

## Pahari language Awareness Conference: the role of mother tongue in education.

As I think all here recognize, any discussion of language involves a high degree of complexity and subtlety which, all too often, is confined to academe and is filtered down in uncoordinated ways to those working at the points of contact with fellow citizens for whom English may be their third language, let alone their second. We owe a debt of gratitude to Ali Daalat and his colleagues who have been, and continue to be, active in raising our awareness of Pahari.

For far too long, Pahari, spoken by the great majority of migrants from Kashmir, and their descendants, has been ignored, misnamed ('Mirpuri Punjabi' is a description that I remember from my own days as a Language Support teacher), and, in fact, completely buried, sometimes with disastrous consequences for individuals. Its non-recognition, not least in the field of education, has contributed to the continuing repression, if not oppression, for this section of our community.

Mother tongue plays all too small a part in children's education at the present time. It has never been treated seriously enough to be incorporated in education policy and practice formally, leaving aside the Welsh context. In the wake of the Bullock Report[1], here and there, efforts were made to acknowledge mother tongues. Bullock said: 'No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he (sic) crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though school and home represent two totally separate and different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart...the school should adopt a positive attitude to its pupils bilingualism and wherever possible should help to maintain and deepen their knowledge of their mother tongues.'

As far as I know, this is the only acknowledgement of mother tongues to be made in official educational literature in the sense that it contains explicitly an understanding that mother tongue involves a dynamic: that mother tongue is not a static entity but is developmental.

If you glance at handout 1[2], you will see some different ways in which 'mother tongue' can be defined and how the definition may change depending on the criteria used. For the purposes of children's schooling, the sociological definition is the one that is recorded within the sphere of 'ethnic monitoring'. It is also the one that does not contain a dynamic element.

is a misrepresentation. What it implies is racial categorization. However, even supposing that this kind of categorization is helpful, confusion around ethnicity is rampant in all official monitoring, educational and otherwise. For example, in the National Literacy Strategy document, 'Supporting Pupils Learning English as an Additional Language'[3], pupils are categorized variously as 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Bangladeshi', (all political descriptions), 'Black Caribbean', (an ethno-geographic description), and as 'Gypsy Traveller' pupils.(?!).

Language does figure in this monitoring. There is advice in the document to the teacher to 'understand the importance of knowing about all the pupils' languages, culture and educational experience in order to ensure full inclusion and engagement.[4] Of the very few other references to pupils' languages, the first occurs in the section called, 'Making the difference: teaching and learning strategies in successful multi-ethnic schools'. Under the subheading, 'Relationships, behaviour and discipline', it says, 'an holistic view of pupil welfare which routinely incorporates their racial, cultural, religious and linguistic concerns.[5]

It is significant that the reference is made under the umbrella of relationships/behaviour/discipline. When pupils from minorities have difficulties concentrating in class, they are often labeled as having 'special needs' (behavioural) and a disproportionate number of them are so dubbed. It doesn't occur to the powers that be to attempt to identify quite why this situation persists. Studies have shown that when a child is trying to process information through an additional language, s/he experiences chronic stress.[6]

The only other direct reference to 'first language' in the document comes in advice on conducting whole-class teaching. Under a main heading of 'Sharing experience', accompanied by the good advice that 'Children need to link their personal experience to what is going on in the lesson', and as part of the advice on 'establishing an inclusive learning environment', it asks, 'Do I provide opportunities for pupils to discuss in their own first language?'[7]

According to Ofsted, 'Only one third of LEAs monitor ethnic attainment comprehensively'[8]. I assume that mother tongue identification is part of the monitoring, but given that Pahari will be absent from it, the plight of the learners whose mother tongue is Pahari becomes palpable.

What happens to the pupil, Pahari and, indeed, any other pupil for whom English is an additional language, when faced with what is effectively a 'submersion' model of education? Please

refer to handout 2.[9] (Explicate).

At its worst, the experience is one of structural, symbolic violence comparable with, for example, the Kurds (Turkey: elaborate) or native Australians. Tove Skutnab-Kangas puts it thus: 'If everything that is judged to be of value at school, everything rewarded with praise and good marks, everything that leads to high status positions (at school and outside) is associated with the majority language, and if all this is accepted as self-evidently the right thing, and if at the same time the minority language is not even accepted at school, then the same goal is achieved by the use of physical violence, by separation and punishment: the child is alienated from her (sic) own group and begins to be ashamed of it.' [10] The rider to the last point is the danger of the rifts that can appear in the parent/child, particularly mother/child relationship. (Expand). If this is distorted thus, attitudes to learning can be affected adversely.

There is lip-service paid to the needs of minorities within the National Curriculum. (This contains the whole curriculum—for Primary and Secondary education separately. It's the document that teachers work from on a day-to-day basis. They may, or may not, have had 'inset' based on the 'Support' document already referred to). Please see handout 3.[11] Notice 'Examples for C/8a — developing spoken and written English', especially the last two points: 'where appropriate...', and 'building on...'; and 'Examples for C/8b, last point: 'using home language where appropriate'. When I say 'lip-service', look at the C/8a example: 'where appropriate'. This presupposes a level of linguistic knowledge almost certainly beyond the realms of that of the class teacher.

There is some understanding shown of the fact that, in learning through an additional language, surface fluency (basic interpersonal communicative skills: BICS) is achieved, whilst academic language (cognitive/academic language proficiency: CALP) lags behind. [12] Thus, in NLS, Supporting PEALS, in a case study of reading/writing achievement at Key Stage 1 SATS, 1999, the 'Analysis of work samples' reads as follows: please see handout 4.[13] (Explicate).

Unfortunately, the answer to the problem runs like this: 'Curricular target: The target group of pupils will further develop syntactic knowledge and apply it effectively in the context of reading and writing. Success criterion: Pupils attain at Level 2b at KS1 SAT (To be administered after one term). Timescale: 1 Term.'

Target setting is seen as THE answer! This comes as no surprise as, in the same document, the main declaration about support for PEALS reads: 'The NLS Framework and the Literacy Hour are appropriate for children who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The National Literacy Strategy emphasis on careful listening, supported reading and writing, phonological awareness, access to formal styles of written

English and the participative nature of whole-class and group work are all PERFECTLY CONSISTENT (my emphasis) with teaching children who speak English as an additional language. Literacy is a primary route to fluent and confident spoken English for second language learners.&rsquo;[14]

This statement is contradictory -- it is contained in a document that adds on all sorts of advice to the teachers of PEALS &ndash; and certitudinous to the nth degree. It begs a whole lot of questions about the manner of teaching PEALS. For example, that &lsquo;&hellip;there is a considerable discrepancy for a long time in their (PEALS) second language between surface fluency and more academic ability.&rsquo;[15] Far from the time needed to gain any cognitive linguistic skill being &lsquo;one term&rsquo;, &lsquo;it may take from 4 to 7 years for a child who comes to a new country (aka school---explain)&hellip;.to develop in her (sic) new language those abilities which Cummins brings together under the CALP heading, to the level of a monolingual speaker, or to the CALP level she has in her (sic) mother tongue.&rsquo;[16] I suggest that the National Literacy Strategy is NOT &lsquo;perfectly consistent&rsquo; with teaching effectively children who speak English as an additional language.

However, this is what we are lumbered with for now. There is hope in relation to the National Curriculum in the long term. At the end of its introduction, there is a paragraph, (short, but it is there), which is entitled, &lsquo;Developing the school curriculum.&rsquo; It says in part, &lsquo;&hellip;.the curriculum cannot remain static. It must be responsive to changes in society and the economy, and changes in the nature of schooling itself.&rsquo;[17]

One crucial way of contributing towards the creation of an education system that meets the needs of Pahari speaking pupils and other PEALS is for the dissemination of genuinely researched material about the processes of second language acquisition amongst teachers. What they get, and have only got since the introduction of the NC, is training based on false premises about the matter. There needs to be room, once more, for debate rather than what happens now, which is that the teaching profession is told, backed up by the cry, &lsquo;it&rsquo;s the law!&rsquo;, what to teach in minute detail, how to teach it and in what time-scale. It is a &lsquo;one size fits all&rsquo; approach. Education authorities have a duty, I think, to break this totalitarian mould. The authoritarianism that goes from top to bottom in the world of education (cite Ted Wragg: examination system) has stifled meaningful educational research and creativity and responsiveness in the classroom with deleterious results, especially for PEALS.

There is plenty of sound advice as to strategies to employ in the classroom in order to engage the pupils, PEALS and indigenous pupils, in their work, such as the use of relevant pictorial material, texts which reflect different cultural experiences, and so on. And, given that the Literacy Hour and all the other minutely laid down

areas of the curriculum will remain the same for the foreseeable future, it is essential that these strategies are employed. I iterate: these are attempts to ameliorate an unsustainable situation.

The timed nature of each area of the teaching day and the rigidly laid down sequences of learning in all areas of the curriculum make it very hard to use them at all effectively. Talking is given some room -- even talking in mother tongue is given a mention in passing -- but, at the chalk face, the reality is that there is hardly any time for this. At a school I know, currently in special measures, the teachers have to give in lesson plans for 2/3 weeks ahead. They are told that if, when an inspection is made and they are not doing exactly what the plans dictate, they will be deemed 'unsatisfactory'. This is a school with 100% PEALS.....

If we are to make any impact on Ofsted's findings on the attainment of ethnic minority pupils at Primary School level, which says of 'Pakistani' pupils that it is a 'group for whom (it is) hardest to establish patterns of achievement' and 'attainment appears depressed at primary level and well below national averages'[18], then a small but significant start will be made if Pahari is recognized fully as the mother tongue of the vast majority of pupils within that category. Even though it has to be acknowledged that the development of the child's grasp of her mother tongue is not presently seen as the responsibility of the school, at any rate Pahari's recognition will go some way towards respecting the cultural identity of those pupils who speak it as their mother tongue.

If the 'submersion' model of education is ever to be modified, one hopes to the extent of creating 'immersion' or 'maintenance' models[19], (see handout 2), then it is imperative to attract suitable candidates to the teaching profession from the Pahari speaking community. Reliance on scantily prepared teaching assistants from the community to oversee, (often only this), groups of recalcitrant pupils will simply not do.

The use of Pahari as a means of communication with parents about all aspects of the school will empower them to better support their children's education and to intervene appropriately if any problems arise for their children in relation to school. It is incumbent upon schools and educational authorities to make this kind of provision in Pahari. It would also help if information were provided in oral form for those parents and guardians who are not, or not yet, literate in Pahari. As its development in an accessible written form is so recent, there will be a substantial number of people requiring this form of communication.

Schools also need to have an active parental involvement policy integral to the school's life and not just tacked on as a PC afterthought. This means not leaving it at the level of calling in parents to scare them out of their wits about SATS, or to attend the Christmas play!! A lot of schools do leave it at this level. A matter for concern is how many schools have become locked fortresses to keep 'intruders' at bay. This development, I suggest, reflects the wider moral panic in society that is kept alive and kicking by the political masters and the press.

A school in which parents, particularly of younger children, can come and participate informally in lessons, if appropriate, or just sit alongside their child, is one that is welcoming to and respectful of parents, rather than implicitly hostile. At the moment, because of curriculum pressures, this kind of informality is seen as a tiresome nuisance rather than a creation of a secure environment for all.

The development of Pahari and English classes for adults on the school premises could make a considerable and positive impact: firstly, advantageously on the lives of the adults themselves; secondly, on the creation of a meaningful learning culture for everyone connected with the school. It is a source of pride, not shame, for children to see their parents learning. It would raise the status of the parents in the eyes of teachers, I would hazard a guess. These suggestions are not easily provable in terms of quantification but are no less valid for that.

A crucial factor that needs to be spelled out to parents is the importance of the maintenance and development of the children's grasp of mother tongue. Without it, particular negative consequences arise. If the child does not develop in mother tongue, her development in English can be hampered. The cognitive level of linguistic manipulation needs to be present in mother tongue in order for it to develop in the second language. If there is arrestation of this development, a situation of what has been termed 'semi-lingualism' can pertain: shallow competence in both languages. Culturally, personally and certainly educationally, this can be disastrous.

This paper has concentrated on the primary phase of education. Many of the comments made and the theories touched upon are applicable to the secondary phase. On the whole, peripatetic teachers, who may or may not know Pahari, are sent in to settle newcomers to the country, and that's about all that's done in relation to PEALS' needs at this stage. Better than nothing, but not nearly enough... The inclusion of Pahari as an optional examination subject at GCE and A levels would give a great fillip to the language in terms of its recognition, maintenance and development.

Local Education Authorities, 'outsourced' or otherwise, have a pivotal role to play in transforming good theory into good practice. The status of the role of mother tongue in education needs to be raised, visibly, in the form of the appointment of senior Education Officers who have the prerequisite knowledge and clout to effect change for the better delivery of education to pupils for whom English is an additional language. These officers might even be in a position to ask the huge question, always begged in current debates: what constitutes 'good education'?

Lastly, let's remember the fact that learning, talking and listening in a second or third language, unless you are one of the fortunate few who are fully bi- or tri-lingual, is an extremely tiring business. The latest Blairism to be trained on education is to provide additional lessons for underachievers. In so far as it has been thought out (I WISH!), these will occur at the end of the regular school day. What madness! No child is going to have the proper energy for this, even if it were to learn Pahari. That'll be the day!!

Helen Goodway, 07.03.05.

[1] The Bullock report, London, 1975, H.M.S.O.

[2] Definition of mother tongue in Tove Skutnab-Kangas, Bilingualism or Not, The Education of Minorities, publ., Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1981, p.18.

[3] The National Literacy Strategy,  
Supporting Pupils Learning English as an Additional Language, DfEE, 1999.

[4] Ibid, Module 2, Whole-class  
teaching, 2.1.

[5] Ibid, Introduction, OHT 5b.

[6] For example, research by Georgios  
Tsiakols in Bremen

[7] op. cit., NLS, Supporting&hellip;.Module 2,  
Whole-class teaching, M2 H3

[8] Ofsted report, 1999.

[9] Op. cit., Tove Skutnab-Kangas,  
p.191.

[10] op.cit., Tove Skutnab-Kangas,  
p.314.

[11] The National Curriculum, Inclusion:  
Providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils, p.27.

[12] Jim Cummins& M. Guluban, 1974,  
Some4 Effects of Bilingualism on Cognitive Functioning in, S.Carey (ed.), 1974.

[13] Op. cit., NLS, Supporting&hellip;., 1.6.

[14] Ibid, Introduction OHT7, quoted from

DfEE, NLS: The Management of Literacy at School Level, 1988, p.77.

[15] op. cit., Tove Skutnab-Kangas,  
p.113.

[16] op. cit., Tove Skutnab-Kangas,  
p.113.

[17] op. cit., The National Curriculum,  
p.13

[18] op.cit., NLS, Supporting&hellip;,Introduction,  
OHT2

[19] op. cit., Tove Skutnab-Kangas,  
p.191