

BOOK REVIEWS

LANGUAGE CONFLICT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Group Politics and National Language Policy in India. By Jyotirindra Das Gupta. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press. 1970 . Pp 293. \$6.75.

This is a well-researched book combining theoretical vision with a richness of tangible data. It is the first book of its kind, but should another one be mentioned it would be Haugen's Language Conflict and Language Planning. The Case of Modern Norwegian (Harvard University Press 1966).

Das Gupta's main aim is to show, by focussing his study "on the evolution of language loyalty in India and its political expression through voluntary associations" (page 3), how it is possible "to derive a valid theory of development from democratic principles and practice" (page 2), contrary to widely held views among other political scientists. Das Gupta shows how people in India learn to cooperate toward a common good, preserving democratic values of political expression - formerly values of eager reformists, now values of a wider community, of a nation. A reader who is unfamiliar with political science terminology may find himself bewildered at times but the author's effort both to present a model of development by democracy and to prove it without compromising reality hardly offers a choice of styles. Also, the author is very careful in expressing his interpretations, if his style therefore seems heavy it is only a result of his wish to understand life in all its complexity.

One can read Das Gupta's book in at least two ways: as a history and interpretation of Indian language politics; or as a plea for and demonstration of a democratic model of development. Although the title says India, emphasis is on North India. Similarly, throughout the book the author emphasizes political integration as a factor of national development. Whatever the observed datum he treats it by virtue of its political importance. It would be contrary to the author's intentions to give a simplified summary of contents of Indian events. But the outline of the book is briefly:

- a first chapter introducing the political problem and some illustrating language situations.
- a second chapter providing background data on the Indian language situation as it

is today; and I should like to encourage every student of Indian languages and society to read it well.

- a third chapter for elaboration of the author's theoretical aims; and for historical background on the emergence of associations with linguistic interests: Hindi, evidently, was early thought of as an all-Indian link language, and Hindu supporters started developing it for religious authenticity, i.e. Sanskritized it. Later, Muslim and secular interests started to develop their closely similar Urdu and Hindustani varieties using other linguistic sources. Religion, historical symbolism, occupational interest and other issues became intertwined with these created language differences which were subtle in speech, but large in mind and slogan.

- a fourth chapter relates the emergence of language associations into a contemporary political context, as does chapter five, which also discusses the Hindi-Punjabi language struggle after independence.

- a sixth chapter discusses government policy on language, its implementation and administration; and a seventh chapter gives a detailed account of activities and organization of the more important language associations, many of which receive substantial government payments for production of texts, language courses etc.

- a final, eighth chapter could profitably have been divided into two - after the summary (page 259) of the amended Official Languages Act: "... the amended Act of 1967 established a two-language policy for official transactions while the accompanying resolution authorized a three-language policy for the school system and a regional language policy for Union public service examinations with a requirement in addition of a knowledge of Hindi or English." In the latter half of the chapter, Das Gupta evaluates events: people in India have accomplished more than many commentators have realized, and one can appreciate the importance of their accomplishment only "if one assumes that democracy can provide an alternative model of integration based on a pluralistic decision-system" (page 261). Das Gupta also implies that Indian scholars looking at their country have self-critically negated their right to pride because they have relied too much on imported monistic and authoritarian models of development, instead of recognizing that their way of life offers an alternative model, a model of development by democracy.

Das Gupta's book is a protest against simplification of reality, against disbelief in human progress and will. "A viable political community can be built in India", he says, and the sustaining force is Das Gupta's and the nation's belief in democracy: he wants to inspire confidence in his people and other communities that struggle toward a better future. He builds his political analysis on the assumption of democracy to show that unity in difference and through difference can be achieved by participant action. It follows that Das Gupta has to defend violence - "conflicts" in the last chapter - since conflicts lead to a "convergence of interests" and a learning of "bargaining and negotiation." But how many lives shall he admit lost before such learning loses its democratic appeal? Yet, his belief has another consequence, and one which is crucial to western society today; democracy means popular reaction and action, and people in a democratic system allow their decisions to be directly linked to coalitions of political interests however shortlived. Does western "representative government"?

But does Das Gupta state what could have been a better chain of events in India? No! I see a conflict between a line of thought supporting the hard and determined men with well-defined, demanding aims on behalf of a group of people, and another line of thought supporting men in comparable positions who love their country as much as the others but on the whole think that anything goes as long as life holds promise for a better future; an American town planner wants the plumbing right now, but an Indian mayor can wait a few years? I like the latter; but only if he strengthens our consciousness of spiritual life, of cultural values, and of minding our own business. If so, then even a battle is worth losing for the conqueror will not rule alone.

Das Gupta's discussion of language planning (pages 180-185) expresses his dissatisfaction with the Hindi planners' aloofness from realities of the speech community: the planners emphasize a grammar which is hardly accessible to the general public. He finds that language experts, because they possess explicit political roles, have imposed their own objectives on Indian language-planning. Das Gupta reinforces his expressed dissatisfaction with this "imposition", saying that language norms have been arbitrarily set, and that therefore "the normative setup... cannot be measured by completely objective criteria." But I do not understand how norms formulated in a political context can be dismissed as "arbitrary" by an observing scholar. If the same scholar can express dissatisfaction with the rate of acceptance of language norms among the general public, how can he then say

that there are no criteria by which to measure planning results? Nehru obviously had some, because he warned that "artificial efforts would not win confidence" (page 226), referring to the excessive Sanskritization which threatens to render "planned" Hindi incomprehensible even to a positively predisposed inner circle of politicians. This shows that "experts" are subject to follow politicians' criticism, and that language norms are subject to political discussion. Still, Das Gupta is probably right; in another respect, namely that "expert opinion" has too much influence in Indian language planning. This circumstance obscures or at least diminishes the felt importance of estimating the degree of acceptance of suggested language norms. Why? Is it that spoken or written language use can deviate radically from politically recommended norms as long as an apology for personal imperfection and a promise for future improvement is implicit?

I feel that Das Gupta has perhaps too readily taken some linguists' opinion for absolute truths himself in a couple of cases. When correctly attacking the "myth" of a "natural tongue" (page 17), he does so on the basis of diachronic language change - which may be appropriate in some linguistic discussions but not when discussing an individual's attachment to his native language. He should select the more obvious and descriptively correct alternative to say that people may change (and switch) language(s) by will, deciding not only for their children but also for themselves.

Similarly, on page 21, the author juxtaposes language politics and Haugen's (and Ray's) criteria for evaluating alternatives of linguistic choice: convenience, rationality and efficiency. He labels the criteria a "technical viewpoint" and considers them insufficient for evaluating alternatives of action. He prefers a "political perspective". But I think that Das Gupta and Haugen look at the same events; thus, a better approach would be for linguists and political scientists to cooperate to give these terms a fuller meaning. Were that done, efficiency alone would be sufficient a criterion (cf Jernudd & Das Gupta, "Towards a Theory of Language Planning," in Rubin & Jernudd, eds., Can Language be Planned? East West Center Press 1971).

Language modernization or at least deliberate change of language formed part of the programs of even the very earliest associations. Das Gupta shows how associations emerge "from the relatively diffuse categoric language communities..." (page 70) to assume political roles, and how "the organizational pioneers became linguistic reformers and

creators of linguistic pride" (page 81). I feel that Das Gupta in what follows does not emphasize enough what seems to the outside observer a distinctly Indian readiness to consciously control language. The Indian people must have been willing to recognize the use of several languages and the correlation of these languages (or distinct varieties of a language) with cultural, social and political cleavages. They must have been ready to accept the possibility of personal linguistic adaptation and of induced language change. The inclination of Indian literati to manipulate written language should perhaps be recognized as an important factor allowing a politicization of language in India. Such recognition may transform Das Gupta's stronger claim on page 269 that "linguistic interests admit of greater subjective definition" in general into a particularly Indian characteristic.

When Das Gupta asks for linguistic absolutes to set limits for political planning action (page 182), I think he asks for the impossible. Firstly, it is unlikely that people, expert or not, will invent norms of language that people cannot learn. If they do, people will not learn; and if too difficult, people will protest. So political will is and must be the ultimate judge of language reform. Secondly, with increased linguistic education of people concerned, there might follow a more precise delimitation of linguistic possibility, or a better balancing of values of language change and worldly costs of implementing change. Also; if linguistic experts were forced to suggest targets of implementation in a generally target - and economy- oriented administration, they might themselves be satisfied with less haughty Sanskrit in their normative suggestions. Thirdly, linguists and sociolinguists just do not know enough about language to be of much help.

Indian development will not be aided by a search for absolute linguistic criteria with which to curb Indian politicians. Instead, we shall seek tools that predict when ambitions of language reform may be spent in vain, given a convergence of (this so far unknown) regulating forces.

The goals of Hindi planners may be politically unrealistic, and excite political protest. As far as I can understand, short-term success of implementation of new language norms has been rejected in favour of a long-term "classicalization" of Hindi into a shape that corresponds linguistically to the consensus of an elect group of people of some Hindu linguistic tradition. It will be interesting to see if the "growing classicalization...and erection of a set of new barriers between the newly standardizing Hindi and the commonly

comprehended Hindi" will lead to political failure of this language. Are Hindi reformers gambling away their native speaker support? Das Gupta suggests that Hindi "purists" are blind to political reality, and indirectly reinforce opposition against Hindi. Non-Hindi groups, and the new generation of leaders that rely on the rural masses of India have a common interest in using a "popular form of their regional language" (page 194). "Purified" Hindi hardly catches the applause of these latter groups, nor can it compete at an advantage with English because it, too, must be learned. Since emotional resistance to English is lessening, we may well be witnessing the demotion of Hindi to the ranks of the regional languages and the emergence of a bilingual - English vs. regional language - solution to the Indian language problem.

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