

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM

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The Government policy appears to be to introduce Swabhasa as medium of secondary and possibly university education by gradual stages. Therefore the time has now come for us to have a clear conception of the precise place that should be assigned to Swabhasa and English in our educative process. This is a problem on which a most searching investigation has recently been made by West with special reference to Bengal. His findings have been regarded as an achievement of “creative power” by such eminent educational thinkers, as Sir Michael Sadler, sometime Master of University College, Oxford. He has investigated the problem of educational medium in relation to (i) oral class work, (ii) the text books, and (iii) examinations.

The question at issue is whether the same language should or should not be the medium for all these educational activities. Swabhasa, in the words of Sadler Commission Report, is the language of “those dear and intimate things which form part of life from infancy upwards, and which are the very breath and substance of poetry and national feeling.” Therefore Swabhasa is irreplaceable by any language whatever its prestige may be. But on the other hand Swabhasa is not adequately informative nor is it able to keep pace with English in recording the advancement of knowledge, technical, scientific and technological.

According to West, language-learning involves four different types of abilities, namely: (i) speaking the language, (ii) understanding speech, (iii) writing the language, and (iv) reading the language.

“Separation of the above abilities may not be the normal condition, but it is certainly a possible and very common condition”. In support of this contention, West quotes, among others, Professor Palmar, Board of Education Report,

Bertrand Russel and O'Shea. Says Professor Palmer, "Many persons are able to use the language in one state and not in another. One who has read extensively and written little may have a passive command of the written language little inferior to that of his mother-tongue. One who has listened much, who has frequented lecture halls and theatres, will have so sharpened his auditive faculties that nothing of importance escapes his comprehension. But neither of these may be able to express his thoughts in the foreign tongue with any degree of accuracy."

A Board of Education Report says, "Of any language it is possible to have a speaking knowledge, a reading knowledge and a writing knowledge. It is of course possible to speak a language without having learned to read it or to write it. It is no less possible to read or even to write a language without being able to speak it. Each of these elements in combination assists and strengthens each of the others. The speaking powers in particular can be fortified and increased by reading; but each has for different purposes its own independent value." Bertrand Russell thinks that "writing which we now regard as a way of representing speech was originally an independent language' as it is today in China. 'It would seem that writing nowhere began as an attempt to represent speech; it began as a direct pictorial representation of what was to be expressed' so that a congenitally dumb man might be able to read". This view is also borne out by the general belief that different cerebral centres are involved in the processes.

Two of the above abilities, namely speaking and writing the language involve the expression of thoughts. We know that our thoughts are closely interwoven with our actual life, our natural surroundings and our social inheritance. In the case of 97.7% of our people, their conscious and unconscious experiences relating to these three spheres are linked up with Swabhasa. Therefore the appropriate medium for the teacher's exposition, class discussion and the pupil's self-expression is undoubtedly Swabhasa rather than English.

A point is often made of the difficulty in finding Swabhasa

equivalents for scientific terms. At the Annual General Meeting of the Head Masters' Conference, the President suggested the appointment of ad hoc committees to compile lists of equivalents for scientific terms. On this point the University Education Commission Report of 1949 makes an important recommendation. The Commissioners hold that in the whole field of science it is estimated that there are between twenty to thirty lakhs terms, and every year thousands of new ones are added. They also hold that even if for the sake of argument the gigantic task of finding Swabhasa equivalents for so many terms can be accomplished, local scientists will have to acquire two separate vocabularies of scientific terms which will be an intellectual burden. They assert that scientific terminology used in English is international. Therefore they advocate the desirability of adopting the existing English Scientific terms into Swabhasa.

For these reasons, we conclude the educational medium for (a) oral class work and for (b) examinations, has to be the Swabhasa of the pupils. Then what should be the medium of the textbook? It is admitted that we do not possess a satisfactory output of textbooks in Swabhasa for the later stages of secondary education.

This definitely can easily be met, because English is a compulsory second language.

Of the four types of abilities involved in language-learning, (ii) understanding speech and (iv) reading the language which constitute the receptive aspect are far easier than the other two types, and "the receptive knowledge always goes far beyond the productive", for the simple reason that "the understanding of what is said always precedes the power of saying the same thing oneself and often precedes it for an extra-ordinarily long time". Besides "the use of a textbook written in a foreign language is likely to be a preventive of par-rot-learning" if the examination is in the vernacular, since the actual words of the textbook **cannot** be used in the examination; they must be transmuted into the mother-tongue, and in this process must necessarily be analysed and

absorbed as ideas”. Therefore the insufficiency of Swabhasa textbooks in the later stages of secondary education can be effectually remedied by the use of English textbooks.

The foregoing plan presupposes the use of the second language for the specific purpose of supplying the deficiencies of the first and so eliminates the evils of bilingualism.