Politics of *Sambalpuri* or *Kosali* as a Dialect of Oriya in Orissa

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Abstract

There have been a lot of debates going on regarding the status of *Sambalpuri* as a dialect of Oriya in Orissa, a state in India. Linguistic interpretations are unacceptable to many speakers of *Sambalpuri*. There is a politics of division prevailing based on social, economic as well as linguistic issues. Mutually intelligible dialects of the same language spoken by two speech communities, speakers of Oriya from the coastal districts of Orissa and speakers of the dialect *Sambalpuri* are in the centre of this controversy. *Sambalpuri* speakers demand a separate and distinct language identity for their speech, distinct from their current identity within Oriya speakers. This paper seeks to study some of the issues on the politicization of this language controversy. As a language, the true recognition of *Sambalpuri*, whether as a dialect or a language, would come, not by the constitutional certification, but rather through qualitative and quantitative growth of *Sambalpuri* language and literature, in specific ways.

Key words: *Sambalpuri* or *Kosali* Language, Dialect, Language, Oriya, Politics

Introduction

> "According to Sir George Grierson's *The Linguistics Survey of India*, there are no dialects of Oriya within its geographical area. However, Prof. Golokabihari Dhala and Dr. Kunjabihari Tripathi have pointed the dialects of Oriya. ….So whether

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> Sambalpuri is an independent language or is it one of the most valuable dialects of Oriya is a debatable question." (Census, n.d.)

This piece of information given in CIIL, Mysore's website appropriately corroborates the very point of discussion of this paper about a debatable issue pertaining to the *Sambalpuri* language. In fact, it is a million dollar question, whether *Sambalpuri* is a dialect of Oriya or not in Orissa, which means a lot, particularly, for the people of Western Orissa, for whom, it is closely associated with their identity.

The chief communicative language or speech of the *Kosala* region is *Sambalpuri*. Not much research has been done on the accent and phonetics of the *Sambalpuri* language and it is generally considered to be a dialect of Oriya. (Gordon, 2005) Oriya is the mother tongue of the people in Orissa - a state in India. In Orissa, nearly one third of the population speaks Sambalpuri or Koshli and the rest speak the Oriya language.

The linguistic map of the state is characterized by primarily two dominant speech forms, namely, Oriya or *Kataki* - the form used by people in the coastal districts and *Sambalpuri* or *Kosali* - the form used by the adjoining north-eastern border districts like Sambalpur, Balangir, Bargarh, Sonepur, Kalahandi, Sundargarh, Boudh, Deogarh, Nuapada and Jharsuguda by a population totaling around 9,001,406 according to 2001 Census of India. *Sambalpuri* was considered to be a dialect of the standard Oriya, but, owing to its distinct grammar and pronunciations, it has achieved or may achieve the status of a distinct language. In the modern context, the *Sambalpuri* languag*e* is popularly known as "*Kosali* language". (Census, n.d.)

There are plenty of words in *Sambalpuri* like *leti* (a ripen mango), *jhuri* (fish), *patal ghanta* (tomato) and many more, and also certain sounds like aspirated /dh/ in *g∞dhia* (mosquito) which cannot be rendered in any form of Oriya, yet by its generic belongingness to Indo-Aryan language family, and by its linguistic affiliation to Oriya, it is recognized as a variant.

An invisible line of differentiation among the people of the state can be found in terms of language spoken by them and, particularly, this is dominant in the area where the *Sambalpuri* is spoken.

This paper would seek to study the politicization of *Sambalpuri* as a dialect of Oriya from linguistics point of views by analyzing its similar as well different characteristics.

The Demand of Constitutional Status and for a Separate *Kosala* State

The question of recognizing *Sambalpuri* as a language in the Constitution of India has been a hobbyhorse among a wide spectrum of people of Western Orissa. Moreover, there has been a movement led by intellectuals hailing from all walks of life to seek and achieve the constitutional status for the *Sambalpuri* language as a Scheduled Language due to its features distinct from Oriya from grammatical, pragmatics and semantic points of views.

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Because of distinctive linguistics characteristics and varying socio-cultural features of people, it also makes the ground fertile for the demand of a separate state called 'Kosala', based on language spoken by them and the assumed and perceived underdevelopment of the western Orissa as compared to the coastal belt. Researchers like Jay P. Pradhan, et al., have studied this in *Interpreting the Demand for Kosala State in Orissa: Development versus Underdevelopment.* Pradhan, et al observe that

> The demand for smaller states including Kosala state in India has risen not on the grounds of the perceived economic benefits of smaller size but mostly because of the prolonged underdevelopment and backwardness that these regions have faced. In the case of Orissa, the process of economic growth has been regionally lopsided during the last fifty-years. While the coastal region has benefited mostly from the economic policies pursued by the state, the Kosala region remains largely neglected, marginalized, and deprived". (Pradhan et al., 2004)

Heavy indentations of negative assimilatory features are observable so far as the applicability and acceptability of one official language, i.e., Oriya in the state is concerned. The state attaining an ironic stature for development in national scenario is something that pains every one being educated and employed in Orissa. To mention a few: economically poor, yet resource-wise rich; fast developing, yet the lowest ranked; rapidly industrializing, yet home to largest BPL people; and many more as such. It further supports a widespread assumption that a division of the state into two parts such as the coastal belt, named as Orissa and the western part named *Kosala* would solve the problem. Furthermore, this great division is visibly articulated in different events like political election campaigning, academic research writings, educational pursuits, job interviews and many more. In spite of all such vulnerable characteristics, Orissa has attained the dubious distinction of being the most peace loving state in India, although rare events like Kandhamal riots do occur.

Theoretical Perspective of Language and Dialect

Language is a socio-cultural-geographical phenomenon. Language is complementary to society in existence. Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that deals with the study of language with specific reference to society. The linguistic characteristics of language and dialect are almost similar, or else, we may say that, dialect is a small circle inside a big circle of a language. In other words, there are many similarities than dissimilarities between dialects.

Sambalpuri can be studied phonologically with the help of general linguistics concepts. If principles of linguistics are applied to *Sambalpuri*, then conclusions may be drawn that it is a dialect of Oriya.

Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions about language in general among the people of this region. These biases, sometimes, result in undesired and unpleasant situations like disliking coastal belt

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people for belonging to a particular speech/dialect community. People tend to see that the coastal belt people favor regionalism for sheer language reasons.

Myths about Language

Indian linguist Varshney (1977) has identified following types of myths prevalent in our society associated with language. The list is given below. Perhaps the association of regional exploitation of a community based on their dialect use may be included in this list given below.

i) Written form is more prestigious than spoken form.
ii) Literary language is the only language.
iii) One language is superior to another.
iv) Traditional alphabets are adequate.
v) Job of a linguist is not to describe but to prescribe the grammatical rules to preserve the purity of a language.
vi) Children learn language merely by imitation.
vii) Language is an instinctive and inherited property of man.
viii) There are no language universals at all.
ix) No two languages have any similarities.
x) Purity of a language should somehow be preserved and historical forms of usage are to be preferred and remembered whereas the contemporary usage should be ignored as unworthy of attention.
xi) Only a historical treatment of language is the right treatment and that language should not be studied in isolation at a particular point of time.
xii) All languages can be analyzed by analyzing European languages such as Latin, French and Greek.
xiii) Languages are static.
xiv) Sounds of a particular language are in themselves easy or difficult.

Dialect is a Language variation

Etymologically the word dialect has been derived form the Greek word *dialektos* which has two different types of meanings. One usage refers to a variety of a language that is characteristic of a particular group of the speakers of that language. The term is applied most often to regional speech patterns, but a dialect may also be defined by other factors, such as social class. In other words, it is a variant of a language used by a speech community for everyday social interactions that are relative to their cultures and societies.

Because of this close association, study of language variation generally forms a part of socio-linguistics. Language varies in geographical and social space. Language can vary, not only from one individual to the next, but also from one sub-section of speech-community (family, village, town, and region) to another. People of different age groups, gender, social class, occupations, or cultural groups in the same community will show variations in their speech . (Varshney, 1977)

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Furthermore, a dialect is distinguished by its vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (phonology, including prosody).

Two Types of Dialects

There are two types of dialects such as a standard dialect (supported by institutions) and a non-standard dialect (not supported by institutions). Such institutional support may include government recognition or designation; presentation as being the "correct" form of a language in schools; published grammars, dictionaries, and textbooks that set forth a "correct" spoken and written form; and an extensive formal literature that employs that dialect (prose, poetry, non-fiction, etc.).

There may be multiple standard dialects associated with a single language. For example, Standard American English, Standard British English, Standard Indian English, Standard Australian English, and Standard Philippine English may all be said to be standard dialects of the English language. A nonstandard dialect, like a standard dialect, has a complete vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, but is not the beneficiary of institutional support. An example of a nonstandard English dialect is Southern English. The Dialect Test was designed by Joseph Wright to compare different English dialects with each other . (Wikipedia , n.d.)

There are no universally accepted criteria for distinguishing languages from dialects, although number of paradigms exist, which render sometimes contradictory results. The exact distinction is, therefore, a subjective one, dependent on the user's frame of reference. (Wikipedia, n.d.) Linguistically language and dialect have little differences but many times it has been observed that this issue takes the form of 'prestige issue', 'constitutional recognition', 'cultural assemblages' and 'cultural disenfranchisement' emasculating a kind of difference among people that result in bipolar politics like *Kataki* vs. *Sambalpuri* in Orissa and Telugu vs. *Telengana* in Andhra Pradesh and *Vidharva* vs. *Maharastrian* in Maharastra. Despite all scientific analyses, because of the complex nature of language, sometimes it takes the shape of a movement of divisionism, and the politics of speech recognition is magnified into demand for a separate constitutional recognition.

This is also found in the case of *Sambalpuri*. Some of the issues are discussed below.

1. Sambalpuri is a spoken but not a literary language: It is spoken by about 25% of the population of Orissa. This region, concentrated on Western Orissa, exhibits certain degree of cultural and social uniformity in terms of demography and life-style. It's speech community includes Kalahandi district in the south to the Sundargarh district in the northwest, thereby including the whole of the pre-1993 districts of Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Sundargarh and Balangir district and some part of the then-undivided Koraput, Dhenkanal and Phulbani districts.

(a) The demographic record showing the number of people using *Sambalpuri* as a spoken language is given below as per Census 2001.

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District	District Head quarter	Area (sq.km.)	Population 1991 Census	Population 2001 Census
Balangir	Balangir	6,575	1,230,938	1,335,760
Bargarh	Bargarh	5,837	1,207,172	1,345,601
Baudh (Boudh)	Baudh	3,098	317,622	373,038
Debagarh (Deogarh)	Debagarh	2,940	234,238	274,095
Jharsuguda	Jharsuguda	2,081	446,726	509,056
Kalahandi	Bhawanipatna	7,920	1,130,903	1,334,372
Nuapada	Nuapada	3,852	469,482	530,524
Sambalpur	Sambalpur	6,675	809,017	928,889
Subarnapur	Sonepur	2,337	476,815	540,659
Sundargarh	Sundargarh	9,712	1,573,617	1,829,412

(Census, 2001)

2. Speakers of *Sambalpuri* do not have a state of their own: This is another factor that is responsible for politicization of *Sambalpuri*. Indian political system has provided for the reorganization of provinces based on the dominant linguistic majority of the region/area. This gives impetus to the movements for the separation of regions based on language identity. There have been various kinds of activities initiated by a few people to separate *Kosala* from the rest of Orissa based on the variety of language spoken by the people of the region. A separatist movement has emerged in this area and many in this region are demanding a separate *Kosala* state from the State of Orissa (The Hindu, 2004; cf online, 2001) The movement has failed to gain any large scale popularity earlier, but the momentum changed dramatically with the formation of a regional political party called Kosala Kranti Dal, which propose to agitate for a separate *Kosala* state in a democratic way by participating in the general elections. (newsoneindia, 2007)

3. *Sambalpuri* does not have a writing system: There is no writing system or script for *Sambalpuri*. A writing system or script is a type of symbolic system used to represent elements or statements expressible in language. Formation of a script of any language and the conventions for the use of the system take centuries and the writing system undergoes a very complex process of acceptance by wide application at various levels from personal to official, press to academia and as a library language to link the language to the external world.

4. *Sambalpuri* is not used in press and literature: In Orissa, Oriya is the official language of the state. It is used for all purposes. It is a MIL (Mother Indian Language) of all the native students pursuing formal education in Orissa. Almost all the regional newspapers published in Orissa like *Samaj, Sambad, Dharitri, Khabar* and *Bhaskar* are published in the Oriya medium.

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Moreover, there is a rich literary history of Oriya having thousands of literary works being added every year. In *Sambalpuri*, there is no daily newspaper published except one or two weekly newspapers like *Sat Kahele Chati Phatsi* (Heart Explodes if Truth is Spoken), which is published from Bargarh. The circulation of this weekly is limited to hundreds as compared to other Oriya dailies that are read by millions of people.

5. The literary production in *Sambalpuri* is also negligible. Writers like Payag Datt Joshi, Satyanarayan Bohidar, Dr. Prafulla Kumar Tripaty, Dr. Santosh Kumar Rath, Dr. Ashok Kumar Dash, Udaynath Chandan and Haldhar Nag have produced a wide range of literatures, yet, no *Sambalpuri* literary work has ever got recognition either at the state or national level. Interestingly a good number of *Sambalpuri* songs are penned every year for booming music industry, but ironically such compositions are not considered as a work of art of highest degree. In fact, oral poets like Haldhar Nag have written many classical poems in *Sambalpuri* that can be compared with any great work of art but because of lack of marketing strategies and disinterest among publishing houses, these literary works remain hidden, unsuccessful to see the light of the day. Nevertheless, more masterpieces have to be written in *Sambalpuri* to popularize the language and to increase the number readers reading *Sambalpuri* literature.

6. Demand in the Parliament for recognition of *Sambalpuri* as a Scheduled Language of the Consitution: There are a total of 114 languages and 216 mother tongues, 18 scheduled languages and 96 not specified in the schedule as per the census of 1991. (Mallikarjun, 2001) *Sambalpuri* is neither recognized as a scheduled nor non-scheduled language as per the Constitution of India.

i)   It is quite evident that there is a provision of using a spoken form other than official, if used by a section of the state, to make an official language of the state but in case of *Sambalpuri*, although it is spoken by one third of the population of the state, it has not been recognized as an official language of the state. The demand to confer *Sambalpuri* the status of a scheduled language of the Constitution has been made by a Member of the Parliament, Sriballabh Panigrahi in the Indian Parliament in the following manner.

"On Orissa, we have a language called "Sambalpuri language'. It may be called 'sambalpuri language" or " Kosali language". Every body talks about Sambalpur saree, Samba1purl music, etc. this language has got a rich Literature About 10 million people speak nepali and we are discussing about its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule. The Sambalpuri language also spread over large areas, five to six districts. And about one crore population speak this language. This language is different from the standard language……Now we are talking about removal of illiteracy and universalisation of primary education. the child 'is to be……Taught, is to be given education at the…..primary stage, in his own mother tongue, which is naturally not the standard language of that place. In the taribal areas , many children are not attracted to schools and they treat the standard language as a foreign language. In the tribal belts, we should make arrangement for Imparting education In their own

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mother tongue…….The Sambalpuri language is spoken by one crore population, spread over five western districts in Orissa. This language has a good and a rich literature. This language also should be treated as a separate language. The concerned authorities should give recognition to this language. First to start with Sahitya Academy should give recognition to this language……Sir. language is a very sensitive issue and It is something which can be Instrumental to strengthen our national solidarity. It is like atom. If not properly handled. it can do a lot of harms. The language issue is a very emotional issue and a sensitive issue. So, It is time to give a fresh look at these things…..According to Science of language. at a distance of every one hundred Kilometres, there is some change in the language. Even though substantially the same language is spoken, there are some variations….you may call it as dialect or something like that. But it is not the same language that is spoken throughout the State. And wherever is spoken by a large number of people, but it has a literature behind it, it has a distance features, of a separate language. then it is entitled to be called a separate language. Therefore, the concerned authorities should liberally consider these things. And In the process, our literature, our language and our much sought national solidarity. Will be strengthened and not weakened ." (Census, n.d.)

Conclusion

Politicization of *Sambalpuri* is confined to certain assumptions by a section of the people of Orissa. In true literary sense, the language has to proliferate both as a form of communication and the literature must encode the ethos of the region by playing a vital role in the society. It has been discussed that if *Samablapuri* is analyzed linguistically, then conclusions may be drawn that it is a dialect of Oriya. It does not matter whether *Sambalpuri* is designated as a dialect or a language, whether recognized as a scheduled or non-scheduled language of India or bestowed upon the status of state official language or not, but the most important factor is whether the language and the literature are developing or not. Every language has a life cycle of its own in which it has to pass through a complex process in the society. Events like political voicing and demand for a separate state, in fact, will not help the *Sambalpuri* to attain the status of a language. When *Sambalpuri* is used in more domains, especially in writing, perhaps, it may evolve to be a distinct language, distinct from Oriya. Moreover, efforts have to be initiated by linguists to develop a writing system of *Sambalpuri* or script of the language and popularize it among the speakers to use it for all purposes for communication, then only such politicization would find a way in giving due recognition to *Sambalpuri* of Western Orissa.

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