

## CHAPTER II

### LANGUAGE IN THE MODERN WORLD

1. As has been well said, it is speech that endows man with humanity. In other physical faculties man is no better gifted than many of the animals. Without the instrumentality of speech, co-operation between individuals leading to the organisation of human societies would not have been possible; without speech, equally, the development and cultivation of mental faculties and the accumulation of knowledge which has finally led to the tremendous material progress witnessed in the physical circumstances of living amongst modern communities, would not have been possible. The story of language, therefore, is the story of civilisation.

Reflections about Language, its origin, the part that it plays in the perceptions of the human mind and in the systematisation and reasoning about human experiences have always been amongst the oldest and most constant preoccupations of the human mind. We are not concerned with the theories of how human speech originated. Whether it evolved from a sublimation of animal cries or was developed as a deliberate device to supplement communication by gestures, language as a social phenomenon is known to have invariably characterised all human societies, there being no recorded instance of any human society, no matter how primitive, which did not know the art of speech. In its spoken or written form, language is an indispensable tool to all social existence. Without the facility of communication between human beings which language furnishes, the intricate, comprehending co-operation of human beings in organised societies would never have been possible. Language is the one common indispensable nexus of all forms of human co-operation and therefore permeates all aspects of social organisation, whether on the material, cultural or spiritual plane.

It is a commonplace in linguistics that spoken language antedates written language by thousands and may be millions of years. At the dawn of history whether by accident or in a moment of dazzling perception by an unknown individual genius, the device of writing must have been discovered. Coming as an auxiliary and as a substitute to oral speech, writing multiplied almost infinitely, in the dimensions of both time and space, the reach of human communication. Writing can embalm and preserve for posterity the ideas, reasoning processes and fancies actuating the speaker's mind when he gives oral expression to them. Apart from this extension into the time dimension almost without limit which the art of writing bestows on human expression by endowing it with permanency, as a means of contemporary dissemination also, writing, aided by devices for multiplication, has enormously widened the range of human communication. Indeed, even otherwise, as a means of current communication, writing has certain obvious advantages as compared to oral expression, such as its greater precision, certainty and compactness.

The art of writing may follow one of the two principal lines of development. It may symbolise *directly* the ideas, thoughts and objects; or it may symbolise them *indirectly* through the sounds of the words by which they are expressed. Most of the world's written languages now conform to the latter or the phonetical system of writing, although they may have first passed through some stages of the former or ideographic writing. The Chinese, Japanese and other languages which use the Chinese system are the chief contemporary instances of some of the aspects of the ideographic form of writing. When a written form is achieved, languages attain a measure of stability. Spoken languages without any writing are highly fluctuating and variable. An ideographic language, like the Chinese, as an oral speech has the same variability as any other language; but as a written language, not being related to the sound values of oral speech, it has a high degree of fixity.

The art of writing made possible the recording and transmission of individual experience of human beings, not only from one person to another, but also of each generation to all the succeeding generations. It thus multiplied incalculably the permanency of human expression through the dimension of time. It has made accumulation of knowledge possible, as each succeeding generation can benefit by the knowledge and experience gathered by previous generations and embodied in their writings. The individual experience of a single life is transmitted and added to the collective knowledge of mankind by language aided by the art of writing, and the resulting knowledge in turn is made available as the heritage accessible to every single person coming thereafter.

The history of a language is invariably the history of the cultural life of the human community speaking that language. Whereas literature reflects the musings, thoughts and fancies of the best, or at least the most vocal, minds; language is something to which all members of a linguistic society contribute, no matter in how small a measure. 'Language', said Emerson, 'is a city to which every human being brought a stone.' The development of languages is in this sense fundamentally democratic as distinct from the growth of literature which is essentially the study of thoughts and experiences of particular individuals.

Language, having come to make human communication possible, subsists to facilitate the social life in the intricate modern communities in which human beings now dwell. Nor is it merely an instrumentality of communication; we have so become used to language that it enters into the thought itself and moulds it. Much of our thinking is inevitably in terms of words and phrases; and not always in terms of the objects, ideas or relationships which they are supposed to symbolise.

2. The study of languages as such; their structures; how different languages reacted on each other; how by derivation or by borrowing new vocables are developed in every form of human speech for expressing new experiences and ideas freshly impinging on that human society; how words undergo changes, how dialectal variations are developed, the principles of phonetical change, etc.; these are

all technical matters relating to the science of linguistics with which we are not directly concerned. We are concerned with certain practical issues relating to the use of language in a complex situation; and as a perspective thereto, it might be of use for us to consider the special attributes of language as a means of communication in modern societies.

The art of printing wrought a virtual revolution in the facilities accessible to the common man for increasing his knowledge and for entering into the human heritage, which, in the shape of writings of previous generations, belong as potential legacy to every human being. In recent times, modern means of communication, such as the radio, the film, the press, have further vastly accentuated this development and also in other ways contributed significantly to the 'milieu' in which the problem of language in a modern society must be regarded. These modern means of communication, for one thing, tend to establish, far more widely than ever before, contemporary vogues and stabilise and standardise languages. The mass availability of these means of communication now tends to counteract the natural tendency towards dialectal variation amongst languages and is helping to forge a common uniform speech, such as, for instance, 'King's English' in the English-speaking world.

Language inevitably plays an important part in education. As a medium of communication it enters almost ubiquitously all processes of imparting knowledge of whatever subject it may be: apart from this, a good deal of formal education has naturally to consist of the imparting of knowledge of the language itself as a tool of expression. In modern societies literacy has become an indispensable necessity, for even a modest level of development, for each individual as a member of a modern community. Social organisation is now so complex and intricate and the material equipment of living so highly specialised that modern communities require a high degree of information and skill amongst the generality of their member constituents; and literacy is a practically indispensable means for the purpose of acquiring information or developing skills. Without skilled and literate artisans and farmers, countries cannot progress in the modern world beyond a rudimentary stage, as technological or agrarian advance of any considerable dimensions or character, becomes impossible, even purely as a problem of 'extension', in a society where the mass of its members are illiterate. It is not a coincidence that percentages of literacy are generally indicative of the level of material progress and living standards amongst nations of the world to-day. It is in recognition of this situation that the modern State has, generally speaking, assumed the formal responsibility for the spreading of literacy amongst, and the imparting of a certain level of education to, the general population of the community which it governs.

3. We must say a word about language in its relationship to nationality, particularly with reference to the 'national State' which has now come to be the prototype of political organisation in the modern world. The sense of nationality may derive from one or more of many sources, such as a common homeland, a common sense

of history, a co-partnership in a common cultural tradition, sometimes a common religion as well as a common language: in the consciousness of nationhood as a rule, language is an important element although it may not always be a decisive factor. In spite of the rise of political entities organised largely as national States in modern times, the problem of languages of minorities and of multilingualism generally occurs in a large number of countries. Language is the main or almost sole instrument of inter-communication in a civilised society: modern Governments concern themselves so intimately and so extensively with all aspects of social and even individual existence that inevitably in a modern community the question of the linguistic medium becomes an important matter of concern to the country's governmental organisation. In the conduct of legislative bodies, in the day-to-day dealings with citizens by administrative agencies, in the dispensation of justice, in the system of education, in industry, trade and commerce; practically in all fields in which it has to interest itself in modern times, the State encounters and has to tackle the problem of the linguistic medium. Apart from this practical aspect of language-barriers within a political community, emotionally, as a rallying-point of group consciousness, language serves as a very frequent badge or symbol. Nationality and racial groupings are frequently confused with language groupings. In Europe, for instance, racial or ethnographic frontiers, political frontiers, frontiers of so-called separate nationalities and linguistic frontiers seldom coincide. Political frontiers are historical and arbitrary; racially there has been generally speaking so much intermingling of races that demarcation of frontiers is practically impossible; national consciousness is a wholly subjective feeling; language is a ready and plausible objective distinction and therefore in practice all manner of sentiments of group consciousness attach themselves to the badge of language and it gets often over-worked as a criterion of nationhood. We will be noticing in the next section how this problem has been tackled in a few of the countries of the world where it arises prominently; it may, however, be noted here that the problem of linguistic minorities arises in a very large number of national States all over the world. Let us take some of the countries of Europe for instance; in France, there are half a dozen linguistic minorities; in Switzerland, four different languages are spoken, and all four are designated as national languages; in Belgium, there are three languages; in Spain, there are three or four quite sizable linguistic minorities; the United Kingdom itself is not without its problem of minority languages; and so far as the countries of Eastern Europe, like Czechoslovakia, Poland, Austria and Hungary are concerned, they are all very polyglot, and the problem of language minorities has been a persistent and chronic issue historically in many of them. Since language is the indispensable medium for social intercourse, the mutual unintelligibility of different language groups interposes genuine barriers between such groups. In view of the deep permeation of official activities within the life of a modern community, the selection of the language or languages as 'official language(s)' becomes a matter for deliberate choice, and therefore of great interest and concern to linguistic minorities. Different devices have been adopted in different countries for reconciling the need for a common linguistic medium at the official plane with the comprehensible desire of minority linguistic groups to retain their

separate languages, and educational institutions for teaching them, as part of their distinct identity and cultural life.

4. We notice below briefly how the problem has been tackled in certain countries of the world wherein it arises prominently.

Switzerland is always quoted as an instance of the successful solution of the problem of multilingualism created by the existence of a polyglot population comprising persons speaking different languages as their mother-tongues. German, French, Italian and Romansch are spoken in Switzerland, and all these four languages have been designated as 'national languages': the 'official languages' of the country are the major three, namely, German, French and Italian. The German-speaking population constitutes 72.1% of the total population, the French-speaking 20.3%, the Italian-speaking 5.9%, the Romansch-speaking population 1%, 0.7% being made up by speakers of other languages. Of the 22 Cantons constituting the Swiss Federation, 14 are German-speaking, 3 French-speaking, 1 Italian-speaking, 3 bilingual in German and French, and 1 trilingual in German, Italian and Romansch. The four national languages spoken in the country are placed on a footing of absolute equality, and the three official languages are used in all official dealings between the Confederation and the Cantons and between the Cantons themselves. All federal laws, regulations, notices and publications are issued in all the three languages; all the texts of federal laws and statutes in the three languages are equally authentic; in Parliament, the members have the right to speak in all the four national languages but the proceedings are recorded in the three official languages only; while a member may demand that his speech in one of the three official languages be translated into the other two, in actual practice all the three official languages are used freely in debates; for diplomatic purposes of the Swiss Government, French is generally used as the traditional international language of diplomacy. In the Cantons, the Cantonal languages are the official languages; in bilingual Cantons, both the Cantonal languages being official languages are on equal footing; these official languages are used for all administrative purposes and in the Cantonal offices and law-courts within the respective Cantons. The medium of instruction in all primary and secondary schools is the official language of the region concerned; and within bilingual and trilingual Cantons, as the linguistic areas are geographically distinct, the medium is the language spoken in that particular area. In bilingual towns there would be separate schools for the two languages. In all schools one of the national languages is a compulsory second language; thus in the German-speaking Cantons, French is the compulsory language, while in the French-speaking Cantons, German is the compulsory language; the Italian-speaking Canton can choose either German or French as the compulsory second language. The second language is compulsory from the 5th standard onwards up to Matriculation. The Universities are run by the Cantons, and the medium of instruction is the official language of the Canton concerned. In practice, however, difficulties of language relating to French or German do not arise by reason of the fact that most professors and students are more or less completely bilingual. In the Federal Court any of the three languages of the Confederation, viz., German, French or Italian,

may be employed in all the proceedings; however, every Swiss has the right to demand that the judgment of the courts be in any of the three languages he may specify. In the Canton courts the official language or languages of the Canton concerned are used in all proceedings.

In Canada (according to the figures of the 1951 census) of a total population of 14 million, 9.4 million were English-speaking, 2.7 million were French-speaking and 1.7 million were bilingual in English and French. The majority (80%) of the French-speaking Canadians live in the Province of Quebec. Canada is a federal country where two official languages, *viz.*, English and French, are in use. In the debates of the Houses of Parliament of Canada and the Houses of Legislature of Quebec, and in the respective records and journals of the Houses, both the languages are used and either of them can be used by any person or in any pleading in any court in Canada. All publications of the Federal and Quebec Governments are issued in both languages, and paper currency and postage are also printed in both French and English. While the working language of the Federal Government is English, letters written in French are answered in French. The working language of the Government of the Province of Quebec is French, but letters addressed to the Provincial Government in English are answered in English. A Translation Bureau is set up within the Federal administration, the duties and functions of which are to collaborate and act for all the departments of the public services in all translation work arising in respect of their activities. In the educational system, the medium of instruction is English as well as French, and there are Universities in which the medium is exclusively English or French, although in each of them arrangements exist for the teaching of the other language. In the field of commerce, while English is the predominant language, French is also used by French businessmen in their dealings with one another and by English-speaking businessmen in their dealings with their clients in the Province of Quebec. French-speaking Canadians have built up a network of social and economic organisations: schools, hospitals, co-operatives, newspapers, etc. and are well represented in Parliament.

Canadians of French origin are more bilingual than those of British origin and bilingualism is more wide-spread in urban than in rural areas, among men than among women and among the better educated. However, in recent years, a definite trend towards a wider bilingualism is said to have been noted in Canada. Many periodicals print articles in both languages.

In Belgium there are three languages, *viz.*, Flemish, French and German. Both French and Flemish are official languages and are used in Government proclamations, etc. Generally speaking, the problem is solved by the fact that a large number of individuals are bilingual or trilingual.

In the U.S.S.R. there are about 200 languages and dialects spoken by various linguistic or national groups. Large numbers out of this list of languages are, however, very little developed, and some of them are not in use and had never been in use as literary languages;

yet others were furnished with a script only after the October Revolution. Amongst the more important languages of the U.S.S.R., which are some 16 or so, the Russian language has in all respects an outstanding position. Russian is the native language of nearly 100 million people inhabiting the U.S.S.R. out of a total of some 180 million, the other languages accounting for the whole lot of the rest. The most numerous language after the Russian is the Ukrainian accounting for 36.5 million in the 1939 census and the next most numerous thereafter are: Bielorussian accounting for 8.7 million, Uzbek for 4.9 million and Tatar 4.3 million. Besides, throughout the history of Tsarist Russia, the Russian language had been used as the exclusive medium in education, political life and administration. Russian is thus far and away the most outstanding language of the country, which of course changes entirely the relationship of this language with the other regional languages as compared with the Indian situation. It is generally recognised that no language other than the Russian, could play the part of a common language between the different States of the U.S.S.R.

As contrasted with the previous regime, the national policy of the Soviet State, with reference to the linguistic minorities has been very liberal and progressive. The free development of all cultures and languages has been not only allowed but actively fostered by the Russian Government since the October Revolution. Schools have been opened, newspapers started, new literature produced in languages where none existed previously. Within the national Republics of the Union, it would seem that the regional languages find a great deal of scope. In these Republics the business is as a rule conducted in the language of the main population of the respective Republic.

In the field of education also, the regional languages are recognised and encouraged at appropriate levels and the Soviet Government have taken special measures to equip them with scientific literature and pedagogical personnel as far as possible. Thus, for instance, in the schools, institutes and in the University in the Georgian Republic, tuition is in the Georgian language; in the schools and institutes of the Kazakh Republic, tuition is in the Kazakh language, where the native language of a particular nationality is not sufficiently developed as a literary language, the language of a more numerous nationality is adopted as the medium according to convenience, or else Russian is so adopted.

The Russian language is the language of business and correspondence in the Central Government and for inter-communication between the different States. Members of any nationality can, however, it seems, speak in their own language in the representative assemblies including the Supreme Soviet or in any court and are entitled to address any official authorities in their own language. In Moscow, in the Central Government, all instructions and decisions of State and Judicial bodies, departments and ministries are issued in the Russian language. All laws passed by the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. are, however, published in the 16 important languages of the Union. The Gazette of the Supreme Soviet of the

U.S.S.R. is also issued in 16 languages. While there exists in principle the right to a citizen of the Soviet Union to make a written or oral statement in any language of the U.S.S.R., normally the language found to be convenient by most parties is the Russian language. It is said that the desire to study the Russian language is very great among the different linguistic nationalities, and the Russian language is in fact widely studied and known within nationalities where the native language is a different one.

It would appear that in Russia the acerbity of any possible linguistic tensions and discords has been forestalled by the liberal policy of encouraging every language as part of the cultural inheritance of that national group. Any serious linguistic controversy is also precluded by reason of the outstanding position, compared with any other language, enjoyed by the Russian language.

5. We would like to say a word or two about language reform and, very broadly, the way in which this question has been tackled in some countries. In Turkey in the years following the first World War, as a part of the social and cultural transformation initiated in that country under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk a reform of the Turkish language was deliberately and methodically undertaken. In 1928, the Latin script was introduced as a measure of reform along with the Western or International numerals. Simultaneously an attempt was made to replace words in the Ottoman-Turkish drawn largely from the Arabic and Persian stock by words of original Turkish stock. The language reform was carried out by the State almost exclusively through a national association called the Turkish Linguistic Society working in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education. Latterly, however, it is gathered, the puristic drive in respect of vocabulary has somewhat slackened and a moderate linguistic policy is said to have been adopted.

The modernisation of the Japanese language followed the epoch-making 'Meiji restoration' of 1868 after which Japan emerged as a modernised nation with astonishing rapidity, efficiency and success. The Japanese way of writing is basically the same as the Chinese way, that is to say, the ideographic script, with characters estimated to exceed over 80,000. The Japanese have, however, introduced, partially on the ideographic system, a phonetic system, namely the 'Katakana' and 'Hiragana' syllabary consisting of 73 letters each, out of which 48 are original letters and the rest are compounds with orthographic symbols somewhat comparable to the *kanas* and *matras* of the Indian phonetical system. As a result of this modernisation of language, Japan has been able to record a tremendous progress in literacy which has now reached the figure of about 90%, that is to say, a figure comparable to that of the advanced Western countries. The Japanese language is the medium of instruction in the educational system, but Western languages, and especially English, are taught very widely in the commercial and science courses. The technical terms are mostly derived from original Chinese roots.

In China the language problem appears in a very different aspect. In a population of over 460 million, while there are about 24 dialectal variations, the script is uniform. In terms of alphabetic writing it may be said that the script has as many characters as there



are words or expressions. The fact that there is an identical written script, even if there are variations in oral expression of it, results in situations in which two Chinese speakers cannot make themselves understood mutually orally but can converse in writing. An ideographic script, it would seem, is very inhibitive with reference to the development of education, both extensively and intensively, inasmuch as a large portion of the elementary schooling must necessarily consist of acquiring mastery over the linguistic tool in the shape of the thousands of ideograms necessary for expression at a particular level. This imposes obvious limiting factors with reference to the spread of literacy.

Moves for the alphabetisation of the Chinese ideograms have been made for several decades and it seems that a definite policy of alphabetisation is now adopted. In the ultimate analysis the problem of Chinese language reform reduces itself to that of furnishing an alphabetical system of script to the language in place of the ideographic system. From the point of view of vocables, the Chinese language has the same necessity as the Indian languages, to assimilate vast stocks of new terminology which are necessary in the context of modern living and the progress of technology and the sciences.

6. It would appear that the problem of languages, as it arises in our country, is of peculiar difficulty and complexity. A detailed consideration of the Indian linguistic scene will be undertaken in the next chapter; but it might be anticipated that the outstanding feature of the linguistic landscape of India is the fact that there are over a dozen different well-developed languages, each spoken by large numbers of people, prevalent, generally speaking, in compact linguistic regions of the country and with a history and literary tradition going back, variously in the case of each, over many centuries. The languages have also their appropriate scripts in which they are written. In view of the number of languages the problem does not admit of the easy solution that has been successfully employed in countries like Switzerland, Belgium and Canada, of a general and wide-spread bilingualism or multi-lingualism. Nor is one of the languages so outstandingly ahead of the others (except numerically) as to put it altogether beyond any competition as in the case of Russian in the U.S.S.R. The solution, therefore, of allowing unfettered employment of all languages in the assurance that, in their own interests and of their own accord, the different linguistic groups would resort, at appropriate levels, to the one outstanding language medium is not automatically available in the Indian situation. In the Indian situation, it is necessary, at any rate in the marginal overlapping areas, carefully to set out specifically what would be the appropriate fields for the Union and the regional languages of the country.

What exactly would be the appropriate levels in different fields and how the balance between the Union and regional languages should be struck wherever the point arises, would be considered at relevant places in the succeeding chapters of this Report. We would, however, observe that while it is complex and not without difficulty, the problem of such reconciliation is not insoluble. Language is

cherished as an element of cultural identity by the linguistic group who speak that language; and consequently all manner of complexes of group pride tend to accrete around the sensitive subject of language. While each language may be cherished as a cultural expression of a linguistic group, the needs and conjunctures of modern communal existence under the sovereignty of a single State, create the necessity for evolving a common linguistic medium for national levels and for purposes of intercourse between the linguistic groups. The evolving of such a common medium is equally of interest to each of the linguistic groups; and if the problem is approached in a spirit of tolerance, understanding and pragmatic adjustment,—which in some of the multilingual countries of the world have been learnt as lessons of a painful and troubled historical process,—a solution need not be difficult of attainment.

7. One more matter in respect of which experience of other countries would be of relevance and use in our context is the learning of foreign languages as 'a second language' in the educational system, for purposes of keeping in touch with the advances in scientific research and technology. In this respect, the learning of the English language in other countries of the world, where it is not a mother-tongue, would be of particular relevance, both because of the tradition of English-learning in our country and the fact that English is now definitely the foremost foreign second language, more than any other, over the greater part of the world. In France, English has been the leading second language since 1918. In Scandinavia, English has become the leading second language since the Second World War. In Turkey and Greece, English has been established as the principal second language since the Second World War, though, prior to 1939, French was more studied in these countries. In Italy, Spain and Portugal, English is making considerable headway, although French is very popular in these countries, because of the relative ease with which it is learnt by the nationals. English is now widely spread in the Middle-East countries bordering the Mediterranean, where French used to be more popular in the past. In the U.S.S.R., it appears that English is the leading foreign language and it is believed that 10 million school children in Russia are at present learning English and that it is taught in about 40% of the schools in the Soviet Union. A 'foreign language' is compulsory as a subject of study in Russia and it seems English, French and German are available for choice; it would appear that of these English is somewhat more popular than the other languages. In Poland, Czechoslovakia and other East-European countries, English is now widely known and studied, though Russian may be or may become the first foreign language in those countries. In Japan, there is a fairly-long-established tradition of English learning and, although school children may offer English, French or German for examination purposes, the majority are said to choose English. English is generally the first foreign language in Japan; it is taught in all secondary schools from the age of 10 upwards and is obligatory for all 1st-year and 2nd-year University students, no matter what their special subjects. As a rule, and quite understandably, Japanese scholars and scientists have a greater ability to understand written-English than spoken-English. Apart from the attempt by individual scientists, through their knowledge of the English language, to keep

abreast of scientific developments outside their own country, in Japan many Universities and Government Research Laboratories and scientific and learned societies publish journals in English or give English abstracts of articles in journals in the Japanese language, in order to keep other countries informed of scientific developments in Japan. Most of the senior employees of Japanese firms have a working knowledge of English.

This is, by no means an exhaustive account of the learning of English as a second language in other countries of the world. It would be clear, however, from this how much importance is attached in modern times to the learning of an advanced foreign language through which access would be available to international scientific and technological developments; and how, currently, it would seem English fulfils this requirement more than any other advanced language. This point would be of relevance when we come to consider the place of study of English in the educational system of the country.

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