

Book Review

Hasnain, S. Imtiaz and Shreesh Chaudhary.
Problematizing Language Studies: Cultural,
Theoretical and Applied Perspectives. Delhi:
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*We bring this Festschrift to honour Rama Kant for his interests and work, for the questions and concerns he has raised, and for the subtle and not so subtle ways in which he has influenced and even altered our agenda. We bring together in this volume a selection of articles reporting nearly all that is currently happening in Indian linguistics and language studies worldwide. We have, accordingly, decided to call this volume *Problematizing Language Studies*. (pp:02)*

The above lines form the Introduction of the Festschrift unfolds the agenda of the Volume *Problematizing Language Studies: Cultural, Theoretical and Applied Perspectives* edited by S. Imtiaz Hasnain and Shreesh Chaudhary and published by Aakar Books, Delhi. This volume is dedicated to India's noted linguist and educationist, for his enormous and commendable contribution to the areas such as Applied Linguistics, Language Teaching, Morphology, Sociolinguistics, Research Methods, Literacy and Primary Education in India. This volume initiates a new dialogue in contemporary applied linguistics by acknowledging the enormity of Prof. Agnihotri's contribution in Applied Linguistics in general and to the notions of multilinguality as an unmarked phenomenon of language in particular.

Linguistics today is expected to describe and explain not just the design of the lexicon and the constraints on the rules of the grammar of a language; today it is

also being asked to describe and explain links and layouts that enable a multilingual person to not only learn all of the many languages he knows, but also to access and draw form them at will, as and when required. (pp: 02)

The volume critically examines cultural, theoretical and applied perspectives on language studies, centrally located in our multilingual and multicultural contexts. The book examines problems of language studies and the chapters are grouped according to the major class of problems they address. The book accordingly, has three sections with a range of themes from cultural, theoretical and applied perspectives.

The articles in the cultural perspectives apply their major thrust on ‘problematizing Hindi-Urdu, mourn the loss of Hindustani –the idiom of the street, and dwell upon the politics of multiculturalism in India’. Some articles examine the phenomenon of ‘code switching in term of politics of nostalgia, and situate the discourse of identity in post-partition India’. The tension between ‘Orientalists and Anglicists’ and the ‘Role of Elite’ are appropriately documented by Annie Montaut. On the other hand Michael J. Franklin refutes the blame on Orientalists for their Hindu-chauvinism by citing communal harmony and cultural engagement of Hindu-Islamic traditions. The binarized and opposed arguments by Shreesh Chaudhary and Ayesha Kidwai present a new perspective in understanding Hindi-Urdu tension and ideologically truncated identity issues of their speakers.

India houses nearly 3000 languages/Mother-Tongues/Speech varieties broadly classified into four major language families, which are Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman language families. The first systematic accounts of languages spoken in India begins with M.A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* (1898-1927), followed by the numbers available in 1991 Census of India that counts them to be 1672 and 1790 were not counted as they appeared to be the speech varieties. Out of these, UNESCO in 2009 declared 196 languages endangered and on the verge of extinction. Mahendra K. Varma draws our attention to this pattern of endangerment as he cites examples form Himachali languages, which give us a general understanding of the process about other languages and speech varieties as well. Among other chapters, the perspectives of Tariq Rahman, Paroo Nihlani, Imtiaz Hasnain, and B. N. Patnaik are of special mention.

Issues pertaining to the theory of grammar in general, and of syntax, morphology or phonetics and phonology in particular, have been grouped together in the theoretical section. The year 1957 witnessed a paradigm shift in linguistics after the critique of B. F. Skinner’s work ‘Verbal Behaviour’ by Noam Chomsky and witnessed the beginning of Generative Paradigm, which laid foundations of the ‘Nativism and Innateness Hypothesis’. This theoretical position has determined our understanding of abstract linguistic phenomena to a great extent. M.A.K Halliday

(1978) finds no difference ‘between knowing a language and knowing how to use it’ and rejects the Chomskyan focus on abstract linguistic structure. The research in modern linguistics has been toeing these two lines since 1960s to the present. The articles included in section two of the volume advocate for negotiation between these two theoretical positions for an explicative compromise. Some of the articles survey specific problems of linguistic analysis of the formal and functional categories. Among others, articles by Rajendra Singh, Probal Dasgupta, Caroline Fery, Gisbert Fanselow, Rajesh Kumar and Uday Narayan Singh underscore and explain the constraints and plausible alternative solutions for problematic analysis of the linguistic categories.

Articles in the section on Applied Linguistics discuss the problems of language pedagogy, language planning, policy and flawed implementation. From Raj Nath Bhat’s idea of Basic English and plea to bring English within easy reach of all; A. L. Khanna’s reviews of second and foreign language theorists and the influence of mother tongue upon the learning of a second/ foreign language; Rama Mathew’s observations on bringing in substantial proactive practices in the curriculum; Panchanan Mohanty’s call for practicing accepted principles in producing materials for teaching vocabulary by the textbook writers; to S. R. Prahlad’s discussion on some principle for designing a sourcebook which does not intimidate the learners with the texts or the tasks included in it demonstrates the problematic aspects of language and language teaching. Vaishna Narang and Mi Yang make a valid observation on problematic language acquisition theories, while Anju Sehgal Gupta and Madhu Gurtu underline the importance of the ability to comprehend and produce ‘lexical phrases’. If validated this may fetch a far reaching consequences in our understanding of the phenomenon of second language acquisition.

The collection of thirty six articles on diverse contemporary issues in language studies in India renders this volume one of the most valued reading for researchers and scholars in the field. With its wide range of themes pertaining to cultural, theoretical and applied perspectives, this volume sets an alternative agenda for the contemporary research in Applied Linguistics in India.