Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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Linguistic Allegiance, Identity, and Socialization in Digital Space

Welcome to class, today we are going to talk about linguistic allegiance, identity and socialization in digital space. This is a very interesting topic because we are into information and the digital revolution. We have got multiple virtual spaces platforms to express ourselves. So, language use has multiple sides and a lot of theories in social sciences have to come to terms with this digital revolution and change in social configuration.

That is why this topic becomes very important and pertinent where we talk about the socialization process in digital space. So, what happens to this linguistic allegiance or linguistic identity and how do we socialize in digital space? What is the impact of the digitization process on language and language use? This is what we are going to talk about today.

If you look at the march of civilization in human history, the agrarian age is the longest period in human history. And then we shift to, we get into the Industrial Age, which is the age of revolution, Industrial Revolution. And the entire configuration and social network changes in the Industrial Age which lasts hardly 200 years, two centuries.

And then become a service industry age where services like banking, hospitality, tourism and other things are a wide collage industry. And recently, we moved to the information age. So, information is inherited from the industrial age is different. We are in the information age and why is it so crucial and important to understand? It is so crucial and important to understand because the kind of scientific advancement technological advancements we have made in the last fifty years, we have not been able to make in the last five hundred years.

So, look at the exponential growth in technology and advancement. So, we are into a very hyper mobile digital age and we call it information age manual Castells calls it information society, where information becomes the capital and the center of all activities and it is interesting to locate language in such space. This is what we are going to talk today.

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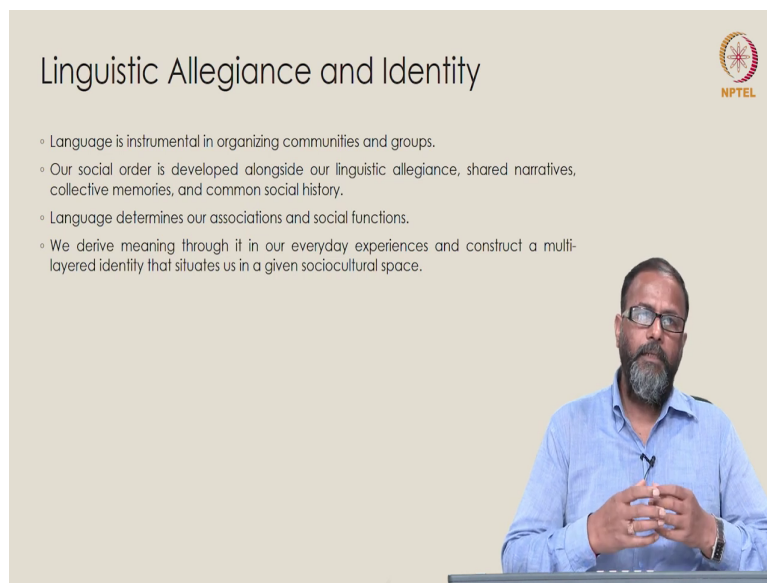Family-wise Grouping of the 121 Scheduled and Non-scheduled Languages – Census of India 2011

Language families	Number of Languages	Persons who returned the languages as their mother tongue	Percentage to total population
1	2	3	4
1. Indo-European			
(a) Indo-Aryan	21	94,50,52,555	78.05
(b) Iranian	1	21,677	0.00
(c) Germanic	1	2,59,678	0.02
2. Dravidian	17	23,78,40,116	19.64
3. Austro-Asiatic	14	1,34,93,080	1.11
4. Tibeto-Burmese	66	1,22,57,382	1.01
5. Semito-Hamitic	1	54,947	0.00
Total	121	1,20,89,79,435	99.85

You must be familiar with this table because for every discussion I bring in this table. And why do I bring in this table because I want you to understand the linguistic diversity. I want to remind you time and again of the linguistic diversity, where we have more than 121 languages and 1369 rationalized mother tongues. This is what census of India level gives us.

Though the number is very very large, because of certain constraints in counting we may have a lesser number of languages and less than number of mother tongues. But the fact is that we have a very rich trajectory of linguistic diversity and five different language families. So, these are Indo-Aryan families, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese, Semito-Hemitic. These are the linguistic groups.

Now, we have been talking about the centrality of language, significance of language in our social life, how it helps us organize communities and societies. We talked about speech communities and how language emerges as a cohesive bond, the central factor in grouping and organizing communities and societies. Our social order develops alongside our linguistic elegance, our shared narratives, our collective memories and our common social history.
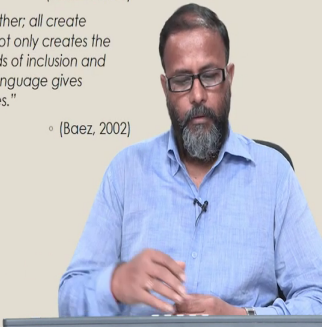
Language determines our associations and it governs social functions. We derive meaning through language in our everyday experiences and also construct a multi-layered identity that situates us in a given sociocultural space. So, that is the centrality of language we need to remember. And we have social functions, we play social roles and language becomes instrumental in all suspects.

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Now, I will quote from some of the important observations and claims made by people like Gibson, 2004, Baez, 2002, Ravira for that matter. So, Gibson, 2004, I quote from there; "Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture. Language is a fundamental aspect of cultural identity. It is the means by which we convey our innermost self from generations to generations. It is through language that we transmit and express our culture and its values.

Language, both code and content is a complicated dance between internal and external interpretations of our identity." That is the role of language, Gibson talks about. Moving on to Baez 2002, what does he say? I quote, "Culture, identity and language maybe inextricable from each other. All create identity or at least important aspects of identity. But language not only creates the contours of identity, it also may set up the conditions for the kinds of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and not belonging, success and failure, and so on. Language gives meaning to social structures, identify creating and identity creating and oppressive ones," I unquote.
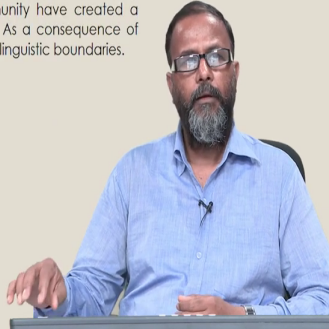
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If you look at Ravira, 2008, she says, "Words, language, have the power to define and shape human experience. It is because of language that I can name my experience." So, undoubtedly, we have also seen strong positions taken by Sapir and Whorf. We talked about linguistic relativity, determinism theory. We have seen how social linguists like William Labov established a correlation and direct connection between linguistic structures and social structures, linguistic parameters and social structures, use of language and in the context of social configuration. So, these are established facts. So far we are talking about a real physical society.

But in this information age post IT revolution and digital technology, the way it is marching, the way it is advancing and the way we are on the threshold of a blended space, real and virtual blended space, what Castells calls it. We are not in real virtuality, we are in virtual reality. So, what happens to language, how language plays a crucial role? And how do we express, socialize, realize the social structures, what happens when the social configuration changes? What impact does it have on language?
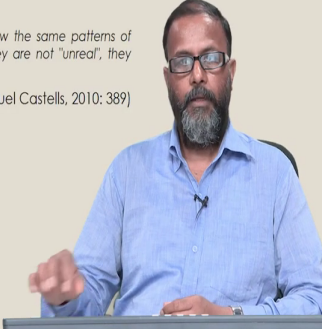
So, the revolution in information and communication technology has created multiple digital sites and platforms where we are using language and we are asserting our identities. One of the most technological phenomena that has turned into a social phenomenon is the emergence of social media and most of you are so active and visible on social media. So, we are into real virtuality and this has created a virtual communities beyonds the limits of space and time. Castells, Mannuel Castells, 2010, explains this community with a culture of real virtuality. I quote, "Their communities, but not physical ones and they do not follow the same patterns of communication and interaction as physical communities do. But they are not "unreal"; they work in a different plane of reality. So, digital technology and revolution in information technology has created multiple digital sites for expression and language use. And it has also mediated the process of our identity creation and we are in the blended space of real society and virtual society. So, real virtuality turned into virtual reality. This is what is the situation.
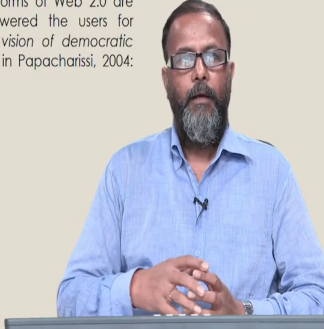
So, we need to understand that such developments are also calling upon us to extend the scope of our theoretical understanding to this new reality, what Mannuel Castells calls a different plane of reality.

Now, you might have witnessed, you might have encountered people who are lamenting the internet and its negative impact on our language and culture. And there is a myth that the internet is killing languages because it is promoting English and dominant languages. But, a situation is not as grim as it is portrayed. We have got a very strong digital footprint of Indian languages on the internet. And if you look at the presence of Indian languages on the internet, it is far bigger and greater than English. Because of our sheer population size, demographic composition and presence on the internet, this digital technology is also proving a very effective tool to document, present, preserve and assert our linguistic elegance and linguistic identity.

So, languages are present on the internet and the footprints of Indian languages and their presence is increasing every day. So, there is nothing much to lament about it. You may seem convinced because you see most of the visual form of the language in terms of text which is in Roman, of course, because most of us are not well versed in typing in our laptop and computers and mobile with Indian scripts. So, visually you will find Roman script. But if you look at the languages growing their footprints on the internet. And I will give you some data to substantiate this observation. McLuhan, the great man media scholar, his idea of medium underlines the fact that medium creates and promotes a corresponding consciousness and facilitates reorganization of social structure.

The process of digitization has transformed the process of socialization when we look at our engagement with technology. And mobile in every hand and we have become an information

grid connected with a super grid. So, we cease to understand the distinction between the physical world and the virtual world because we are physically there and virtually connected with the whole world. Because you have got a magical gadget called mobile in your hand, a tab in your hand. So, you are an information grid, you are connected with the super grid of information. So, this entire experience of using language is changing and this technology has also has some bearing on the structure and use of language.

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So, if you look at the report I was referring to, I was talking about growing footprints of Indian languages on digital sites in digital space. If you look at KPMG Google Survey 2017 report, it gives us a quantitative understanding of the reach and penetration of technology and negotiated linguistic realities of multilingual India. So, if you look at Indian languages for that matter, Hindi in 2016 had 521 million users, Bengali had 101 million users. Telugu had 91 million users. Marathi had 89 million users, Gujarati had 56 million users, Canada has 46 million users, Malayalam had 40 million users. So out of all these users and the speakers, the size or the population which was active on internet in digital space with their mother tongue, if you look at the data it says 254 million Hindi users on internet, 53 million Bengali users, 40 million Telugu users, 64 million Marathi users, 40 million Tamil users, 32 million Gujarati users, 32 million Kannada users, 22 million Malayalam users and mind you this is five years old data. It has grown and gone very high. Today as we are talking, it has grown very high. So, these eight language KPMG report has considered these 8 languages because they are majorly present on the internet in size of numbers. But that does not mean that the minor

languages or languages with lesser number of speakers are not active in this digital space. They are very much active in this digital space and the users of those languages are also sharing and marking their presence on digital platforms. The myths created around English as the language of technology and growth gets challenged when we see such an expanding data in terms of the Indian languages footprint.

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If you look at the growth, the growing user generated contents in digital spaces, the data reveals that there are 234 million Indian language internet users compared to 175 million English internet users in India. So, that is the difference. So, English internet users 175 million, but Indian languages, 234 million. So, this myth is challenged. And again I am saying this is the data of '16 and '17, but it has grown and grown and gone very up exponentially. So, English is not rising, English is not posing a threat, the way it is portrayed because Indian languages are growing in the digital space. If you look at Indian language internet users, they are expected to grow by a cumulative average growth rate of 18 percent to reach 536 million in 2021. It was a prediction done in 2016 about 2021 when we are talking. That means, we have grown more than almost 550 million in '21. However, the growth of English is 3 percent, the growth of Indian languages 18 percent predicted in '16, the growth of English 3 percent predicted in '16. And today in twenty one, it is expected that we have 200 million English users on the internet whereas, we have more than 540 million users of Indian languages on the internet and this study is of 2016 – '17 by KPMG Google. So, you can see the growing footprints of Indian languages on the internet.

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Now, this mobile technology and availability of internet and connectivity to the majority of the population of the country has changed everything. It has changed the face of our socialization and being connected with each other in virtual space. Because the majority of the population has access to the internet. And we are exchanging our ideas, we are sharing information, we are expressing, we are asserting in this digital space, we are socializing. So, mobile has made such a big change in the way we socialize. If you look at the exponential growth and digital connectivity, you should look at the Digital India campaign and Digital India project launched by the government of India. And today we can see the impact of it where the majority of the population has access to the internet.
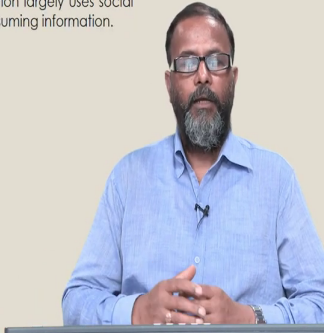
And the sites of language use have grown like anything. And if you go by the predictions of KPMG report 2017, English has grown up to 200 million internet users in India whereas the Indian language internet users have grown to more than 540 million. So, that is the size and the footprint of Indian languages on the internet. So, the number of internet enabled smartphone users crossed 300 million in 2016 and would reach 650 to 700 million by 2020. We have already crossed that, this is old data, I am quoting. If you look at the fresh report, you will see it is more than 750 million. And average outgo one GB data and this is technical detail. But my point is that the Indian languages are growing their presence, marking their presence and footprint on the internet.

And this is nothing to be threatened about with English because the growth of English is in single digit less than 3 percent, but the growth of Indian languages in double digit is more than 18 percent. So, that is the scenario and situation.

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So, it becomes imperative for us to understand the impact and expected outreach of technological footprints which are reconfiguring the way we socialize and communicate. Social media has allowed us to explore and create our own language and assert our own identities. We will not talk about the change in languages and the kind of hybridity it is generating on the internet in this talk. But we have already talked about Hindi English hybridity, you can go to that lecture and learn more about it and how this hybridity is being proliferated and how it is taking place on the internet. It is interesting to see, you can see your own Facebook posts and your own digital space expressions and you can find that most of the Indian languages are negotiating with English and English Gujarati, English Punjabi, English Tamil, English Telugu, English Hindi hybrid expression.

At the same time, look at the claims made in David Crystal's work English and internet. He says that he looks at English, he predicts that the world is moving towards a kind of bilingual situation where English will be language of global order and global identity and local language will be for our local identities. How it unfolds in the future? We are yet to see but one thing is for sure that digital technologies are marking and making major changes in language use, they are promoting and providing multiple digital platforms for users to express

their opinion, share their experiences, register their protest and create, construct their own identity in the digital space, the way we socialize is changing.
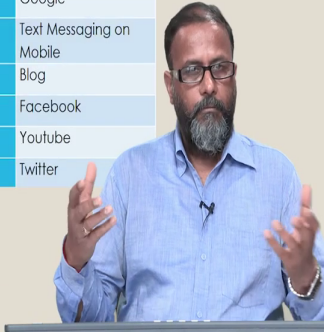
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And finally, what is the takeaway? If you look at the developments, very recent developments in 19th century, arrival of telephone, in 1920s, 20th century we have broadcasting started, 1990s arrival of internet, 1999 Google came, 2000 text messaging on mobile happened, on 2003 blogs started, 2004 we had Facebook, 2005 YouTube through which we are connected. And 2006 Twitter and on and on today in 2021 we have so many avenues and platforms for sharing and using our language. So, the digital space today may seem very chaotic because order is still emerging wherein a state of chaos, everything is changing when the state of chaos and an order is emerging out of it. It will be unstructured and cluttered. However, it is making the identity fluid and mobile between actual reality and virtual reality that I was talking about that we have, we are not in a position to realize when we are in real space and when we get into virtual space because we are on the threshold of real and virtual, virtual and real. So, we are no more in virtual reality. We are into real virtuality. New technologies developed new styles of language and that you can see yourself you are young, you might have seen a lot of expressions, contracted forms like clips, clippings for example LOL, LOL. I took time to understand what it is.

Look at the text messages you type, the way you type. And look at the maximum communicability of it. So,for example, Twitter allows 120 characters. Now, look at the way we are constructing our ideas in a limited number of expressions for maximum

communicability. So, the patterns are changing, writing systems are changing. You never know what will happen in future, how it unfolds, what other changes it may make. But at least for now, we are witnessing a lot of morphological and lexical changes in language. And that corresponds to social changes. Now unfriend is not, was not a word before the internet came. But now you have on Facebook, unfriend. So, lots of things are happening DP, display picture. Now the connotation changes with technology, things have changed expression subjects, we have semantic extensions.

The old familiar word has a different meaning today and we have to be familiar with that. New conventions and practices started in terms of written texts, you can find a lot of structural changes and semantic extinctions because of technological interventions and this gives a new dimension to language as a social phenomenon. Until the 20th century we discussed, understood and theorized language in society which is a real society.

In the twenty-first century, we need to extend our discussion, understanding and theorized language transcending the limits of time and space and use in virtual space. So, how it unfolds in future, we are here to see but we are into a chaotic situation where the new order is emerging. And it is correspondingly changing our experiences with language, the way we own it, the way we use it. This is it for now. We will continue our discussion on similar issues in our next class. Thank you very much.