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BILINGUALISM AND INTERGROUP RELATIONSHIP IN TRIBAL AND NON-TRIBAL CONTACT SITUATIONS

Ajit K. Mohanty & Jayashree Saikia

Multilingual societies are characterised by complex relationship between languages and linguistic groups. There are several sociolinguistic and social psychological features on which multilingual societies have been held to be quite different from the dominant monolingual societies (Mohanty, 1994a, 2004). Individual and group bi- or multilingualism resulting from language contact are characterised as stable in multi-lingual societies, whereas bilingualism in dominant monolingual societies are usually transitional in nature. For example, in U.S.A., the first generation of immigrants is usually monolingual in native language; the second generation is bilingual in English and native language and the third generation is monolingual in English. Thus, bilingualism is a point in transition between monolingualism in native language to monolingualism in English. In multilingual societies like India, contact between different linguistic communities usually leads to stable bilingualism in which minority contact groups maintain their languages and learn the language of the majority contact group. Unlike those western societies with dominant monolingual norms, language contact in India is associated with language maintenance rather than shift. It has been argued (Mohanty, 1994a) that contact bilingualism in India is a strategy for mother tongue maintenance.

Why does language contact in some cultural contexts lead to language shift (and transitional bilingualism), whereas, in others it leads to language maintenance and stable bilingualism? Outcomes of language contact under different socio-cultural conditions can be understood from cross-cultural and social psychological perspectives of intergroup and intercultural relations in plural societies. There is a wide variety of theoretical approaches to understanding of ethnolinguistic identity and multicultural attitudes in intercultural contact situations. In cross-cultural research, Berry's (Berry, 1990; Berry & Sam, 1997) model of cultural relations in plural societies has been widely used to understand the outcomes of cultural and linguistic contact. This model analyzes the contact outcomes in terms of acculturation attitudes of individuals and communities in contact along two dimensions—maintenance of one's own identity, culture, language and way of life ("own group maintenance and development", Berry, 2003), and establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the other group ("other group acceptance and tolerance", Berry, 2003). Depending upon positive or negative attitudes with respect to these two dimensions, Berry's model identifies four outcomes, viz., assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization (deculturation). Although the concept of deculturation/marginalization in the model has been questioned (Del Pilar & Udasco, 2004), the model is widely used and empirically supported (Berry & Sam, 1997) in cross-cultural research.

It has been suggested that language contact outcomes and the nature of bilingualism in different cultural contexts can be understood within the framework of Berry's model (Mohanty & Perregaux, 1997). Stable bilingualism and language maintenance can be viewed as a reflection of integrative relationship between the linguistic groups in contact. Transitional bilingualism and language shift are assimilation outcomes of contact, with the minority group allowing its own language to be replaced by the dominant contact language either voluntarily or under a variety of assimilative pressures. With separation orientation in a contact situation, minority linguistic groups display a rejection of the language of the majority group by showing strong linguistic divergence. Sometimes, however, the dominant group may encourage separation and isolation of the minority language in contact restricting the minority language to limited domains of use. The marginalization outcome in Berry's model can be seen as a situation of inadequate development of either of the contact languages. Such a situation of development of subtractive forms of bilingualism with limited competence in two or more languages has been referred to as double (or multiple) semilingualism (Cummins, 1979; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984); but, the concept has been highly controversial (e.g. Edelsky et.al, 1983) and not very productive.

Berry's model is quite useful in analyses of different forms of contact bilingualism in multilingual and multicultural societies. Triandis (1985) has suggested possible application of the model in understanding the relationship between different linguistic communities in Malaysia and Singapore reported in a study by Ward and Hewstone (1985). Analysis of the dynamics of intergroup relations in language contact situations is of significance in language planning and also in explaining the development of ethnolinguistic identity and the processes of language change. For example, studies show that intergroup tension, linguistic divergence and polarized linguistic identity (rejection of out-group language) can change towards development of multicultural identity with positive changes in ethnolinguistic vitality (Azurimendi & Espi, 1994). The social status and educational use of minority contact languages in multicultural situations are important determinants of linguistic identity strategies (Camilleri, 1990; Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997). Thus, it seems, in situations of language and culture contact, the social relationship between contact groups and the nature of bilingualism are interdependent.

This paper examines the relationship between bilingualism and intergroup relationship in different language- and culture-contact situations in India. It is based on analyses of attitudes toward maintenance of own language and culture and positive intergroup relations in the context of contact between members of Bodo tribe in Assam (India) and the nontribal Assamese people within different minority-majority group settings. The findings are compared with those of earlier studies, which looked at the relationship between bilingualism and social integration in case of contact between Kond tribals and non-tribals in Orissa (India). Such a comparison is interesting since the sociolinguistic features of language contact in the two tribal-nontribal contact situations are quite different in nature, as will be shown later in this paper. It should also be pointed out that the present discussion of the Bodo-Assamese contact situation is based on analysis of preliminary data of a continuing study of the Bodos in Assam. A brief description of the Bodo situation is necessary for appreciation of the nature of language and culture contact between the Bodo tribals and nontribal Assamese people.

THE BODO-ASSAMESE CONTACT SITUATION

The people of the Bodo tribe constitute a major linguistic group in Assam, a north-eastern province of India. Bodos are the majority community in Kokrajhar, Baksha and Udalguri districts of Assam. They speak Bodo (or Boro)—a language of the Tibeto-Burmese family. The major language of Assam is Assamese (Indo-Aryan language family) which is also one of the constitutionally recognized languages of India. The total population of Assam is 26,638,407 (2001 Census) of which Bodos constitute 19.71 percent. Assamese is the dominant language of Assam and the language of education as well as official transactions at all levels. In the 1950s' Bodos started a movement for linguistic rights which gradually snow-balled into a major socio-political insurgence. As a result, in 1963, Bodo was introduced as a medium of instruction in primary schools up to Grade Ⅲ, and later, in higher secondary level up to Grade Ⅻ. Bodos were also given increasingly additional political rights, which culminated in formation of autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on February 10, 2003. Following an agreement between the Governments of India and Assam and the Bodos (Bodo Liberation Tigers), Indian parliament passed the Constitutional (100th Amendment) Bill in December 2003 granting the status of a scheduled language to Bodo, making it one of the 22 official languages of India (in addition to English, which has an Associate Official Language Status). Thus, the Bodo situation is a typical example of assertive language maintenance (Dorian, 2004). The Census of 1991 shows nearly 1.2 million persons who indicated Bodo as their mother tongue. The assertive language maintenance forces are quite evident from the fact that between 1981 and 1991, declarers of Bodo mother tongue increased by 4169.47 per cent (i.e. from 28,619 to 1,221,881). There has been a corresponding assertion of ethnolinguistic identity and linguistic rights of Bodos in Assam. The majority of the Bodos are bilingual in Bodo and Assamese, the two languages in contact. In the BTC areas, Bodos constitute the numerical majority whereas in other parts of Assam, Bodos are a minority group in contact with the dominant Assamese speakers.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This paper is based on preliminary data from a large-scale study of ethnolinguistic vitality, social identity, pattern of language use, attitudes towards cultural and linguistic maintenance and intergroup relations in Assam. The present analysis is based on a study of Bodo and Assamese high-school students, drawn from Bodo-majority BTC areas and Assamese-majority areas in Assam.

Method

The sample consisted of 217 students from Grades Ⅸ and Ⅹ in the age range of 14-16 years drawn from a selection of six Government schools in BTC and Assamese-majority areas in Assam. There were 72 Bodo and 35 Assamese students from three schools in a BTC area and 75 Bodo and 35 Assamese students from three other schools in an Assamese majority area. These schools have parallel sections in each

grade for Bodo and Assamese medium instruction. The Assamese students were in Assamese medium section whereas some of the Bodo students were also in Assamese medium section. There were 110 boys and 107 girls in the total sample. In the BTC area, there were 36 Bodo students from each of the two medium classes and in Assamese-majority area there were 37 from Bodo medium and 38 from Assamese medium classes.

Measure Used in the Study

The data for the present analysis were based on a questionnaire to assess (a) attitudes toward own group language and culture maintenance and (b) attitudes towards intergroup relationship with the contact group (i.e. Bodos or Assamese). The questionnaire was based on a similar tool for Assessment of Attitude towards Linguistic and Cultural Maintenance (Mohanty, 1987) in Oriya language—which has been used in earlier sociolinguistic surveys in Kond tribal and nontribal contact situations in Orissa (Mohanty 1994a, b, Mohanty & Parida, 1993). This questionnaire—In-group Maintenance and Intergroup Relationship Questionnaire (Saikia, 2004)—consists of 16 statements in each of the two sections for out-group relationship (Part A) and in-group maintenance (Part B). There were parallel forms for Bodo and Assamese respondents. The statements represent positive integrative and instrumental attitudes towards in-group maintenance and intergroup relationship. In each part, there are 9 items, which show integrative motivation for positive attitude, and 7 items, which show instrumental motivation. The form for use with Bodo respondents has Bodo and Assamese versions giving them a choice of language for the questionnaire. The respondents are instructed to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 7-point scale, i.e., -3 to +3 through 0 (-3 strongly disagree and +3 strongly agree).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to students in their respective classrooms. They were instructed to read each statement carefully and to indicate their agreement or disagreement (on the basis of their immediate feelings or reactions) by a tick mark (√) in the appropriate box. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers and that their opinions would be kept confidential. The students in the sample were also administered three other measures for assessment of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, social identity and pattern of language use. Consent for administration of the measures was obtained from the school authorities as well as from each student in the sample.

RESULTS

The responses were scored and average response in the 7-point scale was determined for parts A and B of the questionnaire, assessing in-group maintenance and outgroups relationship attitudes. Negative and positive scores indicated unfavorable and favorable attitudes, respectively. The mean attitude scores for each of the linguistic groups in the sample are shown in Table 1. In the Bodo-dominant BTC area, the Bodo students showed a positive attitude towards maintenance of their language and culture

(M =1.96) and negative attitude towards maintaining a relationship with the Assamese (M = -0.68). The Assamese students in BTC area had a positive attitude towards own group maintenance and development (M=1.52) and a slightly negative attitude towards out-group relationship with Bodos (M=-0.11). In the Assamese majority areas, the Bodo students showed a positive attitude towards own group maintenance (M=0.77) and out-group relationship (M=1.28), whereas, the Assamese students showed a positive own group maintenance attitude (M=1.71) with a negative attitude towards out-group relationship (M = -0.77). When the samples from the two areas were combined, the Bodos showed a positive own group maintenance attitude (M =1.32) and a positive attitude (M=0.32) towards maintaining a relationship with the Assamese. The Assamese samples, combined over the areas, showed a positive attitude (M =1.62) for own group linguistic and cultural maintenance and a negative attitude towards out-group relationship with the Bodos (M = -0.44). Thus, for the combined areas, the Bodos are characterised by an integration orientation and Assamese are characterised by a separation orientation in terms of Berry's model. Similar trends for the two groups in contact were observed in the Assamese majority area. But in the BTC area Bodos showed a separation orientation. In terms of the pattern of language use, Bodos in all these areas were Bodo-Assamese bilinguals showing a stable pattern of contact bilingualism and the Assamese were mostly Assamese monolinguals. In addition, all students have some competence in other languages such as Hindi and English as a result of schooling.

Table 1
Mean Scores on Measures of Own Group Maintenance and Outgroup Relationship Attitudes

Measure	Bodo Majority (BTC) Area		Assamese Majority Area	
	Bodo (N=72)	Assamese (N=35)	Bodo (N=75)	Assamese (N=35)
Own-Group Maintenance Attitude	1.96 Bodo Medium: 2.56 (N=36) Assamese Medium: 1.35 (N=36)	1.52	0.77 Bodo Medium: 1.35 (N=37) Assamese Medium: 0.21 (N=38)	1.71
Out-group Relationship Attitude	-0.68 Bodo Medium: -1.49 (N=36) Assamese Medium: 0.13 (N=36)	-0.11	1.28 Bodo Medium: 0.85 (N=37) Assamese Medium: 1.85 (N=38)	-0.77

The in-group maintenance and out-group relationship attitudes were analyzed separately for the Bodos taught in their mother tongue and in Assamese medium classes. Obviously, the Bodo students in Assamese medium schools had a greater degree of contact with the Assamese students and better exposure to and proficiency in Assamese language compared to those of the Bodos in the Bodo medium classes. As a result, the Bodo students in Assamese medium class showed more positive attitude towards intergroup relationship. In the Assamese-majority area, the Bodo students in Assamese medium class had a more positive intergroup relationship attitude (M = 1.85) compared to those in the Bodo medium class (M = 0.85). In the BTC area, the Bodo students in Assamese medium class had a positive attitude (M = 0.13) towards maintenance of out-group relationship, whereas, those in the Bodo medium class had a negative out-group relationship attitude (M = -1.49). The own group maintenance attitude scores showed positive attitudes for all the groups although the scores were higher for Bodo medium students (means were 2.56 and 1.35 for BTC and Assamese-majority areas,

respectively), than for the Assamese medium Bodo students (means were 1.35 and 0.21, respectively, for BTC and Assamese-majority areas). Thus, Bodo students in Assamese medium classes had a more positive integrative orientation compared to those in the Bodo medium classes. These findings have to be interpreted in the context of the assertive language maintenance strategy and the ongoing struggle of the Bodos for assertion of their ethnolinguistic identity.

In the recently established autonomous Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) areas, the ongoing intergroup tension and assertion of ethnolinguistic rights and identity has resulted in a mutual separation orientation in intergroup relationship between the Bodo and the Assamese contact groups, although with increasing autonomy and restoration of linguistic rights for the Bodos, the earlier separatism is perhaps gradually turning into a greater degree of mutual acceptance. Such normalization of relationship is already evident among the Bodos in the Assamese-majority areas who display an integrative contact orientation.

THE BODO AND THE KOND CONTEXTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Bodo situation is characterised by assertion of ethnolinguistic identity and movement for linguistic and political rights of the minority linguistic group. This situation is quite different from most other minority and indigenous ethnolinguistic groups in India which tend to adopt a defensive linguistic maintenance through strategic bilingualism. In these other groups indigenous languages are pushed to domains of lesser power and visibility, yet maintained through use in the home domains (Mohanty, 2004). Our earlier survey of attitude towards own group maintenance and out-group relationship among the Kond tribals in Orissa, India (Mohanty, 1994a, Mohanty & Parida, 1993) can be viewed as a typical context of tribal- nontribal contact in which there is little assertive pressure from the indigenous linguistic groups. Konds (Kandhas) are a major tribal group in Orissa—an eastern province in India. They constitute over 40% of the population of Kandhamal district. Kui, a language of the Indo-Dravidian family, is the indigenous language of the Konds spoken by nearly 640,000 persons as a mother tongue. The Konds are in contact with non-tribal speakers of Oriya (Indo-Aryan language family) which is the regional lingua franca and the official language of Orissa. Due to a process of frozen language shift, in some parts of the district (Kandhamal) Kui has been lost and the Konds have become Oriya monolinguals. In the remaining areas, Kui is used by the Konds who show a stable pattern of Kui-Oriya bilingualism. This process has been called a frozen language shift (Mohanty,1994a) because due to specific sociolinguistic conditions of language contact and emerging awareness of the need to maintain Kui language, the process of shift in favor of Oriya seems to have stopped in the Kui-Oriya bilingual areas. Most of the nontribal Oriyas in these areas show at least a receptive bilingualism in Kui. Kui is the language of identity for all Konds including those in the Oriya monolingual areas. In fact, Konds are known as Kui people and the social organizations for promotion of language and culture of the Konds are called Kui Societies all over the area—both monolingual and bilingual. The linguistic dominance of Oriya is accepted by the Konds as instrumentally significant although they have positive integrative and affective orientation for preservation of their language and culture. Kui language (which, like Bodo, does not have a script of its own) has no official position and it is not used at all as a language in education. All Kond

children are educated in Oriya medium schools. There seems to be no resistance to dominance of Oriya. Kui, as a language in the stable pattern of Kui-Oriya bilingualism, is relegated mostly to the home and close in-group communication domains.

In two earlier surveys of attitude towards maintenance of own language and culture and out-group relationship in bilingual and monolingual tribal-nontribal contact areas, we wanted to find out the role of contact bilingualism in intergroup relationship. Without going into the details of these studies that are described elsewhere (Mohanty, 1994a; Mohanty & Parida, 1993), the Kond adult villagers (from the monolingual and bilingual areas combined) in these studies showed an integration orientation. However, in the monolingual contact areas, the Oriya monolingual Konds showed an assimilation orientation and the Oriya nontribals showed a separation/segregation attitude. In the bilingual contact areas, the Konds and the nontribals showed a mutually integrative relationship and maintenance orientation. Thus, stable bilingualism in contact situations seems to be associated with positive intergroup relationship. On the other hand, language shift (resulting in monolingualism for the minority group) is associated with the assimilative attitude of minority groups.

In the broader context, the findings in respect of both Kond and Bodo tribals in contact with nontribals are similar. Both the groups showed positive own-group maintenance and positive out-group relationship attitudes, particularly when the indigenous language was maintained along with contact bilingualism as in case of the Bodos in Assam. The striking difference between the two situations of language and culture contact is that the Konds are a minority contact group which has clearly accepted its minor and minority status vis-à-vis the other language and culture in contact. The Bodos, on the other hand, are in a process of assertive maintenance of their own language and culture with a recent history of a vigorous movement to establish their linguistic rights and their ethnolinguistic identity. They seem to have effectively countered the marginalized status that is typical in a hierarchical multilingualism in which indigenous languages are treated as unequals with wide difference in their power and status (Mohanty, 2004). Thus, in case of Bodos the otherwise integrative consequences of bilingualism seems to have been affected by a rejection of the dominant contact group in face of an assertive movement to counter such dominance. This is more evident in BTC areas in which Bodos have greater control and political autonomy. Bodos in the Assamese dominant areas are in the periphery of the ripple effects of the linguistic and political movement and, hence, show a greater acceptance of and positive relationship with the nontribal contact group. Further, given the recent history of intergroup tension as a result of the Bodo movement, the Assamese people seem to have developed a separation orientation towards the Bodos in contact. Thus, the sociolinguistic outcomes of the tribal nontribal contact of the Konds in Orissa and the Bodos in Assam can be viewed within the cross-cultural framework of Berry's model with specific applications in understanding the relationship between the nature of bilingualism/monolingualism in contact situations and the forces towards linguistic maintenance.

Another important aspect of our study in the Bodo-Assamese contact situation was the role of medium of instruction. The samples of Bodo students from BTC and Assamese-majority areas included students from Bodo- and Assamese-medium classes. Compared to Bodo students in their mother tongue medium class, the Bodos in Assamese medium class had more favorable attitudes toward maintaining a positive relationship with the Assamese. This may be attributed to closer and longer contact between the Bodo and the Assamese students in the Assamese medium classes and also

better bilingual proficiency that the Bodos may have developed through schooling in the Assamese medium. However, the impact of education of indigenous minorities in majority language medium needs to be investigated further since educational achievement of Bodo students is found to be better in their mother tongue medium than in Assamese medium schools (Saikia & Mohanty, 2004).

In conclusion, it can be said that stable bilingualism in language and culture contact situations is related to positive intergroup relations and social integration. The nature of such relationship, however, seems to be affected by the level of assertive maintenance forces that the indigenous minority groups evince in respect of their culture and language. The analysis of diverse language contact situations involving Bodo and Kond tribals, respectively, in Assam and Orissa in India show that Berry's model of cultural relations in plural societies is useful in understanding the dynamics of bilingualism, language shift and maintenance.

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