

Multilingualism, Diversity and Democracy – The Indian Scenario

Associate Prof. Sanjay Ranade, Mumbai University, Mumbai, India

In India, we are dealing with communication (one of the aspects of which is language) in an environment that has formed over hundreds of centuries. Being multilingual and being diverse in a dynamic communication and media universe is part of life in India as much as it is for a student and a teacher in an Indian classroom.

I was a reporter for a decade before becoming a media-educator. In my doctoral thesis in 2010, I looked at news from the point of view of readers of English and Marathi newspapers in Mumbai. In the newsroom, for various reasons, we make a lot of assumptions about what the readers read. Studying and teaching communication, media and journalism, I realized that there was a difference between what we thought the readers read and what the readers actually read. I found that readers were consuming the newspaper in a subliminal reality in terms of language as well as the medium. At that time, television was spreading fast. Then came social media. The most significant aspect of this media in India was its accessibility, interactivity and its reach.

This study revisits my thesis of 2010. I look at undergraduate and postgraduate students and teachers of communication, media and journalism and their language environment at home, among peers, and in the classroom. I am answering the following questions in this study

1. What is the language environment at home?
2. What is the language environment with friends/peers?
3. How distinct or similar are these two environments?
4. There are various categories of language in India. Which ones are part of the environment at home and which ones are part of the environment among friends/peers?
5. In which language is news being followed?
6. Which sources of news are being followed?
7. What makes 'news' to the recipients?
8. Is language a barrier to a better future?
9. What is the standing of English with respect to Indian languages in this environment?
10. What is done to overcome the difficulty of not understanding English?

I explain, using ideas on language in India, how people in general and news consumers, teachers, students in this specific case, deal with this environment.