Multilingualism as "The Norm"?
First Impressions from the Indian Discourse

In line with the question posed in my doctoral thesis, the praxis and discourse of multilingualism are central to this lecture. The starting point for the considerations on multilingualism in India I would like to present today is evidence I have come across on several occasions in literature from German-speaking countries, but that has not been empirically proved. Whenever (though not often) the criticism is made that multilingualism is presented and discussed in academic, political and everyday discourse as something dangerous, it is argued that children in many parts of the world naturally grow up multilingual, and that this is only an exception in our "monolingual" central European nation states.

> *In contrast to other continents and states, e.g. Africa or India, since the 18th century European people have not grown up speaking multiple languages or in multilingual contexts – since the emergence of monolingual national states in the 18th century a homogenous identity has taken root that has resulted in natives viewing their native belonging and their monolingualism as an anthropological basic constant. Dialect is almost wholly included in this, however people with dual or multiple nationality are regarded as deviating from the norm and are therefore outside the monolingual norm from the outset. (Krumm 2009, p. 235)*

In my view, this suggests a fascinating antithesis, but without empirical evidence it does not hold. I decided, therefore, to examine one of these countries in order to find out what this propagated "normality" consists in, and how it is reflected in the theory. After initial research into African countries I chose India, in part because of access to sources. The following considerations are not yet presented as completed analyses but in the first instance as first attempts to structure the extensive field of discourse.

After a short introduction to the linguistic landscape of India, I will identify two lines of discourse in Indian sociolinguistic research by means of two protagonists in the debate. As the next step, I would like to share the initial results of a systematic survey of 11 volumes of the *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, and then in the conclusion I will briefly discuss the relationship to the linguistic landscape of Switzerland. A comparison with the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, as well as the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* has not yet been carried out, but it is central to a comparative analysis of the discourse in India and Europe, and it will be undertaken.

In order to embed the debate about multilingualism in India I would first of all like to provide a brief insight into the linguistic landscape of India, which can be described as a polyglot state not only because of its size and population figures, but also in terms of its history. Along the same lines as the Austrian linguist, Hans-Jürgen Krumm, whom I have just quoted, Anil Bhatti speaks of a "normality of multilingualism" in India. This is certainly striking when seen against the background of Europe, which is characterized by virtual monolingualism (Luxembourg can be counted here as an exception with its very own challenges).

> *Multilingualism in India is no isolated phenomenon, but must be regarded as unsurprising. It is normal. (Bhatti 2008, p. 41)*[1]

This raises the question of what exactly this "normality" means, how it manifests itself in everyday life, and how it is reflected in empirical research, that is, in the theoretical positions within the field. These questions cannot yet be conclusively answered in this lecture, but they can at least be examined more closely. At this point it is important that I emphasize that I am no expert on India's languages, nor on its multilingualism. In terms of this subject, I am concerned with extending my theoretical and empirical field of vision, with perspectives that have emerged, and are located, in a particular context in which multilingualism is postulated as the "norm".

In India only 22 languages are officially recognized in the constitution, whereas 114 languages are included in the 2001 census (in the 1951 census there were still 825; cf. Sridhar 1996). Recognition as an official language means the state is obliged to make sure "that they grow rapidly in richness and become effective means of communicating modern knowledge" (cf. *Official Languages Resolution* 1968, fig. 2).[2] In addition, official languages may be used to answer enquiries within high official positions (cf. ibid., fig. 4). In what follows I refer to Thomas Benedikter, whose *Language Policy and Linguistic Minorities* 2009 is the most current comprehensive account of the linguistic situation in India that I have been able to access. He shows very clearly the variety of officially recognized and non-officially recognized languages in India.

> *According to the Indian Census of 2001, […] 97% of the people in India speak one of the 22 `scheduled languages` as a first language, whereas 3% speak one of the remaining 92 languages not included in the constitutional list so far, out of a total of 114 languages recognized as such in the census. The Third all India Education Survey*

[1] Source of the English version: http://www.goethe.de/ges/phi/prj/ffs/the/spr/en4980085.htm [21.04.2011]
[2] Source: http://rajbhasha.nic.in/GOLPContent.aspx?t=endolresolution [14.03.2012]

> *reports the use of 58 languages in school curricula and of 47 languages in public administration. Radio programs are broadcast in 91 languages, print media are available in 87 languages, and the Federal and State governments are propagating mass multilingualism under the banner of the Three-Language-Formula (TLF). (Benedikter 2009, p. 17)*

This discrepancy between officially recognized languages and school languages or official languages comes down to the fact that it is up to the federal states to choose as their official language one of the 22 languages recognized in the constitution, or to choose another regional language. The largest language groups are (in order of the number of speakers) "Hindi (422,048,642 or 41.0%), Bengali (83,369,769 or 8.1%), Telugu (74,002,856 or 7.2%), Marathi (71,936,894 or 7.0%), Tamil (60,793,814 or 5.9%) and Urdu (51,536,111 or 5.0%) followed by Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam (between 4.5 and 3.2%)" (Benedikter 2009, p. 21). Hindi and English are official national languages. English was originally supposed to be replaced with Hindi as the sole national language after 15 years of India's independence in 1965, but then it was anchored permanently in the constitution as the national language, something that was initiated by the language groups not related to Hindi.

The 28 Indian federal states are structured on a linguistic basis. However, in each state there are different minority languages and dialects alongside the main regional language (cf. Sridhar 1996, p. 328). This is shown by the following list of main and minority languages in the respective regions, which makes clear how large the percentage proportion of speakers of minority languages is:

Table 5 Majority languages, speakers of minority languages (1991)

Territory	Majority language (and % of its speakers)		% of speakers of minority language
Andhra Pradesh	Telugu	85.13	14.87
Arunachal Pradesh	Nissi/Dafla*	23.40	76.60
Assam	Assamese	60.89	39.11
Bihar	Hindi	80.17	19.83
Goa	Konkani	56.65	43.35
Gujarat	Gujarati	90.73	9.28
Haryana	Hindi	88.77	11.23
Himachal Pradesh	Hindi	88.95	11.05
Jammu&Kashmir	Kashmiri**	52.73	47.27
Karnataka	Kannada	65.69	34.31
Kerala	Malayalam	95.99	4.01
Madhya Pradesh	Hindi	84.73	15.63
Maharashtra	Marathi	73.62	26.38
Manipur	Manipuri/Meitei	62.36	37.64
Meghalaya	Khasi**	47.45	52.55
Mizoram	Mizo/Lushai	77.58	22.42
Nagaland	Ao*	13.93	86.07
Orissa	Oriya	82.23	17.77
Punjab	Punjabi	84.88	15.12
Rajasthan	Hindi	89.89	10.11
Sikkim	Nepali	60.97	39.03
Tamil Nadu	Tamil	85.35	14.65
Tripura	Bengali	69.59	30.41
Uttar Pradesh	Hindi	89.68	10.32
West Bengal	Bengali	86.34	13.66

Source: figures elaborated from the Census of India 2001

Notes: *In these two cases of indigenous languages one can hardly speak of a "majority language", as it is just the language spoken by the relatively major share of population.
**In Jammu&Kashmir Kashmiri is the absolute majority language of the Kashmir

Source: Benedikter 2009, p. 41.

These figures can be used to illustrate India's linguistic variety, but with regard to the multilingualism of the population, as in the case of the national census data of Switzerland, the census data, too, have only limited significance in terms of individual multilingualism. I would therefore like to talk briefly now about the role of languages in the Indian school system, before, as I mentioned earlier, juxtaposing and discussing the positions of two authors.

In order to confront the tensions caused by the diversity demonstrated – tensions that had also taken on religious and political dimensions – the Indian National Congress (INC), India's largest national party, tried to stipulate a detailled list of fundamental rights in the national constitution, applicable to all Indian citizens regardless of their religion (cf. Sridhar 1996, p. 332). That is why the *Three-Languages-Policy*, which I briefly mentioned earlier, was developed. It has been under discussion in somewhat divergent versions since 1949, and

has been implemented in schools since 1961 (cf. Sridhar 1996, p. 334). In the 1977 version it contains the following regulations:

Table 3. Modified and graduated three language formula.

Educational level	Languages as subjects of study
Lower Primary (Grades I–IV)	Mother tongue (Regional language)
Higher Primary	(1) Mother tongue (Regional language) (2) English
Lower Secondary	(1) Mother tongue (Regional language) (2) Hindi in non-Hindi areas and a modern Indian language in Hindi area (3) English
Higher Secondary	Any two from *Group A* or *Group B* (A) (1) Mother tongue (Regional language) (2) Hindi in non-Hindi areas and a modern Indian language in Hindi area (3) English (B) (1) A modern Indian language (2) A modern foreign language (3) A classical language, Indian or foreign
University	No language compulsory

Source: Sridhar 1996, p. 335.

Therefore, with respect to languages, there are three types of schools:

> *The policy, therefore, has been to provide three types of schools: one, where the "principal" medium is the official language of the state (the majority of schools are of this type); two, where a minority language is used as the medium of instruction whenever there are at least 10 students in a given class who request it; and three, where a minority language is used as the primary medium in the entire school (usually these schools are either run by minority institutions or by state governments in areas with substantial presence of minorities). (Sridhar 1996, p. 337)*

At first that appears to be a very comprehensively implemented multilingual education, but this is considerably relativized when one considers that 80% of children attend school for only 4 years (cf. Pattanayak 2004, p. 181), and so at school level they have access to neither Hindi nor English. Other authors even point out that 80-95% of the population, depending on sources, cannot learn English at all, or not well enough (cf. Sheorey & Nayar 2002, p. 23).

Together with the fact that the ability to speak English can, today as in the past, be used as a resource in economic and social advancement, highly critical implications arise here that are also reflected in the Indian debate on multilingualism. Pattananyak, whose positions will presently be introduced, addresses this issue, and the majority of articles on multilingualism in the *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics* are concerned with the acquisition or the role of English as a second or foreign language.

Now I would like to turn to the academic discourse, for which two actors will serve as examples. Then I will look more closely at the articles on multilingualism in the *Indian*

Journal of Applied Linguistics. I will introduce the positions of Anil Bhatti and Debi Prasanna Pattanayak.

Anil Bhatti is Professor of German Studies at *Jawaharlal Nehru University* (JNU) in New Delhi, I have chosen him because he is also active in the debate on European multilingualism in German-speaking countries (cf. for instance Bhatti 2008; 2011). He also highlights the similarities and differences between India and Europe in terms of their multilingualism. As concerns Switzerland, however, he calls it an exception from the monolingually structured other nation states of Europe. This assertion cannot simply be allowed to stand without further reflection, so we can perhaps come back to this in the subsequent discussion. After presenting the positions of Bhatti I will present the positions of Debi Prasanna Pattanayak, Linguist and Educationalist, Founder and long-serving Director of the *Central Insititute of Indian Languages*, now retired, who already in the mid-1990s was referred to as having been active in the debate on multilingualism in India for 30 years (cf. Kachru 1995, p. 608).

I already quoted Bhatti earlier, and referred to his postulation of the "norm of multilingualism in India". With regard to India he speaks of a "pervasive multilingualism practised in a real and living way" (Bhatti 2008). Bhatti quotes the *Anthropological Survey of India*, according to which "over 65% of the communities in India are bilingual, many even trilingual" (Bhatti 2011, p. 143). Multilingualism in India is therefore no "isolated phenomenon", and nor is it "something for the elite" (cf. ibid.). Bhatti thereby characterizes multilingualism in India in a particular way:

> *The functioning multilingualism in India must be understood creatively. It is rather as if multilingual competence produces a level of reference which makes adequate communication possible. I emphasize "adequate" because successful multilingual constellations do not aim for linguistic perfection. Simplistic behavioural models of 'Code Switching' can barely encompass the multilingual disposition. Multilingualism is perhaps better understood through performative concepts such as linguistic habit and linguistic repertoire. (Bhatti 2008, p. 43)*

According to Bhatti, in "multilingual situations""adequate linguistic competence" is enough. The aim is communication and not perfection, "Anything else is down to the individual's individual decision" (ibid., p. 46). With the "performative" terms he has adopted, "linguistic habit" and "linguistic repertoire", he is designating linguistic competence as a disposition rather than a concrete ability. Correspondingly, according to Bhatti, in a polyglot environment like New Delhi it is impossible to differentiate between "one's own and foreign" languages, for there are only "one's own" and "other" languages. In Bhatti's view,

the bipolarization into “one’s own” and “other”, which in European nation states and in Switzerland is a consequence of the relatively homogenous language areas, is not relevant here, and not appropriate. Anil Bhatti quotes the Indian writer Sashi Deshpande as follows, demonstrating how little a term like “mother tongue” conveys in such a multilingual context:

> *[…] since, for many of us, the question ‘What is my mother tongue?’ does not have a simple answer. Is my mother tongue my father’s language? (It often means this. The logic of calling it a ‘mother tongue’ defeats me.) Or, if my mother has a different language, is it that? Is the language spoken at my home, the one which I have been educated in or the one I read, write and think in? […] In any case, most of us Indians learn to live with more than one language, moving swiftly from one to another according to the need. (Bhatti 2011, p. 141)*

Indeed, in more recent publications and statistics in Europe and Switzerland the term “mother tongue” is replaced by “main language”. However, the questions posed by Deshpande can be posed in the same way in relation to this term, for in the context of multilingualism it represents an approach that is too simplistic. For multilingual people in Europe too, the alternative answers available in large-scale quantitative surveys are often a real challenge (cf. Brisić 2009, p. 139). This is connected to the fact that the census data in neither India nor Switzerland directly surveys individual multilingualism in the country, and therefore only approximate conclusions can be drawn based on the survey data. However, we must ask whether Bhatti’s perception – as the quote by the writer may show – runs counter to his claim that multilingualism in India is not a question of elites, by in fact putting the focus on particular sections of society while others are ignored and by not taking into enough consideration issues and theories of power and inequality. If we understand language as social praxis and resource, as Monica Heller argues, both these aspects must be kept in mind. She understands language as

> *a set of resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces, and whose meaning and value are socially constructed within the constraints of social organizational processes, under specific historical conditions. (cf. Heller 2007, p. 2)*

Critical perspectives are only very marginal in Bhatti’s study, and have to be guessed at when he refers to the differences between mostly monolingual Europe and multilingual India, and when he speaks of tensions which he, however, does not directly relate to linguistic variety and the reduction in this, but relates rather unspecifically to “religious-secular space”.

> *In the international context, the diversification process being gone through by Europe's relatively monolingual, monocultural states is being accompanied by tensions that are characteristic of already existing multilingual, multireligious, multicultural states like India. In India, these tensions are leading to a pressure to homogenise in the religious/cultural sector and to the shrinkage of the secular sphere. In both cases it is a matter of the dialectic relationship between the dismantling of borders and the promotion of diversity. (Bhatti 2008, p. 40)*

In contrast to Bhatti's perspective, which in spite of the suggestion of existing tensions is optimistic and perhaps also more concerned with the everyday world than with educational theory, Pattanayak mainly takes an educational theory approach, identifying highly critical points in the development of India's multilingualism. For example, he raises the issue – which will also become apparent in the analysis of the journal article at the end of this lecture – that multilingualism with respect to English is certainly officially propagated in the education system, but it is not implemented individually. This leads to inequalities in education because speakers of minority languages lack access to educational opportunities in their mother tongue, and because even long after the end of colonialism the English language plays a central role now, as then. Pattanayak too, though, pits the European understanding of bilingualism against the "Indian perception".

> *They view bilingualism as a static structure where two languages are at war with one another. They do not see that under pressure of heteroglossia or polyglossia situations change and decisive movements take place in the lives of speech communities. They do not see, that bilingualism is an abstraction, the nature, content, function and domain of which are constantly changing in relation to one another and in relation to other structures in society. Each language is heteroglossic in the sense of complex stratification into genres, registers, styles, sociolects, dialects, and mutual interanimation among these categories. (Pattanayak 1990, p. viii)*

He points to the bipolarity of the European perception, something unthinkable in India. Like Bhatti he also sees linguistic cooperation in a much more performative way than was the case in Europe at least at the beginning of the 1990s. It must also be mentioned, however, that the "zero-sum hypothesis" addressed by the "war metaphor", i.e. the idea that everything that brings about competences in one's own language is missing from the second language in terms of resources, is no longer a popular idea in today's linguistics, even within Europe. Unlike Bhatti, however, Pattanayak brings in aspects of language and language use that cause inequality. He raises the issue of language as an instrument of power that structures access to social positions:

> *Use of language can become a major factor in creating unequal societies in multilingual contexts. As long as this inequality persists education cannot be conflict*

> *free. The assumption that variation is disintegration is unfortunate. Such an attitude equates different with deficient. It must be emphasized that it is not the recognition, but non-recognition of different identities that leads to disintegration. Multilingualism can thrive only on the foundation of respect for the difference. (Pattanayak 1990, p. xii)*

He describes conflicts accompanied by inequalities mainly in relation to the role of minority languages and of English in the Indian education system. Pattanayak sees the role of multilingualism more from the angle of education policy, and sees here the need to increase children's access to educational opportunities. He emphasizes the importance of the mother tongue in the development of children's sense of identity, and addresses the problem that accompanies linguistic variety: many children are not educated in their family language and so they cannot draw on the resource with which they enter school – language. It is very difficult to interlink family and school language (cf. Pattanayak 2004). Similar lines of argument are pursued also in the German-speaking discourse on the role of language in educational inequality (cf. for example, Eckhardt 2008).

Alongside the neglected importance of learning in one's mother tongue, Pattanayak criticizes the overemphasis on the importance of English without there being actual opportunities to learn the language to a decent standard. While English is becoming more important in science and technology, Pattanayak argues that this language is a resource that only very few people have access to: according to Pattanayak only two percent of the population can access opportunities to learn English (cf. 2004, p. 80). So whereas the importance of English is promoted, this development is at the expense of the Indian languages which are increasingly dying out because no or few resources are used to promote them (cf. ibid.). Pattanayak argues that as well as lack of access because of the way the school system is structured, few competent teaching staff are available. The consequence is children who can speak neither their mother tongue nor the regional language or English well, meaning that they are not likely to reach a high standard of education (cf. ibid.).

His devastating conclusion on the Indian language policy with respect to education is as follows:

> *There is colossal ignorance about languages. No distinction is made between teaching a language, teaching about language and teaching through a language. There is no perception of Mother Tongue, First Language, Second Language and Foreign Language. (Pattanayak 1990, p. 188)*

Against the figures cited by Bhatti (65% of the communities are multilingual, referring to the *Anthropological Survey of India*) Pattanayak's figures sound quite different. He cites the figures from the Indian census and says that the proportion of multilingual people in the Indian population is 13.75%. This discrepancy can only be highlighted here. It cannot be explained, due to lack of access to the original sources. What does become clear, though, is that both authors associate multilingualism with quite different implications. Whereas Bhatti strongly supports the model of "adequate linguistic competence" within multilingual situations – probably with respect to everyday communication, although this is not made explicit – and emphasizes that this depends not on perfection in a language but on the possibility of making oneself understood, Pattanayak refers to the role of language as a resource for accessing education and therefore also social and economic life chances. The two authors, therefore, have different points of emphasis which can be viewed as highly complementary in their perspectives on different areas of everyday life.

After highlighting these two chosen authors and their position on multilingualism in India, I would like in conclusion to give you some initial insight into my analysis of a selected Indian academic journal that is published twice a year. Up to now I have carried out a survey of the articles and an initial classification into different categories, and these will be examined further in what follows. The aim of the first survey is to provide an overview of the articles on multilingualism published in a specified period. The following categories are relevant here:

- Author's institution
- Thematic direction
- Country the contribution refers to
- Discipline in which the article is published

Firstly, it is noticeable that in the included volumes on the theme of multilingualism – twelve in total – only 16 articles were published. Considering the presence of the theme in Indian everyday reality, as, for instance, described by Bhatti as "pervasive multilingualism practised in a real and living way" (Bhatti 2008, p. 40), and considering the abundance of languages in use, this may be highly surprising.

Regarding the **institutions** of the authors (all male!), eight of these are in the 'global north', six in India itself and three from other countries of the 'global south'. The proportion of institutions in the 'global north' and the 'global south' is just about equal, even if at first the

northern institutions appear to be dominant when sorted by volumes. Before the year 2004 only articles (six) from universities in the USA, Great Britain and Australia appear, and they examine the Indian linguistic landscape from the outside, even though the authors are often of Indian origin. From 2004 till 2010 only articles from institutions in the 'global south' are represented (ten), which I can explain more clearly in a moment. A paradigm shift in the editorial board of the journal is conceivable, but the change could possibly also be down to changes in the research landscape.

Regarding **thematic direction**, it is noticeable that many contributions refer to English as a second language, particularly in India. The discussion does not proceed in a one-sided manner, either positively or negatively, but from different angles: learning English is, on the one hand, propagated as a multilingual competence, but it is also criticized for its role as a relevant resource in terms of power politics yet also a resource in short supply. This supports the line of discourse opened by Pattanayak. There are hardly any contributions in line with Bhatti's argument. It is possible that his contributions are tailored to the European discourse, as I have only come across him in European publications.

If we consider the **countries** that the contributions refer to, the emphasis is on India (nine contributions). Another one refers to Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa; four are written without explicit reference to any country. In this sense, the emphasis is clearly on countries of the 'global south', but in many cases the view is from the outside, as I made apparent earlier when I talked about the institutions which had submitted the articles.

Regarding the **disciplines**, two essays stand out that have a medical focus and are concerned with the phenomenon of aphasia in multilingual patients. The other contributions fall within the areas of *Applied Linguistics* and *African and Indian Studies*.

That is as far as I have come in terms of a first classification of the existing articles in the form of an overview. I do not think it would make sense at this stage to carry out, in addition, an intensive discourse analysis in relation to these articles, as they are too strongly oriented towards linguistic aspects and less so towards social aspects. This is probably due to the journal's focus. I am planning to undertake a comparative analysis of the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. For the sociological analysis of the discourse on the phenomenon of multilingualism the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*

could also be relevant, however, I could not find any equivalent to this among the Indian journals.

Conclusion

We began by asking about the nature of research discourse and praxis in multilingualism in a country of the 'global south' that is not monolingually structured like the majority of European nation states. The aim was to gain some initial insight into the subject. Bhatti's model, even though it is current in the German discourse, should be treated critically when mirrored against the other contributions: how far and on what levels multilingualism does actually represent a normality is a question that cannot, in terms of the research thus far, be applied to the education system, but it can perhaps be applied to everyday communication. This is probably what Bhatti is referring to when he speaks of "adequate competences". This normality already begins to falter within the school system, and it is not possible to speak of "normality" with respect to English, which seems to be dominant in the debate around multilingualism.

To make a connection with Switzerland, as I originally intended to do in my draft lecture, turns out to be difficult because the starting point is quite different. Structurally, there are four national languages in this small country, and they all have equal status. Swiss German is spoken by the largest number of people, French by the second largest number of people, followed by Italian and a small number of people who speak Romansh. In addition, because of educational expansion the educational theory dimension of multilingualism is highly relevant, so focusing on "Indian ease" with the adequate competence of multilingualism is not helpful on its own.

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