STANDARDISATION OF HINDI AND BENGALI

Sisir Kumar Das

1. The problems of language standardisation in a multi-lingual and
multi-cultural situation, as it is in India, are extremely complex and
cannot be described or solved within a rigid linguistic framework.
Standardisation is not just a method of prescribing certain patterns
of usages, or a choice of a particular system of writing or spelling
made under certain objective criteria. It depends more on the accept-
ance of those prescriptions or choices by the users of a given language.

   In a multi-dialect situation some dialects gain greater prestige
than others not due to their linguistic superiority over other dialects
but due to various social, religious and economic factors (Bloomfield
1933, p.48-52). Standardisation, however, is a conscious process. It
is an attempt to control a language and to use it in a way desired by
the elite or by the people at large. The earliest, and in many ways
the finest, example of language standardisation in India was that of
Sanskrit by Panini around 4th Century B.C. It fulfilled all the func-
tions of a standard language which are considered important by modern
scholars (Garvin 1959).[1] Sanskrit was standardised with a view to
achieving a neat structural pattern and a fixed model for all time.
Though it was a marvellous linguistic feat, nonetheless it was a simpler
task compared to the problems of standardisation in modern Indian lan-
guages. Sanskrit was the language of the elite, and was spoken - many
scholars doubt whether it was ever spoken by any one - by a few. Scholars
could afford to ignore the various problems of mass communication which

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[1]Paul L. Garvin talks about four functions of a standard language: the unifying,
the separatist, prestige and frame of reference. All of them, however, are inter-
dependent and to some extent mutually exclusive.

was made through the Prakrits, the languages of the people. Moreover
it was the prestige language in society. Scholarly innovations in
that language were readily accepted by its users.

The modern Indian linguistic situation is, however, very complicated.
In any area where a modern Indian language is spoken, it is not the
sole medium of total linguistic activity of the community. Sanskrit
is the language of the religious life of the Hindua, Pali of the
Buddhists, Arddha Magadhi of the Jains and Arabic of the Muslims.
There is a language of administration and of higher education. It was
Sanskrit in the old and in the mediaeval period for the Hindua. It
was Persian in the Muslim period and it has been English since the middle
of the nineteenth century. Any attempt at standardisation of Indian
languages has to take cognizance of problems involved in the hierarchi-
cal structure of the language situation in India. Unlike Sanskrit in
the ancient period, modern Indian languages are spoken by two sharply
divided communities: the educated middle class which forms the power
elite and the teeming millions without any formal education. Pro-
grammes of standardisation of languages made by that elite are often
shaped by their value system which are not necessarily identical with
those of the non-elites. Two languages - Hindi and Bengali - have
been taken here to demonstrate the nature of these problems. Both the
languages, spoken by millions of people, have problems which are ident-
ical in nature but their manifestations are different and thus both of
them help to understand the nature of attempts at language standard-
isation in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural context.

2. Hindi, the official language of India, is spoken by 153,729,062
people according to the 1971 Census. It is actually a blanket term to
cover several distinct dialects spoken over a vast area in north and
central India. Linguists have divided the whole area into three prin-
cipal linguistic zones: Western Hindi, Eastern Hindi and Bihari
(Grierson 1904, 1906). Modern scholars view the language situation
in this area as a successive stratum each super-imposed on the other
(Ghatage 1962:139). At the lowest stratam are the various village
dialects spoken in smaller areas each different from the other in vary-
ing degrees and present a continuum of mutual intelligibility "which is
proportional to geographical distance and not directly related to
political and standard language boundaries" (Gumperz 1963:979). On
this stratum are dialects spoken over larger areas such as Braj, Kanauj,
Bundeli, Khariboli and Bangru (which forms the Western Hindi complex),
and Awadhi, Bagheli, Chattisgarhi (which form the Eastern Hindi complex),
and Maithili, Maghi and Bhojpuriya (which are included in Bihari).

Super-imposed on this stratum is Hindi-Hindustani which has emerged as the prestige dialect only in recent times.

Dialects belonging to the second stratum functioned as literary languages in the mediaeval period. The greatest literary figures in Hindi wrote mainly in Braj, Awadhi, and Maithili, speakers of which are careful to keep their linguistic identity distinct from Hindi.[1] These dialects were intelligible, to some extent, in neighbouring dialect areas. Their literary functions were often different and distinct. For example Braj exploits the Radha-Krishna theme, while poets sing the praises of Rama in Awadhi. A kind of **lingua franca** existed in this vast area and that acquired greater currency thanks to the saints and poets who used to travel from one part of the country to another. The language of Kabir and specially of the **Granth Sahib** show in ample measures that poets and saints used more than one dialect and occasionally a mixture of two.[2] When Muslims came and settled in and around Delhi, the dialect of this area received their attention. The Muslims came from different parts of the Middle East and they used to speak different languages. The Afghans spoke Pushtu, the Turks Turki, and when the Mughals came they spoke Persian. It was urgently necessary for them to have a link language which they developed on the basis of the Delhi dialect. Chatterji (1960:189) refers to this dialect as $\bar{a}$ dialect as opposed to au/-o dialects of Western Hindi: the distinction being in the ending of masculine nouns and adjectives e.g. me̠rā be̠tā *my son* as opposed to merau be̠tau or mero be̠to. This dialect is known by various names: Dahlawi, Hindvi, Khariboli and later Hindustani. Scholars, however, passionately debate the meaning and connotations of these names and the relative chronology of their use.[3] Though this dialect did not have the prestige of a literary language it served as a medium of communication between the natives and the immigrants. The real break-through, however, came in the Decan where a large number of Muslims settled. They went from north India and spoke different languages as their

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[1]Maithili is taught in some of the colleges and universities of Bihar. Indian Sahitya Akademy has recognised it as a separate language. Hindi literary historians, however, usually consider Maithili literature as part of Hindi literature.

[2]Languages of several Hindi poets of the mediaeval period show some mixture of different dialects. Mixing up of two dialects and some times two independent languages is a feature of mediaeval literary styles in India. In Bengal, for example, an artificial poetic language developed known as *Brajabuli* (a mixture of Bengali and Maithili) which existed till nineteenth century.

[3]In the etymological sense Hindi or Hindustani can mean any language of Hindi or Hindustan i.e. India. For detailed discussion of these terms see Chatterji (1960), Narula, S.S. (1955) and Grierson (1904, 1916).

mother-tongue and some variety of Khariboli which later became more and
more standardised. At first it was called **Dakhni** (southern) and later
it came to be known as **Urdu**.[1] It was written in Perso-Arabic script
and had a large number of Perso-Arabic words. By the end of the six-
teenth century it acquired some prestige and attracted the notice of
north Indian Muslims and when they started using it, obviously with some
deviations, it came to be known as Šimali Urdu (northern Urdu).
Shamsuddin Wali (*c.* 1668-1741) better known as Wali, who first wrote in
Dakhni, later first known poet in the Delhi variety of Urdu. He settled
in Delhi around 1721 and a new school of poetry came into existence at
that time. This dialect received patronage of the Nughal court and
consequently it was established as the dialect par excellence. Perso-
Arabic vocabulary began to increase in course of time. It borrowed
meters and literary forms from Persian and thus slowly it became an
Islamic variety of Khariboli, though it was used by a large number of
Hindus.

By the middle of the eighteenth century Khariboli had therefore two
styles, Hindustani and Urdu, although they were often used as synonyms.
Hindustani is the popular style used by men of various social and economic
class all over north India. Urdu was more sophisticated and Persianised
in its vocabulary and exotic in its literary language. Another style
of Khariboli, generally known as Hindi or High Hindi, emerged in the
nineteenth century. Khariboli without a Persian bias was first used
in the College of Fort William in Calcutta in the first decade of the
nineteenth century.[2] This style slowly acquired a larger percentage
of Sanskritic vocabulary and was written in Deva Nagari script. Hindi
and Urdu are structurally identical but they became mutually unintelli-
gible because of sharp difference in lexical items.

According to some scholars this Hindi is an artificial language
created to maintain a distinct identity of this dialect by nationalistic
Hindus (Madangopal 1953:101-39). Grierson claimed that Hindi as it is
understood today was "invented by the English". He thought it was
created for the use of Hindus and "was created by taking Urdu, the only
form then known, as a basis, ejecting therefrom all words of Persian
and Arabic origin" and substituting them with Sanskritic words (1922:53).
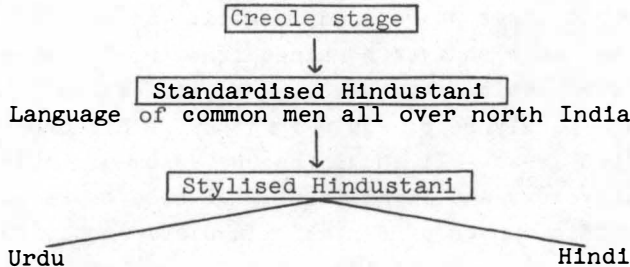
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[1] Urdu is a word of Turkish origin meaning 'army'. This language was also known as
rekhta 'scattered or crumbled'. For a detailed discussion of the emergence of Urdu
see the article written by Rafiq Zakaria in Nadvi (1961).

[2] In the College of Fort William books were written and printed both in Urdu and in
Hindi which was often termed Braj bhakha. Urdu and Hindustani were synonymous at
that time. British teachers and their Indian colleagues in this College were the
first to identify the distinctions between Hindi and Urdu in terms of their vocabu-
lary, literary traditions and script used in writing.

On the other hand many Hindi scholars do not accept the separate exist-
ence of Hindustani, an intermediary language between Urdu and High Hindi,
so powerfully advocated by Gandhi and many writers of the present time.[1]

The standardisation of Hindi passed through two important phases:
creolisation and stylisation.[2] When Muslims settled in Delhi there
must have been a hybrid language, a mixture of Persian, Arabic, Turki
Khariboli and some other dialects including Panjabi. In the absence
of a better term I describe this phase as creolisation. When this creole
was standardised the resulting form of the language came to be known as
Hindustani.

In the second phase when this language was employed in literature the
process of stylisation started. As a result Urdu emerged as the language
of the Muslim elite with several sounds borrowed from Persian and with
a definite influence of Persianism on other levels of the language, and
later High Hindi as the language of the Hindu elite. Sanskritisation
and Hindi coincided with growing Hindu nationalism and it gathered
momentum particularly after the establishment of Arya Samaj in 1875 and
also due to some positive influence of Sanskritic Bengali. By the end
of the nineteenth century the break between Hindi and Urdu was complete.
This development can be described in a simple diagram.

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                        ┌─────────────┐
                        │ Creole stage │
                        └─────────────┘
                               │
                               ▼
                   ┌───────────────────────┐
                   │ Standardised Hindustani │
         Language  └─ of common men all over north India
                               │
                               ▼
                     ┌───────────────────┐
                     │ Stylised Hindustani │
                     └───────────────────┘
                        /             \
              Urdu                          Hindi
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3. Khariboli had very little chance of becoming popular and eventually
prestigious but for the intervention of the Muslim elite in the Hindi
linguistic scene. Muslims came to Bengal in the beginning of the
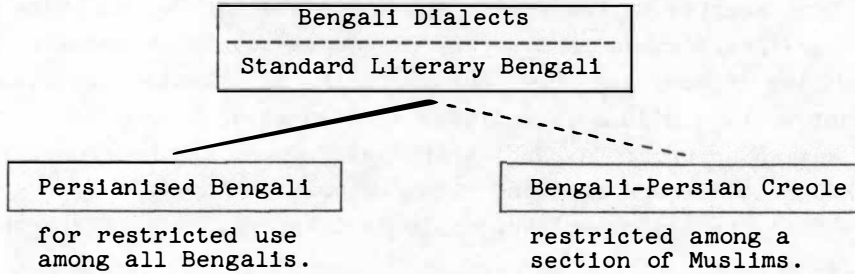thirteenth century, but exposure of Bengali to Persian produced a dif-

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[1]For different views see Shukla (1947), Pandeya (1957), Sharma (1932), Gandhi (1965).
See also Abbas (1960) for his comments on the nature of Hindustani used in Bombay
films.

[2]These terms are used here to distinguish two phases of language development in a
multi-dialect situation: the first process being unplanned and unconscious and the
second planned and deliberate. The stage of the growth of a hybrid jargon is a
natural process and that has been termed as the stage of creolisation. When there
is conscious effort to give a special shape to that 'creole' that has been called
stylisation.

ferent result. Bengali, though it had widely divergent dialects, and
developed a uniform literary style since the fifteenth century. The
literary style was standardised at such an early period probably due
to its adherence to the Sanskrit spelling system. People pronounced
the words differently but wrote in an uniform system. Moreover, the
dialect of West Bengal assumed a greater prestige in the fifteenth-
sixteenth century. Most of the notable writers of Bengali belonged to
this area. Muslims came to Bengal and introduced Persian as the lan-
guage of administration which the ambitious Hindus learnt avidly but
no Muslim Bengali emerged as a rival style of Bengali.

The Muslim elite in Bengal was smaller in size compared to that in
North India. Secondly large number of Bengali Muslims were actually
converts from Hinduism and they belonged to the artisan class and the
peasantry and they spoke Bengali as their mother-tongue. On top of
that the Muslim elite in Bengal found Urdu adequate to retain their
group identity. An attempt to create a Muslim Bengali, however, was
made but that was confined within a small section and did not receive
the support of the majority of Muslims till the middle of the nineteenth
century.[1] Persianisation of Hindustani was quick because Muslim writers
used that language along with Persian and experimented with Persian
literary themes. In Bengali, Muslim writers were few and far between
and moreover Muslim Kings patronised Bengali. Bengali borrowed large
number of Persian words and yet remained free from Persianism. The
basic difference of attitude between the Muslim elites in North India
and in Bengal was partly responsible for the two different lines of
development in two areas. It should not be assumed, however, that
Persian failed to exert any significant influence on Bengali. It did
influence in certain sphere of Bengali linguistic activity where
Bengali was found inadequate or less prestigious. For example legal
documents in Bengali were written in a Persianised style. But the
literary function of Persian in Bengali is mainly decorative. Persian
words help to create an exotic atmosphere and do not necessarily give
an Islamic flavour. Unlike Hindustani, therefore, Bengali did not face
the problem of Persianisation and non-Persianisation. The process in
Bangali can be described in the following diagram:

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[1]A style containing large number of Persian words originated in late seventeenth
century which became popular among a section of Bengali Muslims in the nineteenth
century. Stylisation became more vigorous in the twentieth century but it did not
succeed because there was no viable Persian-Bengali creole as its basis. There are
some evidences of some kind of creole in industrial towns where Urdu speaking Muslims
came from Bihar and U.P. and acquired a smattering of Bengali. But the Muslim
peasantry in Bengal was mono-lingual and thus a Muslim creole could not grow.

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│         Bengali Dialects        │
│ ─────────────────────────────── │
│     Standard Literary Bengali   │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Persianised Bengali │   │ Bengali-Persian Creole │
└─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────┘
   for restricted use   restricted among a
   among all Bengalis.   section of Muslims.

In the nineteenth century when literary prose emerged in Bengali -
there was no literary prose in the preceeding centuries - the problem
of standardisation centred around the tendencies of Sanskritisation
and non-Sanskritisation.[1] The Sanskritised style was known as **Sadhu
Bhasa** (the elite style) and the style which did not favour Sanskritisa-
tion was termed as **Colita bhasa** (the current speech). A speech style
was soon standardised which was used in religious debates and sermons
and also on the Bengali stage. It was based on Calcutta dialect with
some minor modifications. But the emergence of a standard literary
dialect to be used in prose was delayed because of its vacillation
between Sanskritisation and non-Sanskritisation. In the case of Hindi
the process of stylisation resulted in the divergence of two styles.
In the case of Bengali it resulted in the convergence of different
styles of written Bengali. Sanskritised Bengali was considered to be
artificial and the non-Sanskritised Bengali was considered to be ill-
suited for intellectual communication. So the standard style which
emerged in the nineteenth century was a compromise between the two.

In the next phase of standardisation of Bengali there was an attempt
to reduce the difference between literary standard and standard speech.
At the first stage of their growth **Sadhu bhasa** and **Colita bhasa** were
distinguished by their relative Sanskritism. At the next stage of
their existence the distinction was made solely on the differences
between few pronominals and verbal forms. **Colita bhasa** used those
forms which were used in the Standard speech but **Sadhu bhasa** used
another set of pronominal and verbal forms which belonged to the Middle
Bengali and naturally they did not exist in the speech of any one in
the nineteenth century. There were heated debates in the Bengali press
and Bengali writers were divided into two camps one favouring the
retention of the difference between the literary and the standard dia-
lect, the other favouring the convergence of the two. For a long time

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[1]This problem has been discussed in detail in Das (1966).

Bengali was written in two styles and only recently **Colita bhasa** has
become more prestigious in literary discourse but **Sadhu bhasa** is
still active in many spheres. Many speakers of sub-standard dialects
also want to retain it as a unifying written style. The whole story
can be summed up thus: a particular dialect becomes the prestige dia-
lect though it differs from the standard written style in few respects.
Finally the literary or written style is identified with the spoken
standard.

Here again, Bengali provides an interesting contrast to the Hindi
situation. In the case of Sanskritised Hindi or High Hindi, the
written style emerged first, ahead of the spoken style.
In Bengali the literary standard took the standard speech as its model.

4. This brief account of language standardisation both in Hindi and in
Bengali shows very clearly how social and religious forces work behind
the process of standardisation. The Urdu-Hindi problem, for example,
became a burning political issue. Similarly, at a later stage, a sec-
tion of Bengali Muslims thought Bengali which has been nourished by
Hindu-Buddhist traditions was a threat to their religious identity.
When English appeared on the linguistic scene in India, the already com-
plicated language situation of this country became more complicated.
English education helped the growth of another elite group different
from the earlier group in taste and motivations. English was accepted
first by the Bengali elite and then by the Hindu elite in other parts
of India as the vehicle of modern science and technology. It soon
became not only the language of administration but of new education and
thus became the most prestigious language in the Indian society. English
words started coming into Bengali and Hindi either through direct bor-
rowing or through translation. By the middle of the twentieth century
not only hundreds of lexical items were borrowed from English by Indian
languages, but the normal informal educated speech styles of Indians
became a pot-pourri of English and their respective languages. In some
cases the influence of English has gone beyond lexical levels. For
example in Bengali one notices the presence of final consonant clusters,
certain initial consonant clusters previously unknown to the language.
And these features are not restricted to educated speech only. Most
of these features are reflected in literary styles also. However
conservatism is clearly seen with respect to words borrowed from English.
This conservatism is not a new phenomenon as it had worked throughout
the history of linguistic development in India, thus giving the process
of standardisation of Indian languages its peculiar character.

Grammarians of Prakrit languages divided the vocabulary of those languages into three classes: tatsama (unmodified Sanskrit words), tadbhava (modified Sanskrit words) and deśī (words of unknown origin, probably from the non-Sanskritic languages spoken in India). This classification roughly corresponds with caste hierarchy in Hindu society. Tatsama corresponds with the status of Brahmins in Hindu society and deśī words are the 'fallen words'. And that is one reason why tatsama words were preferred to tadbhava and deśī. The mixing up of tatsama and non-tatsama words in a style was often censored as guru-caṇḍālī doś *Brahmin-outcaste error*. When Persian and English words are considered by Indian grammarians they are included in another category: Videsi (foreign). The attitude of the purist is much different from the orthodox Hindu attitude to a foreigner who is often considered as a mleccha. Attempts of language standardisation as well as official language policies in India have been partly regulated by this kind of deep-rooted social and religious prejudices of religious communities as well as of different social and economic groups. Pride and prejudices of different groups are clearly manifested in the issues relating to the standardisation of technical terms, reform of script and spelling and so on. Chatterji pointed out in an article on Scientific terminology in Bengali (*Desh*, Annual Number, 1964) that the labours of committees specially appointed for creating suitable terminology in Hindi and Bengali have been wasted because of lack of a uniform policy. One notices four tendencies: Sanskritisation, Persianisation, Anglicisation and also indigenousisation - working at cross purposes. The main motivation of the first two tendencies is to retain a special group character in the language concerned. John Beames pleaded long ago (1865) not only for the retention of Perso-Arabic element in official Hindustani but he also believed that borrowing from Semitic sources was better than borrowing from Sanskrit or other Indian sources. His arguments were mainly linguistic but the actual choice between borrowing and reconstruction never depended on precise objective terms. In case of building a scientific terms, for example, it is generally admitted that retention of European terms already familiar in Indian languages would serve the purpose of achieving greater linguistic efficiency than reconstructing them. One of the motivations of Sanskritisation is to build up a common core of words in Indian languages to keep them closer. But in actual practice technical terms coined from Sanskrit in Hindi and Bengali were less. convergent than those taken from English (Ray 1963:72). On the other hand, indigenousisation which was championed by many to make technical terms intelligible to larger number of people were often too uneconomical and was a fanatic reaction against familar English or Sanskrit words,

which have already become   part and   parcel of the commonman's vocabu-
lary.

    The same tendencies were manifested in the issues involving reform
or standardisation of script. Different groups clung passionately to
different scripts even when their disadvantages were clearly pointed out.
Deva Nagari has a symbolic value for the Hindu elite and Perso-Arabic
script is considered a "symbol of the essential unity of culture of
art" for the Indian Muslims (Mujeeb 1966). All attempts of Romanisation
were severely criticised by champions of different scripts. Gandhi
wrote in 1939 that "the only script that is ever likely to be universal
in India is Devanagri, either reformed or as it is. Urdu or Persian
will go hand in hand unless Muslims of their own free-will acknowledge
the superiority of Devanagri from a purely scientific and national
standpoint....The Roman script would displace both. But sentiment and
science alike are against the Roman script." (1965:55-6) In fact Gandhi
voiced the feeling of a nationalist emotionally attached to Deva Nagari
though it is well known that "comparative intricacy and complexity of
its letters, the use of conjunct consonants and the syllabic and not
purely alphabetical character of the writing" (Chatterji 1960:237) are
its main defects. Mujeeb saw in the Perso-Arabic script the possibility
of isolating the Urdu language from "the modern world of technology and
delaying the attainment through Urdu of the knowledge which moves the
whole of the modern life" (1966:36). Committees were made to suggest
reform in Deva Nagari or in the Bengali script but there was no signifi-
cant change. While many agree that the presence of letters representing ṛ,
ai and au in Deva Nagari were not really necessary (Madangopal 1953:275-6,
Sharma 1968:113) they were allowed to stay. The situation was more complex
in Bengali. It retained long vowels, three sibilants [s š ṣ], two con-
trasting nasals, one retroflex [ṇ] and one dental [n], to mention only
a few, in the script, though they were not present in the speech. When
Calcutta University appointed a committee in 1937 to suggest changes in
Bengali spelling some standardisation was made with respect to non-tatsama
words only, although many scholars protested against such changes (Ghosh
1939). Simplification of consonant clusters in writing (which are
written with conjunct characters) can economise the problems in reading
writing and printing in Bengali as well as in Deva Nagari and can thus
substantially help in the programmes on the eradication of illiteracy.
Probably with a view to achieving that objective, one influential Bengali daily
made some attempts at the simplification of medial consonant clusters
in 1967. But they left the Tatsama words untouched. In fact all
attempts, official and non-official, of language standardisation in

Hindi and Bengali, have been regulated by so many extra-linguistic
factors ranging from religious to political and social factors that a
choice in linguistic terms alone is hardly possible. The modern phase
of standardisation of Indian languages thus is marked by a very serious
tension between the elitistic and popular approach and needs, as well
as between the forces of modernisation and of tradition.

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