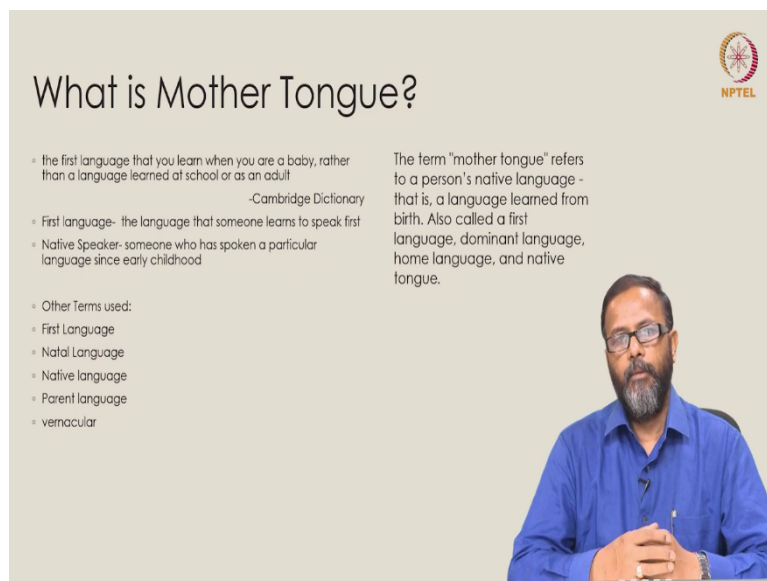Welcome to class. Today, we are going to talk about the mother tongue. Mother tongue refers to the first language that we learn in our early childhood.

There are lots of terms and people refer to the first language with different names like native language, mother tongue, natter language, or parent language, in some societies they call it vernacular language. It is the language that one inherits through bloodline, it represents an individual's cultural heritage. Lots of different terminologies are used for this term, but the central essence of the terms is that the mother tongue is the first language that we acquire in our early childhood.

So, when we say a first language or mother tongue, we have a lot of debates on the designation. Which language should be referred to as mother tongue, specifically, in the respondent's data of the Census report, we have a lot of languages identified by citizens as Mother tongue based on socio-political factors.

Today we are going to talk about the characteristics and role of a mother tongue vis-a-vis the Census of India languages 2011.

(Refer to Slide Time: 1:52)

Firstly, what is a mother tongue? It is the first language, which you learn when you start learning when you come to the world and start learning. It is named as mother tongue

because the mother is the immediate caregiver to the child, and perhaps the first contact with the child. When you say mother tongue, it has nothing to do with the biological designation. Because sometimes unfortunately a mother may die while giving birth to a child. So, in that case, the immediate caregiver is considered the mother of the child. It has nothing to do with the sex of the person, it can be a father as well, but it is called the mother tongue only to indicate the umbilical relationship one has to the mother and the connection that's established that is inseparable.
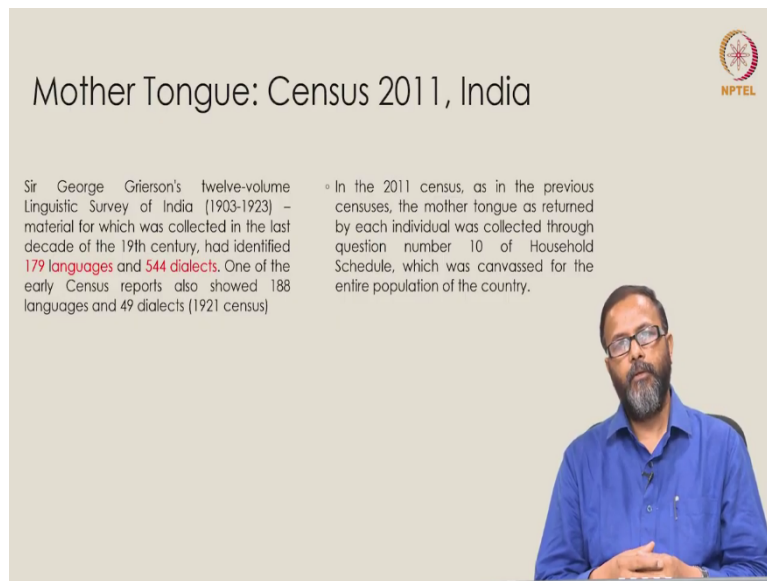
It has various names such as first language, native language, parent language or vernacular. And we start our linguistic journey with our mother tongue, which is our first language, and in later stages of life, we acquire more and more languages. You can have a second language, a third language, or a fourth language. People who speak many languages are called polyglots.

So, the mother tongue can be identified and defined in terms of which the child gets the first input. If you go by the behaviourist paradigm, the first is stimulus, the primary linguistic data which triggers the LAD language acquisition device, which triggers your universal grammar understanding is in the mother tongue. The first primary linguistic data that we receive in early childhood, is when we start acquiring our first language.

The term mother tongue refers to a person's native language which is a digital language learned from birth also called the first language or dominant language or home language, and native tongue which mostly denotes a particular geography and demographic group.

And the first primary linguistic data that we receive and start interacting with the external world after birth is also called the first language or mother tongue.

Now, the Census 2011 of India, is a very interesting document to look at concerning the data on mother tongues. It is the latest extensive data available. When it comes to designation or naming the mother tongue, we have a lot of emotions attached to it, especially the problem of identity, and how you identify. Therefore, the entries in the Census do not necessarily reflect the exact number of native languages or mother tongues, the reason being, that the raw response and a large number of classifications.

For example, more than 19,000 responded as having a native language unique to them in the 2011 Census. So, are they all different languages? A rough estimate says that we have approximately more than 6000 languages in the world. So, how come we have more than 19,000 languages alone in India? So, this number is a misnomer, and confusing and it depicts and denotes our emotional attachment to the language or dialect that we speak, how we identify, and how we can attach our identity to languages.

If you look at the early source to quantify the total number of languages in India, Sir George Grierson produced 12 volumes of a monumental work Linguistic Survey of India between 1903 to 1923, a span of 20 years. And surveyed British India and pre-independence, and he came up with a total number of 179 languages and 544 dialects.

Now, the question of language and dialects are still debatable, and I repeatedly mentioned that these are designations. How to find the difference between them? What is the exact difference between language and dialect is still debatable, we cannot arrive at a definition of

it. Hence, it is all a speaker's idea and attitude towards the language and others' attitude towards the other speaker's language.

However, Sir George Grierson produced 12 volumes of the Linguistic Survey of India in the span of 20 years, starting from 1903 to 1923. And he came up with 179 languages and 544 dialects. The 1921 Census pre-independent India Census also reports 188 languages and 49 dialects. Again, look at this variation in numbers. And then we had a continued process of decennial surveys in the Census.

And question number 10 of the Census survey questionnaire pertains to languages and mother tongue. In the 2011 Census, as in the previous Censuses, the mother tongue, as responded to by each individual was collected through question number 10, which was canvassed and explained to people of the country to collect accurate data.

(Refer to Slide Time: 9:27)

Now, if you look at the classification, Census does not include those languages, which have less than 10,000 speakers. And the number of such languages in India with less than 10,000 speakers is very high and they are grouped and clustered with other major languages. So, Census does not report them separately, they are clustered and clubbed as other languages.

However, the respondents were made free to return the name of their mother tongue, and the same was recorded faithfully by the enumerators and enumerators were given specific instructions not to be judgmental. They are a set of rules and instructions of the code of conduct in each of the surveys. Not to be judgmental, not to correct the designations or the names returned by the respondent, and not to suggest any name returned by the respondent.

So, objectively and faithfully they only record the designations or the names given by respondents to the response to question number 10 of the household schedule, and these are collected as raw returns. And this raw return or recording of these designations and names by the enumerators led up to the mark of 19,569 varieties or unique designations associated with the term called mother tongue in the 2011 Census of India.

These numbers are mind-boggling. You cannot imagine such a huge number. The question is, why do respondents respond in such a way? What is, is there any truth behind such a huge number of Census not able to capture these numbers or is it the individual's preference to associate with a particular designation? What works there? The identity issues? The collective identity issues? Why do they have such a wide variety and huge number in the mother tongue column of the survey?

These names returned by the respondents are designations provided by them, and they were faithfully recorded by the enumerators. And the number that we arrived at in the 2011 Census stood at 19,569.
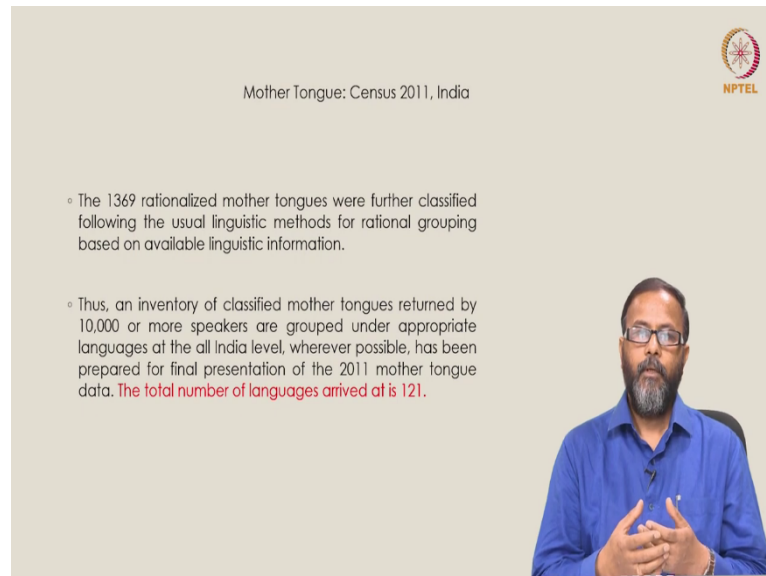
(Refer to Slide Time: 12:59)

Now, for assessing the correlation between the mother tongue and designations of the Census, and for presenting the numerous raw returns in terms of their linguistic affiliations, to actual languages and dialects, 9569 raw returns were subjected to thorough linguistic scrutiny, editing and rationalization.

And after a thorough editing, linguistic scrutiny and rationalization, the Census arrived at 1369 rationalized mother tongues, and 1474 names, which were treated as unclassified and relegated to other mother tongue categories.

(Refer to Slide Time: 14:23)

And these 1369 rationalized mother tongues were further classified following a usual linguistic method for rational grouping based on available linguistic information.

So, they have again, re-clustered and grouped, and thus, an inventory of classified mother tongues returned by 10,000 or more speakers. Always remember, that Census does not record the designation or names of varieties, which are spoken by less than 10,000 and 10,000 is a huge number.

There is a lot of debate about why this 10,000 number. So, what happens to the minor languages, which have a little number of speakers?

According to UNESCO, there are 187 languages endangered in India. And, when they are endangered, we do not have 10,000 speakers for them. So, what happens to them? How do we account for them?

Do we count them? Or ignore them? And almost like 1,400 other languages are relegated to cluster in other mothertongue'scategory. What happens to those languages? How do we count them? How do we account for them?

But in the Census2011, we rationalized regrouped and re-clustered these 1,369 languages which have more than 10,000 speakers. And the final presentation of the 2011 Census comes

up with a total number of languages 121. So, imagine, we started from 19,569 reached 1,369, and finally, the Census declares 121 languages in India. So, this is the number that Census gives us. But the question remains unanswered, what about those independent designations and names people returned in the raw returns as their mother tongue?

(Refer to Slide Time: 17:01)

Other sources like the people's Language Survey of India, and the Linguistic Survey of India carried out between 2010 and 2013 identify 780 languages. Yet another source very reliable source Ethnologue, which is a global database, it says in its 2019 report, that there are 453 living languages in India out of 7,111 languages in the world.

So, now, these numbers are quite confusing. The Census of India declares 121 languages, the people's Survey of India, and the Linguistic Survey of India declares 780 languages, and the world database on languages Ethnologue declares in its 2019 report 453 languages. This becomes a complex contemporary problem that we are left to ponder.

The way we collect Census data, and the rationale behind rejecting the total number of languages spoken needs rethinking. The methodology was chosen for clustering, grouping these languages according to the linguistic affiliations, and goes against the aspirations of the respondents of Census 2011 who wanted their respective language to be called their mother tongue.

The matter of the mother tongue is a very sensitive issue, and it is not easy to arrive at the exact number of mother tongues, or the exact number of languages spoken by different

people. And the Census does not include languages spoken by less than 10,000 and language experts, linguists and scholars debate this issue of 10,000 number.

So, what is the rationale behind counting only those languages, clustering only those languages, and grouping only those languages which have more than 10,000 speakers? So, what happens to endangered languages? What happens to languages which are on the verge of extinction or what happens to the languages which have less than 10,000 speakers, minor languages not mentioned separately in the Census? How to account for 19,569 returns?

To understand the sociopolitical implications of it one must first understand mother tongue is also an emotional subject. We associate with the world, we start constructing the knowledge of the world in our first language. We dream, we feel, and we think in our first language, in our mother tongue.

The new education policy seeks to promote mother-tongue education. But the problem is how to arrive at the exact number of mother tongues which we require to produce study material, train our teachers, and prepare reference materials, dictionaries, and textbooks, what rationale do we have for that? Do we have a supportive environment for that?

For example, William Labov's popular, and very famous study of Martha Vineyard Island. The Island saw almost 40,000 visitors every summer from outside the island. They are not islanders, and we find a deliberate attempt to create a distinction between the two groups of speakers. They had centralized firms, the islanders to sound different, to identify with the community and distinguish them from external visitors.

Another interesting case is Sanskrit, which records a sudden jump in the numbers. So, while responding to Sanskrit as a mother tongue the sociopolitical factors work. You can see the decennial growth or which is either positive or negative in many cases of many languages, how people identify with a particular language.

There are other political reasons, social, and identity issues, which trigger such migrations as people want to be identified with a dominant language group or create new identities.

For example, Hindi, when we have more than 40 languages grouped under Hindi, people claim Hindi as their mother tongue, but it includes Magahi, it includes Bhojpuri, it includes Angika, it includes Bajjika, it includes Bundeli, it includes Avadhi, it includes Braj. So, do we consider them a separate language or do you consider them part of the package of Hindi as a dominant language? this happens with many other languages.

Because the Census groups all these languages in some dominant language or the other. For example, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi have some dialects grouped under them. Do you consider them separate languages or are they simply dialects of these languages?

Bhojpuri. Is the Bhojpuri dialect of Hindi? Is the Magahi dialect of Hindi? Is the Bajjika dialect of Hindi? Is Braj dialect of Hindi? Is Avadhi the dialect of Hindi? Is Bundeli dialect of Hindi? So, do we have Hindi as a universal you know level for all these languages? Are they separate, different or are they the same? And they are grouped under Hindi?

Therefore, these are some questions, which are to be debated in academia, however, scholars differ in their views and there is no consensus. And people do continue to respond in the Census survey, with Hindi as their mother tongue, although they speak Braj, Braj is our household language, and they speak Avadhi, which is our native language first language.

Some speak Bundeli, which is the first language, and some speak Magahi, which is the first language, but they responded with Hindi as their mother tongue. And these languages are grouped under Hindi. In some other classes, we will talk about scheduled and non-scheduled languages and the groupings, clusterings and techniques used in the Census survey.

But one thing that we need to remember is the question of the mother tongue needs to be rethought, the technique and the methods as well.

Then different sources and databases arrive at different numbers of languages, different numbers of dialects in this country. As I mentioned, 121 the Census of India says 121 languages in the country, out of which, 22 languages are scheduled languages and 99 languages are non-scheduled.

Similarly, the people's Linguistic Survey of India arrives at 780 languages, the Ethnologue database arrives at 453 living languages, Census 1921 pre-independence Census says 180 languages and 44 dialects, the immigration survey Linguistic Survey of India done over a period of 20 years with 12 volumes produced claims some other number. So, this is puzzling.

It is interesting to see the emotional attachment, and the sensitivity associated with this phenomenon called mother tongue. And the most important thing is that 19,569 raw returns tell us a very complicated story of linguistic harmony and tension in the country and the freckles of representative politics.

So, with this, we will talk about the linguistic diversity of India in the other class, and in some other classes also we will talk about scheduled and non-scheduled languages of India. So, this is for now. Thank you very much.