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RESEARCH PAPER

The Politics of Linguistic Hegemony: A Postcolonial Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intricate relationship between language politics and power dynamics within social hierarchies, focusing on the historical and socio-political impact of colonial language policies on postcolonial societies. Language politics is deeply rooted in societal power structures, creating friction among social strata. The study employs postcolonial theory and analyses postcolonial dichotomies, such as self/other center/periphery and colonizer/colonized, and how they translate into power imbalance. The process of 'othering' lies at the heart of postcolonial conundrum and results from the ensuing tension from the interface between these polarities. The study explores how marginalized communities often referred to as 'subalterns' adopt colonial languages for socio-economic mobility and examines the implications for identity and cultural preservation. The findings reveal that linguistic marginalization sustains power inequities while enabling limited socio-economic benefits at the expense of native languages. Thus, Policymakers are encouraged to prioritize the preservation of indigenous languages and implement equitable language policies to reduce socio-political disparities.

KEYWORDS Dichotomies, Marginalization, Othering, Subaltern

Introduction

The politics of language and representation unfolds power struggle among various tiers of society, vying for parity against the continuum of socio-linguistic identity. The marginalized contest to occupy the 'centre' and override the 'periphery' to precipitate their identity in this queer power positioning. The 'centre' at times conditioned with the 'colonial centre' is furnished as an epicentre of civilization, serving as a yardstick of advancement. The schematic conditioning of the marginalized initiates them into the 'politics of difference', where the inherent 'difference' of the colonial subjects with respect to the imperial centre becomes a measure of their perceived, subservient identity. The identity of the colonized 'other' is determined in terms of 'difference' from the imperial centre. The politics of 'difference' further precipitates into 'world orders', conditioning the schemata of people in erstwhile colonies making them acutely aware of their identities as being strikingly 'different' from the colonial, controlling agency. The colonizer, therefore takes it upon himself to represent the colonized other by entrenching colonial values and representing the colonized other through this difference where the colonial centre stands out as the 'standard' to be emulated.

The colonized are deemed as virtually incapable of 'representing' themselves as evident in the poignant epigraph; a short quote from Karl Marx with which Edward Said's time-honoured treatise on *Orientalism* opens i.e. 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented' (Said, 2006). Although this epigraph has invited debate and deliberations as to whether Marx's words refer to the people of the orient i.e. those living in Asia or North Africa or refer to people with a conspicuously different spatial-temporal context. The phenomenon of representation however becomes an exceedingly colonial venture, making this representation more of 're-presentation'; a polarized practice on

behalf of the voiceless, nameless other. Ronald Barthes (1915-1980), in "Myth today" illustrates 'living' as an act objectified by the intent to close the gap between the 'word' and the 'world' (Barthes, 1957). Thus, the function of language to condition the schematic consciousness of its referents results in the larger-than-life role of words such as 'Europe', and the 'West'; looming large upon the collective memory of the colonized even after formal independence. This refers to the mythical omnipresence of the imperial centre. Barthes contends that a myth operates by submitting the historical as a natural construct, thus highlighting a concomitant relationship between the historical and the contemporaneous (Barthes, 1957). Chakrabarty elucidates that the 'historical' in Barthes is not circumscribed by all that is confined to history books for that too is an offshoot of a 'mythical representation'. History here signifies the very act of 'living' (Chakrabarty, 2000). In fact, Barthes demonstrates 'myth' in a manner analogous to Karl Marx's 'ideology' in *The German Ideology*, furnishing myth as a system of communication and signification rather than an idea or a concept (Chakrabarty, 2000). Colonizer/colonized, first world/third world, self/other, man/woman, white/black refer to the systemic communication of signs and symbols embedded within these dichotomies. It is imperative to note that these dichotomies are invariably furnished with a perceived precedence attached to the former construct. Therefore, the distinctions such as the First World and the Third World remain unabridged much the same way the mileage elapsing between them on the socio-economic continuum grows.

Literature Review

The interplay of language, identity, and power has been a central theme in postcolonial discourse, as scholars interrogate the enduring effects of colonialism on socio-linguistic hierarchies. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism foregrounds the dichotomy of "Self" and "Other," demonstrating how colonial representation dehumanized and marginalized native identities. Challenging popular belief, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) offers a nuanced perspective by depicting the bourgeoisie in the colonized world act less as 'competitors' against colonial forces and more as 'collaborators,' driven by an inherent predisposition toward upward mobility through compromise (Orwin & Nathan, 1997). Positioned in urban settings and distanced from the 'natural rhythms' of pastoral life, the bourgeoisie are closer to being 'citizens,' motivated by economic pressures to sustain themselves (Orwin & Nathan, 1997). As individuals prioritizing self-preservation, particularly in the context of avoiding 'violent' death, they adopt a non-confrontational stance, favoring euphemisms like 'passing away' over blunt references to death and annihilation (Orwin & Nathan, 1997). It is unsurprising, then, that within a society, the ostensibly weaker segments actively resist colonial forces, while others complacently accept the status quo.

Said's epigraph, drawn from Karl Marx, 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented"; highlights the colonial enterprise of "re-presentation" and its power-laden implications (Said, 2006). Ronald Barthes' notion of myth as a system of communication further illustrates how colonial narratives naturalize historical constructs, perpetuating Eurocentric dominance in cultural and collective memory (Barthes, 1957). Dipesh Chakrabarty expands on this by asserting that histories, even from non-Western perspectives, often frame Europe as the central subject, thus relegating colonized nations to a state of "subalterneity" (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Homi Bhabha's theory of the "third space" deconstructs binary oppositions, positing a hybrid space where colonial narratives of superiority and subservience are simultaneously affirmed and contested (Bhabha, 1986). This ambivalent space fosters a complex identity dynamic, challenging rigid categorizations such as First World/Third

World or colonizer/colonized. Aijaz Ahmed critiques these constructs, noting that the Third World, unlike the historically driven First and Second Worlds, is defined by its colonial past and positioned as an object of history rather than its agent (Ashcroft, Gareth, & Helen, 1995). These binaries also manifest in socio-economic disparities, where the colonized's efforts to traverse the center-periphery divide often lead to adopting the colonizer's language for upward mobility, at the cost of cultural and linguistic integrity (Ramanathan, 2005).

Frantz Fanon and Andre Gunder Frank delve into the class dimensions of these struggles, examining how racial and economic hierarchies sustain systemic inequality. Fanon identifies the internalized racism of labor hierarchies, while Frank views underdevelopment as a direct consequence of the capitalist world's dominance (Fanon, 1986; Frank, 1966). Jean-Jacques Rousseau's critique of the bourgeoisie further underscores how class collaboration perpetuates colonial power structures through economic and cultural acquiescence (Orwin & Nathan, 1997).

The literature collectively underscores the centrality of language in the colonial and postcolonial power matrix, where linguistic choices reinforce hegemonic structures while providing a paradoxical medium for resistance. These insights frame the subsequent analysis of how linguistic marginalization and representation shape identity and socio-political dynamics in postcolonial contexts.

Material and Methods

The application of postcolonial theory on the notion of linguistic hegemony allows us to explore the dynamics of power, identity, and representation within colonial and postcolonial societies. The friction between "self-other" replicates the motifs underlying class struggle in a society. Franz Fanon describes how white labourers can emanate a stronger racist streak than white bosses unto the black men (Fanon, 1986). Andre Gunder Frank (1929-2005) argues that a society is modern owing to its exposure to the 'capitalist' world and that a lack of such an exposure is a litmus test of underdevelopment (Frank, 1966). Theorizing the capitalist world as a vantage point to look down upon the developing world unravels a pattern of class distinctions inherently at work in societies. The friction brings to the fore, different stakeholders of power, exercising control not only on the territorial front, but also on the cultural, economic, and political arenas in the form of countries or as power-mongers in societies, unfolding class struggle in a microcosm.

Results and Discussion

Language serves as a critical marker of identity, but it is far from being a neutral artifact. Instead, it often becomes a source of conflict. Language preference is sometimes employed as a measure of state loyalty. For instance, many indigenous speakers have consciously abandoned the use of Russian to demonstrate allegiance to the state language, even though they previously spoke Russian fluently and comfortably (Mirovalev, 2021). This factor positions the act of speaking a particular language as a litmus test for friction or hostility towards the state.

Linguistic choices trigger a constant interplay of variance, a course of inclusion or exclusion of choices. The underlying difference on the ethno-linguistic and socio-cultural plane with respect to the colonized is considered as a yardstick to measure the distance of the colonized from the precepts of human civilization. The distance elapsing between the 'centre' and 'periphery' translates in the occident-orient or east-west dichotomy, an uneasy space fraught with friction. The colonial agency thus appropriates the collective

unconscious of the marginalized through stereotypes meant to justify hegemonic advances in a society. The stereotypes serve a two-pronged function; firstly, the marginalized are conditioned into subservience as a given and secondly the colonizer's self-aggrandizement is established as a necessity to 'civilize' the uncouth and uncivilized colonial subjects. Thus, linguistic predicament lies at the heart of postcolonial anxieties referring to a class-based division precipitating into the ancillary divisions of caste, colour, creed and even gender. Issues of upward mobility based on the kind of exposure available to the speakers, their proficiency in the language goes on to showing that English should not be treated as simply a 'variety' in comparison and contrast to the varieties of English spoken by native English speakers. English therefore represents a value system, splintered at heart, based on this exposure. The values are largely incumbent upon how the linguistic divide moulds, shapes and perpetuates inequalities in terms of power and knowledge. Speaking on behalf of the colonized, marginalized and the peripheral brings to the fore, 'speaking for' and 'speaking to' phenomenon with its spatial implications of 'speaking 'from' and speaking 'of' variously including the postcolonial struggle and the class struggle in a microcosm. Even in struggling to be 'heard', the marginalized unconsciously take to employing the colonizer's language to 'speak back' (Ramanathan, 2005).

Thus, representation as a colonial enterprise can be contextualized historically. In fact, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that almost all 'histories' furnish Europe as their 'subject (Ashcroft, Bill., Gareth, Griffiths., & Helen, 1995). Therefore history whether it is dealt with from an atavist, nativist or modern standpoint unravels an inherent set of repressive practices. European history is thus a master narrative in which all other histories be it Chinese, Indian or any other find themselves in a disadvantaged position of 'subalterneity'. Such a history is a double entendre, where colonized nations are both the subject and object of modernity embodied in a rift between the 'modern' upper class and the agrarian class which is yet to traverse degrees of modernization. Mimesis is thus a strategic mode of representation left to the hapless colonized to exist from within the meta-narrative of this split double. Having to offer history as a compulsory subject further brings to light a certain unnatural coercion which goes onto showing that it is driven by a mercenary end; both European colonialism and third-world nationalisms partner to enforce their subjective 'truths' (Ashcroft, Bill., Gareth, Griffiths., & Helen, 1995).

In the colonial perspective the case of *Minute on Indian Education* merits consideration. The 1854 dispatch from the Court of Directors of the East India Company stipulated the aims and objectives of colonial education policy in which English was categorically espoused as the medium of instruction. This further translated in the growing rift between the Anglophiles and the Orientalists of the age. Interestingly *Orientalism* was later redefined by Edward Said, as he ventured to subtitle the work as based on western conceptions of the Orient. In Said's discours, orientalism signified a white man taking upon himself to re-vision and re-present the orient thereby suggesting that the orient inherently lacked scholarship and erudition to lend voice to matters pertaining to orientalism. This was precisely the reason why Said invited criticism for equating the oriental discourse with western scholarship, especially those who treated the hitherto colonized in a diminutive manner, whereas Orientalism as a term was used to mean studies in oriental languages and cultures. The difference between the 'orient' and 'occident' lies at the heart of postcolonial discourse.This notion of 'difference' can also manifest as 'deference' to colonial influences in an attempt to align with prescribed degrees of 'development,' which are often dictated by the former colonial center. The movement from the periphery to the center is frequently motivated by socio-economic aspirations, with the center representing the perceived hub of progress. Consequently, the power matrix transcends abstract expressions of power and the mere exercise of control over resources. Instead, it intersects with the spatial configuration of power and the

opportunities such configurations provide to redefine power dynamics. This space has often been referred to as the 'third space'.

The concept of the 'third space' is thus imbued with an ambivalent consciousness, where binary oppositions are deconstructed simultaneously. In this space, the black man embodies his subjugated identity while the white man is confronted with his assumed supremacy (Bhabha, 1986).In this conceptual space, the conscious affirmation of polarities splits, creating an opening for the unconscious where seemingly disparate conceits merge in an uncanny transition of shifting narratives: from superiority to servitude, and from hate to love. These fissures and gaps expose ruptures within the colonial narrative, each anticipating a role reversal in the dynamic of the 'other.' In this interplay, the colonized aspires to occupy the colonizer's space of privilege, while the settler harbors a subconscious inclination toward the subject's position of 'avenging anger' (Bhabha, 1986). Consequently, the third space resists rigid compartmentalization, instead representing a hybrid amalgamation of two distinct realities—simultaneously embodying dual positions. Representation within this space transcends the mere affirmation of an existing identity, instead manifesting as an alchemical process through which an image comes to be identified during the experiential encounter.

The notion of the 'third space' stands in contrast to the term 'Third World,' a designation often rendered with capitalized initials. The ambivalence inherent in the 'third space' becomes particularly salient when juxtaposed against the overtly colonial connotations of the Third World. While the 'First World' and 'Second World' derive their identity from systems of 'Production'—whether Capitalism or Socialism—the Third World finds its locus in the historical experience of colonialism. This identity is defined not intrinsically but through a complex interplay of extrinsic factors. Whereas the First and Second Worlds are constructed through their collective historical struggles, the Third World is situated at a specific moment in colonial history. Aijaz Ahmed asserts that the First and Second Worlds represent states that actively alter and create history, whereas the Third World remains primarily an object of history (Ashcroft, Gareth, & Helen, 1995).

The tension between first and third world echoes the underlying motifs of class struggle within a postcolonial society. Frantz Fanon describes how white labourers often display stronger racist tendencies toward Black individuals than white bosses do (Fanon, 1986). Similarly, André Gunder Frank (1929–2005) argues that a society's level of modernity correlates with its exposure to the 'capitalist' world, with a lack of such exposure serving as a litmus test for underdevelopment (Frank, 1966). Viewing the capitalist world as a vantage point from which to look down on the developing world highlights inherent patterns of class distinctions that permeate societies. This friction reveals the existence of diverse stakeholders in power, who exert control not only over territorial domains but also within cultural, economic, and political spheres. These dynamics unfold as microcosms of broader class struggles.

The colonized remain perpetually positioned on the 'defensive,' while those who internalize colonial power replicate the master-slave binary to subjugate weaker societal segments. Violence against minorities, women, and the underprivileged exemplifies this dual oppression: 'repression from within' coincides with 'suppression from without' under ongoing colonial domination. The emergence of the bourgeoisie marks a significant shift in the trajectory of economics and history, translating into capitalist modes of production and the formation of the nation-state, respectively (Ashcroft, Gareth, & Helen, 1995). For a third-world historian, the glorification of Europe as a hub of modernity becomes an almost

inevitable narrative, spoken from a non-Western, 'subaltern' position that looks up to Europe's economic dominance and nationalistic grandeur.

Historically speaking, the Anglophiles as the name indicates advocated English as a medium of instruction. (Thomas Babington) Lord Macaulay (1800-1859), one of the famous Anglophiles, made pungent remarks about indigenous languages in the famous *Minute on Indian Education*, laying down that a shelf of English literature was worth more than libraries in oriental languages (Macaulay, 1835). Macaulay seems to follow a predecessor Charles Grant (1746-1823), who propounded similar views much earlier in 1797: 'wherever we may venture to say, our principles and language are introduced, our commerce will follow'. Both Grant and Macaulay were members of the same evangelical group and both supported English from a colonial vantage point, deriding indigenous language and culture. This can be contrasted with the Orientalists of the age such as Sir William Jones, an Anglo-Welsh philologist.

Thus, in return language policy was introduced as a means of interpellation of the native to disconnect them from their cultural legacy. The Orientalist however encouraged the use of local languages and advocated the use of vernacular languages as the medium of instruction. The Orientalists laid down that employing Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit language had greater utilitarian appeal as these languages had enjoyed ascendancy in the past. They believed that employing these languages in official and local proceedings would not pose any challenge to the native and hence would mitigate chances of rebellion. The fact remains that whether it was the Orientalists, with their seemingly sympathetic approach to the local linguistic landscape or the Anglophiles with their robust advocacy of English and occidental scholarship, both strived to strengthen their rule in the Sub-continent. However, a close reading of the literary texts produced during the age of colonization demonstrates disparaging remarks with respect to the indigenous culture.

The diminutive rendition of the colonial subject as 'other' is punctuated with negative epithets such as 'swarms of stocky peasants', 'string of women', 'a horde of natives' and a 'flock of pot-bellied naked children' codifying the colonial subjects as 'other-than-human' in texts such as the *Burmese Days* by George Orwell (1934). 'Othering' is thus an exercise in dehumanizing the marginalized through negative stereotypes and can be treated in contradistinction to Eurocentrism which further adds credence to the European perspective. The European standpoint functions as the 'universal signifier' ascribing ascendancy to the 'west' and the values it has become synonymous with. Thus, a Eurocentric narrative goes beyond the connotations of privileging 'Europe' or the West for that matter; rather it shows how anything non-European is pitted against it. The world was therefore seen as either 'inside' Europe or 'outside' Europe. Stuart Hall (1932-2014) shows how this 'difference' translates into difference of representation (Hall, 1997). Hoskins for example, vociferously decries such notions where Europe is considered as the seedbed of human civilization and Africa is portrayed as perpetually waiting for the Europeans to bring light to the African continent (Mellish, 2019). The *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad can be treated as a case in point. Although it was furnished as a critique of colonization, yet Chinua Achebe (1913-2013) argues to the contrary (Philips, 2003). Achebe lays down that the novel uncovers a prevalent trend to place Africa in binary opposition to Europe, delineating the former as 'uncivil', 'savage' and 'barbarous' while the latter is entrenched as 'civilized', 'refined' and 'humane' (Clarke, 2017). He is sceptic about the reader-response in acquiescence to the celebrated Western canon, thereby contributing to the tacit support of colonial supremacy (Clarke, 2017). Ngugi wa Thiongo (1964), the Kenyan author promoted writing in African languages as an anti-colonialist strategy on the part of the African people (Ashcraft, 1995). He considers literature written in English with a pinch of salt and not as 'purely' African. Although the colonized-colonizer equation is an

interlocking of polarities in an estranged relationship; yet it unravels how the colonized or the hitherto colonized can be an 'exotic other' for the colonizer, and the colonial master on the other hand can serve as the 'vantage point' unto the colonized.

G.C. Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak* brings to light the colonial designs embedded within the colonial practices. For example, the tradition of *Suttee* was abolished by the 'white men' to save 'brown women from brown men', which still does not lend voice to the suppressed women rendered as a rudimentary existence, defined merely by the 'colour' of their skin. It rather works in the direction of bolstering the colonial rule, establishing the colonial master as a paragon of chivalrous values, undermining the local populace as a silent, anonymous multitude with inhuman disposition.

Spivak explores the plight of a marginalized black woman who suffers oppression on multiple levels: as a woman, as a black person, and as someone economically disadvantaged. In an intriguing contrast, if this woman were transported to the First World, her vulnerabilities might empower her to rebel against various forms of oppression. However, when placed in the context of the Third World, her weaknesses lead her toward annihilation, with all three aspects working against her. In this context, these vulnerabilities do not serve as markers of emancipation but instead highlight her subaltern status (Spivak, 2006). This leads us to consider the concept of the "third space," a space where a hybrid and ambivalent interface between the colonizer and the colonized emerges. The colonizer strategically manipulates indigenous languages to disrupt the consensus formed around a shared linguistic heritage, replacing them with colonial languages and literature in an effort to consolidate power and control within society.

Mark Kelley delves into the intricate relationship between language and knowledge, referencing Nietzsche's philosophy on knowledge as a manifestation of instinctual drives aimed at preserving existence (Kelly, 2009). Nietzsche, for instance, regards 'ethics'—similar to knowledge—as a means of exercising control, but with an important subversion: it becomes the means for the strong to dominate the weak (Kelly, 2009). This subversion of meaning demonstrates that knowledge, when examined from a critical lens, is not merely an intellectual pursuit but a form of political intervention. According to Nietzsche, there is no intrinsic connection between 'knowledge' and 'things that should be known'; rather, knowledge attempts to impose an artificial order on a world full of inherent chaos (Kelly, 2009). In this sense, language, as the primary vehicle of knowledge, is at times manipulated as an artifice created by colonial authorities to impose a specific worldview. The benefits traditionally associated with knowledge, such as classification, simplification, and comparison, are revealed as a diversion from the essence of reality (Kelly, 2009). Similarly, Jacques Derrida's perspective on language sees it as fundamentally dissonant, with written discourse merely masking deeper, unattainable meanings (Kelly, 2009). The colonizer's so-called "knowledge" transfer often serves a politically charged agenda, aiming to maintain and extend authoritarian control.

The early 19th century witnessed an expansion of vernacular languages, especially in the educational institutions of the British Empire. For instance, the Fort William College offered courses in Marathi, Persian, Bengali, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Canarese Hindustani alongside English, Greek, and Latin (Rahman, 2008). However, the British soon abandoned these vernacular languages, fearing that their promotion might lead to the 'Indianization' of the civil service. Persian, once the language of law, was also discarded as the British sought to consolidate their power. This pattern of linguistic manipulation continued, as evidenced by Sir William Jones, a scholar renowned for his contributions to Oriental languages and Sanskrit literature. Despite his promotion of Oriental literature,

Jones translated Indian laws into English, a move aimed at reinforcing the colonial system and asserting British dominance (Cannon, 1971). This reveals the deeper relationship between language, knowledge, and colonial power, where even the translation of legal and cultural texts served to entrench colonial control.

The tensions surrounding language are not confined to colonial contexts but also extend into post-colonial societies, particularly when state policies persist in the same colonial vein despite the formal end of colonial rule. Language planning, which involves status planning, acquisition planning, and corpus planning, shapes the role of language in society, particularly as official or national languages. While the state controls language policy, it is not necessarily driven by linguistic scholars but by political, economic, and social factors. These state-led decisions can determine the languages used in educational systems, media, and official documentation, reflecting broader geopolitical and socio-economic interests. Consequently, language policies are often motivated by power dynamics and the desire to maintain control rather than by the needs or goals of the society's linguistic communities.

In some cases, acquisition and status planning are used interchangeably, as language acquisition closely ties with state institutions that decide the medium of instruction in schools. Language policies, therefore, cannot be seen as a mere reflection of societal linguistic needs; rather, they are part of broader socio-political agendas that favour certain languages over others. For instance, the promotion of a specific language at the expense of vernacular languages can create unequal socio-linguistic opportunities, leading to social divisions. This creates a paradox, where the imposition of a 'universal' language can both unify and divide, depending on its application and the political motives behind it.

The concept of Esperanto emerges in this context as a potential solution to the tensions inherent in language politics. Esperanto, introduced by Dr. Zamenhof, was designed as a 'neutral' language that transcended cultural boundaries without privileging any particular ethnic or national group. Zamenhof's intention was to create a language that avoided the political and cultural weight that accompanies national languages, offering a counterpoint to the power struggles often associated with linguistic choices (Kachru, 1992). While the future of Esperanto remains uncertain, it still attracts idealistic support from linguists who believe in the potential of a universal language to bridge divides.

This discourse on linguistic politics can also be observed in the longstanding ethno-linguistic marginalization in Ukraine, a country that has struggled for independence for centuries. The tension between Russian and Ukrainian is reminiscent of the divide between Urdu and English in the Indian subcontinent. The ethno-linguistic struggle in Ukraine traces its origins to Czarist and Soviet rule, which suppressed Ukrainian culture and language. Despite Ukraine's formal independence in 1991 and the recognition of Ukrainian as the state language, linguistic tensions have persisted. Russian, deeply entrenched in the Soviet Union's non-Russian republics, continued to hold sway, even after Ukrainian was declared the official language. The distribution of Russian remained widespread in the newly independent states, including Ukraine, where Russian-speaking communities continued to exert considerable influence (Bowring, 2012). While both Ukrainian and Russian are spoken in Ukrainian cities, Russian often takes precedence in many social and political contexts. This has led to a sense of marginalization among Russian-speaking Ukrainians, who view themselves as an oppressed group within the country.

The election of Volodymyr Zelensky in 2019 highlighted these shifts in Ukraine's linguistic landscape. Ukraine's linguistic situation can be divided into three distinct regions: the Central and Western areas, where Ukrainian is predominantly spoken; the Southern and Eastern regions, where both languages are commonly used; and the Eastern regions, where Russian-speaking populations hold significant influence. Russian, often associated with colonial dominance, continues to exert considerable influence, creating divisions within Ukrainian society (Mirovalev, 2021). Between 1991 and 2012, Ukrainian was promoted as the sole state language, while Russian was relegated to a secondary, regional status. This shift in language policy led to a polarized political climate, affecting both parliamentary and presidential elections. In 2014, following the removal of President Viktor Yanukovych and the annexation of Crimea, the repeal of the 2012 language law further exacerbated the linguistic divide, leading to the Russian intervention in Donbas under the pretext of protecting Russian speakers (Arel, 2017-18). Despite the state's efforts to promote Ukrainian, Russian remains widely spoken in daily life, especially in the media and workplace.

The persistence of Russian-speaking communities, often viewed as remnants of Russia's hegemonic influence, has led to policies of 're-Ukrainianization' in the eastern parts of Ukraine. These policies have been implemented with the aim of promoting Ukrainian over Russian, despite the latter's continued prevalence. The ongoing ethno-linguistic struggle has shaped Ukraine's identity and its political dynamics. In response, the government has passed laws, such as the 2019 language law, making Ukrainian mandatory in all public spheres, creating tension among different linguistic communities. While President Zelensky initially supported linguistic balance, occasionally speaking Russian during his campaign, his administration continued to favor the promotion of Ukrainian. The challenge of balancing the linguistic landscape remains, with Ukrainian now dominant in public spheres, though Russian continues to be spoken in private homes by nearly 29% of the population. The government's approval of a new action plan in May 2021 aims to promote Ukrainian usage in all aspects of public life between 2022 and 2030, marking a new phase of 'gentle Ukrainization'. This effort is framed as a response to Russian geopolitical ambitions and its continued influence in parts of Ukraine.

Language policies are thus crafted by state machinery to ensure adherence to certain languages at the cost of others. Celebration of linguistic diversity is pivotal to promoting peace and harmony in a society. On the other hand, the colonial model of debunking a certain language and introducing either the language of the colonial master or attributing a language with cultural supremacy is still employed as a means of furthering hegemonic motives. The current Ukrainian language laws have made Ukrainian mandatory by state officials and civil servants (Kudriavtseva, 2021). The law further envisages development of a free access database of Ukrainian dictionary, promoting Ukrainian in media and film industry, including dubbing of films and television transmissions. The plan also suggests offering Ukrainian abroad as a foreign language (Kudriavtseva, 2021). The question remains whether efforts at promoting a language should inevitably imply neglecting other equally significant language varieties in common currency.

The peculiar way linguistic disparities are dealt with in the political arena results in either state recognition for a certain language or with a blatant disregard for other languages. Therefore, politics and language are closely intertwined where the latter is not considered a neutral medium. The conceptual shift in terms of language preference, language as a marker of national identity, and the political implications of language with respect to gender, minorities and religious communities highlights the political underpinnings surrounding language issues.

Conclusion

The discussion underscores the complex interplay between language, power, and identity, particularly in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Spivak's subaltern theory highlights how marginalized individuals, like a black woman facing oppression on multiple fronts, are shaped by their vulnerabilities, which can either empower them or lead to their destruction depending on the context. Nietzsche's views on knowledge reveal that what is considered "knowledge" is often a tool of control, manipulated by political powers to maintain dominance, a concept that is reflected in colonial practices where language is used to assert authority. The historical use of language in colonial India, such as the British shift from vernacular languages to English, and the post-colonial struggles seen in countries like Ukraine and Pakistan, demonstrate how language policies are deeply entwined with political agendas. In Pakistan, for instance, the dominance of English over indigenous languages like Urdu and regional languages has led to social stratification, where access to power, education, and opportunity is often determined by one's proficiency in English. Similarly, the tensions between Russian and Ukrainian in Ukraine reflect how language policies, aimed at consolidating national identity, often marginalize indigenous languages and create socio-political divides. The discussion also touches on the idealistic notion of Esperanto as a neutral language, highlighting the challenges of achieving linguistic equality in the face of political and cultural realities. Ultimately, language remains a powerful tool for both oppression and resistance, shaping national identity and social structures across historical and contemporary settings.

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