

## Does a Language Matter?

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### Abstract

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The World is moving towards multilingualism at home and outside the home. Every child when he/she goes to school in 21<sup>st</sup> century in India and in many countries speaks more than one language. Globalization and migration are forcing us to use more than one language. They are the agents of making multilingualism a reality. In this context, this paper asks a fundamental question "Does a language matter?" and analyzes the real language situation to conclude that a language matters with languages, a language does not matter when it excludes other languages.

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**Keywords:** Language, Multilingualism, Indian Languages, Language Regulators

### 1. Introduction

By asking the question, "does a language matter?" I might be criticized highly by the scholars of Linguistics, language and literature and many others. It is obvious to be so. But my question is an objectively thought up and practically experienced one. In this question, I have used "a language" not language. I admit wholeheartedly that language is indispensable. But I wonder in this era, when the multilingual situation prevails, whether a language is indispensable? A language to me is any one language out of thousand languages like Hindi, Latin, Sanskrit, English, Urdu, etc. Language, without any preposition added to it, means language we use for our immediate purpose, where it may be a hybrid or a creole or a mixed language or a language. For a language, there may be a conscious effort for its use, but for language there may not be.

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## 2. Discussion

Most of the cities in India are becoming multilingual. Here multilingual means the existence and use of more than one or two languages in more than one or two contexts. I feel that there is no monolingual city in India now. In Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, we could realize the fact that there are people staying in all these cities who speak more than one language. I get to see Odia / Bengali speakers in Mysore or Bangalore, Telugu in Odisha. Migration is happening more and more because of the search for jobs or because of the search for quality education. Whenever a person moves from his/her native place, his/her native tongue also moves. He gets word from other languages and accepts the change which takes place in his/her mother-tongue. Because of the advanced science and technology, rapid growth of urbanization and industrialization, we are unable to be monolingual. Monolingualism seems to be away from real language situation, whereas multilingualism is becoming a fact. This multilingualism is a part of what I am categorizing under "language", not a language. Historically, colonialization and invasion by the Aryans, the Moghul, the Portuguese and the British have contributed to the multilingual situation in India. Diversified religious and ethnic groups have also added to the multilingual situation in India. Various religious sects Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians through their propagation, convention and various systems have facilitated a mutual space in which Indian languages have been interacting with one another.

### 2.1. Heterogeneity and Homogeneity

The nature of the language we are discussing about is heterogeneous. Growth of the modern Indian languages shows us their heterogeneous characteristics. Language homogeneity makes us think that whether the development of language is dependent or independent of the influences of other languages which come in its way. Can a language have only its own vocabulary, its own lexicon only? If I say, Sanskrit, how much of it is only Sanskrit? Is everything present in Sanskrit from Sanskrit only? Or it has some words which cannot come under Sanskrit? If a language is that language only, if a language is of that language only, it is homogeneous. Modern Indian languages are open-ended.

There may be directives from a government or from a community to check the quantity of open-endedness of an Indian language directly or indirectly, but the reality is that it can't be checked.

## 2.2. Verbal and Non-verbal Elements

Communication in a multilingual setting does require language but not a language. Sometimes I feel that language is not a barrier in our communication, if it is unknown to you and you are in a multilingual environment. I can cite two examples here. I have met many Kannada speakers here in Mysore on the way, in shops or in tea stalls. Every day, I meet a person who runs a laundry nearby RaghavendraswamiMatha, Mysore. Every day he speaks to me in Kannada. He speaks to me as if I am a Kannada speaker and I am getting him whatever he is speaking in Kannada. Actually, I understand only Sanskrit and English words that are in Kannada. But he does not use Sanskrit words much. How I understand him from his expression that he uses while speaking means body language. Another important thing is that he is very open in the sense he is very friendly while communicating. I am bringing another person here who is a security guard in a bungalow in Jailaxmipuram, Mysore, who is from a village and he speaks completely in Kannada without using body-language.

He speaks to me in Kannada, the way he presents his Kannada, it is difficult to understand and he is not at all friendly. He does not care whether you understand him or not. So what matters in communication, above all, is how one speaks something not what someone speaks. The first person was accommodating and understanding one, whereas the second was a rigid fellow. Neither of them was a multilingual. It was the non-verbal element and the quality of social inclusiveness, good exposures to others made one more communicative, although his/her language was not understood. So these features are found more in language rather than in a language. It is both verbal as well as non-verbal elements which make communication possible. Realities of lives prove that non-verbal elements are indispensable part in a communication process. Without knowing a language also, one can communicate in a multilingual situation where these non-verbal elements play most important role.

With this, the language, on which we are discussing, has following features:

1. It has a mixed vocabulary. In this language, one can get vocabulary from more than one language (English, Hindi and any other Indian language or Indian languages). As for examples:

Bahut tension hai (Hindi-English-Hindi), reserve kareng (English-Hindi), director ko meet kiye (English-English-Hindi), hair-straightner use kale (English-English-Odia), mobilere 100 tankaa recharge kariba (English-Odia-English-Odia), please adjust maadi (English-English-Kannada)

2. This exists mostly in urban areas. This language is much found in metropolitan cities of India.
3. It is a lingua franca. It is a link language among the city dwellers who are from heterogeneous language groups.
4. It is a spoken language. It is not found in books but in media.
5. In some contexts, non-verbal elements are emphasized more. It means one's gesture speaks more than the words one uses.

### 2.3. Language Regulators

The regulators of this language in urban areas and metros are market places, railway stations, bus-stands, auto-stands, tea-stalls, shops, hospitals, hotels, tourist spots. These regulators make this language possible. These places in any city of India will have the language, not a language. These are the places where heterogeneous language groups meet and communicate in the language. This language fulfills their immediate purpose. If you speak Odia and travels to Mumbai, the time you get down at the station, you can't speak Odia; you have to speak the language which has Hindi and English mixed. If you know Marathi, you can mix it also with Hindi and English. The above-mentioned language regulators influence the homogeneous element of a language. In this era, there is no control over such language situation. One can't check a language. State government may take some administrative step to use its official language in the state, but as long as we migrate, as long as we share, as long as urbanization and globalization influence us, language is bound to change.

## 2.4. Languages spoken in metropolitan cities of India

**Table 1: The Languages Spoken in the Metropolitan Cities of India are Shown in the Table**

Name of the city	Languages spoken in the above context
New Delhi	Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, English, Marathi, Sindhi, Gujarati, Nepali, Tamil, Odia, Malayalam, Konkani, Bhojpuri, Bengali
Mumbai	Marathi, Gujarati, Kannada, English, Telugu, Konkani, Dangii, Varhadii and Hindi, Sindhi, Urdu
Bangalore	Kannada, English, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, Odia, Bengali
Chennai	Tamil, Urdu, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Hindi, Bengali
Kolkata	Bengali, Hindi, Odia, Urdu, Haryanvi, Rajasthani, Bihari, Tamil, Assamese, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi and Gujarati, Punjabi
Hyderabad	Telugu, Urdu, Tamil, Marathi, Kannada, Gujarathi, Bengali and Malayalam, Hindi, Odia

In the places mentioned above in all these cities of India, we find this multilingual situation. A percentage of all major Indian language speakers are there in all these cities. The contexts in which they are used are informal. This situation triggers the people to speak a mixed language. In this situation, communication is the goal, no speaker is conscious of grammaticality of the language. They speak to know something, to get something. This is the actual use of language. To know about the languages spoken in various other cities of India, one can refer the data provided by the census of India. Based on the census data, all the major Indian languages (except Sanskrit) have speakers and users all over India.

## 2.5. Varieties Coming Up

Because of the multilingual situation and globalizational advances, new varieties of major Indian languages and English are emerging. We all are aware of Tangilish, Tenglish, Hinglish, and Kanglish in this context. These forms are highly used in urban areas and metropolitan cities of India.

Though these forms influence the regional language used in rural areas, but the influence is much felt in urban areas. Popularity of regional movies and TV channels has contributed much towards the growth of such varieties. Likewise, Odia-Telugu or Telugu-Odia, Kannada-Hindi or Hindi-Kannada, Bengali-Hindi or Hindi-Bengali etc are emerging. Because of the immigrants from various parts of the country, there has emerged a new linguafranca in Mumbai, known as Mumbaiya or Bumbaiya version of Hindi. It has mixed vocabulary from Hindi, English and Marathi. Arrival of British East India Company in Madras caused the coming up of Madras Bashai which is mainly used by fishermen and auto-rickshaw drivers. It is a mix of Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, English, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam. It has also vocabulary from Dutch, Portuguese and French. It is also used in Tamil movies.

## Conclusion

Living in a globalized world has delimited us and has created environment to enable us to use more than one language or to mix a language with another. Today, sitting at home, we can watch TV in our mother-tongues and in English and also in other Indian languages. Multilingual environment surrounds us. To use a mixed language happens immediately. None of us uses a language but languages. Our children are driven more towards this mixed variety of languages. Above all, language is developing inclusively, when languages are open-ended, they contribute to one another. Purists may argue for the development of language exclusively, but the reality falsifies their notions of language.

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