

ORIYA AS A TYPOLOGICALLY DISTURBED LANGUAGE AND SOME
RELATED MATTERS

B.N.Patnaik

Department of Humanities and Social sciences

And

Centre for Creative Writing and Publication

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur

Kanpur – 208016

Email: patnaik@iitk.ac.in

I should wish to begin by recording my sincerest thanks to DLA and to respected Professor V.I. Subramonian for inviting me to deliver, at this year's DLA Conference, the Endowment Lecture, created in the name of the esteemed Mr. Kuppasamy, on some aspect of Indo-Aryan. I most humbly regard this invitation as an opportunity for me to articulate and share some of my thoughts, not yet fully formed really, with the scholars of linguistics here. I propose to do mainly two things: (a) suggest that Oriya, regarded as an Indo-Aryan language, may be viewed as a "genetically-typologically" (henceforth just "typologically", assuming that in the case of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, the two language types of direct relevance to the present effort, the genetic and the typological classifications converge) disturbed Indo-Aryan language, as M.V.Nadkarni would put it (personal communication, 1976), and (b) consider the taxonomic notion "Indo-Aryan", "Dravidian", etc. in the context of the present-day thinking on language in what has been sometimes called the natural scientific approach to language.

In this section we consider Oriya as a typologically disturbed language, try to specify the parameters of such a language, and suggest the possibility of connecting the history of such a language with the development of the culture associated with the same. It is well known that although Oriya is an Indo-Aryan language, it has many features which are not typically Indo-Aryan. However although many Oriya linguists have dealt with the influence of the Dravidian languages (and other languages, such as English, as well, but chiefly Dravidian) on Oriya, they have done so mainly at the lexical – morphological, phonological, and semantico-pragmatic – levels. We know, for example, that retroflex sounds in Oriya are due to Dravidian influence, and we know that there are a number of words used in Oriya now in day-to-day life which have the history of borrowing from Telugu and Tamil. It has been suggested (although there is lack of unanimity among scholars in this regard) that the use of the same *vibhakti* marker for *karma* and *sampradaana kaarakas* in Oriya is again due to Dravidian influence on Oriya, etc. Very little, however, at least as far as published research is concerned, is available on the non-Indo-Aryan features in Oriya at the syntactic level. This is one reason why we decide to restrict ourselves to the syntactic level here. There is yet another reason: if we have to show that Oriya is a typologically disturbed language, then, given the widely held (and quite reasonable) view that syntax is resistant to change, a particularly persuasive case can be in favour of our assertion if we can show that there are non-Indo-Aryan features in Oriya at the syntactic level. Among the readily recognizable features are the following: (i) use of *boli* (an indeclinable entity, homophonous with the participial form of the verb *bol* “say”) as complementizer (*baasana dhoi de boli se taaku kahilaa* = he told him that he must wash the dishes = he asked him to wash the dishes), as reason (or reduced reason) clause marker (*bhala padhilaa boli raama bilaata galaa* = Because he studied well, Rama went abroad), as an entity that marks off proper nouns, designations, labels (*maanika boli gotie gauduni thilaa* = there was a milkwoman named “Manika”, *emiti lokanku debataa boli kahiba* = one must call such people “god”), as an emphazier (*raama boli taaku khaailaa* = Ram ate that curry (implying that no one else would have done so)), and as adverbial particle indicating “extent” – it also to emphasize the entity it is associated with - (*duaaraku boli se caali aasile* = He came right upto the door (say, to see a distinguished visitor off)), (ii) extensive use of the participial relative clause, both

restrictive and non-restrictive (*soithibaa pilaa* = the child who is asleep, *gaandiba dharithibaa arjuna* = Arjuna, who is the carrier of (the bow) *gaandiva*), (iii) conditional participial clause (*mate daakile mu jibi* = If you call me, I will go), and (iv) non-extraposability of the *boli* clause leaving a pronominal copy of the extraposed clause behind (* *se ehaa taaku kahilaa baasana dhoi de boli* = he told it to him to wash the dishes; compare *se taaku kahilaa baasana dhoi de boli*, which is grammatical).

It may be noted in passing that *boli* is not the only complementizer in Oriya complement constructions; there are other complementizers or complementizer-like subordinating conjunctions: *ki* and *je*, but it is only *boli* that occurs post verbally. In addition to participial relative constructions, there are the so-called relative-correlative constructions, characteristic of Indo-Aryan languages. The former type is not restricted in comparison with the latter type; however there seems to be one construction of which this is not true; it has a pronominal head: *euti jaahaa tume deithila* (it (this one) which you had given). The participial relative version of it *tume deithibaa euti* is ungrammatical. Even the canonical Indo-Aryan version is not well formed: *jou ehaa tume deithila*. The participial relative construction in Oriya does not show participle agreement – Oriya does not allow participial agreement.

By the fifteenth century at least *boli* had started being used as complementizer as evident from an inscription in the Jagannath temple of Puri (Tripathy: 1984; p.186). *Maadala Paanji*, which dates back to at least the fifteenth century, although some would pre-date it to the even thirteenth century, contains use of *boli* as complementizer: *ethi mahaadeba thile boli bolanti* (People say that (god) Mahadeva was here) (Mohanty: 1969, p.26); *boluthila boudha bada boli* (You were saying that the Buddhists are great (in comparison with the Brahmins)) (ibid, p.26), in which the subordinate *boli* clause follows the main clause verb. In the same text one finds constructions in which *boli* sets off titles, proper nouns, etc: *taahaanku kapila saantraa boli pada dei ...rakhile* (He kept him (in the palace), giving him the title “Kapila Saantraa”) (ibid, p.45); *sehidinu gandiaabhandanda boli parbata bolaailaa* (From that day the hill was called “Gandiabhandanda”) (ibid, p.15). *Maadala Paanji* also provides instances of the *boli* reason clause: *tu aniti kaama kalu*

boli aambha saadhi ta aniti nuhai (Because you did wrong things, Our arrangement (very rough translation) is not wrong) (p.42). In an inscription at the Laxmi Narasingha Swami temple at Simhachalam, dated 1568 A.D., one finds the use of the participial relative construction *amruta manohire bisha delaa paataka* (the sin of putting poison in the divine food – very rough translation) (Tripathy: 1984, p.223).

However, there do not seem to be instances of the emphasizer and the extent indicator uses of *boli* in these texts. One finds the use of the latter in *Chatura Binoda*, an eighteenth century text. An inscription in the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar contains the use of the conditional participial clause: *raajaanka anahite bradile...raajaa sarbasa hari* (if one says things against the interests of the king, the king confiscates everything (that belongs to him)) (Tripathy: 1984, p.167). All these show that most of the non- Indo-Aryan features – presumably Dravidian - in Oriya listed here date back to at least five hundred years – no wonder, considering that there have been close interaction between speakers of Dravidian languages and those of Oriya for centuries. There have been military actions: fights between the *gajapati* kings of Orissa, and some Southern kings, and some *gajapati* kings actually came from the South - one of them was actually called *telenga* (Telugu) *mukundadeba*. The court of the *gajapati* king was the seat of culture; therefore the consequences of the enthronement of a person from the South on the *gajapati* throne went far beyond the political – the consequences were socio-cultural and linguistic too. Pandit Binayaka Mishra (Mishra: 1975) believes that the earliest inhabitants of Orissa were Dravidians, but there are others who do not subscribe to this view. However, no one disputes that the interaction between Oriyas and speakers of Dravidian languages has been very close and stretches over centuries.

Even if these constructions were borrowed from Dravidian languages, it is not the case that these were assimilated into Oriya in their original form; for example, participles in Oriya do not show agreement, unlike in, say, Tamil. This is by no means a characteristic feature of borrowing from Dravidian languages. It is generally held that the so-called indirect speech construction in modern Oriya is an instance of borrowing from English, but the Oriya construction does not observe sequence of tense. In any case the origins of

the *boli* adverbial particle expressing extent, the use of *boli* as an emphasisizer, and the non-standard use of *boli* as noun in Puri meaning roughly a piece of abusive language (*taaku bolite kali* = I ragged him) are unclear: if my informants are correct, these may not have their origin in the Dravidian languages. There is no reference to these in the relevant literature; therefore one might speculate that these might have emerged in the language itself for some internal reasons, which are unclear at the moment.

In any case given the facts cited above, one may be persuaded to think that Oriya is a typologically disturbed language. Now is it an intuitive notion or can it be fairly rigorously defined? That is, when indeed can one say of a language that it is typologically disturbed, especially when one knows that there aren't really typologically "pure" languages? Is it a matter of vocabulary? The answer to this has to be in the negative. Masica (1991, p.44) notes that there are non Indo-Aryan languages the vocabularies of which contain considerable number of words of Indo-Aryan origin. For him Telugu is an example of such a language. But in our view it is not a typologically disturbed language; we do not think that augmentation of the lexicon of a language this way can necessarily alter the typology of that language. Then is it a matter of the number of typologically uncharacteristic phonological, syntactic, etc. features that such a language demonstrates? Perhaps, although we think that this observation needs a bit more sharpening, since at the level of phonology we may be still talking of individual items: just tokens. We would suggest that the notion "typologically disturbed" be characterized in basically syntactic, rather than phonological or lexical terms. Perhaps this may be put in a somewhat different way, keeping in view the very influential idea, currently held (although arguably its echo could be heard in ancient Indian grammars), namely that grammatically well formed syntactic constructions are the ones that satisfy lexical requirements. We might now state that the notion "typologically disturbed" may be characterized in terms of syntactic properties of lexical items. Occurrence of participial relatives or conditionals might then be viewed as a consequence of the verb having rich participial morphology, or the occurrence of constructions in which *boli* sets off labels, etc. can perhaps be seen as *boli*, a Case assigner, assigning (or checking) nominative Case. This emphasis on syntax for the purpose of characterizing the notion of typologically disturbed language may not

be ill placed, because it is obvious that syntactic change affects language at a deeper level than does change at the lexical data base. Contact with English has significantly added to the Oriya lexicon, but has hardly affected the syntax of the language; therefore if Oriya can be seen as a typologically disturbed language, it will be a perspective unrelated to English.

Characterizing a language as typologically disturbed could lead to interesting investigations that go beyond diachronic linguistics. At one level language, as is very well known – too well known, in fact, to merit discussion - can be viewed as a window on the world, as discourse about society and culture – a perspective that tends to get clouded these days because of the appeal of the natural scientific approach to language. Therefore when a linguistic form disappears or its use becomes very restricted, it might, in some cases at least, relate to some social or attitudinal change in the users of that language. For instance the use of the verb form in Oriya expressing highest form of politeness (V-inf – *ho-tense*, in modern Oriya, but not in mid fifteenth century Oriya of the inscriptions, where a different form of the V was used, as in *aasibaa heu* (please come) – literally “may (your) coming be”) has almost disappeared. It clearly relates to some change in social hierarchy, and the attitudinal change to hierarchy that has set in as a result. Similarly when a word is borrowed, a bit of culture is borrowed, and when a borrowed word is nativized, a bit of the other culture is nativized, that is, assigned a place in the recipient cultural system. When a syntactic construction emerges in a language, may be through language contact, it extends the stylistic repertoire of that language and the language might assign a specific communicative function to the new construction. When, some decades ago, the word *sarbaharaa* was created in Oriya as the equivalent of “proletariat”, it not only introduced a word into the Oriya lexicon, but also brought into the awareness of the people a new way of looking at the human condition in the world. One of the reporting devices in Oriya, namely, the so-called indirect speech construction, is borrowed from English; this borrowing was not need based because the language indeed had reporting devices – no borrowing at the syntactic level is need based, it is another matter that when the new construction is accommodated, it is assigned a communicative value. The reporting construction that arose as a result of the borrowing

increased the stylistic repertoire of Oriya. It appears that the language has assigned it a communicative function too by restricting its use to formal writing. Thus language, being the carrier and some times the creator of knowledge (in my view, Cameron and Kulick's (2003) *Language and Sexuality* is a fairly good instance of language as creator of knowledge), the expansion of the lexicon and the syntactic component of a language as a result of language contact can be fruitfully viewed as an extension of the wider knowledge domain of the users of that language.

Thus the understanding that Oriya is a typologically disturbed language can lead to meaningful research into the cultural history of Orissa - exactly as the finding that there occur non Brahminic / Hindu features in the Jagannath worship today in Orissa has lead to some deep understanding of the way Jagannath worship has evolved over centuries, and of the process of its Hinduisation. Although there are very insightful observations regarding the past and the present of Oriya culture scattered here and there in historical and other texts, such as histories of Oriya language and literature, there is room – very wide indeed – for a more systematic and focused (and a more comprehensive too) study of the cultural history of Orissa. If Pandit Binayaka Mishra is correct in asserting on the basis of some lexical evidence (ibid, pp. 12-13) that the earliest inhabitants of Orissa were speakers of Dravidian (Mayadhara Mansingh (1981) also holds the same view), and that Oriya emerged as the result of contact between them and the Aryans, then there is indeed justification for investigating into this process of cultural evolution, since the evolution of a language cannot just be restricted to elements of language – it would also relate organically to the evolution of a culture, as we have mentioned above.

Incidentally, in the study of culture there is certainly place for a concept equivalent to the linguistic one, namely, “typologically disturbed”. Such terms as assimilation, absorption, diffusion, melting pot, salad bowl, etc. do not capture the idea; the first three of these refer to the process, comparable to the notion of “nativization”, and the last two lack the idea of a base – “typologically disturbed” does not exclude the idea of a base category. Perhaps the notion that is the closest is the one of “subculture”, but it seems that with respect to some (base) culture, a subculture has a degree of autonomy that a

typologically disturbed language does not have with respect to the base category. Consider the case of Taliban in the context of Islam, although one might regard it as a rather extreme case. A really good candidate to instantiate the idea of typologically disturbed culture is Jagannath worship. Today Jagannath worship is seen as worship of Vishnu; yet animal sacrifice is performed in one of the temples within the Jagannath temple compound during the Dassara days – a *shaakta* practice carried out in a *Vaishnavite* temple. There is an interesting account of this: animal sacrifice was introduced in not too distant a past – in the middle of the sixteenth century - by Rajguru Bardhan, an intellectual, a reformer, and a very influential adviser to his king, when he felt concerned about vegetarianism among people as a result of the growing influence of Chaitanya’s teaching. He felt that this would take away protein from the people’s diet and there was no easy substitute available since milk was always in short supply. This step of Rajguru Bardhan was intended to bring protein back in the diet of the people (Mohapatra: 1989, p.60, pp.73-74). It may or may not be the correct account, but this is not the point here. What we wish to stress is that the identification of unexpected cultural or linguistic features can lead us to a diachronic study of the relevant culture, which might provide illuminating insights into its evolution.

II

In this section we discuss two questions: (a) in which discourse on language can we meaningfully situate our thinking on typologically disturbed languages? and (b) is it possible to connect these two discourses? We know that there are two distinct discourses on language: the sociolinguistic, communication theoretic, etc., and the bio-linguistic, which adopts the natural scientific approach. For the first, language, in the familiar sense of the term, is a socio-cultural construct or a real world object; for the second, language, in this sense, is rather an intuitive notion, and is not a real world object – it’s rather an epiphenomenon (Chomsky: 1982, p. 108). It is not a real world object in the sense that it is not part of nature – exactly as the continents of the world with their boundaries are not part of nature for the earth scientist. Rivers, oceans, deserts and mountains are not boundaries inherent to nature; if these are *used* as boundaries, then these are political

constructs superimposed on them. For an understanding of these demarcations earth sciences can make no contribution. From this point of view what is real is the language faculty, sometimes called a “mental organ”, which is part of the human biological system. What is real is then is the knowledge of language that a human has: in one terminology, the I-language (internalized, individual, and intensional), which she puts to use in order to negotiate with the world and for other purposes, including the one of self expression. It is clear that the concept of typologically disturbed language belongs to the first of the two discourses noted above.

What can be the relevance of taxonomical notions that classify languages as “Indo-Aryan”, “Dravidian”, and the notion of typologically disturbed languages that is derived from these? This question arises in the context of contemporary theoretical linguistic research. It is not the case that linguistic theories articulated within the natural scientific approach such as the GB theory or the Minimalist theory do not have place for classification of languages; the theory of parameters deals with language variation. But language variation here (based on, for example, the so-called “pro-drop” or Head or Case parameter, etc.) does not lead to classification of languages as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, etc. It is unlikely that a complex of parametric choices a language makes would converge to any taxonomy like these because the number of parameters is extremely small, and the level of abstraction at which parametric choices are made is deep. Classificatory terms such as Indo-Aryan and Dravidian to designate languages are based on a view of language as an evolving object: a language has a history and socio-political events and processes like migration, plunder, conquest, leading to, among other things, contact with people using a different tongue and belonging to a different culture, contribute to its development. Thus it can be observed that although classificatory terms such as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, etc. are linguistic terms, the associations that they evoke and the questions that they invite are not entirely internal to linguistics. Language in the more familiar sense of the term, being a socio-cultural object, its development cannot be understood in purely linguistic terms alone. It is in this way that one understands Chomsky when he says (Delhi lecture: 2002) languages have changed, but language faculty has not – there is at least no evidence that it has. We know that language contact

is one important reason for language change, but contact that leads to change does not bring a language into contact with some object that is beyond the scope of the language faculty!

Turning to the second question of this section, namely whether the two different discourses on language can be connected, we feel that they indeed can be - through a certain notion of language in the ordinary sense of the term. We may take the clue from, ironically, Chomsky's observations - "ironically" because he is the one who is most skeptical about the validity and even clarity about the notion: "...the notion language", he had observed, "might turn out just to be a useless notion" (1982: p.107). He had said this in the context of defining language within the possibilities of the natural scientific approach: language faculty generates all kinds of objects - "well formed" or "ill formed" - and what one calls "language" is nothing more than almost an arbitrarily chosen set of the output material, one's decision for the choice being nothing more than "some accidental, historically conditioned decision" (ibid). He made the same point when he said, "... what we call "English", "French", "Spanish", and so on ... reflect the Norman Conquest, proximity to Germanic areas, a Basque substratum, and other factors that cannot seriously be regarded as properties of the language faculty..." (1995: p.11). Notice the notion of language that emerges from these remarks; it is a superstructure on some output of the language faculty - in fact, one could perhaps put it somewhat differently by saying that some output of the language faculty gets a "local habitation and a name" in the form of a particular language in the day-to-day sense of the term. The situation is comparable to what happens when some natural objects - an ocean or a mountain - is converted into the boundary of a political entity such as a continent or a state; a new object, in some sense an artifact, is formed. In this sense language can be viewed as an artifact; one does not, however, mean that some individuals created language, what one means is that certain human actions such as territorial conquest, migration, etc. had consequences for assigning a name to some output of the language faculty, thereby making it an object of a certain kind - a marker of identity, for example - an object with which we conduct our day-to-day affairs in the world. It is with such a view of language that we think that the two discourses on language can be related. Both

of these distinct perspectives on language – the bio-linguistic and the socio-cultural historical – are needed for a more comprehensive understanding of language. More generally, that the human being is a biological organism is not her complete story as she negotiates with the world she lives in in many ways. Nurtured in a culture, which is part of her environment, from which the language she is exposed to is not dissociated, she is in some sense the product of not only nature but also history. To understand her therefore we need insights from both perspectives. From this point of view, classificatory terms such as Dravidian or Indo-Aryan are not misconceived or irrelevant in the contemporary milieu of linguistic thinking.

Acknowledgement

This paper has benefited substantially from the discussions I have had with Achla Raina. I am indebted to her. Thanks are also due to Munmun Jha, with whom I checked some observations I have made with regard to culture in this paper, and to Anil Thakur, Hamidul Haque, and Manideepa Patnaik.

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