

Fundamental Concepts in Sociolinguistics
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Multilingualism in India

Welcome to the class. In continuation to what we have already been discussing about languages in India and languages of India, we have established the fact that India is a truly pluricultural, multilingual society. Multilingualism in India is not an exception; it is a norm of the sociocultural fabric of the nation. Thus, the average Indian is multilingual. When we say an average Indian is multilingual, it means the ability to understand and speak in more than one language.


In our previous videos and discussions, we talked about the Census data 2011 and the number of responses and entries people have given for their mother tongue.

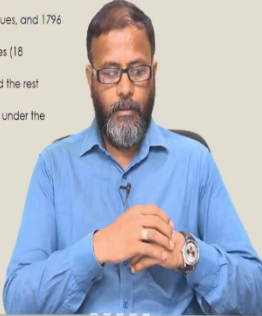
Moreover, looking at the Census data from 1961, 71, 81, 1991, 2001 and 2011, the assertion of the mother tongue is increasing. For example, in the 2011 Census, you have more than 15,659 respondents. When we look at the domains like home, streets, bazaars, and school, and formal domains like education, administration, and governance, we find a swift and flawless movement of people from one area to the other by the same individual. In the Indian ecosystem, language has never been a barrier to assimilation into different sociocultural spaces. Today, we will talk about these pluralistic features and the phenomenon called multilingualism in the Indian context.

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Census Data: 1961 1981 1991

- The 1961 Census returned 1652 mother tongues and classified them under 193 languages.
- Austric (20 languages),
- Dravidian (20 languages),
- Tibeto-Burman (98 languages), and
- Indo-Aryan (54) languages
- In the 1961 Census, 91% of the population spoke one of the fifteen scheduled languages and this number rose to 95.58% in the 1981 Census.
- In the 1991 Census, the raw returns of the mother tongues came to 10,400.
- These 10,400 raw returns were subjected to thorough scrutiny. This resulted in 1576 rationalized mother tongues, and 1796 names, which were treated as unclassified and relegated to the other mother tongues category.
- The 1576 rationalized mother tongues were regrouped following the linguistic methods under 114 languages (18 languages that are included in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution of India, and 96 other languages).
- 96.29% of the total population of India has one of the Schedule VIII languages as their "mother tongue" and the rest (3.71%) speak the languages not listed in the Schedule VIII of the Constitution of India.
- 85 mother tongues are grouped under the Schedule VIII languages, and 131 mother tongues are grouped under the other 96 non-scheduled languages.





Let me explain why the Census data of 1961, 1981, and 1991, are essential. If you get the facts and figures of this data, you will understand the complexity at the same time, the coexistence of all these languages and how they coexist without any conflict. In a nutshell, multilingualism does not portray any challenge in the Indian context in assimilating, communicating and sharing.

Firstly, let us look at the data. We can make some deductions from the 1961, 1981 and 1991s Census surveys. In 1961, 1652 recorded mother tongues grouped under 193 major languages, including the Austro group of 20 languages.

In the Dravidian languages, 20 languages were listed, 98 languages fell under the Tibeto-Burman language family, and 54 languages under the Indo-European category.

In the 1961 Census, **91** per cent of the total population surveyed spoke one of the **15** scheduled languages, which rose to **95.58** per cent in the 1981 Census.

Moreover, to remind you about scheduled languages, if you recall, in our previous lecture on scheduled languages of India, we talked about the constitutional provision and Scheduled Eighth, which is the genuine statutory acknowledgement of pluricultural, multilingual India, where this provision had listed 14 languages on twenty-sixth January 1950, when we adopted our constitution. The list keeps on increasing till today. As we speak, as of 2022, we have 22 languages listed in the scheduled list as official languages.


So, **91** per cent of the total population in 1961 spoke one of the languages from the scheduled languages; it rose to **95.58** per cent in the 1981 Census. Furthermore, in the 1991 Census, the number of native speakers of scheduled languages rose to **96.29** per cent.

In the 1991 Census, the mother tongues accounted for 10,400 variants. Moreover, they were further classified and reduced to 1576 nationalized mother tongues and 1796, treated as unclassified. And this growth can be understood by the fact that some more languages were added to Scheduled Eight.


In 2001, there were 85 mother tongues grouped under Schedule Eight of the scheduled languages and, 131 languages grouped under non-scheduled languages, 96 other pseudo languages.

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Statement - 9
Family-wise Grouping of the 121 Scheduled and Non-scheduled Languages – Census of India 2011



Language families	Number of Languages	Persons who returned the languages as their mother tongue	Percentage to total population
1	2	3	4
1. Indo-European			
(a) Indo-Aryan	21	94,50,52,555	78.05
(b) Iranian	1	21,677	0.00
(c) Germanic	1	2,59,678	0.02
2. Dravidian	17	23,78,40,116	19.64
3. Austro-Asiatic	14	1,34,93,080	1.11
4. Tibeto-Burmese	66	1,22,57,382	1.01
5. Semito-Hamitic	1	54,947	0.00
Total	121	1,20,81,71,433	77.83



Nevertheless, this figure changes dramatically if we look at the 2011 Census. If you look at statement 9 of the Census of India 2011, it has five family language families. Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese and Semito-Hamitic languages. The number of languages grouped under each of the major linguistic groups was as follows,

- 21 in Indo-Aryan languages
- 17 in the Dravidian languages
- 14 in Austro-Asiatic languages and
- 66 in Tibeto-Burman languages families.

The grouping has caused dramatic changes and shifts in numbers. Most importantly, as we saw earlier, the Indo-Aryan group of languages form the largest, followed by Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese /Sio-Tibetan, Persia, Germanic and other fringe groups.

The ever-increasing assertion and demand for recognition are evident in the 2011 Census data. Although India speaks many languages and writes in many scripts, it sings in one voice reflected in the national broadcasters' official song "*Mile Sur Mera Tumhara, Tho Sur Bae Hamara*". We have already talked about the official languages of India and the story of Hindi emerging as the official language and English as an associate official language; we have already discussed it in our other video.

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Other Sources:


- People's Language Survey of India, carried out between 2010 and 2013, identifies **780 languages**.
- Ethnologue, a global database, says in its 2019 report that there are **453 living languages in India**, out of 7,111 in the world.
- India has the fourth highest number of languages in the world, according to that report, with Papua New Guinea topping the list with 840.



As discussed earlier, there are other sources which list several languages and varieties spoken in this country. So, for example, one of the sources, the People's Language Survey of India, carried out between 2010 and 2013, identifies 780 languages. These are often termed external or artificial interventions. The parameters used by different surveys give us different results from the Government's 2011 Census data.

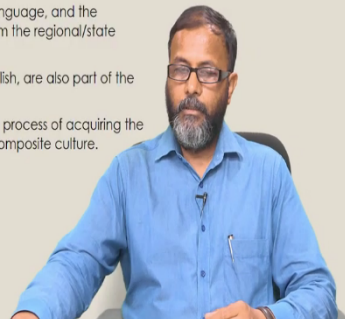
Another data source, Ethnologue, a global database, gives us a different number where it says that as of 2019, 453 languages are active in India, and India has the fourth-highest number of languages in the world. Although it is interesting and establishes that we are a pluralistic, multilingual society, the numbers are unreliable.

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Complementary Nature of Bilingualism

- India as a Pulti-cultural Nation: ethnicity, culture, language and religion.
- India has a high degree of multilingualism.
- Another significant feature of Indian bilingualism is that it is complementary.
- An individual uses a particular language at home, another in the streets, the bazaar, and still another in certain formal domains such as education, administration, and so on.
- It is very common to have a person with mastery of his/her home language, and the regional/state language (where the home language is different from the regional/state language).
- Mainstream languages at national and international, Hindi and English, are also part of the linguistic repertoire of a vast majority of Indians.
- In India, linguistic diversity is not by accident, but it is inherited in the process of acquiring the composite culture of the nation. It is an integral part of the Indian composite culture.



Now, if you look at the ability of an average Indian speaker, he or she is primarily bilingual. A vast majority of Indians are multilingual, but this ability of bilingualism or multilingualism does not stand in contrast to each other but is complementary in nature.

We have a wide range of ethnicities, cultures, languages spoken, and religions followed. Hence, it is a truly diverse country with multilingual speakers with access to multiple linguistic repertoire and verbal repertoire. However, the ability to speak many languages is not a linguistic deficit but a compliment.

For instance, a person born in the Northern plains can know Bhojpuri, might use Bhojpuri at home or Braj at home, Avadhi and Kharib,oli or what you call Hindustani on the streets and also be literate /know Hindi and English that they learn through formal education.

English becomes prominent if he enters administration, civil services, judiciary, science and technology. Thus, an average Indian from a Braj-speaking family or Avadhi speaking family or Bhojpuri-speaking family is competed and equipped with three languages, a mother tongue, Hindi and English, except for Tamil Nadu.

Another example is a person from North Eastern state, speaking Adi/Tibeto-Burmese language at home, who could speak Hindi on the streets and for other purposes and English in education or other formal domains as a contract language.

So, the average Indian is naturally multilingual, and multilingualism is in our DNA. It is a widespread feature of our geography and frequent, and it is complementary.

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The Kothari Commission




- Kothari Commission was formed on 14 July 1964. On 29 June 1966, Kothari Commission was dissolved. It was formed under the Chairmanship Daulat Singh Kothari. He was the then chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC).
- Kothari Commission was the sixth commission in post-independent India.
- It was the first commission mandated to comprehensively deal with the Education Policy of India.



Recommendation regarding Languages



- Languages – The Commission recommended adopting a three-language formula at state levels.
- It intended to promote a language of the Southern States in Hindi speaking states.
- It intended to promote Hindi, English and a regional language in non-Hindi speaking states. The Kothari Commission recommended promoting regional languages, Sanskrit as well as international languages, preferably English.

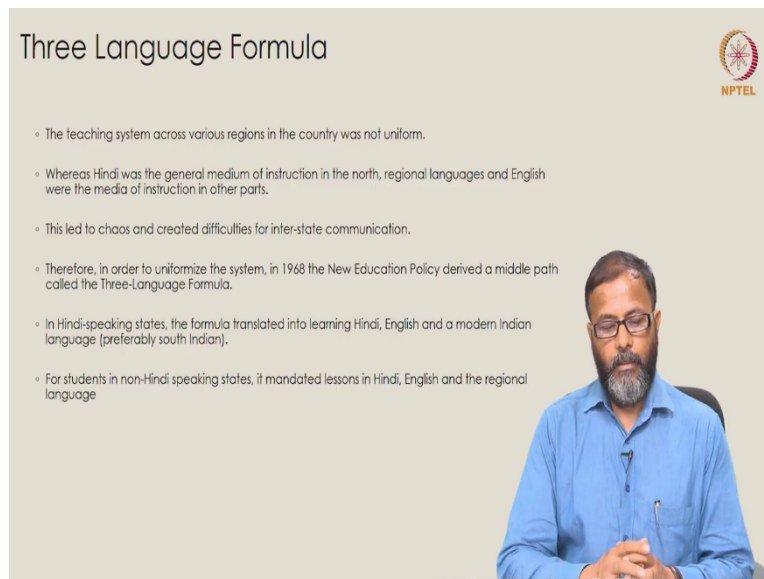


Now, Why is the Kothari Commission important? Because if you want to understand the education system of India, it is essential to understand where the National Educational policy began.

As discussed earlier, we came up with the idea of the three-language formula, which is an actual acknowledgement of the multilingual fabric of the country. Moreover, this three-language formula became the rock bed solid pillar in framing policy in education in India.

Furthermore, if you look at the new education policy, there is no division. We also continue with the similar assertion and acknowledgement of multilingualism in the country in our education system. It intended to promote Hindi, English and a regional language.

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The slide is titled "Three Language Formula" and features the NPTEL logo in the top right corner. It contains a list of six bullet points describing the historical context and implementation of the formula. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, speaking into a microphone.

- The teaching system across various regions in the country was not uniform.
- Whereas Hindi was the general medium of instruction in the north, regional languages and English were the media of instruction in other parts.
- This led to chaos and created difficulties for inter-state communication.
- Therefore, in order to uniformize the system, in 1968 the New Education Policy derived a middle path called the Three-Language Formula.
- In Hindi-speaking states, the formula translated into learning Hindi, English and a modern Indian language (preferably south Indian).
- For students in non-Hindi speaking states, it mandated lessons in Hindi, English and the regional language


It reflects the practical application of language in today's multilingual society, so what is the three-language formula? The objective of the Kothari Commission is to develop a **uniform policy** across the country in education; because there was no uniform teaching system across the country, we wanted to have a framework, and Kothari Commission's recommendations are essential in that way.

So, Hindi was a general medium of instruction in the Northern states, and regional languages or English was the mode of instruction in non-Hindi states. This led to administrative chaos, created difficulties for interstate communication in our federal democracy, and created hurdle for and mobility of learners and labourers.


Therefore, to uniformize the system, in 1968, a new education policy was drafted, and a middle ground was agreed upon, which became the trilingual formula or the three-language formula given by Kothari Commission.

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Implicit Functions and Implementation



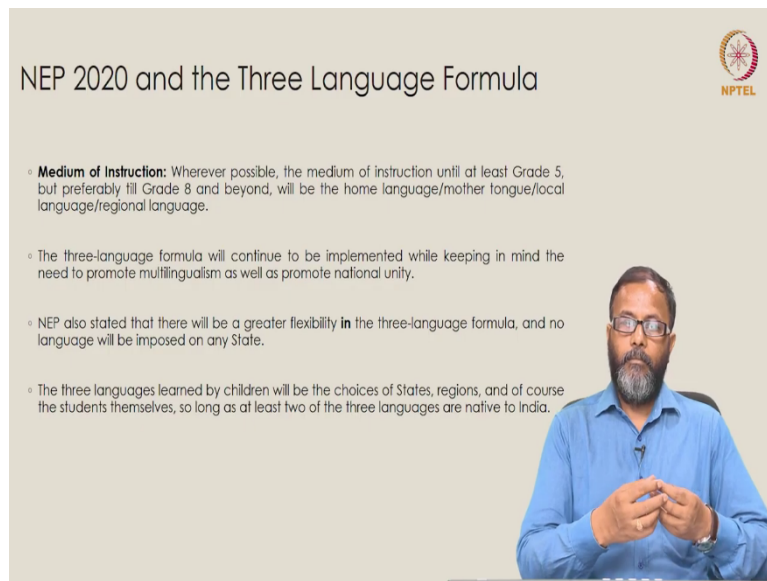
- The three functions which the three language formula sought to serve, were
 - Accommodating group identity
 - Affirming national unity
 - Increasing administrative efficiency
- Incidentally, the NPE 1986 made no change in the 1968 policy on the three-language formula and the promotion of Hindi and repeated it verbatim.



So, what was the use of it? What were the implicit objectives of this trilingual formula? So, the Kothari Commission tried to achieve three objectives to minimize linguistic tension and promote linguistic harmony. They accommodated group identity. So, linguistic identity assertion was respected and accommodated.

It was an attempt to affirm national unity and increase efficiency in administration. The following policy framework was drafted in 1986. The 1986 NPE did nothing to this idea, initially promoted by the 1968 education policy and adopted the three-language formula verbatim without any change.

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The slide features a title 'NEP 2020 and the Three Language Formula' at the top left and the NPTEL logo at the top right. A speaker, a man with a beard and glasses wearing a blue shirt, is visible in the bottom right corner. The slide contains the following text:

- **Medium of Instruction:** Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language.
- The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity.
- NEP also stated that there will be a greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language will be imposed on any State.
- The three languages learned by children will be the choices of States, regions, and of course the students themselves, so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India.

Suppose you look at the 2020 National Education Policy. We have not deviated from the idea of the country's multilingual fabric; we have maintained that tradition, and it has been elaborated to be more accommodative. For a detailed analysis of the 2020 NEP, refer to other lecture videos on the same topic.

Some important takeaway points are: The three-language formula will continue to be implemented while keeping in mind the need to promote multilingualism and national unity. NEP 2020 also stated that there would be greater flexibility in the three-language formula, and no language would be imposed on states. So, it gives much autonomy because education is a state subject, and it gives much autonomy to the federal system.

The three-language learned by children will be the choice of their states, regions, and, of course, the students themselves so long as at least two of the three languages are native to India. So, you can see our consistency in the policy from 1968 to 1986 and now 2020. I will not discuss the challenges of implementing this policy; that is a separate debate. What is important to underline here is the statutory acknowledgement of multilingualism in the country.

Although there is a resentment that minor fringe languages or dialects are not getting equal respect and status, overall, if you look at the linguistic ecosystem of India, it is very rare in the world to find five different families of languages that aspire to obtain official recognition

As we survive through ages in this multilingual ecosystem, all the languages in the country that belong to this biome are complementary. Perhaps we will talk about language contact

and variation in some of the classes. I will also highlight other things where languages are continuously in contact with each other, exchanging and interacting, and the change happens in both directions.

There are inevitable linguistic tensions in the parts, but perhaps, we will talk about them later on. However, the fact is that we have a composite culture we have a composite society, even though we have multiple languages and multiple cultures. So, this is it for today.

Introspect for a moment; you are exposed to many languages and have mastered more than one language to write and read. If your language is not the language of the state, you have a different home language. You have a dominant state language regional language and access to Hindi, good in Hindi, for all functional purposes. Moreover, you have a good command of English, and you are, therefore, multilingual.

You are not simply bilingual. You are multilingual. Look at the ease of doing business when you move from one domain to another, home to the streets, the market, the school to college and finally, a job. You move seamlessly and switch from one court, one variety, and one language to the other. This is our most outstanding achievement since independence, from a country of illiterates to literates with knowledge of more than one language. We became proficient in each field of study, which has helped our economic growth and the easy labour movement.

It may look like chaos for Western society. However, for us, it is organic chaos that we fail to appreciate. It is said that when you have accessibility to society, you have accessibility to that culture. In a very prolific India is indeed a long-lasting civilization.

That is all for today. Let us discuss other themes in our subsequent lectures and videos. Thank you very much for your attention.