

LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NAGALAND

Sociolinguistic Dimensions

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Editor

Rajesh Sachdeva

This book seeks to fill in a long felt need of providing a bird's eye view of the issues involved in Language Education in Nagaland in particular and perhaps North-East India in general, where ethnicity and nationalism are often seen as confronting one another. Growth of literacy has only added to state of discontent as people have become increasingly aware of the role of education in development, but the slow pace of socio-economic changes is unable to cater to their emerging aspirations. It is often claimed that *to plan language is to plan society*, but the language planners in the country are hardly aware of the diversity of context(s) and hence the need to appraise them was long over due.

There is a growing feeling in the North-East that political problems permeate all fields, which needs to be questioned. This book is a modest attempt in that direction so that others can first evaluate the complex multilingual setting and then join in the debate and create a feeling in the Nagas that their needs and aspirations are worth a genuine look for they may provide for the most valuable lessons to those who value diversity and want to manage it without impairing its essence. This book brings together views of some of the important functionaries and ideologies in different linguistic communities of Nagaland with an aim to stir those who are on the fringes to join in the endeavour to shape their own destiny. Language development requires conscious effort, which can provide for an opportunity for the development of the people. This book may appraise the people of the work to be done.

Dr. Rajesh Sachdeva, Reader in the Department of Linguistics, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, is a postgraduate in Linguistics from Deccan College, Pune and earlier worked in the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore (1973–88), where he commenced research in the area of Sociolinguistics. His Ph.D. work (1981) on the study of Punjabi-Hindi Bilingualism in Delhi was conducted at a time when the Punjab problem had begun surfacing. It awakened him to the sensitivity of Sociolinguistic work and the difficulties inherent in language and identity studies, which are often subject of emotional political issues. His subsequent work (1984–88) in the Wagdi speaking tribal areas of Rajasthan brought home the need for bilingual education programmes and the immense challenge involved in doing applied Sociolinguistic research. Literacy issues have engaged his interest ever since and he has contributed articles on the use of spoken languages in literacy endeavours. The interest in language education has guided his work in Nagaland, where he spent several years (1988–95). Considering the paucity of materials and the complexity of the situation, he has found it necessary to dwell on the views of the people within, before involving them in a dialogue to bring about a change. He has also examined issues involved in framing an *explicit language policy in education for Nagaland* (1996) based on his research in the area.

He is best remembered in Nagaland as the General Secretary of the THINKERS FORUM (1991–95) who was instrumental in conducting seminars—*'On a Vision for Nagaland'*; *'The Idea of a University'*; and *'On Sovereignty and Human Rights: An Unconditional Dialogue'*.

Presently the author is involved in conducting regular courses in *Sociolinguistic and Language Planning and Language Development in the North-East* and his students have undertaken research on *Multilingualism and Linguistic Diversity in Shillong*. The basic premise guiding his work is that the people should be involved in defining their problems and also in exploring alternative solutions and the research must directly influence the people themselves.

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Email: regency@satyam.net.in

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1068

Phone No.: 250101(O), 250074(R)
e-mail: mirimrinal@hotmail.com

North-Eastern Hill University
NEHU Campus, Shillong - 793 022 (Meghalaya)

Mrinal Miri
Vice-Chancellor

10th April, 2001

Foreword

It gives me immense pleasure to write this foreword for the book entitled "*Language Education in Nagaland: Sociolinguistic Dimensions*" edited by Dr. Rajesh Sachdeva. The book is partly the result of a Seminar held quite some time ago in Kohima with the active collaboration of the North-East Regional Centre of the ICSSR.

The problems of education, both at the primary and elementary levels in the entire North-East—but particularly in Nagaland—are well known. There are many mother tongues, and owing to the fact that most of these are not written down modern education through the medium of mother tongues at the primary and elementary levels seems almost impossible. However, with efforts like the Seminar of which the present book is a record and many others made by organisations like the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, the problems, to some minimal extent, have been mitigated. The present work, therefore, must count as a very useful contribution to understanding the problems of education in Nagaland.

I might also add that our entire view of education in the North-East, particularly in the tribal areas, might have been different if we had taken the traditional methods of

transmitting values, skills and knowledge among the tribal communities, more seriously than we ever did.


Mrinal Miri

Prefatory Remarks

Several years back a seminar was conducted in Nagaland in which the participants were able to air their views on issues related to language education in the state. None of the participants had written a paper on the theme and several were not sure what they ought to say. It was obvious that there was lack of information in the state on the subject and hence the first felt need was to just create a profile of the speech communities. There was also a realization that some issues that were general could be best examined as policy related, while others were to be examined in their local context. While the need to review the policy was to involve further sociolinguistic research, the views on the use of different languages were to be recorded and made available for further debate. It was felt that the views of the government—both state and central—were important as also those of teachers, researchers, administrators, trainers and material-producers. The views of the people were to be elicited through research so that the recipients of policy are able to participate in shaping their own destiny. This book attempts a part of that former task by bringing together some of the different views.

Some actors who had participated in the seminar and contributed their views are not visible in this volume, for their written views were not available. Nevertheless, their support in staging the event must be acknowledged. Here in one would like to mention the three former Directors of school education—Yajen Aier, Maosasang and Talitsuba, who were able to provide the perspective needed for the debate dwelling on the constraints and challenges. While the recommendations of the seminar appear towards the end of this work, we begin instead with the views of the ex-Minister of school education—Imkong

and those of Dr. Annamalai [former Director of CIIL], which have been included after the seminar and I must thank them for the time they gave. Also included are the views of T.A. Shishak [Principal, Patkai Christian College] whose concern for the education of the Nagas is well known.

The funds for the meet were provided partly by the ICSSR [NERC] and partly by NEHU and one must record appreciation for that timely support, for these little gestures often contribute immensely in the creation of records.

I do feel guilty in the delay that has occurred in publishing their views, but the consolation is nothing else has since appeared on the subject that would render these obsolete.

R. Sachdeva

Acknowledgements

I thank all those who have made it possible for this book to be finally out. It was produced in fits and starts, changing its form from the world of ideas to oral discourse and then into the world of the handwritten manuscript, from where it went to my typist in Kohima—Leena Solo—who could decode those scraps of untidy sheets, and then finally it was Dr. N.P. Goel who transformed it into the manuscript for the publishers. I must thank Prof. Mrinal Miri, Dr. C.J. Thomas, ICSSR-NERC for getting promptly in touch with the publishers. The publishers must take credit for accepting a manuscript, which is not so much for the highbrow intellectual as it is for the people on the ground and the decision makers who are unable to take the right decisions for want of appropriate feel of the setting. Most of all I want to thank my many friends in Nagaland who made me feel that I could take the liberty of presenting the insider's view, for they always valued an authentic observer who could articulate. The many shortcomings that shall survive are because of my own inability to live up to those hopes.

22nd January 2001
Shillong

R. Sachdeva

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List of Contributors

1. Easterine Iralu
Department of English
Nagaland University
2. Pari Sanyu, SCERT
Department of Education
Govt. of Nagaland
3. Dr. K. Kapfo
Central Institute of Indian Languages
Mysore
4. H.R. Borah
Former Additional Director
Directorate of School Education
Govt. of Nagaland
5. F.C. Datta
SCERT, Department of Education
Govt. of Nagaland
6. B.B. Kumar
Former Principal of Science College
Kohima, Nagaland
7. E. Annamalai
Former Director of Central Institute of Indian Languages
Mysore
8. D. Kuolie
Department of Tenyidie
Nagaland University

9. All Authors Mentioned in the Compilation of Profiles are Language Officers/ Assistants in the Directorate of School Education, Govt. of Nagaland
10. Tuisem A. Shishak
Principal
Paticai Christian College
Nagaland

Part I
Ideologies and Viewpoints

CHAPTER 1

An Overview of Issues in Language Education in Nagaland

R. Sachdeva

The Theme(s)

Language and Education go hand-in-hand. Education is not only through language (MEDIUM), but also about language (SUBJECT), and it is often remarked that all teachers are language teachers. Since language permeates all social life and is the most important tool for communication, educationists can ignore it only by risking education itself, for it cannot be denied that education is undoubtedly concerned about transmission of content, as well as values, and words embody both. Languages also display remarkable ability or an inherent potential capacity, to convey these new things through old means, often risking change, although the speakers may not always exercise that potential and in practice, prefer to borrow the readymade stuff from other languages to fill in the gaps. It also so happens that in the very process of coping with new content the languages are enriched and education becomes a conscious process of language development.

In multilingual societies, where different languages complement and compete with one another to cater to the communicative needs of each group, and the collective needs of the speech community as a whole, some languages gain in

usage but not necessarily at the cost of the others, although cases of language 'loss' have come to light. The Educationists, who have to plan, which languages should be used as medium or subjects up to which level, have to ascertain the dictates of collective will in a democratic society. They have to get in touch with their own problems and pose their own solutions, and it is here that the sharing of experience with members of other societies can play a great role. The only danger in a 'dialogue' is that often enough people may 'import' solutions from 'without' which have worked well in different settings, and in the process import an additional problem 'within'. The search for one common language in a multilingual society, instead of a 'common set of codes' may be an example in this direction.

The Setting

Nagaland is, undoubtedly, one of the most complex sociolinguistic settings in the entire world, wherein, several genetically related but often mutually unintelligible languages, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman family, are used along with other unrelated languages like English and *Nagamese*, to cater to the communicative needs of a society interested not only in preserving the linguistic identity of each tribal group at the micro-level, but also forging a unity across them and evolving a NAGA identity at the Macro-level which transcends those differences.

Seventeen of these tribal languages (including a non-Naga tribal language Kuki) are recognised for use as media in the initial stages of the educational programmes but only four of them survive as subjects upto the High School level, and only one is taught at the College level. English, on the other hand, is chosen to be the sole official state language and begins atleast as a subject, if not as a medium, (it is invariably the medium in the ever growing private schools), and from middle school onwards it is the only medium and is also taught as a subject at all levels. Despite increasing literacy and spread of education, English is not the language of the masses but does enjoy mass attitudinal support and is also seen as a tool for promoting unity and gaining prestige. *Nagamese*, perhaps,

is the most used and the least liked language which is used for interlingual situations involving inter-tribal communication and at times for OUTGROUP communication. It is a lingua franca of the hills, and although it is more used in the urban areas, the rural areas have their own users. The attitudes towards it often vary from tolerance to marked intolerance and some Nagas consider it the greatest threat to their quest for a "pure" 'NAGA' identity. While pragmatic reasons have often directed the decision-makers to use it over mass media, its use has also invited resentment since it is seen a process of developing the unwanted language.

Hindi, unlike *Nagamese*, does find a place in the formal system as a part of the official 'three-language-formula' policy and meets with lesser resistance, but only seldom do people feel its utility as a sufficient cause to achieve competence in it. In 'out-group' situations, especially where they (the Nagas) are certain of the others code being 'Hindi related', Hindi is occasionally used, and this may be indicative of either a boundary marking mechanism or of changing socio-political reality with accommodation being born. However, despite the multilingual character of the language use patterns, the educational domain is geared more towards the growth of English alone, a move, which is felt would strengthen the Naga cause of becoming an independent modern state on the verge of nationhood.

Planning and Research

Language planning, i.e., planning 'of' language and 'through' language is of utmost importance in Nagaland. The role of attitudes, that preclude certain choices and include others while shaping social change and fulfilling societal aspirations, needs to be better understood. The existing policies and their implementation needs to be reviewed and new impetus given to the desirable aspects while taking care to prune the undesirable features. There is a need to share our experiences in the field with all others, for education does concern the entire society. The roles of agencies, governmental and non-governmental, has to be critically examined and support found to encourage the efforts of deserving.

One critical area in which there is definite paucity is Research. This has to be linked with a felt need for better 'training', 'materials', 'evaluation', and 'feedback' from one area into the other. Several questions have also crept in the area of spellings and writing systems, which need to be answered. In addition there are questions related to 'models' of education in both formal and non-formal domains of education. The future course of action needs to be formulated, for postponement of this could only be at the risk of allowing problems to grow out of size, which may then survive forever.

Agencies at Work

While Nagaland has evinced keen interest among scholars because of its peculiar socio-linguistic setting and political aspirations, the Government of India has not been very keen to entertain foreign scholars in the area. It has decided to take over this mantle of research in its own hand and, it would be important to point out that, it has indeed done some commendable work in this direction through its most important agency—The Central Institute of Indian Language, Mysore. The Philosophy guiding their work will be evident through the paper included here in which the present author has a Dialogue with Dr. E. Annamalai—who was then the Director of C.I.I.L. According to him C.I.I.L. had worked to lend some 'Cohesiveness' to the 'Statehood' of Nagaland by evolving a viewpoint, which does not consider it unnatural that 'ethnic' and 'regional' viewpoint(s) may apparently be seen as against the national interests. From the Indian viewpoint, it was important to regard National Identity as a multi-layered phenomenon in which the micro level unfolds and expands through local, ethnic, regional and national layers to be seen at the macro-level as multi-layered. There is of-course a need to have a good idea of the 'ground conditions', the 'context(s) of communication', and their study of *Nagamese* or *Naga Pidgin*, as they prefer to call it, to reveal the birth of codes when there is a necessity, is of real value in understanding the communication patterns across linguistic and tribal boundaries. Dr. Annamalai is quite aware of the attitudes against it and the linkage of this issue with linguistic identity. Hence,

despite earlier pronouncements by the C.I.I.L. scholar Dr. M.V. Sreedhar to promote its use (Nagamese) for education as a kind of 'common mother tongue', which would be cost effective, the Director, C.I.I.L. is not willing to pursue the path. However, he feels that the fate of Naga languages will be served better if they are linked to other Indian languages. He is also of the opinion that development of the creative potential of the local languages is a better way of preserving and enriching the Naga culture than the pseudo modernisation which is being sought by getting into English alone.

The descriptive work on Naga languages had been undertaken earlier by some missionaries and anthropologists but the C.I.I.L. scholars went into greater detail on the subject. Thus Grammars, Phonetic Readers, and Dictionaries were written for *Angami*, *Ao*, *Lotha*, and *Sema*. In addition *Konyak* and *Kheza* have also been analysed. *Nagamese* was analysed linguistically and sociolinguistically with variations across tribes being noted. Besides, a dialogue with the Officers/Assistants of all the other languages had also commenced and pedagogical grammars are being prepared. There is of-course a need to step up the pace and also explore new avenues of research. The dearth of local scholarship is quite evident for in some languages nothing worthwhile has been tabled in terms of its description.

Another agency, which has done a fair amount of work, is the *Nagaland Bhasha Parishad*. While it suffers on the quality front, often importing a taxonomic framework in which the materials are being fitted, it provides a fair quantity of work, and what is more, explores writing these languages in *Devnagari* script. Dr. B.B. Kumar had been a Key figure in the organisation and he gives us his brief views on the 'Language Scene in North-East India'.

SCERT has been a body concerned with material production in general and its work in the English Cell is tabled here. They are obviously doing a fair deal but considering the fact that many of the teachers are not yet trained, they have to continue to strive a lot more. It will also be better if they interact more with the material producers in Naga languages so that they can encode 'local' culture in English as well and the 'other' culture in local languages.

The Directorate of School Education is the main body involved in the production of textual materials in Naga languages. Their Language Officers/Assistants are key members of their own literature committees. With their limited competence they are involved in a rather challenging task. There is a definite need to provide them with a better academic environment. Also, it would be important if all the languages are treated equally and posts created to encourage better work. While many of them have received training from C.I.I.L. there is still plenty of room for improvement.

Last of all we may also look into the work being done by the Department of Linguistics, NEHU, which has been set up to help develop the local languages and to research into their structure and use. Two important research projects are underway which involved a questionnaire-based study on various 'Issues in Language and Education', and 'A comparative study of Naga Languages'. The Department has been suffering immensely from lack of Resource personnel and funds, which has minimised its effectiveness. It has of-course been trying to get people interested in linguistic issues to come together and debate their own problems.

Areas of Work

During the entire proceedings, the reader may be led to think along various issues. Most of them need to be researched further. The list below will be helpful to those involved in working in these areas.

1. The present state of language education in Nagaland: Policies and their implementation.
2. Aspects of language planning in tribal areas: Past and present policies. Thrust areas and change.
3. Literacy in Nagaland: Non-formal and Adult Education.
4. Medium of Education: Mother Tongue and English. Models of Education—monolingual or bilingual.
5. Material Production: Agencies involved and Types of materials. Literature Committees and their functioning.
6. Common Language: Alternative Solutions—English, Nagamese, Naga Languages, Construction of a new language.

7. Language Standardisation: Spelling reforms, selection of varieties, and elaboration of functions, acceptance of change.
8. Interrelationship of domains: Language use patterns inside and outside the School/College. Teacher-student Interaction Patterns.
9. Language attitudes and Literacy attitudes: Attitudes towards language learning and language teaching.
10. Extent of bilingualism and types of bilingualism: Interference of languages and transfer of learning.
11. Spoken language vs. written language: Formulation of Communicative role(s). Language as a subject and the language of subjects.
12. Development of languages: Mass media and its role in education.
13. Training of teachers: Motivation and orientation programmes.
14. Research Programmes: Issues for research. Feedback mechanisms.
15. Language and Identity: Educational development and preservation of culture.
16. Language as an index of social change and as an instrument of social change.

Other books on North-East India

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