

EFL University Entrance Examination 2013

Ph.D. Cultural Studies

Time: 3 hours

Max Marks: 100

Instructions

1. Write your Admit Pass No. in the boxes provided in the answer book. Do not write your name anywhere in the answer book.
2. Write all your answers only in the answer book(s) provided.
3. There are four sections (A, B, C and D) in this question paper. Answer only as many questions as specified at the start of each section.

SECTION A

Write a response of about 1000 words to ANY ONE of the following: (1 x 30= 30 marks):

1. Comment on the political, historical and cultural significance of the 1990s in India.
2. Critically assess the contribution of Raymond Williams in constituting Cultural Studies.
3. It is commonly felt that one of the defining differences between traditional and modern cultural forms is the role played by technology in the latter. Focusing on the technologically mediated arts in contemporary India – cinema, photography, television, radio, advertising, the internet – discuss the relevance of the tradition-modernity divide in understanding them.
4. The declining popularity of feminism among women today, according to some commentators, is a sign of its success. How would you make sense of this paradoxical statement? If you do not agree with this statement, discuss with examples, how feminism continues to play a role in the lives of women in today's world.

SECTION B

Read the passage below and answer ALL the questions that follow, in not more than 150 words each. (5 x 5=25 marks)

Language not only unites people, it also effectively divides them. Another way of putting this would be to say that language is, socially, not merely a means of communication but also of deliberate incommunication. It causes not only feelings of identity but also of enmity; often the most indestructible barriers among people are 'walls of words'. By this I do not mean merely that the process of formation of one linguistic identity generates a sharper sense of differentiation from others: for instance, the more the people of a particular region become 'Bengalis', the more their

sense of separateness from surrounding languages like Oriya or Hindi. This is evidently true; but this is not the only sense in which language creates incommunication. Language divides 'internally' as well, and not to pay attention to this process often distorts historical accounts about linguistic identities.

People having the same language do not have it in the same way. Socially, linguistic competence confers on people capacities, and their absence correspondingly takes them away. Being Bengali is an identity coming out of a person's having the Bengali language; but clearly, all Bengalis do not have this language in the same way or to the same extent. Thus, they enjoy the political 'rights' of Bengaliness to a patently unequal degree: for some rights stemming from Bengaliness must be indivisible, but others are unequal and stratified. The *bhadralok* of Calcutta speak the Bengali standard language, one which has resemblances on one side with the high language in which Tagore wrote his poetry, but also, on the other side of the cultural spectrum, with the language spoken in the bazaar by the fisherman, the maid in the babu household, or by the criminals on the margins of urban Calcutta. And these are not tightly separated orbits sufficient in themselves but a complex of words pulled in different directions by the internal logic of each social practice. The historical existence of the Bengali is a complex fact in which all these sublanguages (or linguistic subpractices) must find adequate and properly judged representation. Language as it is socially used thus has to be broken down into various subparts—high and low language, literary and common language, the *guru* (high, of greater merit) and *chalita* (conversational) language (a special distinction of twentieth-century Bengali), the literates' and the illiterates language. Such differences are not merely aural or cultural, but also political. Being able to use a language in certain ways enables a person to do certain things socially; others who do not possess such linguistic competence simply cannot perform them. Often these people are reduced to varying states of dependence on those who are more skilled, and their access to the whole of the social universe is mediated by this later group who can consequently control this tenuous access.

The use of writing by money-lenders, the scourge of the indebted peasantry, is one example. And the peasants cannot be blamed if they consider writing not as a means of enlightenment but of oppressive mystification. Peasant revolts, historians have argued show a particular intensity of anger against written records because they relate to the linguistic practice of writing differently. The complexity of the story of language and identities cannot be tackled without a sufficiently nuanced conception of the gradations of competence in language and its political effect. [...]

The nationalist movement used two cultural devices to solve the difficulty of according legitimacy to regional identities but still requiring a second-order self-identification of people as Indians. In its mature stages, it generated a plausible and powerfully articulated narrative of India's immemorial past, a logic of cultural unification lodged in the essentials or the depths of Indian history...But this narrative structure was supported by a deeper cultural arrangement that was more directly linguistic, which determined and mediated crucial political relations, and decided who could literally speak to whom...[T]he mixed elite drawn from the educated, bilingual intelligentsia of different regions found themselves within a triangle of cultural or discursive exchange—exchanges with the lower orders of their regional people, with peoples of other regions through their leaders

who were culturally and politically similarly placed, and exchange with the British, apart from the more general and exalted need to receive information about scientific developments in the Western world. The most effective and economical means of dealing with this set of discursive demands was a diglossia or cultural bilingualism. Through political experimentation, the national movement came to settle on this device of political culture quite fundamentally. Common training in English education with a common syllabus, common cultural preferences and tastes, and common biases provided the preconditions for this situation, but it was cemented by the evident functionality of this arrangement for the growth of an Indian political movement.

Some consequences of this invisible cultural fact deserve some mention. It ensured in an oblique and unobtrusive way a kind of elite domination of the higher levels of nationalist mobilization, even though subaltern dissent against colonialism was more extreme and visceral and middle class defiance more careful and circumspect. The linguistic economy partly guaranteed that despite this, it was only the middle-class elements who would provide the all-India leadership. Vernacular speakers could storm into the leadership of linguistically homogeneous areas, but there their political stars stopped climbing. Compulsions of this kind, working not through the explicit and usually resented logic of social class or status, but the subliminal agencies of language and communication, introduced an elitist counterweight into the inherent populism of the nationalist movement.

This diglossia was also politically rational in a narrower sense. Indian culture, it is often remarked, is characterized by an easy heteroglossia. After the entry of English education on a large scale, the situation stabilized into a fairly common structure of diglossia among the educated. A pure Indian bilingualism (i.e. using two Indian languages equally fluently for serious intellectual activity) was not very common among the elite: bilingualism rather meant the ability to use a vernacular and English. This meant that a bilingual person was not thickly aware of cultural or political developments in only two areas; under this arrangement, he was of course thickly aware of his own vernacular-based regional culture, but thinly of all others.[...]

Language thus acted as a necessary process of filtration, or 'gate-keeping'; it would filter out inconvenient, extreme, radical, intransigent demands from subaltern social groups from reaching higher bodies. This was no small factor in enabling the higher decision-making bodies to maintain their immaculate middle-class ambience of restraint, and polite gentility. Certainly the English-knowing bilingual elite represented the largest number of people from all vernacular regions; but this implied an inverse relation between the extent or width of representation and its intensity or intimacy. Conversely, seen from the point of view of ordinary people living in the dialect or vernacular spaces of the pyramid of speech, the further their demands were carried into the political world by their representatives, the less the control they could exercise over them.

--Sudipta Kaviraj, *Writing, Speaking, Being: Language and the Historical Formation of Identities in India*

- 1) Kaviraj argues that differences within each language are not simply aural and cultural but political. Linguistic competence enables people to do certain things socially. What does he mean by this? Elaborate.
- 2) Why was writing considered a means of oppressive mystification by the indebted peasantry? Explain.
- 3) What kind of linguistic arrangement, according to Kaviraj, provided an elitist counterweight to the inherent populism of the nationalist movement?
- 4) In what specific ways is the Indian elite bilingual? How does this affect the process of political representation?
- 5) Can you give examples from a literary debate/movement or the work of any particular author in any Indian language which has challenged the literary norms of language use and has thereby made language itself the site of democratic contestation and struggle?

SECTION C

Answer ONE of the two questions given below: (1 X 20: 20 marks)

1) Provide translations for ANY FIVE of the following English terms in any Indian language known to you and write a short essay (500 words) on the problem posed by language for the practice of Cultural Studies in India.

1. **Democracy**
2. **Identity**
3. **Discrimination**
4. **Spectacle**
5. **Privatisation**
6. **Standardisation**
7. **Authenticity**
8. **Psychoanalysis**
9. **Structuralism**

OR

2) In about 1000 words, describe the project that you intend to take up for your Ph.D research. Elaborate on your research question, hypothesis if any, the field of knowledge in which it is located, the theoretical and methodological resources you find useful, and other relevant details. (Note: This does not commit you to the same project. You are free to change the topic later, if selected.)

SECTION D

Write short notes (150-200 words) on ANY FIVE of the following: (5 x 5= 25 marks)

1. The Personal is Political
2. Colonial Modernity
3. Social Exclusion
4. Dalit Autobiography
5. Culture Industry
6. Linguistic Identity
7. Subjectivity
8. Caste Discrimination
9. Political Society