

334. Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove (2019). Series Editor's Preface. In Mohanty, Ajit K. *The multilingual reality: Living with languages*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, xiii-xv.

Series Editor's Foreword

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas

This is a fantastic book, summarising Ajit Mohanty's work of a lifetime. I have followed the development of the book since August 2006 when Ajit first suggested writing it. It has been worth waiting for 12 years. Already in Ajit's 1994 book, he succeeded in correcting some of the biases in most Western studies about the cognitive benefits of bilingualism. One bias in many of these earlier studies was that they compared groups that differed so much that it was almost impossible to differentiate the influence of "bilingualism itself" from the influence of other factors. This was/is mostly true regardless of which groups did better on the tests used. In most of the studies from the 1960s onwards it was the bilinguals who did. Often the bilinguals represented minority or minoritized groups, mainly with a low socioeconomic status (SES), whereas the monolinguals were often dominant language children with much higher SES; cultural differences between the groups were also large. The role of literacy was also impossible to control for. Ajit's studies of the Indigenous/tribal Konds in Odisha, India, which are also presented in his new book, corrected for these biases, in addition to others. In the industrialised "western world", studies like Ajit's would never have been possible.

Merrill Swain coined in her PhD thesis the term "bilingualism as a first language". Ajit Mohanty describes in this book "Multilingualism as a First Language" (MFL) in great detail, psychologically, linguistically, educationally, sociologically, economically, legally, and from the point of view of political science, with many examples. His multi/trans/interdisciplinarity combines with having lived MFL all his life. Having observed it and reported and analysed MFL in so many contexts is unique. Other studies about MFL are mostly not self-experienced from birth by the researchers (except maybe as parents), and even those which are longitudinal are often about one individual child only, and mostly in situations where some kind of monolingualism is the norm in the surrounding society. India is different, as the first Director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Debi Prasanna Pattanayak put it (1984:82).

The dominant monolingual orientation is cultivated in the developed world and consequently two languages are considered a nuisance, three languages uneconomic and many languages absurd. In multilingual countries, many languages are facts of life; any restriction in the choice of language is a nuisance; and one language is not only uneconomic, it is absurd.

Ajit's concept "the double divide" captures a situation that exists in most Asian and African countries and elsewhere. The concept describes and permits strong and persuasive analyses of the power relations encoded in the institutional (including educational) and functional hierarchies that exist between languages and their users. A dominant language, most often English, is at the top, the regional majority and national languages in the middle, and Indigenous/tribal, minority and minoritized languages (ITMs) linger way at the bottom. Ajit describes the functional differentiation between them, and their roles, capturing (and invalidating) much of

the discussion in many countries where “integration” often means forcible assimilation, and where it often leads to linguistic and cultural genocide in education (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar 2010). I cite Ajit’s paragraph (p. xx).

Thus, in the hierarchy of languages in multilingual societies, the most dominant language has instrumental significance but little integrative value. The regional majority and national languages, on the other hand, have some instrumental significance along with integrative value for their users. The ITM languages have minimal instrumental value for their users but, as identity markers, they are important for group identity and sense of community belongingness.

I have tried to put this in tabular form, using the Indian state Odisha as an example, but almost any language in a similar position could be inserted in the Table:

Language	Instrumental value	Integrative value	Group identity, sense of belonging
English	high	low	Low
Odia	some	some/high	some/low
Tribal lgs	minimal	high	very high

The double divide in multilingual societies is critical for understanding the processes of discrimination against ITM languages, Ajit writes. Likewise, to understand the role of formal education as an instrument for perpetuating inequalities (tribal languages at best as a medium for the first couple of years, meaning early-exit transitional education; regional languages as the teaching languages after that (late-exit transitional model), and English as a medium at the latest from the final grades in school, and at all higher, technical and university levels). The double divide also explains much of the loss of linguistic diversity in the world.

In addition to being a serious, subtle scholar, Ajit has also always been a passionate activist. His untiring work for decades (often together with colleagues like Minati Panda, and students) has also resulted in the Government of Ajit’s home state Odisha finally issuing official Guidelines on multilingual education. I have been privileged in having had the opportunity to work closely with Ajit for years, in India, Nepal, and elsewhere (see our joint publications on my home page; see also my long review of Ajit’s 1994 book in the *TESOL Quarterly* (1995) 29:4, pp. 775-780).

The WORLD now has the opportunity to listen to the voice of this wonderful humble scholar/activist/human being! Grasp the opportunity – you will learn as much as I and many others have already done!

The Foreword by a distinguished Western scholar, Jim Cummins, and the Afterword by the equally distinguished Indian scholar, Annamalai, elaborate on the importance and relevance of Ajit’s book.

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