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## THE CONCEPT OF ASSIGNED STATUS AND ACQUIRED STATUS IN LANGUAGE POLICY AND PLANNING

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**Abstract:** *The status enjoyed by a language has always been a core issue in Language Planning studies. The status-corpus paradigm was propounded by Kloss (1969) and Cooper (1989) added a further dimension of 'acquisition planning' to the already existing status-corpus distinction in planning. But these distinctions are not of the compartmental variety but are interrelated and interdependent.*

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Blommaert (1996:22) points out that “Language Planning is artificially divided into status and corpus planning; the former concept represents attitudes towards the language, the latter concept the viability of the language to fulfill its functions in all domains.” And Fishman (1972) points out that the distinction between corpus planning and status planning is clearer in theory than in practice. The reasons are that classifications tend to ignore the interrelatedness of these concepts and how one always leads to the other. In some contexts it is status planning which gets prioritized over corpus planning and in other situations the latter gets the priority over the former. In India, the earlier phase of Language Planning centered on deciding the status of Hindi, English and other national languages and corpus planning was inevitably pushed to the background. This lopsided approach to corpus planning itself was responsible for an anti-Hindi attitude developing in the southern states which in turn led to the reversal of the promised status of official language for Hindi. Commenting on this Kumaramanglam (1965:36-7) observes: “... in the five years after the promulgation of the (Indian) constitution, the most disturbing feature of the linguistic scene in India was that, while Hindi, having been enshrined as the official language of the Indian Union in Article 343 of the constitution, was developing apace in its application in all spheres of the nation’s life, the other regional languages were far behind”. He further argues: “...the failure to re-organize the states on a linguistic basis prior to 1955 contributed to this imbalance in the development of Hindi and other regional languages”. The ‘corpus’ development of Hindi through the increased funding of Hindi-promoting bodies like the Dakshin Bharath Hindi Prachar Sabha (South India Hindi Promotion Council), yielded only counter productive results and fuelled regional language sentiments to shape into anti-Hindi protests, thus affecting the ‘status’ of Hindi in the final outcome, i.e. Hindi replacing English as the official language by the target year 1965, which did not happen.

Thus, it needs to be stated that status functions are determined as much by political decisions and language attitudes of the people as it is by the inherent strength of a language itself. It is worth considering two case studies to substantiate this point. The first is the case of English both in the global and Indian contexts. What has made the language strong and indispensable everywhere? Has it been ‘assigned’ this status by macro and micro level political decision making? Or has it ‘acquired’ this status by a combination of socio-linguistic factors in which its own ‘strength’ as a language has played a vital role?



In England itself English was not taught either as a primary language or as a major important subject until the first quarter of the 19th century. Till then, Higher education in England was “a church of England monopoly...There were only two Universities, Oxford and Cambridge... students had to be Anglican communicants... The teachers were ordained ministers ...the organization of Higher education had not changed since the middle Ages”. (Barry, 12) Further, it is interesting to note that, “From 1828 English was offered as a subject for study, and they appointed the first Professor of English in 1829... and the first English courses were put in place at exactly the same time”. From the beginning the emphasis in the field of Higher education was on the learning of the classical languages which enjoyed ‘status functions’ in different domains. The shift came in early 19<sup>th</sup> century and took stronger grounds in favor of the mother tongue only with a new kind of thinking initiated by persons like Mathew Arnold and even then, as Barry (14) points out “... Oxford and Cambridge were suspicious of the new subject of English and held out against it, Oxford until 1894 and Cambridge until 1911”.

After this kind of evolutionary growth in education in its own native country, English today has emerged strongly not only in education but in almost all domains worldwide. “English, it is generally agreed, is today in a stronger position in the world not just more than any contemporary language but also than any other historical language...Even as recently as thirty years ago, the movement of English towards global domination was scarcely perceived”. (Spolsky, 76) The seeds of growth were there, seen and unseen, but the dimensions of growth are really astounding. Spolsky, writing about the spread of English, asks the question: “Did it happen, or was it caused? Was it the unplanned result of the interaction of a number of factors, or the achievement of carefully nurtured bureaucratic management?” (79-80). Galtung (1980) and Phillipson (1992) see the operation of cultural and linguistic Imperialism in the spread of English. Phillipson (54-7) argues: “The working definition of English linguistic Imperialism attempts to capture the way one language dominates others, with anglocentricity and professionalism as the central ELT mechanisms operating within a structure in which unequal power and resource allocation is effected and legitimated. Linguicism is the central concept here... Most of the benefits and spin-offs of this relationship accrue to the centre, while the periphery remains in a dependent situation”.



These views don't fail to raise the question whether local, indigenous languages have striven to enhance their own functional utilitarian strengths in 'corpus' areas like standardization and modernization. Whether a language like Tamil, for example, with all its classical glory has risen to the level where it can challenge English as a medium of instruction? The same question also applies to other indigenous languages everywhere. One of the reasons for the continuing dominance of English in India is the inadequate efforts at developing the corpus related aspects of the Indian languages like Tamil, which have a determining influence on 'status' issues. Merely assigning a dominant status to the indigenous language as part of language policy decisions, does not guarantee the successful acquisition of that 'status' by that language. Thus, it could be established that 'status planning' and 'corpus planning' are not compartmental activities and are not only interrelated but have a strong bearing on each other in a deterministic mode. 'Acquired status' seems to be more enduring than 'assigned status'.

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