

The Diverse and Changing Face of Verbal Communication in Indian Railways

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Abstract - The country like India is full of regional, cultural, religious and linguistic variety. In India, travel and tourism have become major points of concern as many people travel from one place to another every day. To make this travel comfortable, there are many modes of transport, both private and public. Out of which Railway is a major mode of public transport which makes the travel comfortable, convenient and affordable for the people. While the journey takes place, communication remains a major activity. Most of the times, the communication of the people during their travel remains verbal, which includes both oral and written. Due to the diversity, the language of communication varies and hence it may become difficult to have certain communication with the railway staff, vendors or co-passengers for the travelers. Even there can be chances to have lack of understanding of written instructions for the passengers. To cope up with this problem, a lot of steps have been taken by Indian Railway relating to language usage. There is a progressive change in the official use of language in Indian Railway. The paper studies and analyzes the verbal communication of and with the Railway Passengers focusing its diversity and the changing face from the initiation of Indian Railways till date.

Key Words- Indian Railway, travel, language use, verbal communication

I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country of diversity. People follow different religions and culture. There are geographical variations in the country. As language and culture are interrelated, all this has brought variations in the use of languages. 22 languages have been chosen as the official languages for India from around 150 living languages which currently exist in India with sizable number of speakers. Indians travel from one place to another. This travel may be there for different reasons varying from tourism to education and jobs.

Transportation system hence becomes one of the major needs of Indian people. Majority of the people use public transport to go from one place to another. One of the widely used modes of public transportation is Railway- which is the affordable and comfortable mode for many of the people.

Indian Railway is the backbone of Indian transportation system. In a country like India, railway journey is a great opportunity to experience the country's vast diversity. Being public transport system, it needs to cater the needs of the people from different regions with different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. So naturally the system does not remain a mere transportation system but it takes form of a social institution.

Verbal communication is the communication through the use of words. It can be both oral and written. While travelling by using a public transport like railway, people need oral communication a lot. But along with that for

instructing, ticketing etc. written communication is also used. So it becomes necessary and interesting to study that.

II. RAILWAY AND LANGUAGE VARIETY

Railway is possibly the only mode of public transport where a huge variety of passengers ranging from high class people travelling in First Class to the common people with lower economic background travelling in the general bogies of Second Class Sitting are found travelling together. As people differ in their socio-economic, educational and cultural background, it gives more variety of language usage during the travel and it finally provides a wide variety for language study.

It becomes very much interesting to study the Language Use in this social institution of Indian Railways. The motto of Indian Railways is to serve the passengers and satisfy them. The slogan of Indian Railways is 'Lifeline of the Nation', which has been proved by them through the facilities and care provided to the passengers.

India being a diverse country in case of language use, it becomes necessary for the public transportation systems to use the languages which will be understood by the passengers travelling in trains.

This paper has been written based on the study of a major route of Konkan Railway i.e. from Madgaon to Mumbai, which covers two states- Goa and Maharashtra. But though

there is inclusion of only two states in the direct study of the language use for this study, these two stations fall in between the major railway routes going to and from Delhi and Trivandrum.

So the possibility to get the passengers is from Kerala, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and the nearby states. This paper deals with use of language in official and formal use such as ticketing, announcements, instructions, signboards as well as unofficial and informal things like passenger interactions, vendors and sell of things etc.

III. HISTORY OF USE OF VARIETY OF LANGUAGES IN INDIAN RAILWAYS

The first passenger train of India ran between Bori- Bunder (Mumbai) and Thane with 14 carriages which carried 400 people and it had three steam locomotives named- Sindh, Sahib and Sultan. By these names of locomotives even the influence of major religions of India at that time namely Hindu, Sikh and Islam can be seen. During that period, the practice of using English, Marathi and Urdu was common for instructions and boards related to rail transport was common. The official picture released by the Central Railway's Chief Public Relations Officer showing the crowd waiting at Kurla station for the country's first electric train has the name of the station painted in three languages - English, Marathi, and Urdu. At the initial days, of use of Marathi by Railway, 'Modi' script was used to write Marathi. So the use of Devnagari script was started a few decades later by Indian Railways.

Later after 1950, the practice of using English, Hindi and local language of the state started and it has been being used till date. The names of stations, instructions, and announcements are given in English, Hindi and the major local language of the state.

IV. LANGUAGE ON ELECTRONIC DISPLAY BOARDS

The electronic display boards even provide the updates in Hindi and English and for the regions, where 'Devnagari' script is not used, there the electronic displays even have the local language on them. So it becomes very easy for the passengers to get the information about the trains very easily and it becomes even easy for them to understand them.

V. USE OF LANGUAGE IN ANNOUNCEMENTS

Three Language Formula has been used by Indian Railways to make the passengers comfortable to understand the instructions, announcements etc. The three languages are- English, Hindi and the dominant language of the region or the state language. Each station on the route from Madgaon

to Mumbai gives announcements in three languages. For Goa it is English, Hindi and Konkani and for Maharashtra, it is English, Hindi and Marathi.

VI. LANGUAGE OF TICKETING

Previously, only Hindi and English were used on the Railway Tickets. But it was not understood by some of the Indian travellers. The Indian Railways' Passenger Amenities Committee found many people in Tamilnadu, who were not able to understand whether they had got right tickets or not as they did not know Hindi or English and hence couldn't read anything printed on the tickets. So from January 1, 2018; the railway tickets were decided to have the local language of the state where the ticket has been issued. It proved relieving for the southern states of India.

VII. THE RAILWAY STAFF AND USE OF LANGUAGE

The staff members of Railway office, who have a direct contact with the public, are expected to know and understand the local language of the people, along with Hindi and English. The persons at the ticket window, station masters etc. have to interact with the people. Even the ticket collector has to understand the language of the people. So possibly the ticket collectors of the particular region work for the particular routes. For the long-journey trains, Hindi and English remain the language of interaction with on train staff.

VIII. USE OF LANGUAGE AMONG PASSENGERS

Especially during the long journeys, the passengers have more chances to have communication with each other. Sometimes the passengers are not from the same region. So they have different languages of communication. But if they need to communicate with each other, they need some common ground of understanding. It is usually observed that, the language used in the First Class or Two or Three Tier AC is usually the elite way of using language in its content and style. Preferably English or Hindi, is the language through which the passengers communicate with each other and with the vendors and pantry car servants. The code switching is observed more in the First Class between English and Hindi. In the Second Class bogies, many people opt to communicate in local languages there. In case of differences of local languages of the passengers, a common pidgin with mixture of their local language and Hindi or rarely English is used for communication. So the code mixing of local language, Hindi and English is found there. This difference is seen due to the differences in economical, social and educational backgrounds of the people travelling in different classes.

IX. OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

- 1) As Railway is a public transport with the capacity to occupy people with all possible social and economic classes, a great variety of language use can be studied.
- 2) There is a noticeable change in the official use of language in Indian Railways since its inception, till date.
- 3) It provides opportunity to study the variations and positive changes in language use catering the needs of the people.
- 4) Language use plays an important role in making the travels comfortable and easier for the passengers.
- 5) Along with the formal and official communication a variety of use can be studied from the informal use of language among the passengers, vendors and so on.
- 6) The study states that people from different socio-economic backgrounds differ in the use of their language of communication with the other people.

X. CONCLUSION

Verbal communication is an inevitable form of communication used in travelling. Public transport demands a good level of communication which takes place among many levels. This verbal communication is carried out through the medium of language and which is to be taken care of for better communication. Indian Railway has brought positive changes by the use of three language formula or use of local languages for ticketing etc. All this has made travel through Indian Railways pleasant and comfortable for Indian as well as foreign travelers.

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