

English Versus Hindi and Other Regional Languages – A Survey Based Analysis

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Abstract: Language is not only a way to express or communicate but is also a heritage for a community which communicates in a particular language. Language also provides an identity to a person. Various emotions and sentiments of an individual can be best expressed in her/his mother tongue. Due to these reasons, language is always one of the dearest things for people, which civilizations have always strived to keep safe with them forever and also to pass on to the next generation. This paper attempts to study the status and appreciation of Hindi and other regional languages of India among the youth of the country.

Keywords: Hindi, India, national language, linguistic diversity.

India is a nation full of linguistic diversity. With the advent of British in the Indian sub-continent in the seventeenth century, the people of the sub-continent were introduced to English culture and language. Initially, the British came to the Indian sub-continent for trade, which perhaps motivated them to learn the native languages of India so they could communicate with native people of India. Some among the Indian sub-continent gradually acquired colloquial knowledge of English. These were called Indo-Britons who subsequently began communicating in English even in their day-to-day life. Except for the Indo-Britons, others native people of the Indian sub-continent seldom used English unless they had to communicate with the Europeans for purpose of trade, etc. A subsequent rapid increase of British domination over the Indian sub-continent made English a lucrative language to learn. Eventually, knowledge of English language became an indispensable qualification in the Indian sub-continent and also led to an increasing demand for English education (Allen, 1854). Due to the great linguistic diversity in Indian sub-continent, the British

continued to feel the need for having a common/ general language (Allen, 1854). The need for having a common/ general language for India continues to be felt even today. Considerable debates and arguments revolve around this issue creating much confusion and disarray. According to Rao (1978), Hindi could be the official language but written in both Devanagari and Roman scripts. Further, English could be the second official language to be used by non-Hindi speaking states, if desired, and Hindustani should be the oral communication link for the masses (Rao, 1978). On the contrary, according to Srivastava (2000), Hindi is merely a *Sanskritised* version of English and by submerging many other dialects in Hindi, it has become inevitably dependent on English (Srivastava, 2000). Mishra (1972) has raised clear opposition to English even being considered as an official language although its study may be continued (Mishra, 1972).

A constant emphasis on study and knowledge of English had been advocated by many scholars, even those who support other native languages. According to Orsini (1999), Hindi, 'the people's language', is the only one language fit for the mass education (Orsini, 1999). On the other hand, Dutt et al. (1985) have been of the view that Hindi is incompetent at higher level of education and it has to become more liberal in order to prepare for its wider role. Schools and Universities in India should therefore nurture Hindi and it should be enriched by assimilation of vocabulary and styles from other regional languages mentioned in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India (Datt, 1968). The present research contribution explores the historical debates revolving around language discourse in India amidst the emergence of an alien language appearing in the scenario. The paper tries to analyze how and to what extent English language has affected native Indian languages and whether it is a colonial hangover or a will of the Indian people that such a suppression continues in the present day.

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A total of 100 students of University of Delhi were randomly surveyed at the *Vishwavidyalaya* Metro station located in North Delhi, India. This station is located at the entry point of North Campus, University of Delhi and was chosen to ensure random and unbiased survey sample. The University of Delhi and its constituent colleges are a preferred destination for higher education and it attracts students from across India and abroad. The survey focused on understanding the language preference of students for day-to-day communication. The survey also attempted to gather the opinion of the students on the need and implications of having a national language.

The survey shows that out of the 100 students randomly surveyed near the University of Delhi in the National Capital, 75% students considered Hindi to be their mother tongue. The remaining 25% students identify a total of 17 different languages/ dialects, among them, as their mother tongue (Fig 1.).

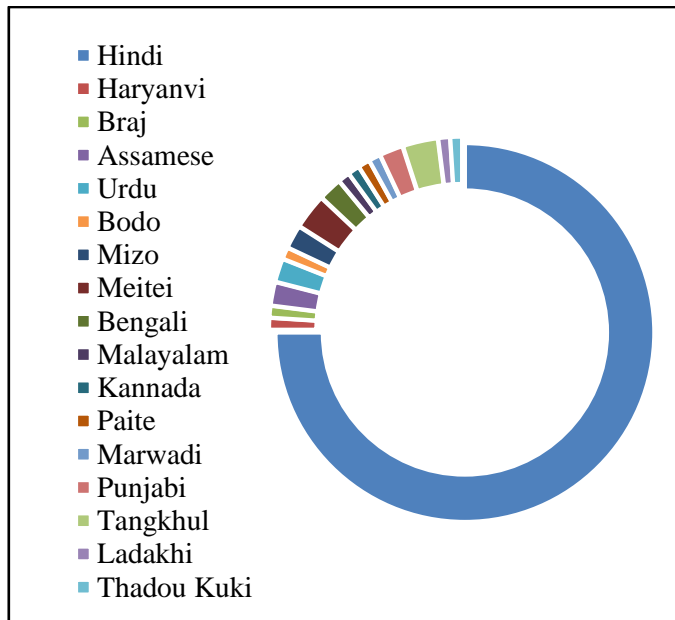


Figure 1. Linguistic diversity of the surveyed population in terms of their mother tongue identified by them.

However, 61% of the respondents carry out verbal communication with their friends mostly in Hindi while 34% of the respondents carry out verbal communication with their friends in English (Fig. 2). 5% of the respondents choose to carry out verbal communication with their friends mainly in their mother tongue (Fig 2). Interestingly, for written communication, 91% of the respondents prefer English as the primary language and only 9% choose to carry out written communication in Hindi (Fig. 3). 60% of the respondents feel the need for selecting one language as a National language for easier

communication across India. Out of these 60%, who feel the need for having a national language, 80% of the respondents felt Hindi to be the most preferred candidate as a National Language. 15% felt that English could be made the National Language while the rest either preferred Sanskrit or were not sure.

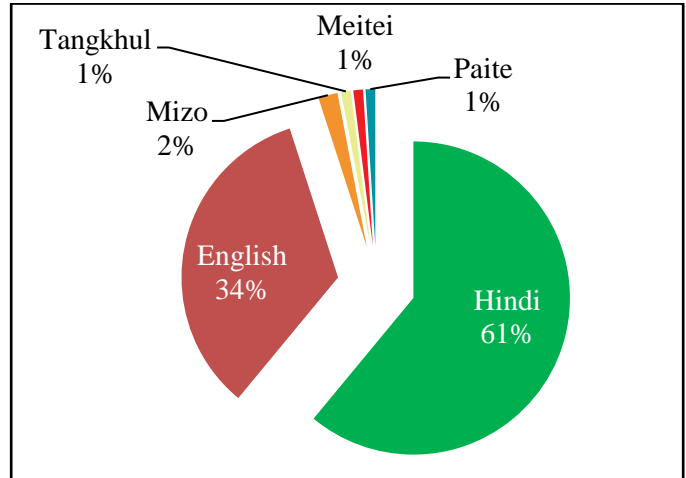


Figure 2. Percentage use of language for verbal communication in the surveyed population.

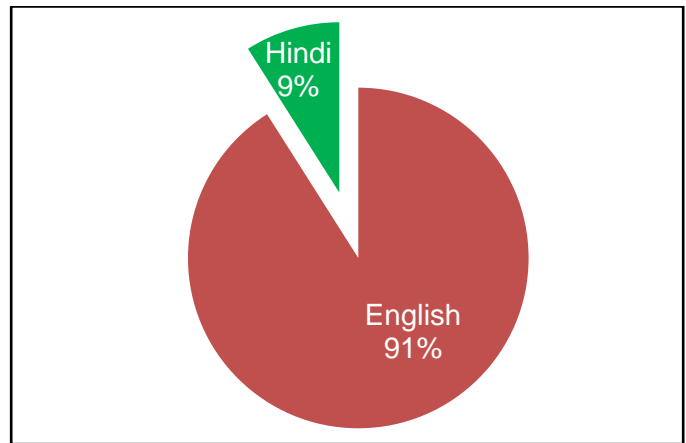


Figure 3. Percentage use of language for written communication in the surveyed population.

The basic knowledge of the mother tongue of each student was checked by asking them to narrate the alphabets of their mother tongue in the order that they appear. Only 29% respondents could narrate the alphabets of their mother tongue in the correct order or attempted to do so. On the other hand, 99% of the total students surveyed could recite the English alphabets in the correct order.

The large number of languages/ dialects that emerged in the survey speak for the linguistic diversity of India. It is interesting to note the disappearance of the use of regional

languages when it comes to written communication. Respondents, whose mother tongue is Hindi and also the non-Hindi speaking respondents use Hindi as their preferred language for verbal communication. This is because they think Hindi is well understood by everyone especially in the National Capital.

A significant finding of this study is the respondents' lack of basic understanding of their mother tongue, even when almost all the respondents could recite the English alphabets fluently. This raises a question on the basic/primary education system to which these students were exposed to. Clearly, the education system which was provided to these students had a much greater emphasis on English language. All the respondents had undergone basic/primary education in one or other part of India.

The perception of students towards English is such that its usage is seen as a matter of pride and lack of English fluency leads to the feeling of an inferiority complex. The fact that respondents could not recite the alphabets in their mother tongue did not either come as a surprise to the participating students nor did they feel the need for knowing this.

The survey reveals that in the student community in Delhi, English supersedes every other native language of India and is being extensively used for written communication. While there is a real consensus of whether we should or should not have a common National

Language, there is need for promoting and popularizing all the native Indian languages. These languages need to be given the same amount of attention in our school education, as is being given to English at present. The connection among mother tongue, identity and heritage needs to be carefully carved out and disseminated among the youth today. There has to be greater emphasis to teach and learn local languages in a local manner for sustainable national growth.

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