

NEW TRENDS IN THE VERBAL BEHAVIOUR OF NABADWIP : A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT : There has been a tremendous socio-economic change in West Bengal, a state of India, since independence of India in 1947. This has been accentuated by the influx of other variety of Bengali speaking immigrants from ~~Bāṅglādēś~~. Consequently, languages as the critical tool of communication and socialization has also changed.

The present paper which is a micro-level sociolinguistic study of Nabadwip, an ancient township, adequately reflects the micro-level sociological and linguistic changes of West Bengal and their correlationship. All casual factors of social change in West Bengal are operative in Nabadwip including congregation of immigrants. Moreover, the dialect as spoken in Nabadwip was the basis of the emergence of the Standard Colloquial Bengali as it exerted a tremendous influence in the formative period of Bengali language.

Forms of caste dialects are getting obliterated though caste as the core of an ideological superstructure controls the social behaviour. Other linguistic changes are also noted. But what is most important is that an emergent speech-pattern amongst the young generation is betraying the potency of becoming a newer form of the Standard Colloquial Bengali in near future.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

During the last four decades, and particularly since independence of India in 1947, the verbal behaviour of the Bengali Speech Community of West Bengal, a state of India, is showing vast changes which should be studied on the parametres of linguistics and the social sciences as well as of their tools and apparatus to evaluate these changes in an attempt to codify their social meaning. Though sociologists and linguists had all along underlined the social nature of

communication and socialization, still there were few studies in this regard before 1960's. But following William Labov and Basil Bernstein, the two most original thinkers, a host of studies of languages of Europe and America have come out. Unfortunately socio-linguistic studies of closed and traditional societies of the Third World are few and far between. These societies offer at any point of time a conjunction of forces of the social classes as well as of castes in the social matrix which make them more complex and intricate.

1.2

The socio-economic causes for change in the social structure, pattern of social functions and role-relationships, domains and social network, belief-system and value-system and norms and agencies of socialization of West Bengal are many. Partition of Bengal in 1947 and consequent influx of 15 million immigrants(20); gigantic but haphazard efforts since 1947 for modernisation and urbanisation(25); conscious effort for women liberation(3); land reform and mechanisation of agriculture(12); struggle for upward mobility among castes(2); population explosion(Census of India : 1991); -- are some of the major indices of the causes of change. But the most important factor of social unrest and ferment is the yawning gap between the aspiration of people for development and the poor realisation which is causing despair and frustration resulting in convulsive actions by the youth(1).

1.3

Consequently, language as the most important media of communication, socialization, symbolization and group identification has to change by shouldering new loads and adjustments(19).

2.1 Coverage

For our purpose we undertook a micro-level study of the change in the verbal behaviour of the people of Nabadwip area for the following reasons :

2.2

Nabadwip is a very ancient place, the ancient topography of which has baffled the investigation of scholars. For the present purpose we shall accept the topography of Nabadwip in the Modern period and its evolution from the Early Medieval period as has been established by scholars(26), (8). Upto independence and partition of Bengal in 1947, Nabadwip was a small township with surrounding villages and was famous as a religious place and centre of learning(9). The static and traditional pattern of social production based on the caste-system held sway and the famous Renaissance of Bengal in the 19th Century failed to stir Nabadwip off

from its moorings of the traditional social system(22),(18). In short, a particular type of feudal mode of production which has been characterised as "Asiatic Mode of Production" by Karl Marx (Capital : Vol I : Chapter 14) was deeply entwined with a functioning caste-system where social role-relationships were ascribed rather than acquired and this regulated the social life in Nabadwip including its pattern of habitation. Thus, from North to South Nabadwip was divided into many pāṛās (area of habitation) and each pāṛā was subdivided on caste lines like Brāhman pāṛā, Karmakār (blacksmith) pāṛā, Jēlē (fisherman) pāṛā, Chutōr (carpenter) pāṛā etc. This reflected the caste-based trade divisions and settlements of the locality.

Since 1947 the habitation pattern of Nabadwip on caste lines has been totally upset and in its stead a new pattern based on class and immigrant concentration has developed. Thus the Eastern side near the Ganga, the extreme Northern side beyond the old embankment in Catir Math and extreme Southern side in Manipur and Haritala witnessed sprouting up of innumerable colonies of the immigrants of various classes and castes. Meanwhile the older inhabitation areas have been slowly reset on class with mixed population of immigrants and older native residents.

2.3 The evolution of the dialect of Nabadwip from 10th-11th century has been adequately described by scholars(7). Different dialects of Bengali have not developed from a single source which may be called Proto Bengali "but they were derived from various local forms of late Māgadhī Apabhraṣṭa which developed some common characteristics that may be called Pan-Bengali". (ibid : 139-140). But the caste dialects within the general framework of regional dialects have a deeper anthropological strand connected with the evolution of the Bengali race from Proto-Austroloid, Mediterranean-Dravidian and brachycephalic Alpine races(27). Thus caste dialects also developed which unlike regional dialects are neither distinct entities nor linked with socio-economic class. Rather with all their characteristic features which distinguish each other these caste-dialects were to be seen within the framework of regional dialects. But as we have seen in Nabadwip these characteristics are getting levelled up.

2.4 Though the ancient history of Nabadwip is shrouded in mystery, recorded history is available since circa 1202 A.D. when Muhammad-i-Bakhtiyār in a surprise attack on the royal palace of Lakṣmaṇa Śeṇa captured Nabadwip. Throughout the medieval period, that is, upto the 18th Century Nabadwip retained its glory as a seat of learning and culture. Because of the political and

cultural supremacy that Nabadwip enjoyed in the ancient and medieval period, the dialect of Nabadwip which is Eastern Rādhī exerted a tremendous influence on Bengali in its formative period. It slowly emerged as the Sista Calita or the Standard Colloquial Dialect. From the 18th Century onwards the Dialect of Calcutta which is also Eastern Radhi has buttressed the position of this dialect to be accepted as the Sista Calita and the literary language.

2.5 There has been a vast influx and congregation of immigrants from East Bengal (now Bānglādēś) to Nabadwip so much so that two-thirds of the present population of Nabadwip are immigrants(20). Immigrants speaking different sub-varieties of East and North Bengali dialects became diglossic thus making Nabadwip a veritable language laboratory.

2.6 The socio-economic causes of change as enumerated in Section 1.2 are in operation in Nabadwip. Though there is no big industry here, unemployed and helpless immigrants have established flourishing weaving centres as cottage industry in their colonies and this form of employment tends to reinforce dense multiplex network replacing old caste-based network. Added with other factors this is helping to break up the old social order. So today profession is neither absolutely ascribed by birth, nor totally conformative to caste. Still the caste-system forms the core of an ideological superstructure which effectively controls the social behaviour (16).

2.7 The most important thing is that Nabadwip is a miniature representative of the fluidity and the tentativeness of the present-day social picture of West Bengal. As we pointed out, the post-independent effort of modernisation and social transformation has brought in its wake fissures and new constellations in the structure, role-relationships, pattern of social functions, value and belief-system of the society of West Bwngal. The influx of immigrants has lent an accentuating effect on the ongoing process of social transformation. A micro-level study of Nabadwip from a socio-linguistic perspective will reveal not only the interrelationship between language and social forces but also the emergent pattern of the verbal behaviour of the poeple of Nabadwip which will be valid for, or at least useful indicator of West Bengal as a whole.

3.1 Methodology Adopted

At first we undertook a detailed demographic study and the social network of the Municipal area of Nabadwip and its surrounding villages. Long years of participant observation helped us to select twenty

subjects from immigrants and native residents who were carefully chosen with an eye to age, sex, occupation, class and caste dimensions. We selected language variables distributed throughout the language like phonology, lexis and grammar. We were acutely conscious of the variation in intonation-pattern of different classes and castes, but we could not integrate them to the present design. Then we recorded as structured and instructed interviews the talks of the subjects keeping an eye that they use the earmarked linguistic variables. Also we recorded natural and spontaneous speech in clubs, political party offices, community worships, small tea-shops in street corners etc. on an average of ten records of different areas of township. Apart from certain useful constructs of sociolinguistics e.g. domain and role-relationships(14); diglossia(13); (15) etc. we designed certain models of experiments the detailed explanation of which have been given in appropriate places.

3.2 We remembered that apart from general change in the verbal behaviour, the dialect-shift of the immigrants has an added dimension and hence we studied it separately. That is, we studied (A) change in the verbal behaviour of the original residents who use Standard Colloquial Bengali, and (B) change or dialect-shift of the immigrants being subdivided into B (a) of unmixed areas of immigrants and B (b) of mixed areas where immigrants live along with original residents.

4.1 Findings

A.a. As we have pointed out in Section 2.3 caste dialects were the identity of the castes and were used in inter-group and intra-group communication. For example, in the speech of Goalas (a caste of milkmen) and other lower castes /r/ was realised as /a/ and vice versa, e.g. "rānimā" (queen mother) was pronounced as 'ānimā' and "āmbāgān" (mango-garden) as 'rāmbāgān'.

The epenthesis of /i/ and /u/ of earlier period which was replaced by umlaut in the Standard Colloquial was retained in these caste dialects, e.g., "hāriyē gaelō" (it is lost) > 'hāirē gaelō', "kuriyē pēlām" (I picked it up) > 'kuirē pēlām' etc.

There was also an intonation pattern which served as the identity of that particular caste.

Because of gradual reforming of the castes into class-pattern and because of the democratic aspirations of the lower castes, these caste dialects are getting obliterated and levelled upto the Standard Colloquial. This is particularly noticeable in the young generation and more particularly amongst educated service-holders of that generation.

4.2

A.b.1 We have already noted (Section 2.3) that various regional dialects of Bengali were derived not out of a common source but out of which various and independent forms of Magadhi Apabhraṃsa prevalent in different regions and races. So the characteristics of different dialects are to be often explained by these factors. Thus non-initial stress was derived from Magadhi Apabhraṃsa or late Middle Indo-Aryan whereas initial stress was due to residual influence of Dravidian — more prevalent in West Bengal and hence in Standard Colloquial (23).

A.b.2 This initial stress resulted in the aspirated form retained in the initial phoneme and non-aspirated form in the final, of a monosyllabic word, e.g., 'dudh' (milk) > 'dud', 'kāthā' (talk) > 'katā', 'māch' (fish) > 'māc', 'khāitēchi' (am eating) > 'khācchi', 'thākur' (god) > 'thākur' etc. In East Bengali dialects this aspiration and non-aspiration was reverse due to the absence of the initial stress. Now with the ideal dialect-contact situation prevalent in Nabadwip the Standard Colloquial is showing re-aspiration in the final, though this re-aspiration is not total. Rather an intermediatory stage is discernible. Similarly, the Semi-tatsama words like 'bisyudbār' and 'bēspatibār' are almost getting back the Tatsama form, 'brhaspatibār'. Again shortened forms due to initial stress like 'gēsīlō', 'gisīlō' are getting back to 'giyēchilo' (here /e/ is extremely short).

A.b.3 The state of diglossia and bilingualism as prevalent in Nabadwip exhibits an interesting feature in the verbal behaviour of the people. The concepts of diglossia as introduced by Ferguson(13) was refined and entwined with the concepts of bilingualism by Fishman(15). The concept of bilingualism as 'native-like control of two languages' suggested by Bloomfield(6) is not acceptable to sociolinguists. Even the 'cline of bilingualism' as suggested by Halliday(17), or classification of bilinguals as Compound, Co-ordinate and Subordinate by Weinreich(28) are not sufficient. Rather we may say that 'the same situational constraints of an essential sociological nature are in operation in diglossic and bilingual uses as are in monolingualistic choices of linguistic items'(4).

In a recent paper Chattopadhyay(10) studied the diglossic and bilingual state of Nabadwip. The picture of language and dialect choice of a middle-class Hindu in the 19th Century can be represented in a tabular form as shown.

Field	Language/Dialect
1. Intra-family	1. Colloquial Bengali
2. Friends, relatives	2. Same
3. Education	3. Standard Colloquial, English
4. Work place	4. Standard Colloquial, English
5. Literature	5. Sādhubhāṣā (an artificial variety of Bengali)
6. Court and other official places	6. English, Standard Colloquial
7. Meetings, Conferenes	7. Sādhubhāṣā, Standard Colloquial, Sanskrit, English
8. Newspaper	8. Sādhubhāṣā, English
9. Marriage, Sradha (lastrites) etc. social functions	9. Sanskrit, Colloquial
10. Religious functions	10. Sanskrit, Sadhubhasa

The picture was quite complex with different varieties of Bengali and other languages like English and Sanskrit, the uses and value being socially constrained. The present picture has been radically altered. The uses of English have been severely restricted, Sadhubhasa has almost been replaced by Standard Colloquial. Hindi with Government patronage has come to be used in some domains though in a small measure. Even Sanskrit is being used in bookish form.

A.b.4 But the most peculiar thing is that more and more English words and expressions are being used in day-to-day social transactions not only by middle class but by all classes. A few examples may be given :

‘Tōmār ghōritē katō time hōlō?’ (What is the time by your watch ?) ; ‘Ēbārē pātē anēk loss habē’ (There will be much loss in jute this year); ‘Aektā sentencē bhālō kōrē likhtē pāō nā?’ (Can’t you write well even a single sentence?) ; ‘Kātwā local late karē nā’ (Katwa local doesn’t run late); ‘Āmāder yugē disciplinēr barō abhāb’ (There is lack of discipline in our age) ; ‘Khaelātē politics kōrē sab sabbōnās hōyē gaelō’ (Doing politics in games everything is lost); ‘Crossingē mār nā khēlē trēntā right time jētō’ (If not hampered due to crossing, the train would have run on right time) etc.

We must note that English words have been used though there are well used Bengali equivalents. Secondly they are used by all classes. Thirdly, the English words

have taken on inflexions and other grammatical items like any other Bengali words. Settler noticed the same trait in Hindi which he termed as 'sandwich words' (5). As we have explained this should be explained on the same parameters as different styles or varieties used in situational constraints.

4.3

B.b

A micro-level study of the change in and the emergent speech pattern of East and North Bengali dialect-speaking immigrants to Nabadwip exhibits exciting correlation between the social change and linguistic change. In a recent paper Chattopadhyay (11) made a detailed study of it on Labovian models. We may put here the findings in a nutshell.

B.b.1 Dialects and sub-dialects of East and North Bengali immigrants (24) are getting integrated into a common East Bengali Sociolect because of four decades of dense, multiplex network ties.

B.b.2 Amongst the immigrants a general atmosphere of diglossia prevails where the Standard Colloquial acts as the High Variety and the generalised East Bengali Sociolect as the Low Variety, the former being used in the domains of status-stressing value cluster and the latter in those of intimacy value cluster. But the sharpest switching is noticeable amongst the middle class, third generation immigrants of mixed areas and working class of unmixed areas.

B.b.3 The East Bengali Sociolect is showing signs of discontinuity as like Trinidad Bhojpuri (21) in the subgroup of the Third generation of the immigrants, this being replaced by other emblems of group identity like East Bengal football Club. On the other hand a uniform code of the third generation of both the immigrants and the original residents is discernible.

5. Conclusion

Though this nascent code is still the medium of social transaction in particular domains of the young generation, it has helped to build up a distinct subjective social reality for this group through everyday casual and on-going conversation. But it shows the potency of becoming a newer form of the Standard Colloquial Bengali in near future.

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Transliteration of Bengali as used in the paper
(Based on Prof. S.K. Chatterjee)

ৱ = a when the original sound, i.e., short ৱ is retained ; but = o, when the sound is changed to [o]
When ৱ is deleted as a final sound it has been transcribed as ৷.

আ, ঈ, ঐ, উ, ঊ	=	ā, i, ī, u, ū
ঋ, ৠ	=	r
ঐ, ঐ, ঐ, ঐ	=	ē, ai, ō, au
ৱ	=	ñ or ñ
ঃ	=	h
ঊ	=	~ on the top of the vowel, e.g., = a
ক, খ, গ, ঘ, ঙ	=	k, kh, g, gh, ṅ
চ, ছ, জ, ঝ, ঞ	=	c, ch, j, jh, ṇ
ট, ঠ, ড, ঢ, ণ	=	ṭ, ṭh, ḍ, ḍh, ṇ
ত, থ, দ, ধ, ন	=	t, th, d, dh, n
প, ফ, ব, ভ, ম	=	p, ph, b, bh, m
য	=	y
র, ল	=	r, l
শ	=	b
স, ষ, স	=	ś, ṣ, s
হ	=	h
খ	=	y
খ	=	ks
ঙ	=	jñ