

Three Language Formula and the First and Second Language: A Case of North East India

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Abstract

Today, the role to be played by school in the life of a child is crucial. It is because in the name of right to education, a child has to learn almost all the skills and knowledge from school as he / she has to attain school at the earliest. Along with the recognition of education as the fundamental right of every child, providing access to educational facilities to every child from the age of 6 year to 14 years is an important task of every state. School should provide a space where children enjoy every right of learning that is 'right to learn in one's mother tongue', 'right to learn in one's habitat', 'right to learn in one's own culture', etc. However, it is observed that schools in many cases became an isolated space where children always find a gap between what they do at home and what they are asked to do at school. One of the important reasons for this gap is that schools fail to recognize the habitat and languages specially that belong to the children of minority groups.¹ To respond to the multilingual character India has adopted Three Language Formula (TLF), National Curriculum Framework 2005(NCF-05) suggests implementation of TLF in letter and spirit. TLF is implemented in North East India, but there is confusion in the designation of first language and the second language. The paper is an attempt to address this issue.

Key words: Three Language Formula, Minority language, First language, Second language

Introduction

North East (NE) India is a multilingual region where the nature of linguistic diversity is rather complex, different tribes has different languages and different villages within tribes are having different dialects¹. More than 98% of the languages spoken in this region are minor tribal

¹ When we say minority it may refer to those children belonging to the ethnic and tribal groups whose mother tongues are not recognized as schedule language.

languages which are either unscripted or poorly scripted. And they are far excluded from the educational process in terms of medium of instruction as well as in the development of Teaching Learning materials. Adding to this problem is the trend of negligence observed in the developmental process of these languages. Despite India's stand to promote minority languages with all the policies and constitutional mandate the Seventh All India School Educational Survey(7 AISES ,NCERT, 2006) shows that in India only 47 languages are currently used either as the subject of instruction or as the medium of instruction, though the figure has a mere improvement from the Sixth Survey which has 41 the figure has declined from 81 in 1970 to 67 in 1976(Chaturvedi and Mohale, 1976), 58 in 1978, 44 in 1990 and 41 in 1998, showing a clear picture of non- preference to mother tongue in the Education (cited in Mohanty A.K.2006). Though we say that the number of schools using Mother tongue has increased at the same time the number of schools using English as medium of instruction has also increased. The percentage of English medium schools have increased from 4.99 (6 AISES, ncert,1999) to 12.98 (7 AISES, NCERT 2006) at the primary level with our continuous desire to allow children to learn in their mother tongue at least in the early stage of education. The case remains almost the same in the higher classes also, the corresponding figure in these two surveys being 18.25 against 15.91; 25.84 against 18.37 and 33.59 against 28.09 in the upper primary, secondary and higher secondary classes in the two surveys. This has shown a clear non preference of mother tongue education in the country as a whole. Interestingly India's North East shows consciousness in this issue by giving a place to the minority languages in the school curriculum, following is the status of languages of North East in the school education:

Languages Used as Mediums of Instruction

Elementary:	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo/Boro, Chakma, Kokborok, English, Hindi, Nepali, Khasi, Garo, Manipuri, Mizo (12)
Secondary:	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo/Boro, English, Hindi, Nepali, Khasi, Garo, Manipuri, Mizo (10)

Languages Used as Subjects:

<u>States</u>	<u>Languages*</u>
Arunachal Pradesh	English, Hindi, Adi, Apatani, Galo, Khampti, Monpa, (Idu) Mishmi, Singpho, Sanskrit, Tangsa (8)
Assam	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Bishnupriya Manipuri, English, Garo, Hindi, Hmar, Karbi, Manipuri, Mishing, Nepali, Rabha, Tai, Tiwa (9)
Manipur	Anal, Gangte, Assamese, Bengali, English, Hindi, Hmar, Kom, Liangmei, Mao, Maram, Maring, Manipuri/Meitei, Mizo, Nepali, Paite, Paumei, Kabui (Rongmei), Simte, Tangkhul, Thado-kuki, Vaiphei, Zeme, Zou (13)
Meghalaya	Assamese, Bengali, English, Garo, Hindi, Khasi, Nepali (2)
Mizoram	Chakma, English, Hindi, Lai, Lakher (Mara), Mizo, Pawi (5)
Nagaland	Angami, Ao, Chang, Chokri, English, Khezha, Khiemnungan, Kuki, Konyak, Liangmei, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchungre, Zeme (17)
Sikkim	Bhutia, English, Gurung, Hindi, Lepcha, Limbu, Manger, Nepali, Newari, Rai, Sherpa, Sunuwar, Tamang (10)
Tripura	Bengali, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Chakma, English, Mizo Kokborok, Halam Kuki, Manipuri (6)

* indicates the number of tribal/Minority languages.

The language policy in Indian education has been always not free from controversy, perhaps because of the multilingual nature with diverse languages at various stages of development, or because of the present preference of English as a language of power. Since, education provides the framework for language development, all policies of language

development centered on this issue. As a response to multilingual, multicultural, multiethnic character schools adopt three language formula (TLF). The Three-Language Formula emphasized that at the school stage at least three languages should be taught and the provision for teaching should ensure that a student passing out of the secondary school has an adequate knowledge of these languages. The teaching of a language should be provided for not less than three years in a continuous course. Time and again educational policies reflect the importance to follow three language formula in letter and spirit (NPE-1986, NCFSE- 2000, NCF- 2005). NCF-2005 and its accompanying document Position Paper on Teaching of Indian Languages stressed the need of TLF in school education it states -the three-language formula helps in fostering bilingualism and multilingualism, traits that improve “cognitive growth, social tolerance, divergent thinking and scholastic achievement”, however, the formula is never followed uniformly in the country. The paper is an attempt to look into the practice of TLF in North East India and the confusion in choosing second language in few states of North East India. Before we look into the real practice of TLF in North East, it will be meaningful if we could go back into the intention of and purpose of adopting TLF as a strategy in our country, and the intention of bringing mother tongue/first language in the curriculum.

Reasons for Mother Tongue (MT)/First language (L1) Education: Explanations from the Three Language Formula

Language is related to the identity of the people, their ways of life, native wisdom and world view and a lot of information and the knowledge of the particular linguistic community. India’s three language formula no doubt considers the relevance of mother tongue education in the multilingual India. While developing this strategy, in the post independence phase of education, there was a controversy on what medium to adopt in the school education as a whole. In this line O.N. Koul and Devaki (2000) write ‘It was taken for granted that Mother tongue would be the educational medium, for primary education. The controversy in education centered on the issue of medium at the secondary level. In order to solve this problem, some strategies of multilingual education were proposed’. In the following years there were several committees and Commissions to look into the educational policies in connection with language, first it was agreed upon that there is a need to shift the educational medium from English to the regional

language media at the same time it was realized that the minorities would raise voice against adopting the dominant language as educational medium. The strategic decision taken in this line was the advocacy for the study of other languages as a subject. The goal of these educational policies was the promotion of National Integration and Unity. The recommendations made by the University Education Commission (1949) may be counted as the beginning of the concept of three language formula. The committee recommended that the country would require three languages in its educational system: the regional language (RL), the federal language and English. The State Education Minister's Conference in 1949 pleaded for imparting instruction through mother tongue wherever it is different from the state language provided there were at least 40 pupils in the whole school or at least 10 students in a class (Koul & Devaki, 2000). This was the beginning of the strategies to respond to the need of the minorities.

In 1957, CABE proposed a formula to fulfill the language aspirations of India which got modified in 1964, which is the present practice of the three language formula. According to this formula a will learn these three languages in the school:

- (a) Mother Tongue or Regional Language (L1)
- (b) The Official Language (Hindi) or the Associate Official Language (English) (L2)
- (c) A Modern Indian or Foreign Language not covered under (a) and (b) and other than the language used as MOI (L3)

With regard to the tribal children the Commission recommended:

- (a) Use of Tribal Language as medium for the first two years and oral instruction in the Regional Language
- (b) Use of Regional Language as medium from the third year onwards.

Though three language formula is not a Linguistic Policy of India (Pattanayak D.P. 2005) the formula shows concern of linguistic rights and India has responded well on the present day Indian's aspiration of learning English. NCERT in developing a national curriculum reemphasized the need to respond to multilingual India with Multilingual education. NCFSE-2000 and NCF- 2005 are on support of TLF in letter and spirit. NCF- 2005 and Position Paper on Teaching of Indian Language further advocates learning of Sanskrit as a Modern Indian

Language (but nobody should use it as a shield to get around the spirit of TLF) and the study of classical and foreign language, thus the document goes in favour of learning more language and takes a note that three language is not the upper limit of learning languages. The constitutional provisions given by article 350A, article 29(1), RTE (2009) all talks about giving education in MT/L1 for all the linguistic minorities.

Educational Implications of Mother Tongue Education

International researches reveal that education in mother tongue has cognitive, psycho-social and emotional developmental advantages of the children. India's target of Universalisation of Elementary Education may not be fulfilled if we do-not take into account of mother tongue education. In this light United Nation's Education for All, International plan of action Resolution A/56/116 states – 'Literacy for All will be effectively achieved only when it is planned and implemented in local contexts of language and culture.....' and literacy policies must recognise the significance of mother tongue education in acquiring literacy and provide for literacy in multiple languages (UNESCO, 2003 P-4). UNESCO Position PAPER ON Education in a Multilingual World, states that mother tongue education is a means of improving quality and it bring social and gender equality in linguistically diverse communities. NCERT's position paper on Teaching of Indian Languages and NCF (2005) asserts that – home language(s) should be the medium of instruction in school and it is imperative that we honour the child's home language(s). Thomas and Collier, 2001 showed that children's understanding of concepts is limited, or confused if learning happens only in second language and it is a fallacy to think that children who are immersed in second language from the beginning learn second language better they do not and in the end we are creating children who are illiterate in both the language. Another study by Jim Cummins, 2000 proves that the level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development, stronger literacy abilities are found with the children who have stronger foundation in first language as language skills are transferable across languages. Research conducted in many countries show that understanding of concepts is better in mother tongue and learning reading and writing in mother tongue or in a known language yields better academic results. Clear conceptual understanding and ease in developing literacy skills will help in sustaining children in the school system. At the same time

while learning through mother tongues the children learn about their own culture and their environment which they experience on a day to day basis, here lies the relevance of school learning and home environment. Studies across countries and along the time have shown that children feel alienated in a system in which their voice is not heard, their freedom is restricted and are not learning the relevant things in their daily life. In such an unwelcoming environment they either had to be called slow learner or a failure which leads to ultimate dropout. In this regard study by Pinnock reveals that “Learning in a school language which is not used in children’s home lives is being linked both to poor performance and total exclusion from education” These effects are being seen in large populations across a wide range of middle and low income countries, throughout basic education. There is clear agreement among education and linguistics experts that teaching in the language that children have used from birth – their mother tongue or first language – offers the best chance of educational success (Helen Pinnock, 2009). Therefore it is high time for us to look into the minority education scenario and give necessary interventions so that deprived and poor children could also celebrate childhood and meaningful schooling.

Three Language Formula in North East India

North East India presents interesting phenomena in connection with the language usage in school education. This part of India’s North East India took pride in successful implementation of three language formula, all the states adopt three language formula. Following is the state of implementation of this formula in this part of India:

Sl. No	State	Stages of learning of three languages	Name of the language
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class L3 : Class VI-X	L1: English L2: Hindi L3: Assamese/Sanskrit /Bhoti

2.	Assam	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class V-X L3: Class V-VIII	L1: Assamese/Hindi/Bengali/Bodo/Manipuri L2: English L3: Hindi
3.	Manipur	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class I-X L3 : Class VI-VIII	L1: Manipuri/recognized tribal dialect L2: English L3: Hindi
4.	Meghalaya	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class V-X L 3 : Class V-VIII	L1: Khasi/Garo L2: Khasi/Garo/English L3: Hindi
5.	Mizoram	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class V-X L3 : Class V-VIII	L1: Mizo/ English L2: English/ Mizo L3: Hindi
6.	Nagaland	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class I-X L3 : Class VII-VIII	L1: Angami/English L2: English/ Local Dialect/Hindi L3: Hindi/Angami
7.	Sikkim	L1 : Class I-X L2: - L3 : -	L1: Local Dialect/English L2: English/ Local Dialect/Hindi L3: Hindi
8.	Tripura	L1 : Class I-X L2: Class III-X L3 : Class VI-X	L1 : Bengali/Kokborok/Lusahi L2: English L3 : Hindi

Source: Gargesh R. (2002) & 48 NCLM report

Schools in North East usually study three languages, showing the concern about the minority communities and are fulfilling the language needs of the country. However, the region's three language formula is little different from what was expected by the three language

formula in true spirit and at the same time ignores the educational implications of recognizing mother tongue/first language in the school education. In the states of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh English is the first language! The question here is how can a foreign language (there are assertions that English no more remain as a foreign language) be somebody's first language in states? And how somebody's mother tongue is called second language and how English is given a place alternative to mother tongue? These are a few questions to be answered. Another problem is why the mother tongues are not able to draw attention and develop despite being recognized as either medium of instruction or subject of instructionⁱⁱ ? Perhaps, because of the international concern at the same time the increased awareness and concern of the ethnic group might be the strong reason that education in mother tongue has become a political agenda in North East, people do demand mother tongue to be recognized in the school system. Unfortunately, when it is recognised the language could not flourish as is expected, even sustainability is a big issueⁱⁱⁱ. This undermines the educational benefits of mother tongue/ first language education. In the North East states there are a number of so called English Medium schools mushrooming in urban and semi urban areas with a good number of student strength^{iv}. There is a profound likeness of English Medium schools over the government local language/regional language schools, probably because of the reasons like education is an individual concern and response, so it is the parents deciding where to send their children, which medium to choose? Thus, parent's choice is conditioned by India's language policy and the resultant caste like hierarchy of languages (Bijoykumar, 2005) or the hierarchical pecking order of language (Mohanty, 2009), the value attached to the particular language became the criteria for choosing the medium of instruction or the subject of instruction. Minority languages are devalued not only by the government but also by the community in terms of the usage in the education^v. The phenomenon is the vicious circle whereby this educational neglect leads to further reason for neglect on the basis of underdevelopment. The consequence is in few states where there is no majority language all people could understood and in an effort to contain inter-tribal rivalry that may have followed efforts to promote one (Naga) language over the other, the people have chosen some other language (English) not belonging to the state as official language (Sachdeva, R. 2002) or first language in education. But the question is - are we fulfilling the national goal of protecting minority languages? Are we doing justice to our small children who are just stepping into the school system? Are we able to develop quality in the

teaching learning process of mother tongue like other subjects? Are the children of this region getting the benefit of mother tongue education? The obvious answer lies in the fact that two states of NE, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim adopt English as first language, despite the fact that Sikkim recognises 10 tribal languages in school education. Moreover, the states of Nagaland and Mizoram also kept English as an alternative to mother tongue for the reasons known to them only. In such cases school produce children who are neither proficient in first language nor in second language. Because of the neglect in mother tongue in preliminary stage they count mother tongue lessons not purposeful and just a formality to learn. They neither develop literacy skills fully in the mother tongue nor they develop a positive attitude towards so called minority language which are counted as second language in such cases.

The question of regional language (RL) is applicable in only in four states Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Sikkim, the remaining four states do not have RL as unlike the other states of India state formation in this part of the country is not made on the basis of language.^{vi} When there are many tribes co-existing with equal constitutional rights do question the dominance of the State official /Regional language, they always feel deprived in many cases the resultant being the demand for the autonomous states in Assam^{vii} and for a greater Nagaland. Their discontentment is reflected on many negative responses in State govt. policies^{viii}. In such a state of affairs the language to be used as an educational medium is a rather complicated issue. Which language can be adopted as a practical medium of instruction without hurting the sentiment of other language speakers on what grounds is a big question? Even in the states which have RL as official language medium of instruction is not always free from problems^{ix}

As a response to the above situations i.e. not having a common language used widely the states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Sikkim choose English as the official language so as first language. The result is children are taught English before they develop the required oracy and literacy in the mother tongue. The definition of second language also is problematic here how can a tribal child have English as first language whilst they have a tribal mother tongue. In these states tribal languages are recognized for the sake of recognition and designated as second language. In many instances states allow tribal child to appear class-X exam by opting the mother tongue in lieu of the regional language. The situation here is they learn English as L1 from primary to higher education, Hindi for three years as second language, and another tribal language in classes IX& X. The question here is, are they adopting three

language formula in true sense? If not the condition is to be defined by a new strategy or programme.

Conclusion

The present practice of studying three languages as Three language Formula in North East is not in the true spirit of three language formula in the sense that there is confusion in designating the languages. The states have confusion in selecting a L1 because of this they choose no one's language as L1, the next is what to be the criteria of a next language in education to be called as L2. They cannot sacrifice the value attached to MT; therefore instead of discarding their MT which was not taught in the primary classes they called it either L2 or L3 whichever is applicable. Therefore, it can rightly be concluded that in North East the question of implementation of Three Language Formula is problematic as the question of L2 remain unresolved; the states may require a separate language teaching strategy or policy specific to North East.

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ⁱ In Manipur, the Tangkhul language has a variety of mutually unintelligible languages while claiming to be the speakers of the same language.

ⁱⁱ Manipur govt. recognized six languages as subject of instruction in 1969, out of these Six only one language paite has developed enough TLM others are yet to write textbooks of upper primary! Khasi was recognized as medium of instruction way back in 1902 but the school related literature and TLM are still very limited.

ⁱⁱⁱ In a recent field work by the author in Assam reveals that teachers appointed for teaching a particular language no more remained as language teacher but happily teaching other subjects.

^{iv} In Manipur 2.5 lakhs children are enrolled in private schools as against 2.3 lakhs in the age group of 6-14 years.

^v In Arunachal Pradesh when NERIE had a programme on MT education one of the parents asked whether we (NERIE) are interested in keeping their children backward by learning MT, instead they require either Hindi or English!

^{vi} E.g. Assam has more than 20 tribes, Manipur has more than 33 tribes, Nagaland has more than 17 tribes, and Arunachal has more than 30 tribes having distinct language and culture.

^{vii} The demand for Bodoland etc

^{viii} Non participation in Census 2000 by few hill districts of Manipur. And their agitation against election of Autonomous council in Manipur, 2010.

^{ix} Naga student's affiliating to NBSE after Manipuri language written in Meitei Script was made compulsory, 14th Sep 2007 and Agitation by Bodo against 11 Nov declaration 1972 by Assam Govt. and the Tripura's problem i.e. Since tribal children are imparted teaching in Kok-Borok only at the Junior Basic level, the transition to upper primary levels, where they are taught in Bengali, is proving difficult. Another important issue is the non availability to qualified teachers for teaching minority language/ mother tongues.

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