Tatiana Oranskaia 🆔
and Anvita Abbi 🆔

Variation in Hindi: An Introduction

तत्याना ओरांस्कया और अन्विता अब्बी

प्रस्तावना

Variation in language is the basis of its change. The title of the volume reflects this idea, which took form in the early sociolinguistic studies of the mid-20th century and has become nearly a truism in modern linguistic theory. The metaphor of heart in the title refers to the expression used by Stephen Levinson.[1]

The topic of variation draws our attention to the fact that the more varied a language the more it is honoured and accepted in society. Like homogenous biosphere is neither sustainable nor life-giving similarly logosphere can be sustained only if language and languages are varied. English today has assumed the status of world class language because it has spread across several seas in various forms equally acceptable to non-native speakers. In fact, there are more non-native speakers of English today than the native speakers.

Linguists believe that there is a progressive relationship between the antiquity of a language and its varieties. Variety gives a language the power of adaptability and change and thus sustainability over a period. Variety also indicates its acceptability across several socio-cultural, geographical, political, and economic strata. The more various forms—regional or social—a language has, the longer the history of its existence is. A case in point is the Indo-European language family, many of whose varieties have developed into independent languages over a period, Hindi among them.

Uniformity kills a language, and this is the reason diversity of the language indicates its antiquity and sustainability. Overstandardisation of any language leads to its fossilisation. For example, classical Sanskrit is frozen today because it fell out of spoken use, unlike Prakrits, which developed into several modern Indo-Aryan

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1 Interview with Stephen C. Levinson on 1 December 2017 (Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics 2017).

languages. A convincing evidence is the grammar of Sanskrit enshrined into Panini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* written around 500 BCE. The principles and rules of this grammar are still used in the classroom situation to teach Sanskrit, as the grammatical structure of the classical language remains the same.

Not many notions are as broad as variation. It stretches over practically all areas of human knowledge, among which linguistics is a prominent field of scholarship, one in which reality is filtered to reduce the perception of the phenomena to a system. The Saussurean dichotomy of *langue* and *parole* is seen as the theoretical concept which originally introduced the perspective on variation within the Western science of language—one that continues to hold sway up to this day. This conceptual framework, closely preceded by the dialectological research and ideas of Alexander von Humboldt, later found notable application in the principles of the Prague school and American structuralism. The rise of sociolinguistics with the new line of inquiry introduced to research by Labov (Chambers 2002: 6) established a strong connection between social factors and variation, thereby making the latter a major topic of interest of this relatively young and blooming branch of linguistics. The present volume lies almost totally outside this trend; the studies here deal for the most part with the language per se.

Currently, variation is primarily conceived as socially or geographically determined non-standard speech usage, and more strongly related to *parole* than to *langue*. This, naturally, does not exclude the variation inherent in the language system, which belongs to the intrinsic "orderly heterogeneity" language possesses (Weinreich et al. 1968: 100). From the very moment the social constituent manifestly entered language studies it was clear that patterns of social variation do not necessarily relate to linguistic taxonomic units. The relationship between the intra- and extralinguistic factors responsible for the disproportion between a meaning and multiple means of its expression may be more precisely defined as "linguistic and social co-variation" (Wolfram 1993: 199).

The perspective on intrinsic language variation is present in the Indian linguistic tradition, which, informed by the aspiration to preserve the Vedas unaltered, focused on preserving their divine language Sanskrit unchanged. There is evidence of scholarly thought on this topic starting with the formation of the various Vedic renditions. Famously Panini's rules for correct Sanskrit also take into account variants (or 'options' *vibhāṣā*, 'alternatively [applicable]' *anyatarasyām*) in the language. Subsequently, the Pali and Prakrit grammarians follow categorisation patterns like those of Sanskrit, making use of much more variable Middle Indic data.

Most of the contributions in this volume loyally follow the intralingual variation slant of the classical Indian tradition when analysing Hindi data.

Hindi, in the broad meaning of the term, that is including numerous regional forms, surpasses the Middle Indo-Aryan languages of the preceding historical stage (as far as we know them) in the richness of its variation. Compared with Hindi in

this sense, Modern Standard Hindi provides, naturally, fewer, but still abundant sets of interchangeable linguistic items, often of diverse ancestry: Indo-Aryan, Perso-Arabic and English. In this book, the study by Heinz Werner Wessler presents a classic case of semantic variation in the target language, namely in translation of Christian theological terminology: each single Latin entry in the dictionary is rendered with several definitions, on the one hand using Persian and Arabic terms on a par with each other for Islamic notions and on the other Indo-Aryan terms for Hindu notions.

Quite a few prior studies have examined variation on different levels of the Hindi language system. Many of them are concerned with the classical sphere of variation research—phonetics, phonology, and prosody (e.g., Ohala 1976; Pandey 1989; 2020)**.** Other works deal with variation in Hindi syntax (e.g., Vasishth et al. 2012; Kothari 2010; Davison 2015) or the interplay between syntactic and phonological structures (e.g., Patil et al. 2008). A smaller number of variation analyses explore the other subsystems.

Extralingual impetuses are responsible for numerous geographical and sociocultural code-mixed varieties of Hindi which expand its variability scope. Language contact is a multidimensional, multidisciplinary field in which interrelationships between interlocutors hold the key to the understanding of how and why people use language/s the way they do on the one hand and how structures of the contacting languages change on the other. The mixing of Hindi and English has been a favourite subject of exploration for decades, seemingly exceeding the research on the interplay between Hindi and other Indian languages. The latter, so to say, indigenous contact type, is responsible for the emergence of a plethora of grammatically simplified non-standard Hindis as languages of contact described here in the article by Anvita Abbi. Each of them functions as a regional lingua franca and some are even used as the language of regional administration and teaching.

The present volume does not provide a survey of the whole range of variation in Hindi. Nor does it concentrate on theoretical considerations. It sees its modest task as giving glimpses of, for the most part, grammatical but also lexical and discourse variation as well as of varying attitudes to and usages of Hindi in educational pragmatics.

The book makes use of the breadth of the notion of variation. It includes studies on diverse aspects of the phenomenon within the major official language of India considering them from different perspectives. These perspectives may be delineated as follows:
  — Comprehending the paths of grammaticalisation— with its effect of increasing varieties of Hindi across several states and the possibility of bringing social cohesion, especially in contact situations (Abbi; Sharma);
  — Identifying the variation as a long historical process in some dialects of Hindi (Montaut);

— Discerning constraints on variation in Modern Standard Hindi grammar and discourse (Khokhlova; Kostina; Oranskaia; Verbeke & Ponnet);
— Tracing variation in lexical diversity of translated terminology in the source and target language (Wessler) and derivational suffixation in the standard lexis (Pandey);
— Exploring sociolinguistic and ethnocultural issues in language teaching within India (Agnihotri) and particularly teaching of Hindi across borders (Singh).

The volume quashes the myth of monolithic standard language as the norm and the only variety that draws respect and acceptability (Abbi; Sharma). Language contact has been visualized here with a new perspective as contacts between languages are contingent upon ethnic, demographic, cultural, educational, and socio-economic status of communities.

The bulk of the articles deal with Hindi in India. Some of them (Abbi; Sharma) attempt to look more precisely into geographical forms of Hindi and their interaction in different contexts and types of communication. Annie Montaut's and Heinz Werner Wessler's studies add a chronological dimension to this perspective.

A similar vantage point is taken here when investigating the possibilities of and constraints upon formal variation with regard to the grammatical structures of Standard Hindi (Khokhlova; Kostina; Oranskaia; Verbeke & Ponnet). A pragmatic approach comes to the fore when discussing problems and methods of Hindi teaching in ethnoculturally mixed contexts (Agnihotri; Pandey; Singh), one point of interest being the motives among learners from different backgrounds for learning Hindi, that is, how they plan to use their new knowledge (Singh). The article by Agnihotri presents a philosophical stance on language education from the multilingual perspective.

The analyses use data written (including manuscripts), spoken and electronic, which allows variability patterns in Hindi to be explored both in the broad and narrow meanings of the term. In this way, the inclusivity of various forms of data of existing and ancient Hindi makes this volume rare.

Results have been obtained by consulting a wide database of Hindi (Verbeke & Ponnet), compiling and tagging a syntactic database (Oranskaia) and testing data on different subjects (Khokhlova; Kostina). The article by Heinz Werner Wessler deals with the study of the manuscripts from the early 18th century which are fruits of missionary linguistic work in South Asia. It informs readers of the antiquity of the literature available in the forms of grammars and dictionaries well archived now in European libraries.

The volume also exposes the experimental results of rather challenging issues. These are compound verbs, which continue to puzzle researchers, and discourse markers in Hindi. Ludmila Khokhlova's study of Hindi compound verbs is a meticulous analysis of their variation from the perspectives of semantics and pragmatics.

The investigation conducted by Ekaterina Kostina underpins the understanding of discourse markers as tools ensuring text integrity and coherence and emphasises that variation is their fundamental feature.

Two distinctive characteristics of the present book deserve special mentioning: first, it is concerned with variation only and exclusively in Hindi, and second, it is bilingual, with contributions in English and in Hindi.[2] The main text of each article is preceded by an abstract and a list of key words in both languages.

We hope that the language-specific studies may help to improve and increase our understanding of linguistic variability in general.

Heartfelt thanks are due to Ex-Vice Chancellor of the Mahatma Gandhi Antar-rashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya in Wardha, Prof. Girishwar Misra, who initially came up with the idea of preparing this volume and has been supporting it with his interest and advice.

We thank most warmly the contributors to this volume for their valuable works and patient cooperation.

We also thank Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing for taking this volume into its publication programme, and especially warmly Ms Nicole Merkel-Hilf, Ms Elizaveta Ilves, Ms Iris Matzner and Ms Daniela Jakob for their help and support.

It is with the heaviest of hearts and deepest sorrow that we think of our dear colleague and fellow contributor Prof. Vashini Sharma who will not see this book published. She left us all on 2 January 2021. Her article here remains a draft.

ORCID®
Tatiana Oranskaia https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7207-9190
Anvita Abbi https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3163-3751

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2   The variationist approach continues in the English language of the contributions. Thus, some authors use American spelling and punctuation, while others follow British English usage. In some cases, also the Hindi spelling varies.

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