

Language in South Asia

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(1990). This dual role of English may appear paradoxical at first sight, but it is a natural consequence of the globalization of English.

Conclusion

In order to meet the formidable challenge of reaching more than one billion inhabitants, scattered in approximately 750,000 villages, South Asian media experts and planners have not only pioneered new media forms, but also have mastered the art of crafting messages customized to effectively meet their audiences' regional sensibilities and tastes. The dazzling array of both conventional and nonconventional media forms together with programming in dozens of major and scores of minor languages of the region adds distinction and color to the media scene of South Asia. While multiple-language mixing is the most distinctive feature of advertising discourse, mixing with English represents its unifying feature. These features render various manifestations of creativity in media discourse. With the arrival of satellite TV, the appetite for media is growing at a faster rate than ever witnessed before, so are creativity and diversity in media.

20 Language in cinema

Wimal Dissanayake

Introduction

We normally tend to think of cinema as essentially a visual medium in which language plays only a subsidiary and inconsequential role, lending support to the ambitions of the visual images displayed on the screen. However, as modern film scholars, through their carefully conceived and nuanced analyses, have demonstrated, language and the soundtrack fulfill far more significant roles in film diegesis than such common assumptions would have us believe. A work like *The Voice in Cinema* by Michel Chion (1999) underscores the fact that the human voice is of pivotal importance in the experience of cinema and that the relationship that exists between the voice and the image is complex and many sided, and serves to foreground the complex ontology of this technology-based medium of entertainment. Thus, various aspects of language are increasingly attracting the attention of film scholars with commendable results.

Language fulfills many important functions in cinema, which are significantly linked to questions of narrative discourse, content, form, and styles of presentation. It facilitates the forward movement of the narrative, reinforces the intent of the image, opens up psychological depths in characters, and guides the viewer through the cinematic diegesis. These can be termed the positive functions of language in cinema. One has only to examine any popular Hollywood film to realize the positive ways in which language functions in cinema. On the other hand, language can function in a negative way, challenging, counterpointing, and subverting the imperatives of the image as is evidenced in some of the innovative films of Jean-Luc Godard. Hence, one can justifiably say that the function of language in cinema is complex and multifaceted, dispelling the widely held notion that language is of secondary importance in the cinematic experience.

The relationship between language and cinema varies from one cultural geography to another, thereby underlining the nature of cinema as a significant social practice that brings together economics, politics, ideology, technology, the weight of tradition, and so on into fruitful conversation. In the case of

South Asian cinema, language is of crucial importance in the constitution and communication of the filmic experience, enabling the propulsion of the narrative in culture-specific ways. Unlike the standard Hollywood film, which positively valorizes linear development, tightness of structure and unified narrative trajectories, South Asian films by and large tend to privilege circular development of plots, loosely combined segments with independent lives of their own, and constant detours, preferring a digressive and nonlinear mode of narrative discourse. Within such a narrative strategy, language, as is indicated later, plays a crucial role.

In South Asian films, like those produced in India and Sri Lanka, song and dance sequences, fight episodes, dialogues and moral exhortations, comedy, and so on while tenuously connected to the flow of the narrative also have an autonomous life of their own. For example, dialogues play a crucial role in the cinematic experience textualized in South Asian film, and very often they are enjoyed and appreciated as independent and self-contained segments. The dialogues and declamations of Shivaji Ganeshan in *Parashakti* (1946) or Anjad Khan in *Sholay* (1975) – two highly popular movies made in south and north India, respectively – are often played on public address systems at fairs and other public gatherings, much to the joy and uplift of the listeners. Such dialogues are applauded in the theaters. Just as much as there is a star system in operation among actors and actresses, there is a star system in operation among writers, suggesting the importance of this area of activity. K. A. Abbas, M. Karunanidhi, and Salm-Javed in India and Hugo Fernando and Sirisena Wimalaweera in Sri Lanka are good examples of writers who earned a national reputation as writers of memorably powerful dialogue. This general predilection for, and investment in, dialogues has deep implications for the question of language in South Asian cinema.

The languages of South Asian cinema

This chapter focuses on language in films produced in India and Sri Lanka in relation to the questions of narrative and politics, which are deeply imbricated with the role of language. The conclusion focuses on certain areas related to this topic that merit further sustained study.

India presents us with one of the most complex, and at times confusing, linguistic landscapes found in any country in the world. The government has officially recognized eighteen languages (now twenty-two), and English as an associate official language. These “scheduled” languages are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Manipuri, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. According to the *Linguistic Survey of India*,

there are 179 languages and 544 dialects that can be divided into four distinct groups – Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Chinese. Some others maintain that there are around 3,000 (in 1961 Census) to 10,000 (in 1991 Census) mother tongues in India (see Chapters 5, 6, and 10 for latest data and discussion of language in India). This complex linguistic landscape, understandably enough, has generated many conflicts, at times extremely ferocious, as for example between the advocates of English and Hindi as national languages and Tamil and Hindi in the south. In the case of Sri Lanka there are three main languages, Sinhalese, Tamil, and English, and the current civil war occurring in the island between the Sinhalese and Tamils is largely language based. Although narrative film have been made in most of the officially recognized languages in India, the languages that have and continue to dominate Indian cinema are Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu. Similarly, although feature films have been made in all three languages prevalent in Sri Lanka, the number of movies made in Tamil and English is negligible.

The situation of language-based cinema in India becomes more complicated when we realize that movies are sometimes made simultaneously in different languages and are continually dubbed from one language to another. For example in the studio era of the 1930s, identical takes were made of each shot in different languages, very often with different actors and actresses, but with the same music and crew of technicians. V. Shantaram's *Kankar* (Marathi) and *Duniya Na Mane* (Hindi) made in 1937 are cases in point. Hence, the easy move to identify Indian film in terms of language has to be tempered by the knowledge that there are complex processes at work.

Formative influences

A useful way of approaching the issue of language and Indian cinema – the complex ways in which language has inflected the growth of Indian cinema – is to explore it in terms of the formative influences that shaped Indian movies. Among these influences, classical Sanskrit theater, the folk theater, the Parsi theater, and the Hollywood musical are, to my mind, important and allow us to attain a better understanding of the complexities of the situation. Classical Sanskrit theater (see Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1963) inspired the imagination of early Indian filmmakers who were also attracted by the power of the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, with which it is vitally connected. One of the noteworthy features of the Sanskrit theater was the linguistic hierarchy and exclusivities of enunciatory positions. Sanskrit was used by kings and courtiers and Brahmins, and various form of Prakrit were employed by women and people belonging to the lower rungs of the social ladder (see Chapter 8; Hock and Pandharipande 1978; Krishnamurti 1997).

Hence language as a reflector and enforcer of social divisions was central to the classical Indian theatrical experience, and this linguistic desire to preserve the social hierarchy seems to have animated the early India filmmakers as well.

Since the decline of the Sanskrit theater somewhere around the twelfth century or so, owing to a variety of social and religious causes, various regional theaters, which can be regarded as lineal descendants of the Sanskrit theater, emerged in India. In many of the regional folk theaters, such as Yatra, Ram Lila, Bhagavata Mela, Yakshagana, and Terukkutu, we find the same linguistic hierarchization that characterized Sanskrit stage plays. In addition, many of the comic episodes, which were impromptu, held up to ridicule some topical event or occurrence, and once again linguistic diversity was used to good effect. This aspect of the folk theater had an impact on the imagination of the early Indian film directors.

The most dominant influence on the formation of popular Indian cinema was the Parsi theater that came into prominence, and began to gain international recognition, in the nineteenth century. The Parsi theatre influenced the theatrical imagination of vast numbers of theater goers not only in India but also in neighboring countries like Sri Lanka. The Parsi theatre represented a tradition of melodrama that combined realism and stylization in equal measure to dramatize both social and historical experiences. And the use of language in these plays is extremely interesting in that there was an attempt made to combine the power of rhetoric, the vigor of colloquial speech and grandiloquence to communicate experiences that would appeal to the generality of the masses.

Finally, the impact of the Hollywood musicals of the 1940s on the growth of Indian popular cinema is important in that they served as an object lesson for Indian film directors to make musicals based on contemporary experiences using colloquial speech. Here again the use of language both for dramatic and musical purposes merits close study. Thus, what we find is that the various formative influences on Indian cinema that served to infuse it with its characteristic stylistic features and narrative strategies were vitally imbricated with questions of language.

Linguistic structure

The linguistic structure that undergirds Indian and Sri Lankan films and the diverse linguistic styles that operate in them invite closer analysis. Sinhalese films are of course largely modeled on Indian film. There are a number of linguistic styles in operation that give the Sri Lankan films their recognizable character: *elitet language*; *urban language*; *anglicized middle-class language*; *rural language*; *language as spoken by linguistic minorities like Tamils and Muslims*; *classically inspired language as found in the lyrics*; and so on. Each of

these styles has its own distinctive lexicon, syntax, idioms, and intonation. In addition, just like popular Indian films, Sinhalese films are replete with melodious songs that contribute significantly to their popularity. These songs contain very sophisticated lyrics, very often composed by highly talented lyricists of the caliber of Mahagama Sekera, Chandrarane Manavasinghe, Madawala Ramayake, and Sunil Ariyaratne. Interestingly, these highly literary and ornate lyrics do not relate directly to the social background and the linguistic styles that are normally associated with the different characters. These lyrics seem to occupy a kind of transcendental space with their own recognizable conventions and codes of composition. Speaking about Hindi film songs, Madhav Prasad (1998) observes that,

the lyrics are written in a language which has its own set repertoire of images and tropes for themes like romantic love, separation, rejection, maternal love, marriage etc. The songs adopt a literary style which has a predilection for certain recurrent metaphors: "*naijfi, shamalparwana, chaman, ballar, nazare* and so on."

As remarked by many commentators, these images and tropes are largely inspired by Urdu poetry. Songs, which are "de rigueur" in Indian and Sinhalese popular films, occupy an independent space, and they are memorable for catchy tunes as well as romantic imagery. Let me give two examples from Sinhalese cinema. The first is a love song and the second, a "philosophical" rumination. They are taken from the two films *Sujatha* (1953) and *Asoka* (1955), respectively.

Love's glow has faded
You have departed leaving behind your image in my heart
Will a fallen flower reattach to the branch?
Just so, our love was severed.

We are born singly
We die singly
In this brief period
Why be frolicsome?
Why should we feast and dress up showily?
Where will we take our body after death?

Similarly, Hindi films are replete with songs containing romantic imagery and "philosophical" thought. Let me illustrate this point with an excerpt from a song from one of Raj Kapoor's films, *Saryam, Shivam, Sundarim* (1978).

They say, where even the sun cannot reach, the poet can
But neither sun nor poet can reach you, my beautiful
For even as I stretch my arms, you fly away,
As though on angel wings, my love

Narrative structure

One cannot understand the nature and significance of language in Indian and Sri Lankan films without paying adequate attention to the narrative structure of these works. Broadly speaking, these films can be characterized as romantic musical melodramas that set in motion the interplay of the good and the evil and demonstrate the ultimate triumph of the good over the evil. Their narrative structure is loose, episodic, and circular, and each of the loosely connected segments, like music and dance, action, humor, and dialogue are relatively autonomous. In seeking to understand the role of language in Indian and Sri Lankan cinema, we need to explore the manifold ways in which audiences respond to and valorize dialogues, songs, and comic episodes. Dialogue writing in Indian and Sri Lankan popular films is an art form by itself with its own recognizable conventions, linguistic registers, tropes, and idioms. Dialogue, rather than being an ancillary adjunct which serves to carry forward the plot of the film, as in most Hollywood films, takes on a life of its own as an independent entity. Consequently, language in Indian and Sri Lankan popular films assumes a very important and recognizable role in the cinematic experience both as a propeller of the narrative and as an independent entity in its own right. Popular cinema in South Asia operates against a background of consumer culture and capitalist modernity, and the role of language in cinema has to be understood in terms of the discursive regimes of consumer culture. These observations are mostly relevant to the popular cinemas of India and Sri Lanka. In the art cinemas as represented by the works of such film directors as Satyajit Ray, Minna Sen, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan in India and Lester James Peries, and Prasanna Vihanganage in Sri Lanka, dialogue functions far less independently than in the popular commercial films.

Politics of language

Another area that merits attention is the politics of language in South Asia. More than most other national cinemas, Indian cinema presents a convoluted relationship between the politics of language and the desires of cinema. Let us consider the question of Hindi or better still Hindustani. Indian popular cinema has played a pivotal role in the dissemination of Hindustani as a lingua franca not only in India but in some of the neighboring countries as well where Indian films enjoy a wide popularity. Nearly 45 percent of the population speaks Hindustani in India and the Bombay-based commercial cinema has contributed immeasurably to this dissemination. The gap between Hindustani and Urdu spoken by the Muslims in India is negligible despite the religious nuances. For example, growing up in Sri Lanka where Hindi movies were extremely popular,

avid filmgoers picked up not only words and phrases of Hindi but rudiments of the language as well. This is also true for countries such as Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, and Indonesia. This popularity of Hindustani has to be understood against the efforts of the government and various state institutions to popularize a highly Sanskritized Hindi. This so-called "pure" Hindi, which was largely a hothouse product, was put into circulation by government radio broadcast, academic writings, and state-run institutions, but the popular Hindi propagated by the commercial cinema is clearly outpacing the so-called "pure" Hindi (see S. N. Sridhar 1987).

The vexed question of politics of language in Indian cinema has many sides to it related to issues of nationhood, regionalism, art, and entertainment. As was stated earlier popular Indian cinema played a crucial role in the dissemination of Hindi as a vital lingua franca. However there were other developments taking place within Indian cinema that had a direct bearing on the question of politics of language. Since the 1960s with the rise of the so-called "New Indian cinema" more and more artistic films based on regional languages were being made. The state, through the National Film Development Corporation, contributed significantly to the growth of the New Indian cinema. Films based in Bengal and Kerala had the most profound effect. Before long, interesting, and artistically significant films were being made in such languages as Assamese, Oriya, and Marathi. The rise of the regional cinema and the international recognition and legitimacy granted to it had the effect of focusing more and more attention on these films. This trend served to enforce the constitutionally accepted notion of a multilingual and multiracial India. Interestingly, the rise of the regional cinema and the increasing attention directed to the new cinema as represented by the works of such filmmakers as Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Gautam Ghose, and Ketan Mehta had the effect of reinforcing the hegemony of the Indian nation-state.

While interesting developments were taking place in the domain of art cinema, consequential transformation was also occurring in the sphere of popular cinema. In the 1960s and 1970s, Bombay (now Mumbai) was the capital of Indian popular cinema, and Hindi films exerted a deep and pervasive influence on the thought and imagination of the generality of moviegoers. However, by the 1980s, popular films in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, made in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, respectively, began to be produced in large numbers, and these challenged the supremacy of the Bombay-based Hindi commercial films. Now popular cinema became pluricentric and some of these films made in south Indian languages began to appeal to the diasporic communities spread throughout the world, just as much as the Hindi films had done earlier. This linguistic picture is complicated by the fact that popular films made in one language get dubbed in another

language, as for example Mani Ratnam's films that were originally made in Tamil and later dubbed in Hindi.

When discussing the politics of language reflected in and fashioned by Indian cinema one cannot ignore the indissoluble link between language and cinema in Tamil Nadu. Powerful politicians like C. N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi cannot be separated from their popularity in cinema and the power of the Dravida Munnetra Kazagam. The Dravida Munnetra Kazagam films with their desire to challenge the power of the Congress party and the Brahmanical religious authority, and with their desire to propagate Tamil as a language with a hoary past are vitally connected to the question of politics of language in cinema. A film like *Parashakti*, which gained wide popularity not only in India but also in countries like Sri Lanka, illustrates this admirably. It valorized Dravidian heritage in defiantly prideful terms. M. S. Pandian (1992) who has done considerable work on this topic discusses the manner in which the dialogues contained in *Parashakti* had a galvanizing impact on Tamil audiences stirring their deepest passions and enabling the spread of Dravidian culture.

Mixing languages

Any discussion of the role of language in Indian and Sri Lankan cinema should lead to a nexus of issues of indubitable interest to linguists as well as scholars of communication. For example, let us consider the question of code switching and code mixing that we frequently find in Indian films representative of both the popular and artistic tradition. A person who speaks two or more languages is often confronted with the choice of using one or the other in different situations and this choice involves code switching. Code mixing is more subtle in the sense that a word or phrase or locution that is associated with one language is injected into a discussion conducted in another (B. Kachru 1978a; S. N. Sridhar 1978; S. N. Sridhar and K. K. Sridhar 1980). This is extremely common in Indian cinema as, indeed, in South Asian society in general, prompting us to raise such questions as when code switching occurs, under what circumstances, and what the cultural and communicational implications of this phenomenon are. For example in Satyajit Ray's films, which deal with middle-class experiences, there is frequent code mixing between Bengali and English. Similarly in the movies of a Sri Lankan filmmaker such as Lester James Peres we find frequent code-mixing of Sinhalese and English. The communicative and linguistic import of these phenomena need to be explored more fully in order to understand the complex dynamics of language and cinema in South Asia (see Dissanayake and Ratnavihushana 2000).

Humor is another fruitful area of inquiry. In Indian and Sri Lankan films much of the humor is generated through language-linguistic misunderstanding.

For example, in popular Sinhalese films until very recent times the way Tamil speakers of Sinhalese mispronounced and misunderstood the language formed a vital part of humor. Similarly, characters who sought to speak in English or use English phrases with less than satisfactory results became the butt of humor. Hence linguistic humor in South Asian cinema is a topic that can yield valuable results in the hands of sensitive researchers.

Earlier on in this chapter, the interplay of diverse linguistic registers in South Asian films was discussed. The author wishes to suggest that this phenomenon can be most productively comprehended in relation to the concept of heteroglossia formulated by Bakhtin. Although his focus of interest is the novel, it appears that this concept could be used with equal profit and validity in the domains of drama and film. For Bakhtin (1981) the world is constituted by a plurality of language each of which possesses its own specific formal characteristics. However, these characteristics are never solely formal and each is imbricated with social values, visions, and formations. The concept of heteroglossia enables Bakhtin to identify a locus within which the unifying and fissiparous forces that infect discourses converge. This provides a framework with which to study the interplay of diverse linguistic registers in Hindi, Bengali, or Sinhalese films, thereby focusing on questions of ideology in the construction of linguistic subjectivity as well as the polyphonicity associated with the national space.

The use of English expressions and locutions in Indian and Sri Lankan cinema, is another topic that can prove to be extremely significant in our understanding of language, cinema, and cultural discourse in South Asia. Let us, for example, consider the English expression, "I love you," that has become widely popular in Indian films in recent times. As Prasad (1998) points out, it is becoming increasingly clear that in Hindi commercial films as well as in south Indian films, songs and dialogues are animated by this English expression. This is, of course, vitally connected with consumer culture of which Indian cinema is a powerful representation. Prasad goes on to say that,

but beyond this consumerist function, the utopian aspiration to social transformation that the concept of love embodies also finds itself invoking a certain state-form as its true ground. A striking illustration of this intersection of consumerism, romantic love in its congealed form as an English expression, and the modern nation-state is provided by Mani Ratnam's highly popular Tamil film "Rojaa."

He quotes the following lines from the film to establish his point:

Hey, village girl, if I say something to you in English, will you be able to understand it?
Say it, let's see
I love you

This exchange takes place between a married couple holidaying in Kashmir. As is customary in popular Indian films, after the couple cavorts around in the hotel room they get into bed. Although the husband is from Madras (Chennai) and the wife is from the hinterland in Tamil Nadu, they choose to use the English expression as a way of creating an intimate space. Similarly, in Sinhalese films English locutions are pressed into service to discuss abstract concepts, intimate feelings, urbanized values, and so on.

South Asian cinema, then, becomes a useful terrain in which diverse linguistic conflicts and tensions are played out. As B. Kachru (1982b) observes:

In India only Sanskrit, English, Hindi, and to some extent Persian, have acquired pan-Indian intranational functions. The domains of Sanskrit are restricted, and the proficiency in it limited, except in the case of pundits. The cause of Hindi was not helped by the controversy between Hindi, Urdu, and Hindustani. Support for Hindustani almost ended with independence; after the death of its ardent and influential supporter, Gandhi, very little was heard about it. The enthusiasm and near euphoria of the supporters of Hindi were not channelled in a constructive (and realistic) direction, especially after the 1940s. The result is that English continues to be a language both of power and prestige.

(See S. N. Sridhar 1987 for a detailed analysis of this controversy.) B. Kachru's (1982b) statement enables us to put the developments in Indian cinema in relation to language in an interesting perspective.

Conclusion

In order to map the true dimensions of language issues inscribed in South Asian cinema, one has to see them in relation to the power exercised as well as the challenges encountered by the nation-state. Formations of the nation-state and cultural production are inextricably linked, one feeding the other in interesting and complex ways, and generating a complex of issues related to the topic of ideology, nationhood, cultural identity, and cinematic representation. Language and cinema in South Asia can be most productively explored in terms of the concept of nationhood that serves to focus our attention on conjunctures of regionalism, state formation, and globalization. Nationhood comprises a plurality of intersecting discourses, and one that is of particular relevance in the present context is that of symbolism, including topics of construction of meaning, consciousness, problematic of cinematic representation, and cinema lover's pleasure. How a nation chooses to tell its putatively coherent and unified story to its citizens as a way of relegitimization is of fundamental importance in the understanding of nationhood. In modern times, it need hardly be stressed that cinema has come to play a crucial role in this effort. Benedict Anderson (1983) has underlined the importance of print capitalism in engendering notions

of nationhood and the deep horizontal comradeship it entails. It is his view that newspapers and novels dealing with nationalistic themes are mainly responsible for the formation of a sense of nationhood. In times before the advent of cinema, print media and novels were successful in coordinating time and space in a way that was conducive to addressing the nation that he saw as an imagined community. In more modern times, cinema has come to occupy a central role in the construction of this imagined community. David Harvey (1990) has drawn attention to the power of cinema in capturing the complex relationship between space and time in a way that the earlier media could not and underlining the significance of cinema as a field of force. The foregoing issues related to language and cinema that have been discussed gain depth of perspective and definition by being measured against the imperatives and compulsions of nationhood.

I have already focused on the issues of regionalism and the function of language in cinema in the reconfigured space of deterritorialization and nation-state; in a similar manner, we need to understand the issue of language in relation to globalization and transnational diasporic audiences as well. During the last decade or so, the diasporic audience has come to occupy a central place in the calculations of film producers as the global market has generated more dependable returns than the local market. It is the Hindi-language films, followed by Tamil-language films that have attracted the greatest diasporic audiences. In the past decades, Bombay-based commercial melodramas such as *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (Who Am I To You), *Diwane Dushmani Le Jayenge* (Brave of Heart Wins The Bride), *Pardes* (Foreign Land) and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (A Certain Feeling) have enjoyed wide popularity among audiences in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, and Australia. The role of language in Indian cinema and the diasporic experience merits closer study.

Finally, I wish to raise a question of a more theoretical nature regarding this topic that would have a resonance with film scholars. The interplay between language and cinema has been studied by various theorists from diverse angles and vantage points. For example, it was Jean Milry's (2000) considered judgment that cinema is not analogous to language, in contradiction to the views of Christian Metz (1982) and that it was more productive to think of cinematic language in a more philosophical sense. For him the meaning in cinema is generated by images moving across time and space, and hence editing was of fundamental importance in cinematic narrativity. The well-known Italian poet, filmmaker, and thinker Pasolini (1978) thinks of language of cinema not in terms of grammar, as Metz and others have done, but in terms of images that lend a certain generic quality to cinema. For Pasolini, cinema is constructed out of prelinguistic images and not from verbal language. However, one can well raise the question whether in Indian and Sri Lankan popular films, as opposed to

art films, the reverse is sometimes not the case – whether verbal language shapes and determines the flow of visual images. If this is indeed the case, then the study of popular South Asian cinema would lead to the opening up of a line of inquiry that is theoretically compelling and empirically productive. How language functions in the ever-evolving techno-aesthetic space of cinema is a problem of continual interest.

21 Language of religion

Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande

Introduction

In South Asia including Tibet, the indigenous religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, and the extraneous religions, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, currently coexist with various tribal religious systems. One of the striking features of the language of religion in this region is that there is no fixed equation of one linguistic form with one religion. Many languages are used to express one religion and one language is used to express many religions. For example, Christianity is expressed through English (in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka), Portuguese/Konkani (in Goa), Tamil (in Tamil Nadu), Hindi (in India), Sinhala (in Sri Lanka), Urdu (in Pakistan), and Bengali (in West Bengal and Bangladesh). Similarly, Hindi is used to express not only Hinduism, but also Buddhism, Christianity, and Jainism. Within the same religious community, diverse languages are used to perform different religious functions, thereby producing a diglossic situation. For example, Sanskrit is used for major rituals of Hinduism, while for household rituals, modern Indian languages are used. Adding to this variation are various registers of regional religious languages such as Sanskritized, Arabized, Persianized Hindi, Marathi, and so forth.

The emergence, sustenance, and change in the patterns of variation in the use of linguistic codes (languages or language varieties) for expressing religions in South Asia has not been systematically and adequately studied. There are individual studies that explain the variation based on the historical events. For example, the religious movements of the mystics and saints in the medieval period (1500 CE) across South Asia, which were instrumental in promoting the use of the regional as opposed to the classical languages as religious codes, are discussed in, among others, Gaefke (1978), Ranade (1933), Shapiro and Schiffman (1981), Tulpule (1979), and Zvelebil (1974). Similarly, the role of Bible translation (from English into regional Indian languages) in the use of modern South Asian (SA) vernacular codes for Christianity is discussed in Hooper (1963) and Shackle (2001). However, the studies fail to provide answers to the following questions: (1) why is there variation in the language of