

Critical Review

Current Trends in Linguistics: Studies in Sindhi

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Linguistics in South Asia, the fifth in the series, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok and published in "Current Trends in Linguistics", pp: 201-234 (Mouton) carries an article on SINDHI by the Indian scholar Lachhman M. Khubchandani of Deccan College, Poona.

The author has attempted to give a general survey of Linguistic literature on Sindhi under nine headings, viz. 1. Writing System, 2. Phonology, 3. Grammar, 4. Dialect Studies, 5. Language in contact, 6. Lexicography, 7. Comparative and historical studies, 8. Teaching Material, 9. Folklore, and 10. General Linguistics in Sindhi. The text is followed by a comprehensive bibliography on the subject.

This valuable survey, giving too much in too short a space, is obviously circumscribed by its own limitations. In each of the ten sections, developments in Sindhi both in Pakistan and India are covered. The author is more conversant with these developments before 1947; Sindhi literature produced during the post-independence period in Pakistan is of considerable dimensions and its bearings on Linguistics would need a more careful study to reach valid conclusions.

The author has rightly observed that since 1947, Sindhi is being spoken in multilingual situation. This situation appears to be more acute in India where Sindhi speaking population is scattered in groups. In Pakistan, Sindhi speaking population lives in sizable compact area in the province of Sind and also the contiguous areas of Las Bela, Karachi and Sibi districts of Baluchistan and parts of Rahimyar Khan district of the Punjab. In India, Sindhi speakers

have not only come in contact with, but are living in the midst of, overwhelmingly large non-Sindhi linguist populations. Thus; the development of 'literary Sindhi' would seem to be difficult, even the preservation of pure Sindhi speech would be a problem.

The author's observation that the development of Sindhi in the new socio-cultural environment in India has "great susceptibility towards borrowing from different languages" underlines the reality of a compulsive situation - a process of accommodation and assimilation rather than any inherent susceptibility under a climate of free growth and development.

Assessing the reality of the Indian situation, the author has projected a new concept of 'Indian Sindhi' and thus added a new term to the local linguist vocabulary. It would seem as if the survival of 'Sindhi' as it has been known through history, is out of question, and that the present acculturation of 'Indian Sindhi' becomes a unique phenomenon of the present times. According to the author "Indian Sindhi, under the influence of Sanskrit and Hindi, is drifting towards tatsamization in order to conform with Pan-Indian characteristic. This process has greatly affected the phonological, grammatical and lexical pattern of the language". If that is the degree of transformation recognized, the future 'Sindhi' may or may not be able to preserve its historical identity in the new Indian environment."

It would appear that the author takes the increasing weightage of Pan-Indianism for granted, and so also the "two different drifts which have introduced a conspicuous breach in the Pakistani and Indian-Sindhi styles". According to him, Sindhi in Pakistan also "continues to lean heavily towards the Perso-Arabic and Urdu styles to identify itself with Islamic Culture". This suggestion, or conclusion, conforms more to the author's own line of reasoning rather than to the reality of the situation. Islamic culture has been a fact of Sind's history, long before the achievement of Pakistan in 1947. It is not something new to conform with. Sindhi writers during the post-independence era have rather used a more powerful Sindhi idiom and more clear and direct style of expression than before. Sindhi and Urdu have no doubt rubbed shoulders with each other, but this interaction has not taken place within the domain of any "Perso-Arabic influences".

It is to the credit of the author that without any direct studies on the scene, he has been able to marshal useful information on linguistic developments in Sindhi in Pakistan. Some of his observations, however, do not reflect the actual position. We do not agree with his view that Dr. N.A. Baloch in his *Tarikha* (1962) has tried to show "that the ancestry of Sindhi..... is closely connected with Semitic languages". He has taken a consistent position that Sindhi is *an ancient indigenous Indo-Aryan language*. His 'speculation' regarding close connections with Semitic languages applied specifically to the ancient language of the Indus Valley which still remains to be deciphered. Dr. Baloch was the first to point out that Sindhi was not derived directly from Sanskrit, as was widely believed by Sindhi scholars before him, but has its origin in the pre-Sanskrit Prakrits of the local people. This view gave a fresh momentum to research on Sindhi's origin which has continued to this day. Also we do not fully understand the view-point attributed to "the revivalists" (as the author has called some Sindhi scholars in India) that "all Indic languages use one or the other form of Devanagari writing" (p. 204). Bengali is written in Brahmi and not in Devanagari. The author's own "rational stand" in favour of "Devanagari (through Hindi)" is to be appreciated; but if Perso-Arabic script for Sindhi has to be abandoned in "Indian surroundings" (overlooking the advantages of being familiar with Sindhi literature in Pakistan, or the additional advantage of being familiar with Urdu, Persian and Arabic scripts in the competitive commercial world), one may argue more rationally to use 'Hindi Script' with which Pakistani specialists in Sindhi may familiarize themselves one day!

We admire the scholarly effort and the patience with which the author has assembled his information from varied sources and presented a very useful survey of linguistic studies in Sindhi to the reader