RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

'Bridging' and 'Exit' as Metaphors of Multilingual Education: A Constructionist Analysis

Minati Panda

Abstract Using social constructionist perspective this paper critically examines the multilingual education (MLE) discourse and practices in the Indian states of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The choice of MLE model is influenced by the construction of the problem of tribal children's learning as 'poor' or 'inadequate' bridging between the language and concepts used in everyday life and school. 'Bridging' and 'exit', therefore, became key metaphors of MLE programmes. The discursive embedding of these metaphors in the policy documents indicates that they are political and serve to fulfill the mandates of the constitution of India and policy frameworks for early education in mother tongue without subverting the language hierarchy or the majority-centric school education. The current MLE programmes lack pedagogy of critique and limit the scope for reflexive deliberations.

Keywords Bridging · Exit · Multilingual education · Pedagogy of critique · Reflexive deliberation social construction

There lived an old Sa'ra (Saora) couple in a village. They had wealth but no kids. Worried about being robbed of their wealth, they always lived with the fear of thieves. One day, the old man said, "Had I been schooled, I wouldn't have lived with such fears. Let me go to school and learn even at this age". And, he went to school. As he entered the classroom, the teacher said, "*Aasilaki*" (a word in Odia meaning 'So, you have come'). The old man repeated, "*Aasilaki. Aasilaki. Aasilaki*." The teacher continued, "*Basilaki*" (Odia word meaning, 'So, you sat down'). The old man repeated thrice, "*Basilaki.*" "*Basilaki.*" "*Basilaki.*" "*Jaauchhaki*" (Odia word meaning, 'So, you are leaving'), uttered the teacher. And thrice did the old man repeat, "*Jaauchhaki*" "*Jaauchhaki*" "*Jaauchhaki*". The old man went back home, happy that he had learnt for the day. He went on and on repeating the three things he had learnt. As he fell asleep he continued repeating and kept on in his sleep. It was then that some thieves entered with axe, shovel and digger. The old man was still repeating in his sleep, "*Aasilaki. Aasilaki. Aasilaki.*" ('So, you have come'). The thieves thought the old man had seen them; they crouched down. And the old man continued repeating, "*Basilaki.*" "*Basilaki.*" "*Basilaki.*" ('So, you sat down'). The thieves were sure, they had been spotted; scared they turned back to leave when the old man continued, "*Jaauchhaki*" "*Jaauchhaki*" "*Jaauchhaki*" ('So, you are leaving'). The thieves panicked and ran as fast as they could, leaving behind the axe, shovel, digger and all. In the morning, the old man strolled to his backyard and was surprised to find all the equipment. "Look, what I have got!" he said. "So much benefits, just with a day's school learning!" the old man said happily. (Story narrator: S. G.; Story collector and Translator from Odia: Minati Panda)

S. G., a long time school teacher and artist from the Saora tribal community in Odisha, narrated this story to other teachers and community volunteers in one of our early Reader Development workshops. He did this with a sense of satisfaction and pride. They all agreed that the story celebrates the beauty of formal education. In fact, they, as well as their

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administrative heads, chose the story as appropriate for literacy campaigns and schooling advocacy. However, they all failed to see the obvious: the Odia words *("Aasilaki"*, *"Basilaki"*, and *"Jaauchhaki"*) did not mean anything to the Saora old man. For him, any act of the teacher in the school is an act of *giving* school knowledge and any of the teachers' classroom utterances *is* knowledge; it has to be somehow *memorized* even if it does not make any sense. Since he did not understand teacher's friendly Odia utterances of welcome ("*So you came. Sit down.* And *are you leaving now?"*), he kept on repeating them as valuable utterances of knowledge. When I told S.G. and his fellow participants that the story actually gives a wrong set of messages about the meaning of school education and that it celebrates rote memorization over critical understanding, they were not convinced. They had utter incredulity writ large all over them since I was offering them a critique of school education they had not encountered before.

How could these teachers and community volunteers from the Saora community have developed a critical perspective when they themselves were forced to attend school without understanding what the textbooks and teachers communicated for many years? With marginal school performance, they were promoted to higher grades often out of compassion or due to the Government policy of no detention in primary grades. It was probably not enough for them that they joined the same profession to carry out the same task in almost similar manner without ever realizing that the educational practices, of which they are the products as well as perpetrators, never provided them any theoretical tool to critically analyze the practices.

Why is it that, despite officially pursuing modernist projects for more than six decades, the system of school education in India is still not compatible with democratic and human values, leave alone creating critical consciousness among the children and teachers? The social constructionist framework provides a powerful theoretical tool to address such questions. Why could not S.G., a schoolteacher with years of experience, see any problem with the story? In contrast, when I narrated the story to my graduate students, they thought that I was giving them a critique of school education. If we look at school education critically and examine what benefits do the schools bring to children and adults in Saora tribal areas, S. G.'s construction is not at variance with that of the Saora society.

Social Constructionist Perspective: A Brief Overview and an Application

Gergen's (2001, 2003) work on social construction and pedagogical practices furnishes a useful theoretical and analytical tool for examining the policy discourse and practice of MLE. Social constructionism recognizes that 'all claims to knowledge grow from culturally and historically situated traditions' (Gergen 2001, p.127). A community having a specific kind of discursive practice and a recognizable knowledge claim draws its internal logic from the very nature of the discursive constructions of the relations and distributions of the material and symbolic resources and power. Unless the discursive practice of this community is analyzed and challenged, no reform is possible to maintain or create democratic values and practices.

How will the insiders of a community recognize the problems of inequality that emerges from and is perpetuated by the practice itself? How do the members of a society recognize these problems as problems of their falling collective growth and wellbeing? These are difficult challengers because, over a period of time, the members of a community learn to prioritize certain values over others, construct goals in line with these priorities and lend support to the use of strategies that sustain these goals. Alternative constructions do not find a space in this order. It is here that social constructionist perspective offers a useful epistemological tool for creating mechanisms for reflexive engagement. Such an epistemology requires a shift from monologue to dialogue (Gergen 2001). Also, there is need to encourage heterogeneity in the community and its knowledge systems. A recipient of monologue, such as in the universal hegemonic public education system in India and elsewhere, is, more often than not, denied a voice of his own. The curricula and methods imposed by the academics and the government, therefore, largely deskill the teachers and silence them (Apple 1982). They institutionalize the hierarchy by legitimizing one form of knowledge, one way of teaching and almost one way of evaluating the teachers' efficacy and the students' scholastic performance almost in a predetermined manner.

Gergen, therefore, calls for a 'polyvocality' where the insiders of a discourse can cross the boundaries of specific constructions, transcend the monologue and critically examine the hegemonic powers of such constructions and contest them. This is possible only when different voices are given their due space and are contested, if the need arises. This can create a discursive practice that is founded on heteroarchy and polyvocality. Gergen suggests that one needs to be free to move back and forth between social constructions, examine and contest the problematic and less useful constructions. If needed, one can engage in 'ransacking, borrowing, extricating, annexing, combining, reformulating and amalgamating in any way necessary for the most effective outcome' (Gergen 2001, p.129).

Gergen draws from Friere (1978), Foucault (1979) and others to offer the idea of 'reflexive deliberation'. He points to the problems of 'insulation' of discursive communities leading to dearth of critical interdisciplinarity which forms the core of knowledge structure, ideologies and values. He

thus cautions against any discursive practice becoming hegemonic over a period of time when we fail to engage in discursive deliberations. It is important to recognize the 'hidden curriculum' of any discipline or discursive practice and to constantly subject it to reflexive deliberation.

The authoritative discourses must be opened to evaluation from alternative standpoints, including both authoritative and informal. By exposing any professional discourse to the concerns of its peers we gain perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the work in question, and add dimension to subsequent dialogues (Gergen 2001, p.132).

Thus, Gergen places huge emphasis on 'pedagogy of critique' and 'appreciative enquiry'. "Reflexive deliberation cannot be confined to critique, which tends not to appreciate, but to silence the voice of the critiqued, and so must be supplemented by 'appreciative inquiry'… the point of reflexive deliberation is not to widen the chasm between cultural enclaves, but to enrich the forms of cultural life through processes of inter-weaving" (Gergen 2001, p. 133).

In what follows, an attempt is made to open the MLE discourse and practices in India to evaluation from alternative standpoints, including both authoritative and informal. By doing so, we believe that we gain a perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of the MLE work in question.

The Academic and the Assumptive Bases of MLE

Concepts and ideas exist in a web of conceptual machinery that develops along with the evolution of practices within the communities and therefore are embedded in these practices (Panda and Cole 2007). Children interact with these concepts and ideas by participating in valued cultural practices (Vygotsky 1978). They do not get these ideas full till they acquire the conceptual machinery that underlies these ideas. As the concepts and ideas are the discursive resources of a community, every community has an implicit theory of interactive contexts for children so that they acquire the conceptual machinery and become an insider of the community knowledge (Panda 2004).

The formal literacy practices do a similar job where the nature and the horizon of knowledge go beyond the community. The formal knowledge systems used in schools are developed through a long history of participation, validation and canonization of ideas and concepts by scholars. Schools recreate the historical conditions and activities with semiotic tools like models, experiments, graphs, stories etc. Children become the insider of these discourses only when they acquire the relevant conceptual machineries (Panda 2007; Panda and Cole 2007).

The question to be reckoned with is, 'do schools help children become insiders to the academic discourse?' Children acquire conceptual machinery of various classroom subjects only if they regularly participate in classroom discourses. However, classroom discursive practices often make it difficult for the children to become insiders to the academic discourses. The teachers too, removed from the everyday experiences of the children and often engaged in monologic academic practices, also remain as outsiders to such discourses. In community settings adults help children learn the concepts and ideas embedded in the discourses. Moreover, these discourses are accessible to children as the language and the contexts both are familiar to them. If a second unknown or less known language is imposed on them right from day one, children find it difficult to participate in the classroom talk and therefore fail to acquire the conceptual machinery of the academic discourse (Panda and Mohanty 2009). They leave the school after few years of non-participation.

In order to address this issue, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh (India) decided to experiment with mother tongue based MLE in select schools. In these schools mother tongue of tribal children is used as the medium of instruction (MoI) in grade I and then, based on a transition plan, a gradual shift is made to the dominant state language (Odia in Odisha and Telugu in Andhra Pradesh) over the next four years. By the time students reach grade V they switch completely to the dominant state language as the language of teaching. The teaching learning materials for these schools include subject textbooks in tribal language, big and small books based on certain themes, alphabet and number charts, story books, glossaries, tribal language phrase books, teacher handbooks and picture dictionaries (Mohanty et al. 2009). In Odisha, particularly, an academic year is divided into three terms and each term is divided into 10 weeks. There are 30 theme webs for 30 weeks and the themes are taken from the local context. The curriculum is reported to follow a 'Two Track Strategy' aimed at developing a child's Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Jim Cummins' 'Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis' (1984, 2009) forms the basis for developing the transition plan. According to this theory, a child on entering grade I has a sufficiently developed BICS in mother tongue. While this skill is adequate to participate in non-academic or context embedded social conversations, formal school education demands an advanced language for engagement with academic discourse. "…(C)hildren's language needs to move beyond their early interpersonal communication skills to deeper levels of proficiency as a cognitive tool for regulation and improvement of their thinking and reasoning. From using language for social communication or BICS children must develop to use language for reflective engagement with academic learning and purposeful thinking or to the level CALP" (Mohanty 2011, p. 2). It takes a minimum of 6 to 8 years' exposure to a language (in which the child already has acquired

conversational fluency) to develop CALP in that language (Cummins 2009). However, this time frame, as recommended in the theoretical position of Cummins and supported in research (e.g. Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010; Skutnabb-Kangas and Mohanty 2009) is not followed in the MLE programmes in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. These programmes do make a departure and follow a plan of quicker transition from mother tongue (L1) to other languages. There are two issues involved: one, the time allowed for development of the mother tongue (L1) to the level of CALP and two, the transition from L1 to other languages in the MLE programme. I will return to the question of transition between languages later in this paper.

In respect of the time available for development of L1, the question that arises is: despite seeking to maintain continuity in academic discourse on the rationale of MLE particularly in respect of the time available for L1 development, why do the practiced programmes in Indian states fail to push the MLE agenda through to its logical end (at least in the sense in which the proponents and supporters of the 'Linguistic Interdependence' position had suggested with near unanimity)? In other words, since the rationale for MLE necessarily accepts the relationship between development of BICS and CALP and the linguistic interdependence between developed competence in the mother tongue (CALP) and development of proficiency in a second language, it is difficult not to see the contradiction between its fundamental logic and the early discontinuation of classroom use of the mother tongue in favor of a second or the dominant language. It seems the rationale provided for MLE is constructed through discursive engagements with the dominant academic positions in a historical perspective. However, academic constructions do not impact the policy and practice arena in their pure form; they get reconstituted and recontextualized as they enter and influence the dominant social and political milieu of a society or state (Bernstein 1996).

Hierarchical structuring of languages and cultures, as outcomes of centuries of socio-historical processes, are deeply embedded in the social, political and bureaucratic worldviews. In the post-colonial India the hierarchy of languages was gradually reconstructed with Hindi yielding its primacy in favor of English and the major regional languages progressively displacing the minority mother tongues from the prospective position, which the Constitution of India and several other policy documents (such as the Kothari Commission Report and the 1986 Policy on Education) sought to bestow on them. Therefore, in framing the actual practices of MLE, our policy makers and implementers perpetuated the hierarchy in assigning relative significance to the languages in the MLE programmes. As such, the state majority language is positioned in a manner that assigns it the status of a 'target' language and the tribal

mother tongues the functional role as a route or a 'bridge' to reach the target with ease. The multiple discursive practices in respect of mother tongues and MLE and the socio-political processes impinging on the MLE discourse have led to a compromise in the time allowed for development of mother tongue or L1.

Thus, even as MLE came, *albeit*, on an experimental basis, the socially constructed hierarchy of languages and the duality in educational system has never been questioned. This leads to several anomalies in the implemented MLE programmes. One such anomaly is the gross discrepancy between the rationale of MLE and the so-called 'transition' plans. Also, there is incongruity in respect of the overall structure of education in India, which perpetuates the hierarchy of sub-systems of English-medium and Vernacular-medium schools, and mother tongue-medium MLE schools. Thus, instead of contesting the unjust hierarchy as well as the imposed silence of the tribal and minority communities, MLE seems to have unwittingly subscribed to it. When a system perpetuates voicelessness of the dominated and the self-fulfilling silence of the advantaged elites, it minimizes the scope for 'polyvocality', prevents movement from 'monologue to dialogue' and makes it difficult to establish heteroarchy (Gergen 2001, 2003). MLE in Indian states seems to have been doomed to fall victim to the socially constructed hierarchy, which it is supposed to have challenged. It is seen as necessary because some languages are clearly discriminated against and, in the process, marginalized and threatened. The mother tongue based MLE is based on the realization of the adverse consequences of forced education in a language with which the child is not familiar and the need to continue with academic development of the mother tongue without necessarily viewing this only as means to development of academic proficiency in other dominant languages. The metaphors of 'bridge' and 'transition' are used in MLE practices in India to stress this later aspect.

Metaphors of MLE

Integral to the concept of MLE is the concept of bridging - bridging between everyday world of children and the school. Choice of a particular kind of MLE model by the Indian states is influenced by a dominant construction of the problem of tribal children's learning in regular Government schools as one of 'poor' or 'inadequate' bridging between their everyday language and concepts and the school language and the academic concepts (Mishra et al. 1996; Mohanty 1994; Panda 1996). Such constructions are abundant both in research and policy documents (National Education Policy 1986; NCF 2005; 10th and 11th 5 year plan of GOI) in India. In our best effort to transit from a deficit model that frames tribal children as cognitively and culturally deficient to cope with the requirements of modern

education to a difference model (Cole 1996; Cole and Bruner 1971; Cole et al. 1968) that views tribal children as equally or better equipped with cognitive and select cultural resources and, therefore, as different, we have created the concepts of 'bridging' and 'transition'. These concepts do not require the mainstream education to change; it is only the education of the minorities, which is viewed as being required to accommodate and change. Making small changes by using children's language and culture in the beginning so that they are soon ready to make the "jumps" to the mainstream education, is seen as sufficient to accommodate this requirement for change. Neither the "mainstream education" nor the new transition plan based MLE are sufficiently deconstructed to examine their relevance for tribal and other linguistic minority children.

The metaphors of *transition* and *bridging* are also central to the educational programmes in USA and few other Western societies that follow a monolingual and monocultural assimilationist model. The linguistic minority communities in these countries receive some help in their own language in the beginning so that they are ready to get immersed in the state curriculum transacted in the state language. Bridge materials like flash cards, vocabulary charts, some supplementary readers are developed to help these children transit as early as possible to the state language and the state curriculum. This paradigm also found quick and uncritical acceptance in India not for the more powerful dominant linguistic communities but for the less powerful linguistic minorities. Thus Odia and Telugu children are allowed to use mother tongue till higher education. Even when the medium of instruction changes over to English in higher education, Odia and Telugu continue as a language subjects till under-graduate level. Thus, the very forces of dominance, which condemn the disadvantaged to voicelessness by imposing the dominant language in their education, find in the bridge metaphor a new prop to hold the victims accountable for their plight. Implications of the bridge metaphor and MLE do not affect education of the majority. Our analysis of bridge materials developed by the SCERTs, NCERT, Tribal Research Institutes in the states, civil bodies like Centre for Learning Resources, Rishi Valley and few others in mid-1990s reveal that they are developed only for the disadvantaged minority children to facilitate their transition. There is a clear decision for not continuing with linguistic minority children's language beyond class V. Nobody in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh talks about transition and bridging for Odia or Telugu children, whereas, these are perceived as necessary curricular and pedagogic tools for teaching children from the linguistic minority communities.

Adherence to this model by the state bureaucracy is partly due to the paradigmatic perpetuation of the older model of teaching and learning. As Panda (2011b) observes, "the new transition model didn't question the societal language hierarchy as it operated through the use of identified single mother tongue as the Medium of Instruction in the class. Different mother tongues or languages appeared sequentially. The sequencing of the languages in the transition plans in the MLE classrooms more or less matched their hierarchical positions in our society. The major pedagogic achievement rested in the act of individual child crossing the *bridge* between two languages to a certain level of success. And as expected, success here was defined in terms of scholastic achievement (total marks obtained in the end term tests) and not in terms of development of cognitive and emotional capacities including the ability to contest and create fearlessly and development of critical thinking and positive social identities"(p.1).

Bridging, therefore, has become a chosen metaphor among the tribal education experts and language pedagogues in India. In both Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the challenges of bringing child's everyday world into the classroom and her identity are addressed within this prejudged framework using a notion called 'theme web'. The *theme web* model of Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) is handy as it seeks to organize pedagogic practices around temporal sequences of tribal people's agrarian and cultural lives during the academic calendar of 10 school months. Our analysis (see Panda et al. 2011) shows that the environmental themes, occupations, rituals, and select artifacts of tribal communities are presented in historically and politically neutral manner. The textbooks and teaching-learning materials developed for MLE programme include information about the cultural lives of tribal children without creating tools or structures that engage critical thinking. The use of cultural material in an apolitical and ahistorical manner subverts any scope of contesting history of the dominant academic narratives and identities. Moreover, this model has no scope to promote egalitarian positioning and use of multiple languages as classroom resources in tribal societies. Such a transition model, even though named as 'Multilingual programme', is based on a bilingual transfer model and not on the pedagogic principles of a good MLE programme.

In this paradigm, 'Exit' becomes a central metaphor, as without it, the bridge or the transition plans do not work. Children's mother tongue is allowed to enter into the classrooms only after its *exit* is decided. Interestingly, the MLE programmes all over the world are branded as Early Exit or Late Exit Programmes depending on how soon or how late the linguistic minority children's language is planned to exit from their classroom. In seventies, Central Institute of Indian Languages came up with a progamme called Bilingual Transfer Model for primary grades where use of mother tongue was accepted for the first couple of years of schooling as an initial support for education in a language other than the mother tongue. Different tribal area schools

employed unofficially such a minimalist kind of MLE. Children's mother tongue is used during the first 2 years only along with the major regional language and then, the mother tongue makes an unceremonious and complete exit from grade III. Such transitional programmes have been sporadically used until the recent MLE programmes in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. In the new MLE plan, use of mother tongue and regional language for classroom trans-actions is regulated (in the text books, at least) in the ratio of 80:20; 60:40, 40:60, 20:80 and 0:100 per cent for grades I and V, respectively. A progressive document like NCF 2005 (along with its position papers) also stipulates a five-year presence of children's mother tongue over the early school years. Like many Indians, I studied in Odia medium school where my home/mother language never had a formal exit till I completed undergraduate course. Whereas, in case of minority and less powerful groups, the exit point of child-ren's language is decided much before any transition plan of MLE is conceptualized and put in place. Tribal children know that their home language has to exit in favor of regional language and English. The new MLE programmes, therefore, do not alter the hierarchical position of languages both in society and in school.

Discursive Embedding of *Bridge* and *Exit* in Policy Texts

The policy statements in respect of languages in education in India unfortunately deepen the divides between the lan-guages and maintain the hierarchical positioning of lan-guages in a clear exclusion of indigenous tribal and minority (ITM) languages from school and higher educa-tion. Further, if at all our policy documents suggest use of mother tongue for education of ITM children, it is invariably limited to the primary grades or up to 5 years of formal education; mother tongue as a language of teaching in our schools is required to exit from formal education within a maximum period of 5 years from grade 1. The provision in Article 350A of the Constitution of India (http://www.in-dia.gov.in/govt/constitutions_of_india.php) states: "It shall be the endeavour of every State and every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at *primary stage of education* to children belonging to linguistic minority groups" (italics added). The Constitution clearly treats the majority lan-guages included in the VIIIth Schedule more favourably and in limiting instruction in mother tongue to the primary education, it recommends, by implication, an exit plan for the ITM languages in favour of majority languages in school education.

The 1957 three-language formula (TLF) of the Govern-ment of India recommends use of regional language or mother tongue as the first language of teaching to be followed by teaching (as school subjects) of Hindi or re-gional languages and English. The distinction between re-gional languages and mother tongues was ambiguous. In its 1967 revision to accommodate to the reservations of the Southern states about the status to Hindi, the TLF also continued to sanction, at least by default, imposition of the state majority languages as MoI on the tribal and other linguistic minority children in forced submersion education in a language other than their mother tongue.

The subsequent policy documents like the National Pol-icy on Education (NEP), 1986 and *The National Curriculum Framework* (NCF 2005) also take similar position in respect of mother tongue. NCF 2005 acknowledges the research evidence and recommends that "children will receive mul-tilingual education from the outset" and that "home lan-guage(s) of children ...... should be the medium of learning in schools" (p.37). However, the NCF 2005 and the position papers by the National Focus Groups (NCERT 2006) in their totality show contradictions by accepting the practice of teaching English from grade 1 while also laying down in a tabular form a 5 year Exit (transition) plan for ITM languages. The policy texts seem to be more concerned with when and how to introduce English than with the basic learning needs and conditions of the ITM children. Despite the initial wave of excitement that it generated, NCF 2005 has not been able to trigger substantive changes in the nature of school education and the positioning of languages in the school systems across the country partly because the frame-work itself lacked clarity on languages in education and because of the state autonomy in education.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) of 2009, also does not get out of this trap of linguistic hierarchy and hegemony of the dominant lan-guages to assure a place to mother tongue in education (Panda 2011a). The RTE fails to guarantee education in mother tongues as a right; Article 29 (2) (f) of the Act (Chapter V) says, 'medium of instruction shall, *as far as practicable*, be in child's mother tongue' (emphasis added). Theoretically, RTE 2009 opens up the possibility of ITM languages for use as medium of instructions in classrooms and as a language subject at all levels of education. But, when we read NCF 2005, NPE 1986, RTE 2009 and Na-tional Knowledge Commission (NKC) 2009 together, there is a clear acceptance for English and the languages included in the VIIIth schedule for use for classroom transactional purposes and as subjects at all levels of education; the same consideration is not given to the ITM languages, which are recommended only for primary classes and that too with certain level of ambivalence. The NKC 2009, in its recom-mendation for English from grade 1 in order to 'democra-tize' English, further affirms the hierarchy and reinforces the popular aspirations for English in a manner that forecloses any scope for deliberations on the relationship between

children's language, education and identity. In general, 'the ITM languages have remained neglected and marginalised, caught in the underside of the Vernacular - other language divide' (Mohanty 2010b, p.168).

Rahman (1998) speaks of the politics of language in Pakistan, where Urdu is promoted as an official language of identity but English is the real language of power. In the South Asia (Mohanty 2010a) and Africa (Alexander 1999; Bamgbose 2000; Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010) the complex dynamics of politics of language and identity has resulted in progressive and egalitarian policy statements ostensibly supporting the indigenous languages of identity in policy papers. However, the actual practices are more acquiescent to the dominance of and popular demand for English (or other colonial languages of power). The negotiation of multiple cultural and linguistic divides in hierarchical social structures and the modernist projects of ensuring social justice for all in post-colonial societies results in increasing acceptance of MLE in principle but of an early-exit kind so that the status quo is implicitly maintained.

Historically the policy documents lack coherence and consistency. In the absence of any discursive continuity with history of language policy discourse in India it is not surprising that there are too many instances of mutual contradictions and repeated failures to push an agenda through. As Shohamy (2010) writes,

> … a question that is often raised with regard to language educational policies (and any educational policies) is whether policies that are manifested in policy documents in the forms of laws or other official statements are in fact *meant* to be implemented, or if they only serve bureaucrats as ideological statements and evidence of action and intentions without serious concern for their actual feasibility or meaningful implementation. How else can one explain the phenomenon whereby many educational policies are not followed and their implementation is not studied? (p. 182)

The declared language policies in education in India mostly remain trapped in the gap between ideologies and implementations Shohamy (2010) refers to. From a social constructionist perspective the *de facto* policies of discrimination against the ITM languages in the bottom of the sociolinguistic hierarchy can be understood as manifest outcomes of the social political processes at a macro-structural level. MLE in India needs to be viewed in this perspective and the recommendation and acceptance of the early-exit MLE as a special experimental programme in select tribal area schools can be seen as resulting from this complex negotiation of the language policy in India and the dynamics of the socio-historical processes. An early-exit transition plan is obviously less threatening as the mainstream

education programme at secondary and higher secondary levels do not have to change for the ITM children. Any departure from the early-exit transition plan is considered difficult to implement. As Panda (2011b) points out, "An egalitarian departure from the hierarchical MLE in its current form seems to be necessary to delegitimize the hegemonic positions of certain languages over the language of tribal children and to expose the arbitrariness of such a hierarchy. The new approach, being subversive in its very content and structure, is interpreted as nonfeasible, nontranslatable and difficult-to- imagine by the state bureaucracy and the bridge obsessed transition experts" (p.1).

The Paradox of MLE Discourse: Promises of Polyvocality and Practices of Insularity

In the backdrop of the equivocal policies that grossly disregard the educational and other developmental needs of the real people of India against the imagined global citizens, the early exit transition based MLE programme for ITM children appears to be the best that could happen in the given discursive community. The absence of large scale resistance to the unequal treatment to ITM languages in the constitution itself and to the continued neglect of the specific linguistic, educational and identity needs of ITM children in the education policies in the post independent India is the complex outcome of a particular kind of political and academic discourse on language, education, choice, aspirations and market - both local and global. Multitudes of specific social constructions like endangered and indigenous languages, language of market, aspirations and choice of parents and children, growth and development created colonial inferiority complex among the ITM people that lead to assimilative craving for other's (dominant community's) language and culture. Wherever people realize the politics of particular kind of discursive communities and demand greater space for their language, culture and identity, a new discursive community of practice emerges. Their survival and growth are constantly challenged by the majority group's constructions of parameters of success in school education. This creates two tendencies in these discursive communities; either they close themselves to dialogue and survive or they engage in reflexive deliberations, which constantly demand revisions and growth in the community of practice and their goals, objectives and tools.

The MLE programmes in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh have few conceptual artifacts (or jargons) that distinguish them from the regular discourse in the state education departments. These artifacts include *indigenous knowledge system*, *mother tongue*, *Road One and Road two*, *theme web*, *big book* and *small book* etc. The academicians, the programme designers, implementers and the teachers who

developed the text materials for this programme, trained MLE teachers and implemented the programme, had a shared experience and a shared rapporteur; they created a discursive community. Since many indigenous language users and tribal artists, associated with material development for the MLE programmes and other activities, have relatively lower levels of general education and training compared to the state resource group, they got positioned in a perceived role of lesser power with a stance of compliance and submission. As a result, this group developed a tendency to insulate itself and the MLE discourse traveled the hierarchy in a monologic fashion (Panda 2009). Further, the MLE discourse has positioned itself in an insular mode as a discourse of departure from the discourse of the mainstream education. This resulted in reduction of dialogue between the curricular and pedagogic resource groups of the mainstream general education and the team associated with implementation of the MLE model.

MLE discourse in India is both insulated and isolated from the larger social praxis. Ideally, MLE as a theoretically sound model of education should have been based on the rationale of crossing boundaries across languages and across multiple discursive constructions that go with different languages and linguistic communities of practice. It also involves getting away from and contesting the hegemonic power structures of languages to assert inherent equality of all forms of communication. In the words of Gergen, therefore, MLE necessarily involves 'polyvocality' of discursive practices and egalitarian positioning of languages. Thus, in practice, because of its dissociation from the mainstream education and pedagogical practices and also the limitations of the application of the model to a particular disadvantaged community of linguistic minorities, the gaps between the policy (theory) ideologies and the practices of MLE in India is paradoxical; it is ideally polyvocal and practically insular.

It is, therefore, important to examine what kind of reflexive deliberations are possible within a transition based MLE programme meant only for the ITM children. In a transition plan, the debate in India and elsewhere oscillated between three choices of using children's mother tongue as MoI: up to class II, class V or class VIII. There were debate on use of children's mother tongue in the initial years of schooling as Medium of instruction, but there was almost no debate on the pedagogy of multilinguality. Moreover, in each of these arrangements, one language is introduced at a times. As a result, these transition plans did not change the language pedagogy. A truly MLE needs to use pedagogy of multilinguality where linguistic resources of different children are expended to teach the nature and the structure of languages to the students. The students in this paradigm are helped to see universal and cross-linguistic patterns of language usage and discover for themselves the structure and nature the languages and how can they use them creatively. Moreover,

as MLE practices emerged as a reaction to the homogenizing universal school education system and also as a special programme in an atmosphere of resistance to the majority centric universal school education programmes, there is both non-acceptance and misrecognition from the other side represented by the educational planners and curriculum designers in the general school education system of the state. Because of this, the MLE resource groups operated in isolation in Odisha (see Panda and Mohanty 2009) and became over-protective of its approaches and achievements. This resulted in monologic discursive practices within the MLE group in Odisha since it was not open to the parallel discursive practices in general. In Andhra Pradesh, on the other hand, MLE came as an imposed model successfully advocated by international organizations and guided by a borrowed the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) model. The methodological details of MLE implemented in the state was supervised by a some international experts who handed down a set of formula driven procedures uncritically appropriated by the state educational planners, tribal education experts and linguists. This colonial practice foreclosed any possible dialogue with the regional tensions among the tribal communities and their discursive practices. Thus, MLE programmes in India were limited in their openness to multiple discursive practices and scope for critical reflectivity. Further, a critical pedagogical approach was missing and any possibility of deliberate reflection was reduced.

Linguistic and cultural resources make learning better and more engaging but not necessarily critical, unless we use pedagogy of critique. In both the states, an already developed transition plan of SIL was introduced by a group of European SIL experts without sufficient dialogue with the state administration and the academics. This highlights the fact that MLE paradigm and practice in both the states are not the products of their own social, political and academic discourse. In a top down structure, since the changes are not the product of peoples' restlessness and discomfort with existing paradigm of general education in a dominant language, there is relatively less scope to experience transformations than when such changes evolve out of local struggles and tensions. Unless the state moves out of the highly structured package mode of the current MLE to a flexible academic discourse and plan the scope for reflexive deliberations remains minimal. MLE experts and pedagogues need need to work with pedagogies that gradually develop the capacity of children to engage in metadiscursive practices in all areas of school learning first in their mother tongue and subsequently in the second and other languages. In the absence of such reflective engagement the MLE teams in the two Indian states lack critical understanding of the model and follow its routine implementation (For details, see Panda and Mohanty 2011; Panda et al. 2011). However, as stated earlier, unless a system

encourages reflexive deliberations and adopts critical engagement as an intrinsic requirement, it cannot be expected to challenge any unjust hierarchical order.

School Education and A Pedagogy of Critique

Education, when it works as critical transformative praxis, may expose new modes of colonialism and can be used to empower the marginalized tribal and indigenous people. As is evident from the story given at the beginning of this paper and its use for campaigning for education, the parents, teachers and the community members appear to have no critique of school education and of the society where they live. This is because they almost regularly experience exclusion. The older model of school education has completely excluded them as they identify neither with the language and the culture of the textbook nor with the knowledge systems that the textbooks represent. As a result, they have never acquired any theoretical tool from education to analyze their lives, ecology, and polity. Therefore, inclusion of tribal lives, society and knowledge in the new bridge model of MLE uninformed by a critical perspective can only further legitimize the inferior position of the tribal peoples in different spheres of public life instead of subverting hierarchy and promoting multivocality.

During my ethnographic work in 1997–1999, I had to visit at least 20 houses to find Saora Art only in one or two houses. In the recent visit (January 2012), I went to almost all houses in two villages of Gumma block of Gajapati district and found Saora art in none of the homes. When I asked the villagers the reason, I was told that the Saora art was essentially linked to Saora religious beliefs and practices and was drawn on the left wall of the second living room where the adults performed the "*Puja*". The art contained basic human figures that were considered to be their ancestors who bless them and helped in moments of crisis. It was considered inauspicious to draw these figures in any other place or to learn to do so without going through a schedule of fasting (for 7 days). Moreover, it is learnt strictly from the Saora Pundits. The transfer of this knowledge in any other form or means was considered inauspicious. Almost everybody narrated the same story in these two villages. But what they fail to perceive is that the mass scale conversion of Saoras either into Christianity or into the Hindu religion required this art form to go out of their life space. Most formal spaces in both Hindu and Christian communities have no Saora artifacts like Saora musical instruments, Saora architectural styles, Saora Art and Saora music. The modern non-Saora artifacts have replaced all these. The ongoing MLE programme in these areas also does not give them a tool or a perspective to recognize that they are gradually losing their Saora identity and may soon lose

Saora consciousness. Extending Gergen's arguments, anybody who is ripped off his social and cultural roots will become voiceless and therefore will be ready for any kind of assimilation that comes his way in the name of modernity and progress.

Few examples from the MLE classrooms will make this point clearer. The MLE textbooks developed for Saora children in Odisha begin with Saora number system and gradually move to the Universal number system with an objective that we move from the known to the unknown. Therefore, the Saora number system gets minimally used for doing some counting, showing the corresponding quantities and occasionally doing addition of small or single digits. Our review of MLE textbooks shows that the use of Saora number system ceases after the first 4 months of grade I teaching and it never then appears in class I textbook nor in other primary class textbooks. Like Saora language, the Saora Knowledge systems also exit the classroom academic discourse soon after their entry performing a routine task of helping in bridging from everyday to classroom knowledge. Similar short-term references are observed in the case of advanced Saora irrigation system, architectural designs, traditional food preservation techniques etc.

Like many significant communities across the world, Saoras too have a fully developed number system, few algorithmic practices, a developed irrigation system, fine musical instruments, a wonderful folk literature etc. As a community they are invisible in the text books as their ecology, their history and their sociology are not part of the academic discourse except in the new MLE textbooks, where these elements are presented in the routine textbook style. Even if the new MLE textbooks have lot of information from Saora cultures, they lack in analytical tool to help children look at their society as knowledge society and their history and sociology as being worthy of academic discourse and dissemination. They are also not helped to see the tension between their knowledge systems, the school knowledge systems and the modern developmental projects and plans. They are not aware how these tensions are undermined, brushed aside or capitalized to suit the so called modern developmental projects. The absence of any focus on social history or mention of major events in the Saora history and mention of Government's critical experiments of trying out different cash crops and their story of success and failures and the place of Saora community in the larger picture of Odisha indicates that the way the academic MLE programmes are carried out, there is very little scope for creating a pedagogy of critique. Using Gergen's ideas, one clearly can argue that unless the Saoras figure substantively in the textbooks and are discussed critically both by themselves and others, they will not acquire confidence in

their own positions and engage in dialogue with others. This concern in respect of the school curriculum and textbooks find a reflection in Gergen (2001, p.133):

> As the hidden curriculum argument suggests, all discursive practices carry with them an associated range of values and practices. Thus, to incorporate a professional discourse (and the modes by which it is taught) is also by indirection to absorb its implicate orderings for cultural life. For example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) have described how working class students, in particular, are encouraged to be obedient, passive, and unoriginal. Apple (1982) has discussed how the production of textbooks and other curriculum materials establishes the values and beliefs of certain groups as "official" knowledge. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argue that mainstream expectations systematically exclude members of subordinate groups from academic success, and reinforce and justify the values of dominant groups. Similarly, Beyer and Apple (1988) argue that, instead of producing citizens capable of articulating their own views on our collective life, schools produce workers prepared to subordinate themselves to others' judgments.

Conclusion: Why Not Multilingual Education for ALL?

If plurality including multilinguality is constitutive of human life, MLE principles should be at the core of all educational programs. If MLE runs only as a special program for certain groups trapped in the status of subalternity, the habitus itself will ensure the reproduction of dominant structures, while creating the illusion of something different and relevant for these groups. One therefore fears that, in the new globalised world order, the tensions and conflicts generated by homogenizing and dominating national and sub-national group formations may get absorbed by the pretentious details of these special (and parallel) provisions. Thus, it is often the case that instead of critical engagement with the core principles and issues, MLE as a specific localized practice gets preoccupied with the ground level details. This, in effect, keeps MLE from becoming critically engaged with broader structural questions.

It is important to recognize how the interests of some policy makers and academicians align with those of the Government and how their vision and strategies are identified with and owned up by the larger masses with a winning slogan of "something is better than nothing". Every time, we argue for revision of the statement "education will be in mother tongue as far as possible" in RTE 2009, we are told that, 'something is better than nothing'. Similar responses are offered even when we fought for reinstating the section on Common School System and the Early Childhood Education in the RTE Act 2009. We often chose to desist from examining what does this dominant construction, "something is better than nothing" mean paradigmatically and how does this "something" delay the project of achieving a more egalitarian society in India. It is this paradigm that legitimizes the practice of continuing with the mainstream education with minor revisions and giving little 'extras' to the children of disadvantaged minority communities. These 'extras' generally include inconsequential aspects like free textbooks, free uniforms, one or two supplementary readers in the children's language and in its best form, the Early Exit MLE programme.

The first and the foremost task would, therefore, be to contest these discursive formulations, as Gergen (2001) suggests and reject the *ad hocism* and the dual treatment, i.e. for some the mother tongue stays till the end of the higher education while for others it can stay till end of the primary education. In a democratic society such differential treatments should not be meted out to anyone. As long as we continue with this, we cannot develop a pedagogy of critique.

MLE is deeply rooted in a discourse of critical pedagogy that seeks to empower the learners and their communities (Panda 2012). As a powerful model for the education of all including indigenous tribal and linguistic minority communities MLE needs to move from the Early Exit models to a paradigm where all children's languages are respected. It needs to replace the authoritarian, rigid, pre-ordained knowledge approach of dominant-culture-centric education by a system of critical educational experiences empowering them to become valued, equal, and responsible members of their own and the larger society outside their community and not feel estranged from it (Panda 2012; Panda and Mohanty 2009). We need to acknowledge that the dominant-culture-centric education being hegemonic is not good for children from powerful majority groups as they will always live with guilt and fear of consuming more or having a larger share and never getting an opportunity to live in and live for an inclusive society. The experience of an inclusive discursive practice is humanizing. At one level, strong MLE practices will develop children's home language competence and, at a deeper level, develop strong multilingual competence, identity and a few vital collective processes that will sustain the linguistic and the eco-cultural diversity of the society.

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