A Preliminary Investigation into Ahirani Bilingualism

Frank Blair, with researchers P. Keder and L. Sanni
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Abstract

This survey was carried out in the last quarter of 1987. The report summarizes the findings of the researchers with regard to the linguistic situation of the Ahirani language in Dhule District. The survey of the Ahirani language was part of a larger sociolinguistic survey project of the linguistic minorities of Dhule District.

The fieldwork was carried out by Mr. P. Keder and Mr. L. Sanni under the direction of Frank Blair. A three-week training seminar held before the fieldwork began to acquaint the researchers with the principles of sociolinguistic survey. The actual fieldwork was conducted in seven weeks, a very short time period in which to conduct a sociolinguistic survey among an ethnolinguistic community as large as the Ahir. This report must necessarily be christened a “preliminary investigation,” for it does not answer all the questions that we had. Nor does it claim to say anything about the situation of the Ahir outside of Dhule. Yet I believe that the conclusions drawn as a result of this survey are sound and that further research will bear them out.

The varieties of Ahirani used in Dhule District are inherently intelligible with each other. The words which are considered proper Ahirani words vary from place to place in the different parts of the district, but this does not seem to affect the ability of people to understand each other very much, as people share a common pool of vocabulary items. Nearly all Ahirs are at least functional in Marathi, able to accomplish basic tasks using that language.

Attitudes towards Ahirani are very positive in the situations where the use of Ahirani is considered appropriate: in the home or at work, if the work is agricultural and the co-workers are also Ahir, and in conversation with other speakers of Ahirani. Attitudes toward Marathi are also positive in situations where the use of Marathi is considered appropriate, which include certain occupational domains (e.g., working in a mill) and speaking to strangers who do not know Ahirani. The most common use of Marathi is in non-agricultural jobs, with people who are not Ahirs, and for higher education.

The Ahirani of Akkalkuva taluka and Dhule taluka are intelligible with each other. To a large extent, the conclusions drawn from the comparison of wordlists match those drawn from dialect intelligibility testing. The varieties of Ahirani spoken in Dhule District constitute a single dialect. This is shown both by the high degree of similarity in the wordlists from the two areas and by the fact that the Ahir of Dhule taluka understand the Ahirani of Akkalkuva taluka. As Akkalkuva Ahirani represents the northernmost extremity of the Ahirani dialect area, and the Ahirani of Dhule taluka represents the southernmost variety in Dhule District, it is concluded that the Ahirani of Dhule District consists of a single dialect. This coincides with the perception of the Ahir people themselves.

(This survey report written some time ago deserves to be made available even at this late date and without the usual anonymous peer-review. Conditions were such that it was not published when originally written. The reader is cautioned that more recent research may be available elsewhere. Historical data are quite valuable as they provide a basis for a longitudinal analysis and help us understand both the trajectory and pace of change as compared with more recent studies.—Editor)
Contents

Preface

1 Introduction
   1.1 Geography
   1.2 People

2 Goals
   2.1 Linguistic similarity
   2.2 Dialect intelligibility
   2.3 Bilingualism
   2.4 Language use and language attitudes

3 Summary of findings
   3.1 Dialect area study
   3.2 Bilingualism
   3.3 Language use and language attitudes

4 Study of dialect areas
   4.1 Linguistic similarity
      4.1.1 Procedures
      4.1.2 Lexical similarity chart
      4.1.3 Conclusions
   4.2 Dialect intelligibility testing
      4.2.1 Dialect intelligibility scores
      4.2.2 Conclusions
   4.3 Integration of dialect area conclusions
   4.4 Residue

5 Bilingualism
   5.1 Recorded text tests
   5.2 Second language oral proficiency evaluation

6 Language use and language attitudes procedures

References
Preface

This report is the result of research carried out in the last quarter of 1987. It summarizes the findings of the researchers with regard to the linguistic situation of the Ahirani language in Dhule District. The survey of the Ahirani language was sponsored by Suwarta Alliance Ministries as part of a sociolinguistic survey of the linguistic minorities of Dhule District.

The fieldwork on which this report is based was carried out by Mr. P. Keder and Mr. L. Sanni under my direction. A three-week training seminar held before the fieldwork began served to acquaint them with the principles of sociolinguistic survey. Mr. R. O., Mr. G. J., and Mr. S. W. aided and advised at various points along the way. Many thanks are also due to Mr. P., who provided us with contacts in the area around Dhule and who accompanied the fieldworkers on several occasions. Without the kind cooperation of the people living in Phagane and Borakund villages, this survey could not be as complete as it is.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not also express my appreciation for the kind hospitality shown to me by Mr. and Mrs. R. O. during the ten weeks that I was their guest. They made me feel as though their home was my home.

Seven weeks is a very short time in which to conduct a sociolinguistic survey among an ethnolinguistic community as large as the Ahir. This report must necessarily be christened a “preliminary investigation,” for it does not answer all the questions that we had. Nor does it claim to say anything about the situation of the Ahir outside of Dhule. Yet I believe that the conclusions drawn as a result of this survey are sound and that further research will bear them out. I am solely responsible for any errors of fact or opinion and will be the first to welcome any corrections that need to be made.

The spelling of Marathi proper nouns is somewhat problematic when using Roman script. The ambiguity of the choices involved is increased by the fact that the proper nouns themselves often have more than one form, especially since the “Marathization” program has begun. I have tried to use the currently accepted Roman spelling of Marathi proper nouns insofar as I am aware of them. Where the current spelling differs more than marginally from previously common spellings, I have given the alternate spelling in parentheses the first time the word is used. Thereafter I have used the current spelling, except when quoting an author who uses one of the older spellings.

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M.A. (Linguistics)
Deopur, Dhule
7 November 1987
1 Introduction

1.1 Geography

The district of Dhule (Dhulia) was known as West Khandesh until it was named after the district headquarters in 1960. The Dhulia District Gazetteer describes the situation of the district with the following words:

It is the western-most of the districts on the northern border of Maharashtra State. It is bounded on the west by Dangs, Surat and Broach districts of Gujarat State, on the north by Baroda District of Gujarat and Jhabua and West Nimar districts of Madhya Pradesh, and on the east and south by Jalgaon and Nasik districts, respectively of Maharashtra State. (Kunte et al. 1974:1)

The district has been composed of ten talukas since at least 1971. They are: Akkalkuva, Akrani, Dhule, Nandurbar, Navapur, Sakri, Shahada, Shirpur, Sindkhede, and Taloda.

Akrani taluka and Akkalkuva taluka together once formed a taluka known as Akrani-mahal. Akrani taluka is sometimes (unofficially) referred to as Dhadgaon, which is actually the name of the town that is the taluka headquarters.

The Western Ghats, the range of mountains that stretches from Maharashtra south to Tamil Nadu, have their northern terminus in Dhule District. The Satpuda (Satpura) hills run through Akkalkuva taluka and Akrani taluka in the northern part of Dhule District. Most of this region is above 300 meters in altitude. The Toranmal plateau lies at 1,000 meters between two ranges of the Satpudas. In Sakri taluka, in the southern part of the district, may be found the Sahyadri hills. This portion of the district also lies above 300 meters in altitude, though it is not so high as the Satpudas. Until recent times these hills were densely forested, but this is no longer the case.

In between the Satpudas and the Sahyadris lies the Tapti (Tapi) river valley. The talukas of Talode, Shahada, and Shirpur form the north side of the Tapti river basin, while the talukas of Dhule, Sindkhede, Navapur, and Nandurbar all lie to the south of the Tapti. Together they form a valley which is generally less than 300 meters in altitude. This has traditionally been the part of the district with the greatest amount of agriculture.

1.2 People

Among the many ethnic groups living in Dhule District are the Ahir. Ahirs may also be found in Nasik District and Jalgaon District. In Dhule District, the Ahirs live primarily in the Tapti river basin, particularly in Dhule, Sindkhede, Shahada, and Shirpur talukas. According to the Dhulia District Gazetteer (Kunte, et al. 1974:184), Ahirs have lived in the area since at least the fifth century A.D. There are several different castes of Ahirs, including such diverse occupations as farmers, herdsmen, fishermen, tailors, weavers, carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, etc. They are one of the more forward ethnic groups in the district, as they do not appear on the list of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.

According to the 1961 Census, the Ahirs numbered at least 277,446.1 The total population of the district was returned as 1,351,236 in 1961, which means that the Ahir formed approximately 20 percent of the population.

According to the 1971 census returns, 82.69 percent of the population of Dhule District is classified as rural. The remaining 17.31 percent is classified as urban. Most of the population (60.14 percent) lives in villages with less than 2,000 inhabitants. About 65 percent of the population is reported to be involved in some form of agricultural labor. Although these figures apply to the population of the whole district, they may be taken as giving an approximation of the situation among the Ahir. It may be the case, however, that the Ahir are more urbanized than many other segments of the population.

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1 This figure is from Kunte, et al. (1974:212). It is the actual number of people who reported their mother tongue to be Ahirani.
The mother tongue of the Ahir is called Ahirani. It has also been called Khandeshi and Dhed Gujarati. There is some disagreement among various writers about the status of Ahirani.

Some writers view Ahirani as a dialect of Marathi. Others appear to view it as a different language. This disagreement arises because, although Ahirani is popularly considered to be a dialect of Marathi, it appears to be quite different linguistically.

The editors of the *Dhulia District Gazetteer* take the view that Ahirani is a local Marathi dialect. Although they summarize, in a page and a half, numerous phonological and grammatical differences between Marathi and Ahirani, this does not prevent them from coming to the conclusion that:

The Marathi spoken in the district, and especially in the rural areas, differs considerably from the language spoken in the other districts of Maharashtra. It differs from pure Marathi...in the use of words, expression as well as intonation. The Marathi language spoken by the rural masses is known as Ahirani, which can be described as a local dialect of Marathi with admixture of Gujarati, Hindi and Prakrt variants...Popular evidence has furnished sufficient testimony to the fact that Ahirani is only the local dialect of Marathi...In the course of the last five decades the form and mode of the language have drifted towards Marathi spoken in Maharashtra. (Kunte, et al. 1974:209)

A footnote to this material in the *Dhulia District Gazetteer* indicates that Grierson does not share this conclusion. He is quoted as saying that Ahirani “cannot be classified as a dialect of Marathi,” but the source of the quote is not given.

The editor of the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Khandesh District* (Campbell 1880) does not appear to share the view that Ahirani is a dialect of Marathi. He says: “Though from its (Ahirani’s) construction it looks like a compromise between the modern Gujarati, Maharati, and Hindi, this dialect is the offspring of several old Prakrt varieties...” (Kunte et al 1974:209). It seems likely the basis of the identification of Ahirani with Marathi by Kunte is sociopolitical rather than strictly linguistic in nature, although obviously the two languages have much in common.

If Ahirani and Marathi may be considered two different languages, it becomes important to determine the degree of bilingualism in Marathi that exists among the Ahir. Concerning bilingualism, the *Dhulia District Gazetteer* (Kunte 1974) states that, “The Census authorities (1961) have defined mother-tongue as a language spoken by the person’s mother to him in his childhood or mainly spoken in the house” (205). And later, “Marathi, the principal language in the district, is understood by almost all the people, even though only 59.3 percent are returned as Marathi mother-tongue speakers” (209).

According to the 1961 census returns, 3,720 mother-tongue speakers of Ahirani reported that they are able to speak Marathi. This represents slightly more than one percent of the Ahirani-speaking population. People reporting that they are able to speak Hindi in 1961 numbered 7,849. These figures have undoubtedly shifted in the last twenty-five years, and a much greater percentage of the Ahir population is likely to be bilingual to some extent in Marathi. In 1961, the ratio of bilingual men to bilingual women in the population as a whole was approximately 2.7 to 1.

Thougb bilingualism has undoubtedly increased in the last few decades, it seems unlikely that the Ahirani-speaking people will attain to a very high degree of bilingualism in standard Marathi without access to higher education in that language. This seems to be tacitly acknowledged by the fact that the local radio station, broadcasting from Jalgaon, translates many of its public service programs into Ahirani for transmission once or twice a week. These programs are reportedly well-received by the Ahirani-speaking community.

Dhule is described as one of the educationally backward districts in the state (Kunte, et al. 1974:736). In 1961, the total number of literates was 339,793, which is just over 25 percent of the population. In rural areas the literacy rate is just over 21 percent. Eleven percent of the rural population falls into a category called “Literate (without Educational level);” the remaining ten percent has been educated up to the fourth standard or higher. The ratio of male literates to female literates is 3.1 to 1.

According to the 1971 census figures given in Kunte, et al. (1974:1025), the overall literacy rate has increased to 31.88 percent. The figure for rural areas is 27.32 percent. The ratio of male literates to female literates has decreased to 2.2 to 1.

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2 I did not have access to a copy of Campbell, 1880. My source for his views is the material attributed to him by Kunte et al. 1974:209.
2 Goals

2.1 Linguistic similarity

To investigate the distribution of Ahir communities using Ahirani as the traditional mother tongue in Dhule District of Maharashtra and to discover the degree of linguistic similarity among the varieties of Ahirani spoken by the Ahir and to compare Ahirani with Marathi. The degree of linguistic similarity will be expressed as a percentage based on a comparison of equivalent words using a standard wordlist.

2.2 Dialect intelligibility

Should Ahirani dialects appear to differ from each other on the basis of linguistic similarity, testing will be done to determine the degree of inherent intelligible which exists among them. The degree of inherent intelligibility is expressed as a percentage. The percentage is based on the average of the scores on a simple language test administered as is described in section 3.2. The sample size and standard deviation are also stated.

2.3 Bilingualism

To discover what segments of the Ahirani population are able to understand oral narrative texts in Marathi, bilingual ability will be investigated using recorded text tests. Population segments are described in terms of the major social criteria which affect bilingualism.

For the purposes of this report, bilingual ability will be evaluated in terms of the continuum in figure 1.

<--- + ------------------------- + ------------------------- + --->
Nonfunctional       Functional       Competent

Figure 1. Bilingual ability continuum.

If a community or individual is said to be competent in a language, it means that their ability to communicate in that language is nearly equivalent to that of a mother-tongue speaker. A competent speaker of a language can, and regularly does, use that language in the same way and in the same domains in which it is used by mother-tongue speakers.

An individual or community described as having functional ability in a language may be sufficiently skilled in the language to use it regularly in certain limited domains but may have neither the ability nor the desire to use the language for all purposes. For example, people with functional ability in a language may be able to understand oral narrative texts in that language but prefer to use another language for everyday communication.

If an individual or community is described is nonfunctional in a language, it means that their ability to use that language is marginal or non-existent. Such people may know enough of the language to accomplish some simple tasks in the language, but it is not a language they regularly use.

2.4 Language use and language attitudes

An investigation into the language use situation was made in the Ahir communities. Particular attention was paid to determining the language used in the home. Attitudes towards the various languages spoken in region was also investigated. Language use and language attitudes were investigated using informal questionnaires and observations. The attitudes expressed were described in terms of the continuum in figure 2.

<------ + ------------ + ------------ + -- ------ + -- ------ + -- ------ + -- ------ + -- ------ + ------>
Strongly Positive Mildly Neutral Mildly Negative Strongly positive positive negative negative

Figure 2. A language attitude continuum.
3 Summary of findings

3.1 Dialect area study

The varieties of Ahirani used in Dhule District are inherently intelligible with each other. The words which are considered proper Ahirani words vary from place to place in the different parts of the district, but this does not seem to affect the ability of people to understand each other very much, as people share a common pool of vocabulary items.

3.2 Bilingualism

Nearly all Ahirs are at least functional in Marathi. This means that they are at least able to accomplish certain basic tasks using that language. It is not known what portion of the population may be considered competent in Marathi.

3.3 Language use and language attitudes

Attitudes towards Ahirani are very positive in the situations where the use of Ahirani is considered appropriate. These situations include language use in the home and in conversation with other speakers of Ahirani. Attitudes toward Marathi are also positive, in those situations where the use of Marathi is considered appropriate. These situations include certain occupational domains (e.g., working in a mill) and speaking to strangers who do not know Ahirani. The most common situations for use of Ahirani is at home with family and other Ahirs, or at work, if the work is agricultural and the co-workers are also Ahir. The most common situations for the use of the Marathi are in non-agricultural jobs, with people who are not Ahirs, and for higher education.

4 Study of dialect areas

4.1 Linguistic similarity

4.1.1 Procedures

Wordlist elicitation

The degree of linguistic similarity between two Ahir communities was determined by eliciting wordlists from people belonging to each community. These wordlists were then compared with each other to determine the percentage of similarity which exists among them.

The standard procedure for eliciting a wordlist involved collecting a 210-item wordlist from a speaker in one community and then checking it with another speaker from the same community. In Ahir communities, it was necessary to check wordlists carefully to distinguish between Marathi words which have become part of the Ahirani vocabulary and those which were offered because Marathi was the language used in elicitation. Checking of wordlists is also necessary to ensure that the correct words were elicited. In one of the communities, however, it was not possible to check the wordlist with more than one speaker.

It is not necessary for the percentage expressing degree of similarity to be one hundred percent for the two wordlists to be considered as representing the same dialect. Eighty percent is the threshold figure used in this report. If eighty percent of the words on a wordlist are considered phonologically similar to those on another wordlist, then the two dialects are considered to be the same. Setting the limit at eighty percent seemed to confirm impressions based on what mother tongue speakers said about their perceptions of the similarity or difference of the various Ahirani dialects within their experience. In
other surveys, the eighty percent threshold also reinforced conclusions drawn from intelligibility testing, which seems to confirm its validity for use in cases where there are no data from intelligibility data.

**Wordlist comparison**

Linguistic similarity was evaluated by comparing the 210-item wordlists elicited in one community with those elicited in the other communities. The results of this comparison are expressed as a percentage of phonologically similar words. It should be noted that the percentage of similarity arrived at in this manner is not the same as a percentage of cognates. Cognate percentages may be discovered only by the application of the comparative method. This is beyond the scope of this project, and a comparative analysis of these Ahirani dialects has not been attempted. The percentages in this report are not percentages of cognate words, though, as Grierson (1909:7) says, “…it may sometimes happen that for the sake of brevity of language I employ words which are used elsewhere to suggest derivation.”

The criteria used for determining the similarity of two wordlists are subjective ones based on presumed ease of communication. C. Rensch (1987, personal communication) suggests using the phonological similarity of the corresponding words of a wordlist as an index to ease of communication. The next three paragraphs are a prose summary of the criteria that have been used in determining whether a pair of words is phonologically similar.

Two words with the same meaning are considered phonologically similar if a certain percentage of the sounds (phonetic segments) occurring in those words are the *same* or *similar*. Two sounds are considered the *same* if: 1) they may be represented by the same phonetic symbol, 2) in the case of vowels, if they differ by only one phonetic feature, or 3) if they are phonetically similar and correspond in at least three pairs of the words being compared. Two sounds are considered *similar* if they are phonetically similar but do not contrast in meaning when used in three or more pairs of words.

For two words to be considered similar, at least half of the sounds in the longer of the two words must correspond to the *same* sounds in the shorter of the two words. At least another quarter of the sounds must correspond to *similar* sounds in the shorter of the two words. The remaining sounds may correspond to sounds which are not phonetically similar, or to no sound at all. If the words being compared consisted of only two sounds, then both sounds must be the *same*. If they consist of three sounds, then two of the sounds must be the *same* and the third must be *similar*.

The percentage of similarity between two wordlists is an expression of the number of phonologically similar words in the two wordlists. Each word in a wordlist is compared with the corresponding word in a second wordlist. The number of phonologically similar pairs of words is then divided by the total number of comparisons. The resulting number, multiplied by one hundred, is the percentage of similarity.

### 4.1.2 Lexical similarity chart

Two Ahirani wordlists were elicited during the survey. One of them was elicited from a man of Akkalkuva taluka in the northern part of Dhule District. The second came from Dhule taluka, in the southern part of the district. As may be seen from table 1, they are ninety percent similar. The similarity of the Ahirani dialects to Marathi is well below seventy percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marathi</th>
<th>Akkalkuva</th>
<th>Dhule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Number of similar words in two Ahirani wordlists and Marathi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marathi</th>
<th>Akkalkuva</th>
<th>Dhule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>138/210</td>
<td>128/202</td>
<td>181/202</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Conclusions

Based on the similarity comparisons, it appears that the Ahirani spoken in the northern and the southern parts of Dhule District represent the same dialect. This agrees with the testimony of the Ahir interviewed during the survey. Denials of significant dialect difference among the Ahirani-speaking communities in Dhule District were frequent.

It would be very interesting to compare these wordlists with some elicited from the Ahir living in Jalgaon and Nasik District. Most Ahir maintain that the Ahirani spoken in those two districts is the same as that spoken in Dhule. It is acknowledged, however, that there are some “differences” in the Ahirani spoken in distant places.

Based on the degree of linguistic similarity, it would appear that Ahirani and Marathi are quite different.

4.2 Dialect intelligibility testing

4.2.1 Dialect intelligibility scores

Four recorded text tests were administered to Ahir living in Dhule taluka. One of these tests was in the Dhule Ahirani variety to ensure that those to be tested were competent in the test-taking procedure. If an individual did not score above seventy percent on the text in the local dialect, that individual was excused from the sample to be tested and a replacement was found. A second text was in the Akkalkuva variety of Ahirani. This text was given to discover whether or not the Ahir of Dhule taluka understood those in Akkalkuva. The third text represented a colloquial variety of Marathi (C. Marathi), such as is spoken in the villages around Dhule District. It was recorded by a man whose parents were not mother-tongue speakers of Marathi but used Marathi in the home as he was growing up. A fourth text was also used. This fourth text was also recorded by a mother-tongue speaker of Marathi. The variety of Marathi used is the educated standard Marathi (E. Marathi). Both of these Marathi texts were control tested with a group of ten mother-tongue speakers of Marathi.

Table 3. Ahirani dialect intelligibility test scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference points</th>
<th>Dhule</th>
<th>Akkalkuva</th>
<th>C. Marathi</th>
<th>E. Marathi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test points</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ahirani) Dhule</td>
<td>x = 98</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s = 4.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 43</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Marathi) Dhule</td>
<td>x = 100</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s = 0.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Conclusions

Table 3 shows that the Ahirani of Akkalkuva taluka and Dhule taluka are intelligible with each other. The Dhule Ahirani text was not tested in Akkalkuva because the Akkalkuva Ahir population is miniscule.
and because the Ahir living there maintain that they use the same Ahirani dialect as is used elsewhere in Dhule District.

The scores on the Marathi tests also indicate that the Ahir of Dhule taluka understood them. In light of the fact that the Marathi and Ahirani wordlists are not very similar, it is suspected that this comprehension is not due to inherent intelligibility, but rather to bilingualism.

4.3 Integration of dialect area conclusions

To a large extent, the conclusions drawn from the comparison of wordlists match those drawn from dialect intelligibility testing. The varieties of Ahirani spoken in Dhule District constitute a single dialect. This is shown both by the high degree of similarity on the wordlists from the two areas and by the fact that the Ahir of Dhule taluka understand the Ahirani of Akkalkuva taluka. As Akkalkuva Ahirani represents the northernmost extremity of the Ahirani dialect area, and the Ahirani of Dhule taluka represents the southernmost variety in Dhule District, it is concluded that the Ahirani of Dhule District consists of a single dialect. This coincides with the perception of the Ahir people themselves.

When it comes to the status of Marathi and Ahirani, there is a discrepancy in the fact that the similarity percentage is so low, and the score on the Marathi texts are so high. This is resolved by postulating that the high score on the Marathi text is a function of bilingualism in Marathi among the Ahir.

4.4 Residue

Word lists should be elicited in Ahir communities in Nasik and Jalgaon District to determine the degree of similarity of these Ahirani varieties with those of Dhule District. Similarly, dialect intelligibility tests should be conducted using Ahirani texts from Nasik, Dhule, and Jalgaon districts in Ahir communities in all three districts to determine the degree of intelligibility that exists among them.

5 Bilingualism

5.1 Recorded text tests

Recorded text tests were used to determine the level and extent of bilingualism in Marathi. The procedures involved in recorded text testing are described in Casad (1974). See also the section on dialect intelligibility tests in this report. Results of recorded text tests are expressed as a percentage of questions on the test which are answered correctly by the respondent. The results of the pilot testing determined that many Ahir were functional in their ability to use Marathi.

Because the pilot test of the Ahir living in Waddibhoker, Dhule taluka resulted in a score higher than 70 percent on the pilot test of bilingual ability in Marathi, it was deemed necessary to conduct a more extensive bilingualism investigation among the Ahir. This more extensive evaluation formed the second step of this bilingualism study. Three recorded text tests were administered to the sample. The first was in the local Ahirani dialect and ensured that the sample was competent in the test-taking procedure. If an individual did not score above 70 percent on the test in the local dialect, that one was excused from the sample and a replacement was found. The second text was recorded by a mother-tongue speaker of Marathi. The variety of Marathi used is the educated standard. A third text was also used. This third text represented a colloquial variety of Marathi, such as is spoken in the villages around Dhule District. It was recorded by a man whose parents were not mother-tongue speakers of Marathi, but who used Marathi in the home as he was growing up. Both Marathi texts were control-tested with a group of ten mother-tongue speakers of Marathi.
5.2 Second language oral proficiency evaluation

In addition to recorded text testing, we had planned to administer Second Language Oral Proficiency Evaluations (SLOPE) to the same sample as took the recorded text tests. A SLOPE interview evaluates the participant on a six-point scale of bilingual proficiency, from Level Zero (no proficiency in the second language) to Level Five (proficiency equal to an educated mother-tongue speaker of the language). Unfortunately, we were not able to apply this technique in the time allotted for the Ahirani survey.3

6 Language use and language attitudes procedures

The primary techniques used to gather information on language use and language attitudes among the Ahir of Dhule District were questions asked while administering recorded text tests and observation.

Questions

Informal questions are a useful way to discover information about the attitudes of people, about the way they think things should be. They are particularly useful in uncovering information about language posture, that is, about what people wish one to think that they do and think about various languages. A person who does not know Marathi may say that Marathi is the best language to use when trying to get a job. The fact that he does not know Marathi, and that he himself uses his Ahirani dialect on the job is irrelevant in this context; his statement shows a very good attitude toward Marathi in some economic situations.

Observation

A second technique used to gather information about language use and language attitudes is simply observation. By observing people speaking in a variety of contexts one can usually determine which languages are considered appropriate in different situations. By listening to people as they talk to each other, an observer can often determine which languages are considered appropriate to talk about certain subjects. Observation is particularly useful in finding out what people actually do, assuming the observer has opportunity to observe language use in a wide variety of situations. As such it provides a way of verifying information gathered with questionnaires. If an observer sees several people applying for work and notes that Marathi is the language used when one speaks to an employer, then he has gained useful information about the situations in which Marathi is used.

3 Comprehensive bilingual testing instruments and results are not available for this report.
References


