a very powerful marker of identity, in the sense that, it becomes more significant than other markers. Just to compare it with something else. One of the other powerful other tools for our identity, other markers of our identity is the religion. And it has been surprisingly noticed that language becomes more powerful a marker than religion at times.

It's a very sensitive tool. It has capacity to create unrest. And therefore, it requires equal amount of sensitivity when we look at the questions of language and power, language and politics and language and identity. So, we will restrict ourselves in some of the domains. And the first part that we want to reflect on is politics of language.

Refer Slide Time: 7:19

Politics of Language

- Language and Identity
- The question of language and dialect
- Identity Marker
- English as a language of power.



As we have mentioned it is an important marker of identity. What we speak defines our identity. What we do not speak would also define identity. Sometimes what we do not want to speak would define our Identity as well. We have looked at the question of language and dialect in great details. We have seen that the whole notion of the difference between the two terms is politically motivating in the sense that dialect is the term, politically motivated term, used for the language of the people who are less powerful relatively.

And therefore, the term language refers to the language of the people who are relatively more powerful. We have also established and we have gone through the discussions that scientifically speaking there aren't differences between the two. But we must not shy away from the reality that the term dialect is one of the most widely misunderstood terms and that happens under political contexts. We will come back to the question of language and dialect in a moment. And we will relate it with the question of power and politics in a moment

Refer Slide Time: 9:08

Politics of Language

- Language and Identity
- The question of language and dialect
- Identity Marker
- English as a language of power.



Let us look at the question of English. English is, as a language, it is considered one of the most widely spoken languages around the world. It acquires the status of the Global language and there are scientific reasons underlying it. But when it comes to the study of Language and Politics, we again, cannot run away from the reality that the Language English is associated with status significance. And therefore, Power and therefore it has become the language of the Global world.

So, the point that we are making through English is, the reason why English becomes the most significant language, most widely spoken language around the world is also rooted in the questions of power who is more influential. The one that is more influential whether in terms of community, individuals or the nation dictates and that becomes the language of the powerful people and that becomes the basis why the idea of upward mobility is related to the question of language and power.

We will take up one more question and we will try to look at this in terms of the idea of language and dialect. And probably that will make, it makes the question of power dynamics and political aspects of language little bit clearer. I am going to count 4 to 5 languages and I

would request you to take a note of these: Magahi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Awadhi, Bajjika and Brajbhasha to name them again. Bhojpuri, Magahi, Maithili, Awadhi, Bajjika and Brajbhasha I will give you a note on this language, the list of this, the languages that we have just mentioned.

Magahi is the language of the ancient Magadha empire. Please look at the available history resources at your disposal, to check the spread of Magadha empire in ancient India. And what I want to underline is that the official language of Magadha empire was Magahi. It will be difficult to get into the questions of History but I do invite you to look at it, see when Magadha empire was established and who where the people responsible for running the Empire. One of the most prominent names in the question of Magadha empire is the great Ashoka.

So please check the historical facts available to you. What we want to underline here is Magahi was the language of Magadha empire. Similarly, Awadhi was language of Awadh. And one of the most significant texts written in this language is Ramacharitmanas which was done by Tulasidas and it is recorded and this was done in sixteenth century around Shakespearean time. Likewise, Brajbhasha is the language of Braj and all the writings and of poems like Surdas and others are done in Brajbhasha.

Maithili is the language of Mithila and the one of the texts or one of the poets that I want to mention in this context is Vidyapati. Vidyapati noted poetry around the time of (Chasha) that was before (Rena USA) and before 13th or 14th century. Now the point I am trying to make through this description of these languages that in modern times, all these languages Magahi, the language of Magadha Empire, Awadhi, the language of Tulasidas, Brajbhasha, the language of Surdas, Maithili, language of Vidyapati and Bajjika, the language of the first republic of the world Vaishali. These are known as dialects of Hindi.

As far as Hindi is concerned, modern spoken Hindi has approximately 200 year old history. Now it seems genetically and biologically impossible a phenomenon that there is any genetic relationship or any connection between these languages and Hindi. Of course, in the modern time, they are mutually intelligible to a great extent. And this will not apply to all of them. But to some of them it would definitely apply and there are mutually intelligible with Hindi.

But on the basis of mutual intelligibility, number of speakers of these languages and how these, how the speakers of these languages themselves have accepted supremacy of Hindi and

considered these languages as Dialects of Hindi is only a phenomena that is rooted in the question. Identity, Power and Politics something which is as old as 14th century, 16th century and Hindi which is only 100, 50 to 200 year old, it is biologically impossible that these languages are related and they are off suites of Hindi.

So why people argue as Bajjika, Maithili and Magahi on one hand and Awadhi and Brajbhasha and all of them put together being dialects of Hindi is question of politics. It is a convenient argument in politics that Hindi is a super structure. And these are the dialects of Hindi for the purpose of Hindi spoken in and around Delhi is considered to be Standard Hindi. We will have a discussion on standard and nonstandard pretty soon, where we will evaluate these terms vis a vis many others and what we have seen before.

But for the time being, let us use the word in non-technical sense. Hindi spoken in and around Delhi is considered standard Hindi and Hindi spoken elsewhere is considered nonstandard Hindi. For example, Hindi spoken in and around Patna, Hindi spoken in and around Kolkata or for that matter Hindi spoken in and around Mumbai or Hyderabad these are not called standard varieties of Hindi. Now why Hindi spoken in and around Delhi becomes standard language is again a question the politics.

And it is not very complex. It is the language of the capital and that the hypothetical test given to this is if the centre of politics is relocated in some other geographical location, then it is highly likely that the language of that place would acquire the status of the one of the more powerful languages of the political setup of the nation. Therefore, the full question of the language and dialect and which language becomes more significant is located is the question of language and politics.

One more point that I want to mention here is one of the most reliable documents that is available on the language of politics and has a lot to say about it in practical and theoretical term is the constituent assembly debate. I again invite you to take a look at the section of language is the constituent assembly debate, why Hindi happens to be the first official language of the country? Why English is associate official language of the country?

Why English was argued that will be reviewed after 15 years and more importantly why it has not been reviewed after 15 years after implementation of the constitution assembly debates and the findings of the constitution assembly and why it is not implemented and how

it is almost impossible to implement or removed English from that list all of them are critically and associated with the questions of language, identity, power and politics.

That is where I would again repeat. Please take a look at constituent assembly debates. One more point about the language of politics is, lot of times, people create identities around language, both ways, by associating their Culture and identity to a particular language. Or also by opposing a particular language as we know, when we talk about India, we know at initial stage, the Indian state boundaries are drawn around linguistic lines. Then you realise that Hindi as the language does not belong to a particular state.

In fact, Hindi is considered the languages, one of the languages widely spoken in northern parts of India is also a misconception. Hindi is spoken all the way from Kabul to Rangoon in different forms in variety of ways. And it faces different kinds of political questions at different stages. In some places, it is favoured over the other. And in some places, it is neglected over the other. All of these are related to the question of politics of language. To take the question further now, we would like to see how

Refer Slide Time: 22:09

Language in Politics

- Political correctness (fairness, equality, and just)
- Metaphors (construction of meaning)
- Implicature (not explicit information)
- Euphemism (less explicit and more polite)
- Rhetoric (repeated usage)
- Use of pronouns
- Neologisms (a loan word or a newly coined terms either morphological or semantic)



people use language in politics? And there are certain markers which will help this discussion and I have listed some of them in the slide. And I invite you to look at these in more details and to take a test of these things to come up with your own examples. I will try to give you some examples from current political scenario. One of the terms that we come across is

political correctness. It is related to fairness, equality and justice. So being fair and equal is going to make things look nice.

So, what political correctness requires is a careful use of language which does not have loaded implications. So, to take a very simple example, the term handicap is considered politically incorrect and disable is considered politically correct. However, the question of what would be considered politically correct keeps changing all the time. Therefore, what is important in understanding of political correctness which is one of the markers of language in politics that is the use of language in politics rather than the examples of political correctness.

The Metaphor is used most often and it becomes the significant part of the language of, in politics, it is a process of construction of many. And it is used very widely in the political discourse implicature is something which is not explicit information and once again I invite you to find examples of these things. So, Euphemism, yet another political tool and it is less explicit and more polite.

We will come back and look at examples of some of these things. Rhetoric is repeated uses. So, let us take a pause and look at these examples sometimes to create Political Discourse people use Rhetorical terms. People create Rhetoric's. So, if you take the example from Indian political scenario, the use of the term development or use of the term cleanliness would be considered rhetorical usage. And creation of rhetoric in political discourse, use of terms had very significant meaning in politics. And therefore, they are used very carefully and accurately and the effect of such uses is really widely spread and has got serious consequences.

Therefore, the point is with these tools, political language and language that is used in Politics becomes easy to create. Use of pronoun is yet another tool which is important in most of the political rhetoric's. You will find the use of the inclusive pronoun instead of saying I will do something. Political discourse would sound more like we will do something so instead of exclusive pronoun 'I' the inclusive pronoun 'we' is more often used in political discourse.

Therefore, a careful use of pronoun is yet another powerful tool in creating political discourse. That is Language in politics 'neologism', a word that is borrowed from some other sources or a coined word either morphological coinage or a word that already exists. And that

has been assigned another semantic meaning, this phenomenon is also one of the powerful tools in creating political discourse.

So only listing some of tools that help people create political discourse and the purpose of political discourse is to make the argument effective. And remember how we define power. It is a tool to influence or to control. Therefore, the primary focus of language in politics is to influence and therefore to control.

So, to conclude both the aspects of our discussion in language in politics, I would like to end by saying, both are equally powerful, both are equally important. How people create politics around language and how people do politics with language are equally important. And therefore, the role of language in Politics is very significant and it operates only at the level of Discourse. Of course, the role of sounds, words and sentences and or other tools to create a political discourse is equally important and relevant. Thank you.