

TECHNO-LINGUAL AMBIGUITIES OF INDIAN MEDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Usage of languages in media plays a significant role in making people to initiate and set agenda for the generation next. The positive aspects of media in producing cultural enrichment more often than not overshadow the pitfalls accompanying it. As communication expert, Wilbur Schramm says, 'no mass media can exist in a cultural vacuum'. After language based unification of states in India, in the absence of clear-cut Communication Policy, unilingual influences dominated in the country. Limitations of media practitioners and technology contributed to the linguistic divide. The rural dialects and art forms were started to decline due to the presence of urban professionals inside media houses. The entry of global media houses also led to the better technological advancement in media and entertainment business. Commercial media houses also started dictating the language component; as a result writing and reading habits of younger generation is fast disappearing. Since the media has the capability to make people imitate, whatever language practices are on the media, the media consumers quickly pick them up. Researchers have often overlooked the potential to study language usages in media. In the convergence era with dominating mobile phones and SMS usages, the situation has still worsened. Transnational media has subtly started imposing English on a conventional society, negatively affecting the youth. In view of the situation, there is an urgent need to save many of the endangered languages. In this background, this article critically evaluates the pitfalls of non-judicious adaptations of language usages over electronic media. The inferences drawn calls for major changes in media language practices.

Keywords: Techno-lingual ambiguities, communication policy, media influences, endangered languages, non-judicious adaptations

INTRODUCTION

Human communication is an innate activity for the purposes of achieving self-goals and societal well-being. No communication process is complete without a language in it. Communication process and language are intimately related. Language and non-verbal communication are the two faces of a same coin.

The positive and negative aspects of a word depend upon the cultural context in which it is used. The greatest barrier of a language is that it is ambiguous in nature, because it can be understood only by a particular group which has acquainted with its usage. An unknown language is always alien to any other group. The usage of a language through a media is understood by the target audience depending upon their cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The message-receiving situation of an individual definitely matters. As the language is also very important for the communication process, it is also the responsibility of any communicator to digest the message of a particular language first, and then it is a tedious process of translating the message, which should be understood by a large section of the masses. Under these circumstances, we cannot neglect the role of language in the process of communication.

After India's political independence, and later the unification of states based on languages, the national language dominated as well as the regional languages flourished Usage of languages in media plays a significant role in its ability to make people initiate and set agenda for the generation

next. Media wields a positive influence over growth of languages, production of literature, translation and cultural exchange.

Media and Language

Language by itself has contributed for the enormous growth of media in India, which has attracted the global attention. The very diverse range of languages in India contributes to proliferation of large number of regional channels. It has further fostered regional cooperation, socio-cultural integration, harmony and amity. It has mitigated gaps of strangeness among countrymen, supported mutual recognition and respect among them. These synergic attributes in turn have augured for reinvestments into media sector in terms of finance, human resource and the very nourishment of media. Moreover, language has strengthened the hands of media to face competition from transnational media. Language has indeed added to the expressions of the media in transforming the multi-dimensional society. Emergence and growth of media has resulted in the growth of languages in different areas. In spite of media having many positive facets in enriching cultures through languages, the pitfalls are many. Communication expert, Wilbur Schramm says, 'no mass media can exist in cultural vacuum'. Language is the crux and ornament of any culture.

Translation plays a very important role and its contribution to media is quite large. In earlier days, major inflow of information into newspapers was in English. Most newspapers translated them. Translation was quite a hazardous, tedious and time-consuming job in a media house. Many a times, English language was not digested by sub-editors and thus resorted to transliteration. In some cases, media of regional languages have sub-editors with not much command over English usages. In addition, most of the sub-editors follow the dictum, 'when in doubt, cut it out'. This denies a lot of useful and valuable information to the people who depend upon vernacular media. When a *sub* fails to digest a message, there is a practice of deleting them. This in turn harms the very structure of the story. Media consumers are thus taken for a ride. It is none of the business of any translator to delete, add or exaggerate the content while translating, which may destroy the original message. It is also a tough task to translate terms related to many technical disciplines. Therefore, people in media should acquire command over the language, which seems to be gradually disappearing.

Whenever there are foreign related or alien words, pronunciation and spelling plays a major role. The wrong usage through the media in terms of pronunciation and spelling sets a bad example for the new generation, harming the very structure of the language.

The Pre and Post-independence era in India saw the media exploiting languages with well-made researches and assigning skilled writers, artists and presenters. Top class outputs have been evident due to such deployments. However, soon due to the unsystematic growth of media, the entry of print was not recognized by the people because of illiteracy.

Media: Transformation as an Industry

In post-independent India, initially development was the agenda of mass media. Print media at that time was comparatively free and evidently contributed to cultural and social aspects. Supplements in newspapers, magazines and tabloids were other available medium through which languages could manifest their value. Even electronic media, then under government patronage mustered up literary personnel to sustain language development. Cinema provided enormous inputs to growth of languages through tapping dialects from grassroots and also registered official and sophisticated usages. Emergence of Indian cinema is nothing but amalgamation of many art forms where language played a crucial role. Movies mainly depended on lingual support and thus *mookie* (silent) to talkie switchover was quicker and smoother. Cinema developed itself as the intimate medium of the masses wherein the other media depended upon cinema for their survival. Virtually, it was a phenomenal contribution of cinema for the growth of many Indian languages. The era of Metamorphosis too saw forceful language blends with electronic media involving maximum potentials of human resource expertise. However, the negative impact after globalization due to the entry of media with commercial interests and the growth of technology also started dictating the language component.

Technology and Language

Space is money in print and so more and more abbreviations got set in the media. Shortening the names of VVIPs even though it gave antagonistic meanings was accepted by the readers and practitioners alike. This development further technically dictated the *style sheet*. Today, typography is executed casually and the principles are simply violated. The set of rules are thrown to the wind; eg:- (1) two single column stories are not to go side by side; but technology accommodates, thus compromising the carry of mere insertion of a thin line, or by use of different font for the headlines of those stories. Here, in spite, readers could get confused and read the two headlines merged horizontally line to line. Language gets second place in the eyes of the readers.

(2) To demarcate stories, mere use of a box or scattering the closely related stories in different pages or positions do not subscribe to any style sheet of print media.

All these have led to an entirely new culture of media graphic practices, making language secondary to design.

Technology Gush

In the convergence era with the dominating mobile phones and SMS usages, the situation has still worsened. Punctuations, though provision made, in the guise of saving time, are simply ignored by the users.

Another argument is, in the absence of technology, the painstaking work in translation section of a print media was only to protect the interest of the language and crosschecks and double-checks was only for that sole reason. Innovative technologies have made these sections redundant and fast vanishing. Even conventional newspapers have started ignoring the language component as they are dictated by the compulsions of technology.

Both the limitations of media practitioners and the technology have together contributed to the *lingual divide*. Once a mistake is committed by wrongly using a language in terms of punctuation, grammar and composition, it cannot be rectified any further. Since media enjoys the credibility, it is taken on face value and its messages become a fact and soon a trend in the society.

Dialects Destruction

The effect of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization has also resulted in the vanishing of life-supporting skills of artists and artisans. Changed life-styles due to globalization have affected grass-root occupations. Indigenous communities like potter men, washer men, fishermen, snake charmers, *dombidasas* and *hakkipikkis* had occupation of their own. They had inbuilt folk-art and culture having umpteen number of dialects embedded with life enriching tips.

Even the rural populace, dialects and their art forms have come under severe threat due to the presence of urban media houses. Transnational media, with their aggressive competition with regional media have started recruiting urban youth into their local media-houses wherein these youth use a substandard, colloquial, mixed lingo, creating a wholly new breed of lewd usages, devoid of any control or scaling.

Quality of Television production has gone berserk. Breaking news, race for TRPs, urgency to reach the viewers and to draw attention, and above all, to enhance revenue through such calisthenics has pushed the language to the backseat. Unfortunately, these programs have endeared to the modern day youth. As a result, their writing and reading habits are fast disappearing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researchers have often overlooked the potential to study language usages in media. In the convergence era with dominating mobile phones and SMS usages, the situation has still worsened. In fact, the very media education in India is in its infancy to go global standards and is yet to gain ground and acceptance by the industry and professionals. The language component in media is chiefly essential because it enjoys the credibility of the population. So it becomes very difficult for the

academicians to snub an erring media inside classrooms. In view of all the above, there is an urgent need to modify the usage of many languages in media.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Media is capable of making people imitate. This is forceful through the theories of the middle range with a new paradigm (1960s) spearheaded by Sociologist Robert Merton's Functional Analysis Approach. The basis of this approach was that all practices that contribute to maintaining the society can be said to be functional rather than good, any practices that are disruptive or harmful are by definition dysfunctional rather than evil. The phenomenon of Inductive learning is predominant under this theory.

METHODOLOGY

Significance

The undertaken research problem critically evaluates pitfalls of non-judicious adaptations of language usages in mass media including electronic media.

Scope

Through basic tracing of print media anomalies in language usages, further analysis is made hereby for its further effects on the skewed promotion of casual language approach among electronic media practices.

Objectives

The researcher generally looked into the causes for aberrations in language usages over media. Specifically, the aftermath of such causes and evaluates the extent of damage to the media and society is probed here. The analysis further looks into forming compartments of such shortcomings so as to treat each of them towards betterment.

Critical descriptive methodology is adopted here by delineating through instances, examples and cases of digressions and violations by the channels and FM stations, to bring into account the stakeholders of the media exercise.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Unilingual influences

In the absence of clear-cut Communication Policy, *unilingual influences* dominated, grossly ignoring the nuances of culturally embedded dialects and local languages at the grass roots. Unfortunately, in the race to adopt an egalitarian approach, monoculture is creeping in through the use of hegemonic influences of language usages. This has destroyed several dialects. It has sufficiently damaged the originality of these dialects, which poses questions to be answered. Different states have different dialects within them. Domination of monotone languages has definitely hampered folk literature, art forms and folk language related to these dialects.

Centralization of media in India has contributed to the biased usages of dominated dialects. A dialect changes for every 30kms in India. No responsible media should diminish a dialect or a language. All these become strong reasons for disintegration of people, for regional strives to set in. The regional folks' aspirations and diversifications are hugely compromised. Already anomalies in usages of dialects have paved way for many misunderstandings.

Content V/S Language: Conflicts and Contradictions

Most reality shows on TV have content with less of cultured language. It borders on antagonistic usages, particularly between opposite sexes. To maintain high TRPs, slangs and double meaning words are rampantly used. The content of Bollywood songs, more so of regional cinema music is dangerously adulterated with mixed languages virtually promoting adultery.

Language in advertisements on TV is sensationally contributive to enhance the visuals and less to soothe the auditory faculty. Language of a Public Service message on a TV channel goes in Kannada language as '*maatadowne mahaashoora*' to mean 'one who talks is a hero' stating with a masculine gender. Women viewers just ignore such catch-lines.

Merely to hold the viewers, some TV channels wrongly use the phrase 'news explosion'. It is a bomb that does; news should not and cannot explode. Such usages set a peculiar agenda for youth.

Local Indian languages like Bhojpuri [Bihar], Kodava [Karnataka], Lambani [all over India] and Tulu [Karnataka] are sidelined and miss the mainstream with no patronage from media. There are many such instances in other parts of the country too.

Usages based on habituations such as 'McDonaldization', 'Glocalization', 'Kiwis', 'Techies', etc., are unpalatable under the disciplined message transfer through the usage of language under any media practice. British lingo v/s US lingo is another unwanted confusion adding fuel to the pyre of conflicts already within the regions of India. Conceptualization of words and statements of a language rather than simplified communication has led to arbitrariness. Simpler societies need simpler usages for optimum communication and effective results. It is more of confusion than clarity about acceptance of programmes in different languages though there could be very meaningful messages in them. This is mainly because of too much of crossovers in reach of different channels without focused target audience groups.

On TV media, in the guise of breaking news and competition with other channels, too many colloquial usages have set in. Adding to it is the syntax carelessness, littering the language in the name of 'competition' and reckless use of numerical illustrations. It is all a futile exercise resulting in drastic decreasing of credibility of electronic media among the consumers and connoisseurs. One should really understand whether it is 'breaking news' or 'break the news'.

FM radio is catching up with similar slang usages and undue mixture of languages. Teenage attraction is on the wrong end about double *entendre* and abusive usages mostly devoid of concept-wise meaningful presentations. The slogans like '*Mast Maja madi*' (enjoy to your peak), '*Sakkt hot maga*' (very hot, my son), '*chamkaisi, chindi udaisi*' (surprise them, loot them) and programmes like 'Love Guru' encourages youth to dream of illicit illusions. These can well be replaced by excellent lines from a beautiful poetry. The creative minds can coin very attractive, healthy slogans in the interest of building a healthy society.

The media career aspirants, without proper command over any language are getting selected to media enterprises and are indulging in marring the language. Egs:- Plural of 'news' is used as '*newses*', staff – *staffs*; information – *informations*, and so on.

Impact of transnational media has unduly imposed English on a conventional society like that of India. English is often used in dialogues of Indian movies or TV programs with a force that is only as a gesture of power, rhetoric, as a sarcastic tone. In some regions, even national language is not accepted in the positive spirit, which reflects very well in programs on those regional channels.

Negative impact after globalization, especially after the entry of TV forced all other media to go extremely commercial, resulting in a metamorphosis. Such commercial interests resorted to appeasing strategies through pleasing urban audiences with better purchasing power. The emergence of 24-hour news channels and soap operas with attractive programs hampered the reading or writing habits of millions of families in India. The concept of traditional family magazines or newspapers or even the reach of print is gradually disappearing. When commercial entities started dictating and when participation of the non-professionals began, the harming of language had already started.

In another instance of an agricultural program on a TV channel, an expert in a 3-piece suit, a tie and sunglasses is made to talk to a farmer. Seeing the foreign presentation the farmers simply surfs to another channel thinking that it does not belong to them. Same with a radio program; an agricultural super-specialist starts delivering a lecture in a sophisticated regional language ridden with jargons; the poor farmer feels it all alien and takes no belongingness; discards it simply.

Even today, sub-editors of regional language media with not much command over other languages, damage the original message. In an instance, the police commissioner of a major city, during the breakdown of a law and order situation announced in a press conference that the curfew was extended from dawn to dusk. Media people face a lot of psychological pressure because of the deadlines. To reach the deadline, a sub-editor of a largest circulated Kannada language daily translated the message as ‘curfew was extended from dawn city to dusk city’! This way no justice is done to a news dispatch. Sometimes, in striving to use a parallel, mostly inappropriate and improper usages creep in. For instance, the usage of a weather report– ‘it is raining cats and dogs’ was transliterated.

Even a standard word like ‘psychology’ is read over a local channel as ‘*pischology*’! While using nomenclature like name of a nation, a city or a foreign dignitary, the usage of the news media becomes the style sheet of that region. It could be a word from Russian, Japanese, Portuguese, Polish, Latin, etc. People in vernacular media should take care on spelling or pronunciation. Eg:- Gorbachev would be Gorbachev or Gorbashave or Gorbaachev. The African cricketer Tsotsobe is pronounced in various ways. Use of alien words makes future researchers or consumers continue to use them wrongly and this proves a disaster to the very communication processes.

The deadline pressures of electronic media by the minute demands mere throwing the messages without performing the gatekeeper function and will definitely damage the structure of the language. In the guise of overtaking their rivals in terms of TRP, the presenters have started using singulars or ask senseless or non-contextual questions.

With mobile phones all-spread in the world, the concept of SMS language has become a sure congestion for formal language usages. Short forms distort the whole structure and composition of languages.

The sudden growth of FM radio targeting the age group of 12-22 years appealed to ‘*kische*’ or gully crowds and slum dwellers. To appease these crowds, content with vulgarity, lewdness and too much chattering over FM is resulting in conscious or unconscious usage of cheap language. It is giving birth to a completely new culture. Even linguists are mute with respect to media and there is no resistance absolutely. The experiment of an FM channel, which concentrated only on the western music, is a classic case in the discussion of the lingual component. This FM channel was forced to shift to the programs of local language in place of western music.

Most experts working in FM radio claim the usage of language as that with ‘*josh*’ and speed, a need to sustain listenership. Use of western accent imitation in regional language, Kangleish [Kannada+English], Hingleish [Hindi+English] etc., has all resulted in monoculture among the youth, not healthy for the diverse cultural fabric of India. Thus, the basic structure and composition of languages is getting distorted. Today, the film industry, especially the regional cinema is frothed with double *entendre* and obscene usages both in dialogues and in lyrics.

In some states, the language component in many courses of Media Studies is missing. More emphasis is given to teaching of technology, which will fail to produce capable professionals. In the curriculum, technology and language should go hand in hand to achieve desired results.

INFERENCES AND CONCLUSION

Media practices needs an altogether refurbishing and rethinking, especially of its editorial values. If the credibility of media is in question, it cannot survive for a long time. Globalization has ‘glorified’ the labour class and the real intellectuals gradually disappearing from the scene. The proposed Higher Education Commission Bill in India is looking into the language supporting design of courses and would soon be a reality. This will be a blessing in disguise for different courses of media studies.

Many regional dialects and even some languages are on the verge of destruction. Even as the mother of the dialects dominates, it is the miniature dialects that will nourish the culture. While the subcontinent encourages addition of new words through churning of multi-language approach to media programs, it is to ensure that the fundamental fabric should remain intact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What is to be done to gain the lost glory of usage of language in the media is to address the issues from the bottom. Under media studies, subjects related to semiotics and linguistics should find place on priority. Media industry should put on priority, the language exercises and reiterate its importance. The need for emphasis on translation should be campaigned for. There is impending necessity to promote small, medium, community and language oriented media which have preserved the local tinge. Such media houses will take care of these dialects and languages in future. Defying technological onslaught, the student community should be trained to convey the messages in the native language instead of imitating any pre-set standards or even foreign accentuated usages.

Media of the future should work towards preserving the sanctity of the languages and the responsibility lies equally with media experts, academic scholars and linguistic experts. There is an urgent need to save native languages, more so in India's context.

Glossary

Dombidasas and

- Hakkipikkis – Nomadic tribes of Karnataka state in India
Kische – An aggregate of target audience with cheap media consumerism
Mookie - The silent film
Style sheet - The regulations of a media house regarding the content
TRP - Television Rating Points
Typography - Design and style of fonts that goes to print for optimum readability
Unilingual influences - Hegemonic dictates of one language at the cost of other dialects

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