Language use in Fiji and Aotearoa/NZ: trends and implications for Fiji Hindi

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Introduction

This paper examines data from four surveys conducted on language use in Fiji over twenty-five years and discusses the implications for Fiji Hindi (FH), the mother-tongue of nearly 44% of Fiji's population and a large number of Indo-Fijian immigrants living in English dominant countries. While three of the studies (White 1971, Siegel 1973, Mugler and Tent 1998) were conducted in Fiji, one (Shameem 1995) was a retrospective look at language use in Fiji by immigrant Indo-Fijians living in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ). The paper is divided into three parts. The first part examines the goals and methodology of the four surveys; the second looks at some important findings in each survey; the third part examines the trends and the possible consequences of the data, both in terms of FH maintenance in Fiji and among immigrant Indo-Fijian populations living outside Fiji.

Longitudinal studies on language use provide valuable data on language change over a period of time, enabling prediction of language maintenance, shift or loss in speech communities known to speak endangered languages. FH is an Overseas Hindi of low status and recent development (1879-1916).[1] Siegel (1990) suggests it survives because of a strong sense of Indo-Fijian identity which experienced a resurgence after the two 1987 military coups which ethnically polarised the Fijian and Indo-Fijian populations. The two most recent studies (Shameem 1995, Mugler and Tent 1998) confirm that Indo-Fijians have very positive attitudes towards FH. However, as sociolinguistic surveys world over have shown, positive attitudes to a language are not enough to preserve it for future generations. Siegel (1990) suggests that of all Overseas Hindis,[2] Sarnami has the best chance of survival because of attempts being made to standardise it, the official adoption of a Roman script and institutional support.

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[1] Such languages developed as a result of plantation language contact during indenture and were very susceptible to shift and loss.
[2] These developed in South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Fiji , Mauritius and Surinam.

Background

It is essential to look at any data on Fiji language use in the light of Lieberson's comment that 'sociolinguists must come to grips with a central theoretical issue: the societal underpinning of linguistic behaviour' (1980: 24). Language use in Fiji is complex. Fiji has a population of almost equal proportions of Fijians and Indo-Fijians. In the three Fiji surveys, Indo-Fijians reported using Fijian, English and FH to communicate with Fijians (White 1971, Siegel 1973, Mugler and Tent 1998). English seems preferred for inter-ethnic communication in urban areas, and is used as the medium of instruction in schools, in parliament (where the use of the vernaculars are permitted but rarely heard), and for all business and administration. The English medium daily newspapers have a far greater circulation than the weekly/monthly vernacular papers. However, radio stations, films and videos which employ only Shudh ('standard') Hindi are very popular, even though Indo-Fijian oralcy and literacy in Shudh Hindi is limited and declining (Siegel 1990, Shameem 1995, Tent and Mugler 1996).

Although some information on Indo-Fijian language use was available from census data (1956 and 1966 only) and an earlier study by Adam (1958), White (1971) was the first survey to address Fishman's (1972) notion of domains as important indicators of language use in multilingual societies. White looked specifically at who spoke what language to whom and when, as well as the issue of language choice with changes in topic, interlocutor, setting and function. Other studies (Siegel 1973, Shameem 1995, Mugler and Tent 1998) have used the results of this survey to establish trends and differences in language use in Fiji since 1971. The results of the two surveys conducted in this decade are particularly important as they provide information on changes in Indo-Fijian language use following the 1987 coups.

Methodology

Context

While language proficiency is a static account of the individual's competence in a language, the amount used, and the domains in which it is used are important indicators of actual performance. As Holmes (1996) suggests, this tells us where and how languages are being used, so that if the goal is maintenance then one can extend the uses of the language to more interactions and social contexts. Moreover, policy makers can use this information to support their efforts to revive endangered languages. This is particularly true in the case of immigrant populations who face rapid language shift, such as the Wellington Indo-Fijians.

A comparison of survey results is limited however, because of the differing aims of the studies. For example, White (1971) studied the extent of bilingualism among Indo-Fijians and Fijians in Raiwai, in the heart of Fiji's capital city, Suva. Siegel (1973), on the other hand, studied Shudh Hindi-English shift in formal domains while taking for granted that FH was

being maintained in the informal domains in Nadi and its surrounds, a setting he calls semi-rural. Mugler and Tent (1998) report on an extensive survey conducted among Indo-Fijians and Fijians in Suva and among South Indian sub-groups in the 'sugar cane belts' including a number of townships in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, the two main islands. Although the primary aim of my study was to determine the extent of FH maintenance among recent Indo-Fijian immigrants to NZ (since 1987), I also asked respondents questions about their language use when they had lived in Fiji.

Sample: methods, size, scope
The two most recent surveys drew stratified random samples from their target population. The samples mirror the proportions present in the population. Both studies used age and gender as their primary stratification categories, although I also used religion, and Mugler and Tent (1998) further stratified by income (Suva study), geographical region (Viti or Vanua Levu) and area of residence (rural or urban). Stratification by socio-economic background was inappropriate for the Wellington survey, as this is notoriously difficult to identify for immigrant populations (Shameem 1995: 94), given the change in circumstances between life in the two countries.

The two earlier studies made no attempt to stratify the population in order to obtain a representative sample; White (1971) interviewed everyone who was at home during the day, while Siegel (1973) used a simple random sample to select participating households. While simple random sampling is possible in Fiji where all the Indian names in a telephone book, the electoral roll or households in a street are likely to be Indo-Fijian, this is not so in NZ where being Indian gives no indication of country of origin. Categories offered in NZ census questionnaires on birthplace or language spoken (1996 census only) are too broad to identify FH speakers. Thus, in my study, a list of Indo-Fijian teenagers living in Wellington was obtained through networking with gatekeepers in the community.

The nature of the sampling techniques used by White (1971) and Siegel (1973) meant that their samples were potentially skewed. White points out, for example, that 148 out of his 217 respondents were women, since men were at work during the day when the interviews were conducted. However, he argues that it is valuable to have more women in the sample, since they are the likely determinants of language use at home since they spend more time with the children.

An important feature of all four studies was the presence of community insiders at various stages of the projects. In this respect, gender seemed particularly relevant. For example, Mugler and Tent (1998) were careful to match interviewer/interviewee gender (female) and ethnicity for their 1000 (Indo-Fijian and Fijian) participants, and it was clear that my being a Muslim woman in the Wellington survey facilitated access to teenage Muslim females in the community. Siegel (1973) acknowledges the difficulty faced by his three male Indo-Fijian interviewers in gaining access to Indo-Fijian women. As a result, only 31 of his 145 respondents were women.

White (1971) worked with 'largely untrained' research assistants and does not specify their ethnicity, though he does say that the questionnaires were administered in English wherever possible, suggesting that respondents and administrators were not matched for ethnicity or language.

The three Fiji surveys included respondents from a much wider age range than did my NZ study, which was limited to 53 teenagers (aged 13-19) and their mothers (aged 34-50). Siegel's (1973) respondents were aged between 14 and 70 with 42% under 30. White's (1971) respondents were aged between 20 and 74 and Mugler and Tent (1998) interviewed respondents in the three age bands, 15-25, 30-45 and 50+.

Instruments and administration

All four studies relied on self-report data. Despite the drawbacks of this method, the tool used (the questionnaire) is particularly useful in a struct-ured interview where the interviewer is the scribe and can therefore clarify questions (Mugler and Tent 1998), and probe into interesting or vague responses (as in Siegel 1973, Shameem 1995). Although it is difficult to verify claims of language ability and use, consistency checks can be built into the questionnaire by repeating a question later in the study, by re-wording, or by employing different answer categories, as White (1971) does in using Rubin's (1968) questionnaire for Guarani as the basis of his own.

The survey questionnaires generally elicited information on domains of use, although variation with interlocutor, setting and topic were included in White (1971) and Shameem (1995), and with the first two variables in Mugler and Tent (1998). All four surveys used language choice as the basis for data collection — respondents were asked to nominate the language used last or most often in specified situations. This slight difference in the wording of the question meant a difference in the data gathered, even within the same domain, with implications for comparability. My respondents were asked to nominate the language used most often and given five options (1=Always English, 2=Mainly English, 3=Both English and FH, 4=Mainly FH, 5=Always FH). Mugler and Tent (1998), in asking their Indo-Fijian informants to specify the language last used, offered only two choices (FH or English).

Choosing the language for questionnaire administration is another problem, due to the limited literacy of Indo-Fijians in Shudh Hindi, and the fact that FH is a pre-literate language with no written script. If using a FH questionnaire, research assistants have to be trained not only in survey techniques but also in reading an unfamiliar script. Mugler and Tent (1998), however, used a FH questionnaire which, according to one of the writers of this instrument, Veena Khan (personal communication), avoided 'using the basilectal level that most people assume FH is'; instead their questionnaire was written in simple standard Hindi. The use of this register may have been another reason why 56% of their informants felt more comfortable with English.

In fact, Siegel (1973) attributes some of the major differences

between his and White's (1971) findings to the difference in language used in questionnaire administration. As I did later, his assistants used the English language questionnaire as the basis of a simultaneous oral translation to FH of the questions when needed, and recorded the answers in English. In my study, most mothers opted for FH during the interview and most teenagers, English, although among the older teenagers (16-19 years) code-switching with FH was common. This pattern is also clearly apparent in the most recent Fiji survey where 68.4% of those aged 15-25 chose to use the English questionnaire over the FH one and 87% of urban Indo-Fijians aged 15-25 reported code-switching regularly (Mugler and Tent 1998).

Results

English language influence on the vernacular languages in Fiji has been discussed by all the studies, although the three Fiji studies (White 1971, Siegel 1973, Mugler and Tent 1998) also comment on the high degree of FH-Fijian bilingualism during inter-ethnic communication. In contrast, in the NZ data, proficiency in Fijian was minimal among teenagers, and only marginally higher for their mothers: only six mothers rated themselves at the highest proficiency level in Fijian and no teenager reported an equivalent level of competence. In fact 50 teenagers said their oral skill did not extend beyond greetings and thanks. The discrepancy in findings between the Fiji surveys and my own (which was conducted within four years of immigration) is perhaps due to the political and social desirability of knowing Fijian in Fiji — a function which is replaced by English in NZ.

In the next section I will concentrate on language use in Indo-Fijian homes and in public settings. Public settings includes communication with interlocutors of various backgrounds in the delivery of formal and informal speeches, as well as communication at school. Home language use includes use with grandparents, parents and siblings with variation in topic and setting.

Language use in public settings

Both White (1971) and Shameem (1995) included questions on language use with various interlocutors in public settings in Fiji. I adopted White's categories of Indo-Fijian government officer, shop assistant and market vendor in order to verify his claims of diglossic language use over locale or setting[3] and status of addressee[4] in Fiji.

Figure 1 confirms White's earlier findings. Wellington teenagers reported they had used the most FH with market vendors, followed by shop assistants and then officials (all Indo-Fijian). As the setting moved from

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[3] Used by Rubin (1968) and discussed by Fishman (1972).
[4] Adlam (1987) and 'Aipolo (1989) found this to be a significant factor influencing choice of language.

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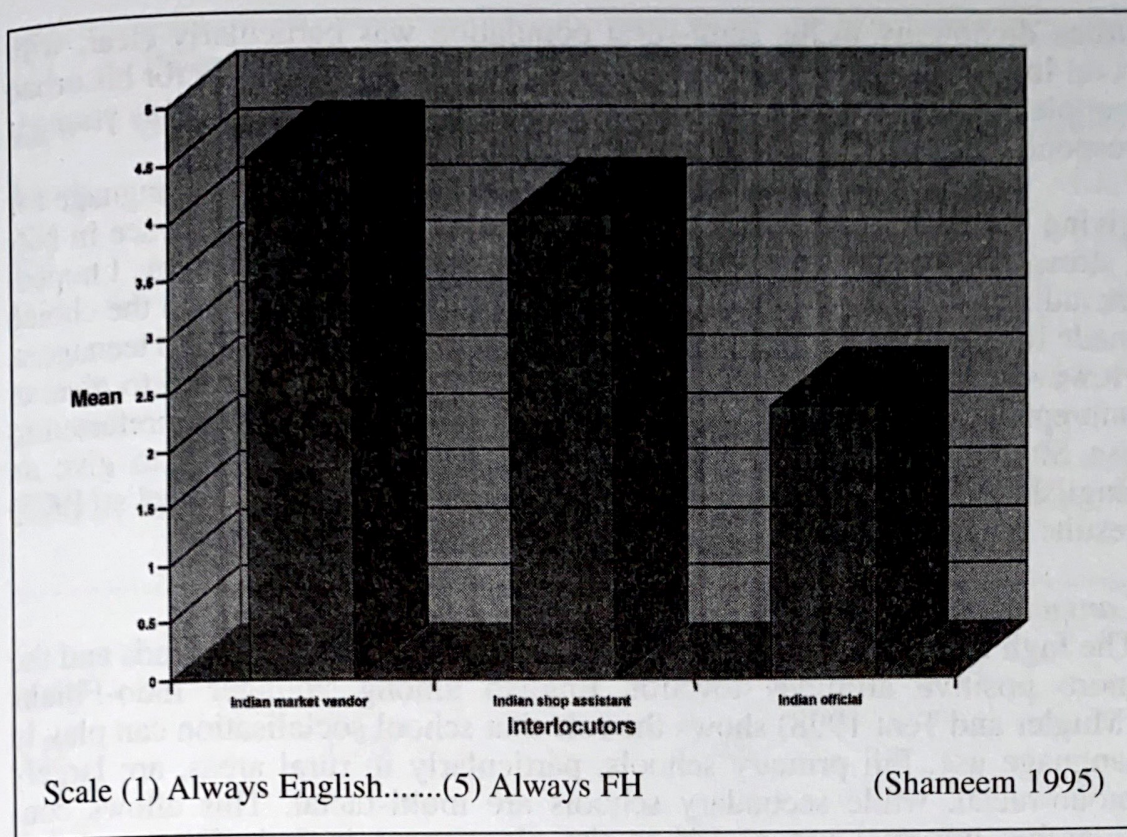Scale (1) Always English.......(5) Always FH   (Shameem 1995)

Figure 1: Language use in public settings — Fiji

informal to formal, the preferred language shifted from FH to English. White suggests that the use of the vernacular and English are related to the diacritical features of the interlocutor. In all cases, he says, the visible attributes of status of the interlocutor (high in the case of [government] officials and low in the case of market vendors) appear to influence language selection. Overall, however, White's evidence demonstrates an overwhelming preference for FH among Indo-Fijian interlocutors regardless of status. My retrospective data suggests a significantly greater amount of English was being used between interlocutors than White's study had shown earlier, although the pattern of use according to the role of the interlocutor was similar.

Language use in speeches
Two of the studies looked at language choice for giving a speech although in different situations. Siegel (1973) describes Shudh Hindi-English shift in a public arena and writes that Indo-Fijians, having little knowledge of their vernacular (Shudh Hindi), preferred to use English on formal occasions. In my view, he does not adequately distinguish between Shudh Hindi and FH, nor consider adequately the strength of the expectation of Shudh Hindi use in formal situations. Half his survey sample preferred English, a third Shudh Hindi, and a further 14% bilingual Shudh Hindi-English use. The rural-

urban dichotomy in his semi-rural population was particularly clear, with rural Indo-Fijians preferring Hindi over English and vice versa for his urban sample. He also found a distinct preference for English among his younger respondents (aged 14-24), and with higher levels of schooling.

My study asked respondents to nominate their preferred language for giving a speech in a variety of situations to an Indo-Fijian audience in NZ. I stressed that it would be an impromptu, informal speech thereby, I hoped, including FH in the range of possibilities. FH featured highly in the choice made for speechmaking at family gatherings for both mothers and teenagers. However, although a majority of teenagers preferred to use FH to give an unprepared speech at religious functions too, half the mothers preferred to use Shudh Hindi for this purpose. Most teenagers preferred to give an English speech at social gatherings, a finding in line with Siegel's (1973) results on formal speech making.

Language use in school

The high incidence of Fiji English use in urban school playgrounds and the more positive attitudes towards English among younger Indo-Fijians (Mugler and Tent 1998) shows the role that school socialisation can play in language use. Fiji primary schools, particularly in rural areas, are largely mono-racial, while secondary schools are multi-racial. This allows considerable informal use of FH in the playground in Indo-Fijian primary schools, while vernacular language education, as stipulated by the 1953 UNESCO report, is provided in the first three years by Shudh Hindi, a point of contention for bilingual educationists and sociolinguists for many years (Siegel 1973, Rao and Harrington 1997).

Siegel's (1973) student respondents reported using both FH and English at school, and he felt they probably used FH with classmates and English with teachers, although this information was not specifically elicited. 86% of his school age respondents said they used English in varying combinations with other languages at school.

In my 1995 work with Wellington teenagers, I elicited information on language used in interaction with various interlocutors with changes in topic and setting. As Table 1 illustrates, English was an influential force at higher levels of schooling, although FH was definitely preferred for peer interaction (Table 2). This overall preference for FH in intra-ethnic peer communication in Fiji was clear in all four surveys.

Home language use

Home language use was even more influential than peer interaction in the use of FH. In Siegel's (1973) study, FH was the home language in 71% of the households, with the balance being largely Gujarati speakers. Two Indo-Fijian families used English as the sole home language.

Both White (1971) and I found that in parent-child interaction the use of English was higher when the topic was schoolwork than when it was family matters. White found, however, that English was being used more in

Topic	Primary school		Secondary school	
	Schoolwork	*Social activities*	*Schoolwork*	*Social activities*
Mean	2.52	3.15	1.24	1.83
SD	1.58	1.53	0.44	1.09
N	52	52	29	29

Scale (1) Always English .... (5) Always FH
(Shameem 1995)

Table 1: Language use with teachers in Fiji: topics

	Schoolwork	*Social activities*
Mean	3.50	3.90
S.D.	1.36	1.37

N = 52
Scale (1) Always English .... (5) Always FH
(Shameem 1995)

Table 2: Language use with peers in Fiji: topics

	FIJI				NZ	
Topics	*Schoolwork*		*Family matters*		*General topics*	
Language used with:	**Mean**	S.D.	**Mean**	S.D.	**Mean**	S.D.
Grandparents			**4.60**	1.07	**4.49**	1.1
Father	**3.85**	1.50	**4.19**	1.36	**3.23**	1.55
Mother	**3.92**	1.46	**4.22**	1.3	**3.59**	1.45
Older siblings	**3.80**	1.39	**4.20**	1.35	**3.10**	1.54
Younger siblings	**3.83**	1.53	**4.03**	1.56	**2.24**	1.15

Scale (1) Always English .... (5) Always FH
N = 49 teenagers
(Shameem 1995)

Table 3: Language use with grandparents, parents and siblings

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interactions with mothers than with fathers. While my retrospective data showed non-significant differences between these two interactions in Fiji, in NZ substantially more FH was being used in mother-child interactions (about the same as in Fiji) than father-child ones. Both Mugler and Tent's (1998) Suva data and my NZ data show a high level of FH being used in family interactions with amount of use increasing with age of interlocutor (see Table 3).

In Mugler and Tent's (1998) study, 94.3% of the informants used FH and 5.7% used English in their last oral communication with their sibling, this being the interlocutor with whom the greatest use of English occurred at home. In my study too, respondents said that in Fiji they had been using mainly FH with siblings, but in NZ, with their younger siblings they were using mainly English.

Discussion

The value of longitudinal language use studies is that each study builds on and further develops previous work. This includes research methodology, analyses and results. Language use data gives us a significant insight into language behaviour in complex multilingual communities and indicates the direction for further studies.

All four of the surveys discussed in this paper used questionnaires to collect data on language use. Obviously questionnaires have limitations, since they do not necessarily give an accurate or complete picture about the social and political determinants of language choice. Even the language of the questions and the focus of their wording can influence the quality of data gathered. For example, the development and use of a FH or Fiji English questionnaire might yield a different type of data from one in simple standard Hindi or standard English.[5] It is particularly difficult to measure the extent and nature of use of the languages in multilingual communities, and the influence of the language of the questionnaires is an important factor in such research.

Nevertheless, language use surveys, even if reliant on self-report data, do provide valuable information on trends. For example, Siegel (1973) comments on the 'surprisingly' high number of respondents, in both his own and White's (1971) work, who claimed knowledge of English, a hitherto unrecognised feature. Also significant were rural-urban differences which have been confirmed in the most recent Fiji survey (Mugler and Tent 1998). In White's Suva study, English was used much more in the home than it was at home in Siegel's Nadi study. In Nadi, its use was generally confined to inter-ethnic communication, although Fijian was used more for this purpose. By the time the two more recent surveys were conducted, in the 1990s, the

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[5] Tent and Mugler (1996) argue for the inclusion of Fiji English in the International Corpus of English.

widespread knowledge of English was no longer surprising and, although Fijian had almost completely disappeared from the speech repertoire of the Wellington teenagers, it was still very much a feature of inter-ethnic communication in out-of-city areas in Fiji (Mugler and Tent 1998).

A further aspect of my research was to identify on a five point scale, degrees of shift in FH use among Wellington Indo-Fijians. I knew that urban (Fiji) and immigrant (NZ) Indo-Fijians had non-diglossic language use patterns: English and FH no longer have clearly defined roles for these communities. A range of criteria determine language choice in any situation and code-switching is common. A five point scale was helpful in revealing that differences existed according to topics discussed, interlocutors and settings in Fiji, and that a shift in FH-English use had also occurred between Fiji and NZ.

As Mugler and Tent (1998) show, FH has a strong user base in Fiji and attitudes to its use are extremely positive. In 'official' domains and in secondary schools, English has a great deal of influence, but at home and with Indo-Fijian peers and friends, FH is preferred. In NZ, my data showed that FH support at home has declined, and although teenage language use with grandparents and mothers has remained constant, the greatest shift was apparent in language used in communication between the teenagers and their fathers and siblings. Significantly, teenagers and their mothers showed a preference for FH for delivering informal speeches at family gatherings, and while mothers preferred Shudh Hindi on religious occasions, their children preferred FH. This data suggests that home, family and religious group act as incentives to encourage FH in NZ.

As Siegel (1990) predicted, and the two recent studies confirm, the coups of 1987 contributed to a resurgence in feelings of nationalism, and with this a strong feeling of ethnic identity for Indo-Fijians. For Indo-Fijians overseas, however, this does not necessarily engender a desire for language maintenance. For example, Hornberger (1997) discusses the situation of the Puerto Rican immigrants she studied in the United States for whom ethnic identity maintenance was to a certain degree independent from language and literacy maintenance. I believe the level and nature of FH maintenance and use for Indo-Fijians also depends on their perceived visibility. In NZ, for example, they are an invisible minority, speaking a stigmatised language and difficult to identify under any category in the 1996 population census. Only by looking at families who value FH as a home and community language can we determine the factors which contribute to its maintenance. It seems likely that, as Hornberger (1997) suggests, communal and individual efforts and sacrifices are needed to support languages in such communities, as well as a move from mere tolerance to promotion-oriented government policies. For the Indo-Fijians in Fiji and overseas alike, individuals will then be empowered to retain and use FH in the future.

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