

Introduction

The subject matter of this work is an attempt to explain the data given in Table 1. The data come from one of a number of tables presented in the annual *Test and Score Data Summary*, a booklet published by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, which administers the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) all over the world. A high enough score in the TOEFL is the key to entry into a North American university (and into universities elsewhere). These data are taken from the table that gives the average grade of examinees according to their native (or strongest) language. Table 1, then, is a summary of the *highest* average grades of examinees according to their native language for the five school years 1993 through to 1998.

Native English speakers are normally aware that speakers of Dutch and of Scandinavian languages are often good speakers of English, so speakers of languages such as Dutch, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish (and perhaps Icelandic) do not present any surprises as far as their results are concerned. These are all Germanic languages, with English as a representative of its western branch. To such a list of no surprises may be added speakers of German, another Germanic language, and Finnish (although the latter is not a Germanic language, it is still spoken in Scandinavia). There is a miscellaneous group of other 'top' languages such as Maltese, Nyanja (spoken in Malawi and other parts of central Africa), Setswana and Shona (southern Africa), which need not detain us, since their appearance in the list seems to be infrequent; none of them appear more than once or twice in the five years presented in Table 1 above.¹ All of them are spoken in areas where the British had administered colonies in the not so distant past. But what about Hindi, Kashmiri, Konkani, Marathi, Oriya, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Tulu? These are all languages spoken in India; the first five are Indo-Aryan (the eastern branch of the Indo-European family of languages) and the other four are Dravidian languages spoken in central and southern India. As to the reason for their appearance in Table 1, we may give the same answer as the previous group. After about 350 years of British presence in the area,

Table 1 TOEFL results according to native language

1993–95		1995–96		1996–97		1997–98	
1. Konkani	622	1. Konkani	615	1. Konkani	616	1. Konkani	621
2. Maltese	610	2. Dutch	609	2. Dutch	613	2. Dutch	610
3. Dutch	608	3. Danish	606	3. Danish	608	3. Tulu	608
4. Tulu	605	4. Tulu	604	4. Tulu	604	4. Danish	606
5. Marathi	604	5. Marathi	601	5. Marathi	598	5. Marathi	601
6. Danish	599	6. Kashmiri	595	6. German Icelandic Malayalam	594	6. Kashmiri	598
7. English	594	7. Finnish	594			7. Kannada Finnish	595
8. Hindi	592	8. German Malayalam	593				
9. Setswana Kannada German	587			9. Finnish Kashmiri	592	9. English	594
		10. Hindi Swedish Nyanja	591			10. German	593
				11. Kannada	591	11. Hindi	592
12. Swedish	586			12. English Norwegian Hindi Swedish	590	12. Icelandic	590
13. Malayalam	585	13. Icelandic Norwegian	590			13. Oriya	588
						14. Malayalam	587
		15. English	588			15. Tamil Swedish Norwegian	586
				16. Shona	589		

including 150 years of British rule, the occurrence of Indian languages in this list should not offer so many surprises, either. It is well known that in India, English is the academic language and medium of instruction *par excellence* in colleges and universities, and in many secondary and elementary schools, too.

In light of the extensive use of English in educational institutions, it is to be expected that speakers of Indian languages do well in an English test. But why do speakers of one of those languages, Konkani, consistently perform better than anyone else? To answer this question, we have to examine:

- (1) who the speakers of this language are;
- (2) where the language is spoken; and
- (3) what the conditions are that lead to the results presented in Table 1.

The solutions to the first two points are fairly straightforward. Konkani is spoken by the majority of the population of Goa, the small state on the western coast of India (and the smallest state in the Indian Union), as well as by several hundred thousands in the neighbouring state of Karnataka, around the city of Mangalore, and in much smaller numbers in Kochi/Ernakulam² in Kerala on the south-west coast of India. Konkani speakers may also be found in Bombay (or Mumbai, as it is known by today), in other places in India to where Goans and other former dwellers of the west coast have migrated over the years, in Pakistan (especially Karachi), and overseas, in North America, in the United Kingdom, in Australia, in the Gulf States and in East Africa. The information presented here will, of course, be elaborated later on, since further explanations are necessary.

Part of the solution to the third point concerning the conditions that lead to the results in Table 1 will emerge from the more complete answers given to the first two points. However, to complete the picture, a further study has proved to be necessary but on a more personal level. The population that is intimately interested in TOEFL is made up of college students, in particular those wishing to study in the United States and Canada. So, groups of college students in Goa, Mangalore and Kochi were asked to fill out a questionnaire concerning, among other things, their knowledge of languages and their self-assessment of language use; they were also given a short test taken from authentic TOEFL tests with the purpose of examining their proficiency in English.

One can adopt a cynical approach to the TOEFL results presented in Table 1 and suggest that Konkani-speaking students have developed the art of exam-cheating to a very high degree. Many instances of cheating in school and college examinations in parts of India (and, of course, in many other places in the world) have been reported. Observers have noted the presence of outside writers, people standing outside the building in which the examination is taking place who write the answers to the questions and pass the answers into the examination hall. Mass copying was reported 'on an unprecedented scale' in resettlement colonies and rural areas (Di Bona & Singh, 1987: 240). However, the Educational Testing Service does set up checks and balances to eradicate (or at least minimalise) dishonesty during the administration of the test.³ Throughout my own personal 20-year experience in administering TOEFL tests in Israel, and because of the steps I took in running the particular test described in the second part of this

study, cheating, if it did occur at all, was minimal; therefore, the issue of dishonesty does not seem salient and will not be brought up again.

On a more serious note, one can also question the validity of the TOEFL as an indicator of a given level of proficiency in English. The fact that it is administered all over the world and its results are regarded as valid in countries other than the United States and Canada may not be convincing enough for many people, especially those working in the field of language testing. It may be argued, as it may be argued in many other test situations, that the TOEFL tests exam-taking more than it does English proficiency. There is, therefore, nothing sacrosanct about this test in relation to other English proficiency tests (Britain and Australia are two other countries that administer tests of English outside their national borders) and there is nothing sacrosanct about any of these tests in general. It is, however, not the purpose of this study to examine the validity and reliability of the TOEFL. It should be borne in mind, however, that it is administered worldwide and many people (hundreds of thousands) put in a lot of effort in registering for the test and taking it as well. It should also be borne in mind that colleges and universities in North America recognise that the test is valid for their purposes. Hence, it has some recognised value, whatever weaknesses it may have.

Language testing is, then, a subject that has been extensively researched. Moreover, the testing of English is fairly central to the field because of the universal need for proficiency in English, especially in today's world of e-mail and internet. On the surface, in an analysis of the reasons for the success of one group of students – from the same or similar background – in acquiring a second language, we can generalise and draw conclusions as to what the optimal conditions are so as to achieve language proficiency. However, it will be seen that it is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint those features that lead to the desired results. Each case – here this means each group of speakers of a particular language – seems to be highly specific. For each language group, the set of conditions may be different. One can even postulate that the substitution of one condition for another will lead to different results. Spolsky's (1989) comprehensive set of conditions for second language acquisition are, of course, not all necessary for successful acquisition. Apart from a set of necessary conditions, it is only a subset that may be relevant for explaining the reasons behind the acquisition of a given language by a particular group. In this study, in the context of Konkani-speaking students, especially those from Goa, it will be seen that few of the 74 conditions are brought up for discussion (in Chapter 6). What is discussed is that set of conditions that have emerged from the preceding discussion and which seem to be closely connected with the group of speakers/learners we are interested in.

In this study, I am interested not only in a certain group of people but also in a broader social background. Part of the linguistic repertoire of a population may be seen in the environment in which that population lives. Here, I am referring to those overt signs of language use in a culture in which the written language is central. The question that may be asked is in which language or languages commercial signs, street signs, billboards, name plaques on government buildings and other public buildings are written. These factors make up the linguistic landscape of the population under investigation. Unlike the original research on linguistic landscapes (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) which relates to linguistic boundaries within multilingual states, e.g. Flemish- and French-speaking areas in Belgium, the present study looks at the 'multilinguistic' landscapes in several Indian states. Such landscapes may distinguish one Indian state from another but it is rarely the case that internal linguistic boundaries can be so determined. But there are exceptions such as the Moslem district – the city centre – in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh (see Chapter 1).

This study is divided into two parts. Part 1 deals with the macro-linguistic situation in Goa itself and in India in general, the historical and sociological background to the linguistic landscape of Goa and other Konkani-speaking areas on the west coast of India. So, in Chapter 1, the sociolinguistic situation in India will be discussed in general terms, followed by chapters that deal with the situation in Goa itself. Chapter 2 discusses the history and status of Konkani, the official language of the state of Goa, including the origins of the Konkani–Marathi controversy, which is then elaborated on in Chapter 3 in light of the events and of the discourse found in the local Goan press from the spring of 2000 to the national census in February 2001. In Chapter 4, the position of English in Goa, which has emerged in previous discussions, is in effect summarised. The special historical circumstances of Goa in terms of caste and migration is the subject of Chapter 5.

The second part of the book looks more at the micro-linguistic situation, especially among the groups of students in the survey. It opens with a chapter on conditions for second language acquisition (Chapter 6), followed by a discussion of the test administered to groups of students, numbering in all more than 300, in Goa, Mangalore and Kochi (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 considers the responses from the questionnaires distributed among the same groups of students. Chapter 9 discusses the role of English in India as a whole, followed by Chapter 10, which addresses the subject of multilingualism of the students against the background of Indian multilingualism, as well as a discussion of the status of the Indian national language, Hindi, as emerges from the study. The book ends with a concluding chapter, followed by an Appendix and Reference list.

There are three sources from which the information and discussion in this work derive. First, a survey of students in Goa and in cities to the south of Goa, the details coming from the questionnaire distributed in the various locations. Second, bibliographical material on India and the language situation. Third, impressionistic descriptions of the linguistic situation in parts of India I have visited on three separate occasions. Of these visits the longest was in the latter part of 1999; hence, much of the information about the current situation comes from that period. The survey of Indian students (see Part 2) took place at that time, too.

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Notes

1. This is especially true for the central African language Nyanja. In 1995–96, there were only 43 Nyanja-speaking examinees, so their results are not significant.
2. The city on the mainland is called Ernakulam, and the islands off the coast include Willingdon and Fort Cochin. The name Cochin (Kochi) is given to the entire area of Ernakulam and the islands. Institutions and facilities situated on the mainland carry the name 'Cochin', e.g. the Cochin University of Science and Technology and the Cochin airport. Both the institutions which I visited for the purposes of this study are in effect in Ernakulam – the university just mentioned and the Sacred Heart College.

3. The various ways adopted by the Educational Testing Service to prevent cheating include the distribution of different test books with different questions or with a different order of questions or with a different order of possible answers (the test is multiple choice) at the same test administration.