

Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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Official Language (s) of India

Welcome to class. Today we are going to talk about a very important issue, the official language. In most of the countries in the world, roughly out of 178 - 79 countries, 100 plus countries have declared at least two languages or more as their official language. So, we are going to talk about the purpose of an official language, declaring an official language, why we need to have an official language, and what is an official language.

And who determines, who selects, and who decides and what is the impact on other languages? We will talk about the official language in the context of India. So, we are basically going to talk about the official language or languages of India, given the fact that India is a multilingual country and hundreds of languages are spoken in this country.

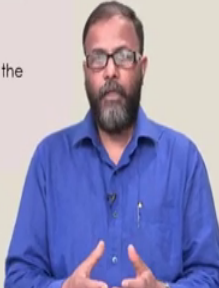
The census 2011 identifies 121 distinct languages, though if you go by the returns, it is more than 15000 varieties returned as mother tongue, the census 2011 identifies 121 languages out of which 22 are scheduled languages, enlisted in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution and 99 are non-schedule languages, I am quoting from the census of India 2011. So, we will talk about the official languages of India today.

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Official Language

- An **official language(s)** or **state language(s)**, is a language which has a special status in a particular country, state, or any other body that has certain jurisdiction. Typically a country's official language(s) refers to the language(s) used in government- judiciary, legislature, administration, and all related domains. All official activities are carried out in that designated official language(s).
- However, the term "official language" does not typically represent the language(s) used by a people or country.

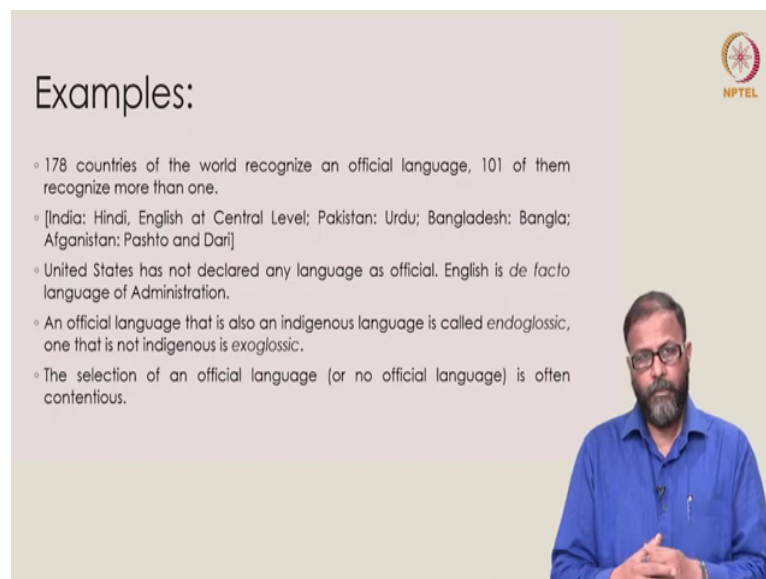


Now, what is an official language? An official language or what you can call state language is a language that has a special status in a particular country or a state or any other body that has certain jurisdiction. For example, the UN, United Nations has identified 6 languages as its official languages. So typically, a country's official language refers to the language used in government administration, governance, judiciary, legislature, and all related domains.

And all official activities are essentially carried out in that designated official language or maybe more than one language, it may be languages. However, the term official language does not typically connote and represent the languages used by people of that particular country. That means people's language may not necessarily be an official language or the official language may not necessarily represent the language of the people.

So, we have to understand this difference and that is why they are called official languages because they are designated, they are carefully selected, developed, designated, and used in all official and government activities. So, all these activities are carried out in that particular chosen designated language and we call that the official language.

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The slide features a title 'Examples:' in a large, dark font. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a book and a lamp, with the text 'NPTEL' below it. Below the title is a list of five bullet points, each starting with a small circle. The text of the bullet points is as follows:

- 178 countries of the world recognize an official language, 101 of them recognize more than one.
- [India: Hindi, English at Central Level; Pakistan: Urdu; Bangladesh: Bangla; Afganistan: Pashto and Dari]
- United States has not declared any language as official. English is *de facto* language of Administration.
- An official language that is also an indigenous language is called *endoglossic*, one that is not indigenous is *exoglossic*.
- The selection of an official language (or no official language) is often contentious.

In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking. He has his hands clasped in front of him.

Now out of 178 countries of the world, so 178 countries of the world recognize official languages constitutionally and statutory, so there is a statutory compulsion and mandate and they have announced some or the other language, maybe one language or maybe more than one, in some countries you have three official languages, four official languages, I will talk about the case in India as well, we have more than one official languages.

So, 100 of them, more than a hundred, hundred and one of them recognize more than one language as an official language. If you look at India and the neighboring countries, like India, in India you have Hindi and English at a central level, Central Government level declared as official languages, in Pakistan you have Urdu, in Bangladesh you have Bangla, Afghanistan has Pashto and Dari as their designated official languages.

Interestingly the United States of America has not declared any language formally to be official and English is a de facto language of administration, and governance all the states in the United States have their own policy of official language and they carry out their businesses in the particular set of languages, most of the states recognize more than one, for example, even Bangla is listed in New York for that matter, where the voter ID cards and the registration forms for voting are carried out in Bangla as well.


So, they have 5 - 6 languages, and Bangla is one of them. So, that is a diversity, even Britain, did not have de jure official languages, de facto it is English, Welsh in Welsh areas, and Scottish in Scotland, so this question is very significant and also very sensitive. So, I mean, take the example of Italy for that matter. In the late 80s, Italy recognized Italian, Standard Italian as its official language.

So in some countries, for example, in Africa, if you go, there are countries in the African subcontinent and continent, that have declared more than 2 - 3 indigenous languages as their official language. However, official activities are carried out primarily in English or maybe in any of the colonial languages, but in their constitution and officially they have declared 2 - 3 languages as official languages.

So, if any indigenous language or set of languages are designated and declared as the official language they are called endoglossic official languages and if that is not indigenous, and has come from outside, it is exoglossic. So, the majority of the countries where you have a colonial history, a colonial past, have endoglossic as well as exoglossic official languages. India is one of them; India has declared English as an associate official language.

But always the selection of an official language for a particular country is controversial and debated and in India, if you look at the case of India the case of official language is still debated and not settled, though constitutionally we have settled everything, we might find undercurrents in non-Hindi speaking states. So, that is the case in India.


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Holmes (2013) on Indian Case

« The identification of official languages may also be necessary when the choice of national language is problematic. In multilingual India, for example, attempts to give Hindi sole status as the national language have not succeeded. Fourteen regional Indian languages are recognised as official languages alongside English and Hindi for the country as a whole, and in addition different states each have their own official languages.

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I will quote Holmes, Janet Holmes, 2013, where she says the identification of, I quote, from Holmes, “the identification of official languages may also be necessary when the choice of natural language is problematic, the national language is problematic.” We need to understand the difference between the national language and the official language. India does not have a national language. Hindi is not the national language of India.

Hindi is the official language of India that too at the federal level, and at the central level. I quote, Holmes, 2013, “The identification of official language may also be necessary when the choice of a national language is problematic. In multilingual India, for example, attempts to give Hindi soul status as the national language has not succeeded.


14 regional Indian languages are recognized as official languages alongside English and Hindi for the country as a whole and in addition different states each have their own official languages,” I unquote. Now, if you look at this quote, it is mentioned 14 regional languages, but now if you look at schedule 8 of the Constitution of India, today as we speak in 2021, there are 22 languages now, 8 have been added and the list grows because 39 more languages are in the queue to be included in the 8th schedule.

So, India has two languages as official languages and if you recall the Constitution Assembly debate, we have a long section in that Constituent Assembly debate where the question of official languages and national language was discussed. Ultimately, we agreed to declare

Hindi as the official language at the federal level, at the level of the center and English was declared as the associate official language for a period of 15 years.

And if you look at the articles in the Constitution, part 17, chapter 1 from 343 to chapter 4 you have 351, from 343 to 351 all these articles talk about the official language of India. We will come to them shortly.


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◦ Because of its colonial history, as well as its value as a world language and international lingua franca, English is an official language in many countries throughout the world, such as Pakistan, Fiji, Vanuatu, Jamaica and the Bahamas etc.

◦ Interestingly, English is not legally an official language of England, the USA, or New Zealand. In these countries it has not been considered necessary to legislate that the language of the majority is an official language. In New Zealand, ironically, although English is de facto (in fact or actuality) the official language of government and education, Maori and New Zealand Sign Language are the two languages which have legal or de jure status as official languages.

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Moving on because of its colonial history as well as its value as a world language and international lingua franca, instrumental in business and trade, international business and trade, English has acquired a very high status in the sense that the majority of countries have English as exoglossic official languages, somewhere it is de jure, somewhere it is de facto but it is present.

And countries like you know India, Pakistan, Fiji, Jamaica and Bahamas, and so many other countries this is a very dominant and prestigious languages, interestingly English is not legally an official language of England, the USA, or New Zealand. In these countries, it has not been considered necessary to legislate that the language of the majority is an official language.

In New Zealand ironically although English is de facto, the official language of government and education, Maori and New Zealand sign languages are the two languages that have legal or di jure status as official languages and the story continues.

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Constitutional Provisions (India)

- The Constitution of India had a dedicated section from pages 212-217 in Part XVII, Official Language consisting of Articles 343 to 351, which are dedicated to the matters of official languages of India and the Union of States.

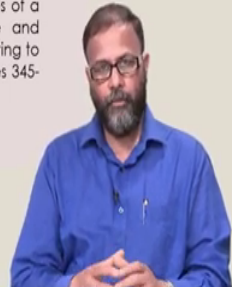



So, moving on, coming to India and the case of the Indian de jure official language provision, so Constitution of India as I mentioned from Article 343 to Article 351 describes the constitutional provision and de jure official language of the country. So the Constitution of India has a dedicated section from pages 212 to 217 in part 17 official language consists of Articles 343 to 351, which are dedicated to the matters of official languages of India and the union of states.

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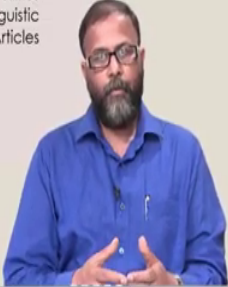


- The section is devised in four chapters addressing the issues of:
 - Official Language of the Union, and Commission and Committee of Parliament on official language in Article 343-344, Chapter 01;
 - Regional Languages covering issue of Official language or languages of a State, Official language for communication between one State and another or between a State and the Union, and Special provision relating to language spoken by a section of the population of a State in Articles 345-347, Chapter 02;





- Language to be used in the Supreme Court and in the High Courts and for Acts, Bills, etc.; Special procedure for enactment of certain laws relating to language in Articles 348-349, Chapter 03; and
- Language to be used in representations for redress of grievances; facilities for instruction in mother-tongue at primary stage; special officer for linguistic minorities; and directive for development of the Hindi language in Articles 350-351, Chapter 04.




Let us have a close look at that. So, this section, 17 Section has four chapters and in each chapter, you have two articles and their extensions. So in chapter one for that matter, chapter one deals with the official language of the union and commission and committee of parliament on official language in Articles 343 and 344. If you look at chapter 2, it deals with regional languages covering issues of the official language or languages of the state.

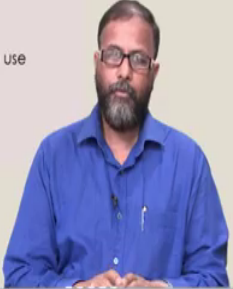
The official language for communication between one state and another between the state and the union and special provisions relating to language is spoken by a section of the population of a state in Articles 345 to 347. If you look at chapter 3, it deals with language to be used in Supreme Court and in the High Courts and for acts, bills, and all parliamentary procedures, a special procedure for enactment of certain laws relating to language in Articles 348 and 349, chapter 3.

If you look at chapter 4 of the same section, chapter 4 deals with language to be used in representations for the redressal of grievances. It facilitates instructions in the mother tongue at a primary stage, a special officer for linguistic minorities, it deals with directives for the development of the Hindi language in Articles 350 and 351. So, these four chapters elaborate on and describe the de jure official language of India.

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- Article 343(1) of the Constitution provides that Hindi in Devanagari script shall be the Official Language of the Union.
- Article 343(2) also provided for continuing the use of English in official work of the Union for a period of 15 years (i.e., up to 25 January 1965) from the date of commencement of the Constitution.
- Article 343(3) empowered the parliament to provide by law for continued use of English for official purposes even after 25 January 1965.



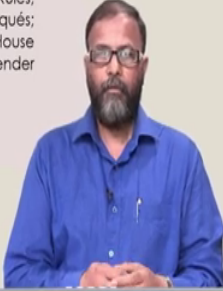
Article 341 clause 1 of the constitution provides that Hindi in Devanagari script shall be the official language of the union, the union at the central level. Article 343 section 2 clause 2, also provided for continuing the use of English in official work of the union for a period of 15 years that is up to 25th January 1965. Mind you we adopted our constitution on 26 January 1950. So, it gives a 15 years period for English to continue as an associate official language, from the date of commencement of the constitution that is 26 January, 1950.

Article 343 clause 3 empowered the parliament to provide by law for the continued use of English for official purposes even after 1965 because we had a constitutional amendment and we enacted a new act. We will talk about that shortly.

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- Accordingly, section 3(2) of the Official Languages Act, 1963 (amended in 1967) provides for continuing the use of English in official work even after 25 January 1965.
- The Act also lays down that both Hindi and English shall compulsorily be used for certain specified purposes such as Resolutions, General Orders, Rules, Notifications, Administrative and other Reports, Press Communiqués; Administrative and other Reports and Official Papers to be laid before a House or the Houses of Parliament; Contracts, Agreements, Licences, Permits, Tender Notices and Forms of Tender, etc.




Section 3 second of the Official Language Act, 1963, amended in 1967, it provides for continuing the use of English in official work even after 25th January 1965. If you look at the history of the development of the official language in India, on 26th January 1950 we erupted our constitution with a 15 years window period for English to continue as an associate official language as the date of 15 years period was nearing and we saw a lot of unrest and protest in non-Hindi states.

Because there was a fear that Hindi will be imposed once English goes and there was a series of protests, specifically in Madras Presidency, erstwhile Madras Presidency, it went very violent, so the government of India had to convene a special session of parliament and Official Language Act, 1963, was enacted and amended in 1967. Because 1965 was the window, deadline for the window period of English.

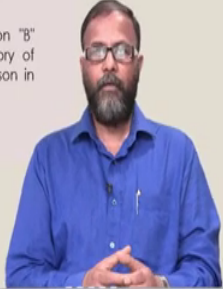
So the act also lays down that both Hindi and English shall compulsorily be used for certain specified purposes such as resolutions, general orders, what you call government orders and GOs, rules, notifications, administrative and other reports, press releases, administrative and other reports, official papers to be laid before a house or houses of parliament, maybe lower house, upper house what you call Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Contracts, agreements, licenses, permits, tender, notice, and other forms of tender, et cetera to be carried out essentially in Hindi and English.

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In 1976, Official Language Rules framed under the provisions of section 8(1) of the Official Languages Act, 1963

- They apply to all Central Government Offices, including any office of a Commission, Committee or Tribunal appointed by the Central Government and Corporation or Company owned or controlled by it;
- Communications from a Central Government Office to State/Union Territories or to any person in Region "A" comprising the States of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana and UTs of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Delhi, shall be in Hindi;
- Communications from a Central Government Office to States/UTs in Region "B" comprising the States of Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territory of Chandigarh, shall ordinarily be in Hindi. However, communication to any person in Region "B" may be either in English or Hindi;



In 1976 official language rules were framed under the provisions of section 8 clause 1 of the Official Language Act, 1963, and these rules and this is the salient feature of those rules, it is a long list but we will shortly look at a few salient rules which are very important for us. So, these rules are framed and since then we have been practicing the mandates of these roles.

So, what are these rules? Number one; these rules apply to all central government offices including any office of a commission, committee, or tribunal appointed by the central government and corporation or company owned by or controlled by it. So, all these rules are applicable to the union of states, and central government because all the state governments have their own regional language as an official language.

And in some lectures, we will talk about that trilingual formula. So, communication from a central government office to a state or union territory or to any person in region A and what is that region A, comprising of states of Uttar Pradesh, which is in the north, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, and UTs of Andaman and Nicobar islands, Delhi, they are all in Hindi.


That means these states that I just named which are these, UP, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana and Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar and Delhi, these are essentially done in Hindi. So, all the communication, all the correspondence between central government offices and officers and

these bodies and any statutory body in these states they are clubbed as, they are categorized as region A and in region A it is exceptionally and only in Hindi.

So primarily in Hindi, let me put it that way, primarily in Hindi. If you look at the other rule it says it designates region B. So, region A states we have just listed here, the region B is another set of states. Let us see what are these states. So, communication from a central government office or any officer to states and Union Territories in region B comprises the state of Punjab. So, Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and the Union Territories of Chandigarh, shall ordinarily be in Hindi.


So, this is not mandatory only in Hindi, this is ordinarily in Hindi. However, communication with any person in region B may be either in English or Hindi, so here you get a question, a choice where it can be either in English or in Hindi. But the communication and official correspondence will be ordinarily, primarily, and ordinarily be in Hindi, but in the first section, in the first category of region A, it is essentially in Hindi. In the second category region, B English is also a choice.

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◦ Communications from a Central Government Office to a State Government Office in region 'C' comprising all other States and UTs not included in region 'A' & 'B' or to any office (note being a Central Government Office) or person shall be in English;


◦ Communications between Central Government Offices and from Central Government Offices to the Offices of the State Governments/Union Territories and individuals, etc., will be in Hindi in such proportions as may be determined from time to time;



And then another rule says communication from a central government office to a state government office in region C and that region C is the rest of the country, which is not covered in A and B, so the rest of the country comprises all states, rest of the states and Union Territories not indicated in region A and B and it shall be in English. So, Hindi is not mandatory, it shall be in English.


Another rule says communication between central government offices and from central government offices to the state government offices, Union Territories, and individuals will be in Hindi in such proportion as may be determined fit from time to time. So, this gives you flexibility. I will come to the story of the promotion of Hindi as an official language and the government provisions and exercises that they have carried out.

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- All Manuals, Codes and other Procedural literature relating to Central Government Offices are required to be prepared both in Hindi and English. All Forms, Headings of Registers, Name Plates, Notice Boards and various items of stationery, etc., are also required to be in Hindi and English;
- It shall be the responsibility of the officer signing the documents specified in section 3(3) of the Act to ensure that these are issued both in Hindi and English.
- Shall be the responsibility of the administrative head of each Central Government Office to ensure that the provisions of the Act, the Rules and directions issued under Sub-Rule-2 are properly complied with and to devise suitable and effective check points for this purpose.

Ref: <https://knowindia.gov.in/profile/the-union/official-language.php>



So, it gives you, another rule that says all manuals, codes, and other procedural literature relating to central government offices are required to be prepared both in Hindi and English. All forms, headings of registers, nameplates, notice boards and various items of stationary, et cetera, are also required to be in Hindi and English, essentially bilingual. It shall be the responsibility of the officer to sign the document specified in section 3 of the act.

1963 Official Language Act I am referring to that these issues are taken care of and these documents are issued both in Hindi and English. And finally, shall be the responsibility of the administration and administrative head of each central government office to ensure that provisions of the act, the rules, and the directions issued under Sub Rule 2 are properly compiled and complied with and to devise suitable and effective checkpoints for this purpose.

So these are the rules formulated to ensure effective use and the spread and acceptance of official language. Now to sum up, as we know we got independence on 15th August 1947, and in order to draft a constitution for a newly independent country like India, which was

such a diverse and huge country, a Constituent Assembly was constituted and we got our constitution adopted on 26 January 1950.

And in that constitution part 17 from Article 343 to Article 351, we have a very elaborately laid down procedure for official language issues and Article 343 declares Hindi in Devanagari script and numerals in Roman to be the official language of India. And if you want to know the details you can look at the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly debates available, it runs into almost 4000 pages.

But there are sections, certain sections where this issue has been debated. There was a long debate on Hindi as a national language. But it could not be agreed upon an insistence of non-Hindi speaking states and their representatives, finally developed a consensus to approve Hindi as an official language, mind you not the national language.

And looking at the limitations of functions of this newly adopted constitution and Hindi as a language, English was allowed and approved and adopted as an associate official language and a 15 years window period was given to the government to ensure the development, and extension of functions, acceptability and wider presence of Hindi in 15 years, so the government set up a lot of committees and then institutions.

Raj Bhasha Vibhag what do you call? The official language department and so many other procedures and so many other activities were carried out to promote, support, and develop Hindi and to be accepted by the majority of the country as an official language. But as the window period was nearing to end, because the window period of 15 years was given to English and as it was nearing an end and that was 25th January 1965.

On 26th, 1950, we adopted the constitution. A 15 years window period was given to English, which was supposed to end on 25th January at midnight, 1965. So, as the date was nearing, we saw a sudden surge in anti-Hindi protests in all or majority of non-Hindi-speaking states led by the Madras Presidency that turned out to be a very violent protest, and then the government of India had to convene a special parliament session.

And the Official Language Act, of 1963 was passed and an amendment was done, a constitutional amendment was completed in 1967. In 1976 a very detailed set of rules were laid down. But what happened in the 1963 Amendment Act, Official Language Act, it allowed English to continue as an associate official language, sine dies, that means the

window period of 15 years given to English in 1950 on 26 January was called off and it was allowed to continue as an associate official language, sine dies, till next order, till further provision.

So, today as we are speaking in 2021, English continues to be our associate official language. So, in that way we have two official languages, Hindi and English at the federal level, at the central level, and the central government and state government essentially communicates in Hindi only into specific categories of states region A and region B and the rest of the country, rest of the states and Union Territories where the communication between the state and the center is essentially in English.

So, this is about the official languages of India. When we talk about a trilingual formula we will talk about the regional official languages of the states and we will see which state has what official language policy. We will talk about regional language policies in India in another class. Thank you very much.