



## Language Death Perspectivation of Planned or Unplanned Language Death

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**Abstract:** The present paper is a conceptual paper which explores the innate nature of languages exploring how they are in constant flux. From their sociological birth to them being politically accepted, languages go through a plethora of changes. This paper explores concepts like high and low varieties of language e.g. Hindi in playgrounds and Hindi used to teach; the concept of prestige associated with a language, as well as concepts like elaborate and restricted code by Basil Bernstein. It explores the creole continuum and how they are connected to language death. Diglossic conditions may also lead to languages being used over another leading to language disuse. Certain linguistic groups, despite having a working language, assimilate themselves with a larger language due to many possible reasons (economic, political, geographical or anything else). This paper will take the discussion forward with how policy decisions can also lead to systematic extinction of certain languages due to the farsightedness of language planning. Paulo Friere (Friere, 1985) spoke about how local languages can be the backbones of language education. This paper explores the inability of state level language planning policies at incorporating local languages into the curriculum leading to eventual endangerment of the language over generations. This paper will also look at languages with shared script and how it might be the result of language imperialism over centuries. The content and opinions expressed are that of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by/do not necessarily reflect the views of Azim Premji University.

**Keywords:** Language, Linguistics, Language death, Language Politics, Contact language, Language Policy

### 1. Introduction

Understanding the scope of the word 'language' plays a pivotal role in a paper trying to discern how language perishes or lives on through generations successfully. According to Agnihotri (2010), '*language is a dialect with an army and a navy*'. A certain group of people with power have the decisive power over others and can call the shots when it gets to decisions regarding government. It is this group of people who are advantaged to use the language they use as their own and subsequently impose it on a bigger population. The ones who do not speak this variant of the language spoken by the powerful group, must follow the linguistic desire of the powerful group. The variant of the language spoken by the ones in power is called a 'language', politically. The variant of language spoken by the ones who are either phonologically, morphologically or syntactically different, no matter how minute they are, are called dialects. The point to note here is that the entire phenomenon is based on socio-political decisions and not linguistic. Agnihotri states the example of Hindi (Hindi, 2024), a language believed to be spoken by tens of millions in India. If we go back a few hundred years, we would have found the existence of Awadhi, Braj and Maithili as three independent languages from the Indo-European group of languages, operating freely in their geographical areas. After India's independence, Awadhi, the language of Tulsi Das; Braj Bhasha, the language of Surdas; and the language of Vidyapati as well as the language of King Janaka from the kingdom of Mithila, Maithili are called dialects of Hindi (Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore). Khadi Boli, the version spoken in Delhi and Meerut came into prominence and became the face of the Hindi language. This is because Delhi became the centre of power and the people who held powerful positions in making policy decisions, used that version of the language. Immediately,



every other version of the same language was attributed as dialects of it. Added to that, languages which are phonetically and morpho-syntactically similar (due to them having their roots in Sauraseni Prakrit, (Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore) were also bound together and made into dialects of Hindi. If we stratify languages linguistically and scatter all the languages which were forcefully made into dialects of Hindi due to either not having ten thousand speakers, or not having enough literature or not being the language of education or being similar to Hindi, or simply because people in power used a particular language and wanted that language to gain prominence, we will find out that only a fraction of speakers would actually speak what they claim is the 'pure and standardised' Hindi. There are 54 documented varieties of Hindi now and on closer research, we might find that full-fledged languages have now been made dialects of Hindi (Abbi, 2022). The centre of power, the people associated with them, and their geographical location plays an important role in the making of a language. A language also does not become a dialect of another language automatically just because it uses the written script of that language. When English was introduced as the medium of education in India, the elites had a huge role to play in it, since it was the language of prestige for them. English has not been a neutral language. It was always the language of the aristocrats or elites (Annamalai, 2004). A language can be represented through any language and every language can be represented through any one script. For example, every speech sound and every graphemic occurrence of every language in the world can be represented through the International Phonetic Alphabet chart. Spoken languages have been around for much longer than written language (International Phonetic Association, 2018). UNESCO also celebrates the International Mother's Language day (International Mother's Language Day, 2024) every year to remind everyone of the fact that every language deserves equal recognition and respect.

## 2. Methodology

The present research involves secondary data and forms a narrative to extensively look at trends in the modern world which might be affecting the way in which languages survive or perish. A narrative research methodology is used to delineate the internal workings of a mechanism through real world examples. It helps one narrate an incident or story through examples. A cross-sectional approach to issues related to language endangerment and death leads us to understanding how such phenomenon function throughout the world, in one synchronous point in time, rather than taking a slice of time and then looking at how things have evolved over time. The narrative approach used here looks at incidents recorded at certain times (McAlpine, 2016)

Conceptual research methodology cultivates a deeper understanding of complex phenomena by fostering a thoughtful exploration of existing knowledge. This approach, in contrast to empirical research which gathers new data, emphasizes the analysis of secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and expert opinions. Through this analysis, researchers can refine existing theories, identify knowledge gaps, and propose new frameworks that illuminate the human experience in more nuanced ways (Marek, 2015). This process is akin to a scholar embarking on an intellectual journey, seeking to provide deeper insights and fresh perspectives on a particular topic, all with the aim of enriching our understanding of the world around us (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

The given methodologies were chosen for the present research because they would aid in the process of understanding, prioritising the occurrences around the world which are leading to massive scale language death or in some cases, linguistic genocide. The present methodologies have also helped listing the various planned and unplanned methods that are at present jeopardising the lives of languages. Papers and incidents that have been seen all over the world, have been considered in order to create a narrative that suits the title of the paper. The examples of linguistic disuse, endangerment or genocide have been found out and listed as examples to satisfy the nature of the paper.

## 3. Results & Discussion

Abbi (2022) through her various works in the areas of Little Andaman and Great Andaman states how the art of narration is lost when language speakers stop using their mother tongues. One needs to use immaculate grammar to narrate a story and without this art being practiced, the language goes into disuse. She narrates her years of work to document languages in the Great Andamanese islands and eventually finding various ways to elicit information from the speakers of languages used there. In her book, *Voices from the lost Horizon: Stories and Songs from the Great Andamanese* (Abbi and Roy, 2021), she documents the stories and songs she could elicit from one



of the Aka Boa speakers, Bo Senior. The Great Andamanese are a group of migrants who belong to the first migration that happened out of Africa 70000 years back. They brought with them their stories, culture and traditions and were isolated from the rest of the world, till the British connected them with the rest of India. Abbi narrates how throughout her interviews her interviewees would always tell them how they have never heard stories for the last 40 years and that none of them went to sleep being aided by a bedtime story. The language was lost to them. Incidentally she also narrates how through being an observer as participant, he could elicit some beautiful stories from them, including the creation myth, panch bhoot, nirvana and so on. She also narrates how by showing pictures of birds she could elicit the story named Jiro Mithe (Roy & Abbi, 2013), in which humans slowly become birds. Roy would keep narrating the story to Abbi in Hindi but she would request Roy to narrate the story back in his own language. The encroachment of a larger language and the language of power and how it paves the way for smaller languages to perish is very apparent in this case as well. Roy (also known as Boa Junior) now started speaking the language once lost, due to Abbi intervening through her research. Roy was now at least trying to use his own language for narration of stories and to remember things. These people are the final custodians of a language, a language that would otherwise die if no one else speaks it, sings songs in it, narrates stories in it.

However, the only way in which a language can be put to disuse, goes far beyond factors which affected the Great Andamanese. In the book, *Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and human Rights*, by Tove Skutnabb Kangas (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013), the author quotes information from an article from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* by Leanne Hinton (Hinton, 2022) how languages are dying off at a much faster rate than biodiversity, which is an oddity. California had roughly 50 native languages and by 1995, all of these languages had turned to moribund languages (Bousquette and Putnam, 2020), or languages which children do not speak anymore, in the process killing the language within the adulthood of that generation. Even if some parents would help their children learn their native tongues, these children would not find social scenarios to use their language at, eventually forcing even these children to shift to the language with higher language capital (Huang, 2019). Canada has around 53 native languages and yet only 3 out of these 53 languages have excellent chances of survival. 43 languages out of 53 languages were declared to be at the 'verge of extinction'. An additional of 7 languages were declared as threatened. Like what Abbi (2022) had suggested through her recent book, Bruce Connell (Connell, 1997) mentions his experience in Cameroon where many languages he came across were moribunds. Languages like Yeni, now called Nyalang, only have a song left in the language. A language called Bung only has 3 people left speaking it now and no one uses it for communicative purposes now. Even a bigger language like Wawa, spoken by more than 3000 people now in endangered due to Fulfulde, the regional lingua franca. He also mentions how the language Twendi has around 35 people who are still using it, and how the children born to parents using Twendi are not speaking this language or using it. In Central Nigeria, as mentioned by Blench (2019), most languages have less than 200 speakers, and this is out of the 250 odd languages spoken there. 95 languages are undescribed and there are no government policies which aids languages being documented. The future of these language would depend on the government elected in the country and if the representatives would pay enough attention to language death.

When Mrs. Salter, the last person in Canada to speak Tuscarora fluently, died, the extended population speaking that language realised that with her, her language moved one step closer to death (ONLINE DOCUMENT, 1996). This is as it was noted by Tove in her book (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). Pal, (2023) notes in his novel that when a person dies, all their aspirations, dreams, visions and future dies with them. Similarly, when the last speaker of a language dies, they die with all the stories, all the songs, all the aspirations, all the dreams. Languages have a way of showing one, the world and, the words in a language helps one with cognitive functions as well. Language shapes the way one perceives the world (Sapir, 1929) (Whorf, 1956). The Sapir and Whorf hypothesis talks about how languages shape the way one views the world. The Iñupiaq language of Wales, Alaska ("Eskimo Words for Snow," 2024), has around 70 recognizable and usable words for 'ice'. For a speaker of another language which does not have as many versions of 'ice' it might be difficult to gauge the meaning, usage scenario and associations of those 70 terms for ice. This highly depends on the environment. People living close to ice having less vegetation around them would have more words related to ice, whereas people living away from ice and close to agrarian land would definitely know more words related to agriculture. Friere & Macedo (1985) also talks about a similar phenomenon in his book, 'Reading the World and Reading the Word'. Friere places importance in the value of interactions and environmental nurture when it gets to acquainting a baby with language and literacy skills. A similar occurrence has also been noticed with Kathakali, the indigenous dance form from Kerala. When the last artist who



created the elaborate costumes passed away during the covid pandemic, it opened the doors to new artists, younger artists with new interpretations of the costumes and the overall way in which the costumes helped with narration of the stories. The entire tradition moved one step closer to its end when the artisan passed away. This is a part of an unpublished research, cited here with due permission (Varma, unpublished research, 2024).

As mentioned by Krauss (1992) in his book *The World's Languages in Crisis*, quoted by Tove in her book, (2013), the decline in the rates of biodiversity is still much lower when compared to the number of languages which are presently either moribund, endangered or threatened. According to Jernsletten, as mentioned in Tove's book, some Sami terminologies associated with hunting and gathering, which once held a rich cultural heritage are now systematically being replaced by terms which suit the environment. Activities in their vicinity dictate how they are looking at things in their environment or subsequently how they put it in language or define it. When an environment changes through time (loss of habitat, sudden change through earthquakes, governmental norms etc), people who are associated with work involving that environment are also affected. This certain group of people also might change their entire lifestyle depending on the degree of environmental change. This also leads to changes at the level of language. Languages carry information regarding livelihood, environment and subsequent changes to the environment are also encoded in their language. Unfortunately, the changes which are encoded in the language, are also reason to why certain cultural aspects, traditions and parts of language are gradually lost over time (due to environmental loss). Ecological crisis can directly lead to language loss.

*"The close connection between people's activities and skills and the knowledge preserved in the form of terms and words is also evident when the linguistic expressions and terminology disappear alongside the disappearance of the activity with which the knowledge is connected."* (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013)

Blench (1996) lists factors like growth of nation state, promotion of specific languages, assimilation of languages to bigger and more powerful languages, assimilation to English, ecological changes and labour migration as major reasons for language death. Blench also mentions that languages with no major dominant language groups in the vicinity, languages which have no extensive endogamous marriage practices, languages which have a certain level of pride and heritage, languages which have a written script and languages which have access to media are more successful in surviving.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2008), categorically states that the myth of believing that people generally have one discreet mother tongue, or in remotest cases two, makes up for the basis of most language-based education plans fail. Kangas mentions four perspectives from which mother tongues can be approached. The four categories contain origin (the language one learns at first), identification (the language one thinks they speak as a native speaker and the language others think one speaks as a native speaker), competence (the language one has the best knowledge of) and function (the language one uses the most). Unfortunately, most language planning authorities do not take into considerations, so many perspectives, which planning.

Crystal (2014) in his book 'Language Death' walks in a similar path as Kangas and states that languages are dying and we only get to know about a handful of languages which are threatened. Thousands of other languages die and they never come to the limelight. Crystal goes ahead and talks about factors which affect language death like factors which put the people in physical danger. In it he includes factors like ecological and environmental disasters like 7.1 Richter scale earthquake at E Saundun province in Papua New Guinea in 1998. Over 2200 died and 10000 or more were displaced. An immediate aftermath of the earthquake was total loss of habitat, followed by tribes residing at the villages called Sissano, Warupu, Arop and Malol moving to common locations, with their individual indigenous languages. What languages did they speak at these care centres? In another example, Crystal notes the case of an NGO, Amnesty International which although did not take part in trying to resolve land related issues, took part actively in spreading word about human rights and values. Figures indicated that at least around 123 people from indigenous communities were murdered by non-indigenous people. There are factors which change the people's culture as well, better known as cultural assimilation, where people from a smaller group of languages slowly start identifying themselves with a language with higher social capital. This domination may be a result of historical events like colonisation or large scale immigration, as seen in histories of North America, Africa and the Indian subcontinent. It might also be due to the introduction of new laws, incentives or recommendations by a group in power or things more sociological in origin like prestige concerned with a variety of language. Eventually a bilingual arises as a result and people start using the new language that they are forced to use more than their mother





tongues. But with time, as the pressure from institutionalised sources decrease, these people speaking the new language are left with more proficiency and competence in the new language. Eventually there comes a time when children who grew up learning the language in their critical periods, speak the new language as their mother tongues and the old language is systematically replaced by the new variant of that language or another language altogether, in just one generation. Such situation of diglossia (Ferguson, 1959) mostly lead to higher competence in one version of the language in situations which are informal. This is also similar to what Bernstein (2003) terms as elaborate and restricted codes. The elaborate codes give way to higher competence.

Crystal (2014) also quotes Kincade for a classification matrix for languages. Viable languages which have sufficiently large population bases and are at no risk. Viable but small languages have at least 1000 speakers and have strong internal organisation but are mostly isolated. Endangered languages are surviving but are not in favourable conditions and need support. Nearly extinct languages are beyond the scope of survival and no amount of governmental or extra-governmental help will make it survive. These are languages which are not being learnt as children as their first languages anymore. These are moribund languages. Extinct languages have had their last speaker die, already.

As the number of people living in a society increases, there are needs for bureaucratization, standardization of societal rules and procedures such that the society can function smoothly. If there are multiple rules and procedures in place for a singular societal norm, then it is bound to confuse users. Weber (Schroeder, 2016) talks about modernisation (in which economic, technological, social, political and cultural changes), rationalisation (in which efficient systems are developed and in cases it leads to dehumanisation), standardisation (in which a society gets rid of individuality and partially creativity and creates one standard for everybody) and modernization (in which the creation of a prosperous society along with changes, takes place by keeping up with ongoing standards). Weber also talks about three types of authority which citizens in a society actively believe in or place faith in, namely, traditional (in which leaders generally inherit positions and roles are based on respect for established cultural patterns or norms, for example kings, monarchies), charismatic (in which the leaders in question become leader due to their ability to inspire devotion and obedience from their followers, for example, self-proclaimed godmen in India) and legal-rational (in which a leader is delegated roles and responsibilities according to rules and law designed for it, for example, the prime minister of India). Every society has to do the same and languages are no strangers to the phenomenon of standardisation in which a certain variety which gathers enough support, or has more people with influence speaking it pushes for it to become the version which will be taught in schools, over versions which do not have equal support but are equally used by people in the same geographical area (Agnihotri, 2009).

In Himanshu Upadhyay and Manoj Kumar's paper (Kumar and Upadhyay, 2021), they talk about teachers as the custodians of language. Teachers are called custodians since they receive this legal-rational leadership responsibility (Schroeder, 2016). Their status of being selected as teachers, lead on to them being able to righteously say that the version they are using is the one that is correct, while others are not. We understand this through examples of both Hindi and Gujarati. While Mahatma Gandhi was approving of the varieties that existed in Hindi (Hindusthani, Urdu, Hindi, Braj, Awadhi and so on) and their usage throughout the Indian subcontinent, he was not quite flexible when it got to the language he used as his mother tongue, Gujarati.

Eventually, these standardised versions of languages are taught to students who enrol themselves in schools, notwithstanding the linguistic varieties that might be exhibited by these students. Mesthrie (2009) quotes Peter Trudgill and states that it is not a problem of these students but rather an issue of the schools and their expectations from students. Schools cannot expect languages in the vicinity to be uniform and homogenous, but rather should be open to multiple varieties, which unfortunately isn't the case. If vernacular languages (languages spoken as mother tongue by groups which are socially and politically being actively dominated by another group speaking their own language (Fishman 1968 689 - 690, as quoted in Mesthrie, 2009) are worked on by the community using them or by any other linguist who has interest in the matter, their language can go through vocabulary expansion. Students instead are expected to pick up the standardised variety being taught by teachers, who consider themselves custodians of the language. Northern Ute speakers had high dropout rates from schools due to linguistic issues. These students would enter a school with high proficiency in their tribal languages and/or a version of English which is spoken in their tribe but not the version of English called the standard code. The teachers upon knowing automatically thought that since these students speak English, they speak a version of English, which is the standard code, leading to mismatch in the beliefs of both groups. The Wykoopah bilingual education system tried to take care



of this issue by starting to teach both the language spoken by the students and by slowly introducing them to the language they needed to learn, over time; in the process, keeping both the languages active in the individuals. Other cases like the Ann Arbor trial in which there were problems of mismatch in the sociological upbringing and thereafter schooling of African-American children in comparison with children who were American in origin, also open their doors to bilingual education or considering possibilities of hiring teachers who would bridge the gap between two communities by being an active member of both the communities, or by being speakers of both the varieties of the language with an understanding of both their cultural values. The Linguistic Society of America strongly favoured the Oakland school board's decision to use the vernacular language of the African American students as a language used to teach them Standard English. It is highly likely that the students who are systematically alienated from their own languages throughout their primary classes, would eventually stop using their languages altogether due to the greater influence of the larger language with higher social capital.

History has also shown us that repeated comments on the status of one's language being a moribund or endangered language or a language of stigma, might also lead to the users of that language eventually associating a lower level of social association with their languages. Crystal quotes Harold Pinter in his play *Mountain Language* (1988, Act I) and mentions the portion where a certain group of people directly insinuate speakers of another language (namely, the mountain dwellers) from using their language. They forbid the mountain dwellers from using their language because their language was dead already. They were further told that they may only use language that is spoken at the capital, and not the language that they used to use in their native place. In the end they are told that their language is dead. Crystal terms this as language murder or rather 'linguistic suicide' (Crystal, 2014).

Deumert (2011), mentions that there are around 6000 to 7000 languages in the world, at a given point in time and none of the countries in the world are in any way monolingual. Colonialism according to Deumert is one the major reasons why language diversity is lost, leading to language death. Pre-colonial Papua New Guinea had multiple languages being spoken there in an equal manner, but post-colonial Papua New Guinea shifted to Tok Pisin as a second language. The shift to Tok Pisin signifies the shift to the language spoken by the powerful, dominant group. The went from Kopar, Adjora, Murik. Buna, Pankin, Watam and Bien to Taiap and Tok Pisin. This can be an example of how languages and language variety can be systematically razed or levelled.

In situations (Deumert, 2011) where a child is born to parents and the parents speak two non-dominant languages in the given geographical area, the child will learn the dominant language as soon as the child interacts with members of the society beyond their immediate parents. This child will pick up the dominant version of this language over time and with multiple interactions with the society, all, well within their critical period, in which a child can learn languages quicker (Moskovsky, 2001). Over time, the language preferred in most social scenarios by the child will be used more by this child and eventually, the first language of the child used at home previously, will take a back seat. This can lead to a drop in the proficiency levels of the first language in the child. In the future, this might be one viable reason, as to why certain languages slowly go into gradual disuse.

Deumert (2011) further explains the concept of code switching (the need/ want to use at least one other language than the language which is being used, for communication) and claims that it is a version that is highly accepted as the L version of language, in a diglossic situation (Ferguson, 1959). Whereas the version taught in schools is the pure version and devoid of stylistic devices like code mixing or switching. In such a situation, the question that needs to be pondered on is which version of the language would outlive the other. About 50% of tribal languages in Australia have under 50 speakers and few have over thousand speakers. What is unfortunate is that the majority of these speakers have a 'monolingual mindset'. They would rather learn the language English, which is suggested and recommended in their curriculum. Their language might hold the cultural heritage that they identify with but at the same time they understand the value of a language that can be used for their personal economic gains. Sesotho was introduced in South Africa as a language that can be used for tuitions for a 10-year period. There was a strong negative attitude that was discerned from the students concerned. Their concerns involved the efficacy of Sesotho in the global scenario and the prestige involved in learning English vs not learning English. Deumert associates the informal versions with covert prestige and the ability to use the formal versions of any given language (possibly supported by government policy) with overt prestige of a language.

An example can be taken from South Africa where 11 official languages have been declared, including English. Every language has variations in it, either in terms of phonology, morphology or syntax, and these variations



are always standardised using the versions which the powerful choose and decide to use for education. However, the problem starts when a country decides to declare 11 languages as official and does not take into consideration all the variants that it has, as well as the languages which are close in morphology and syntax, to be a part of the 11 languages already scheduled (these smaller languages are then called dialects, given lower prestige socially). This is very akin to what Agnihotri mentioned of Awadhi, Braj and Magadhi. The problem does not end there. Parents in South Africa still prefer the language of the colonisers, English, for the language they would want their children to learn, more than the 10 standardised languages which belong to them, exclusively (Janks, 2004). This leads us on to the issue of the access paradox (Janks, 2004). In it, when a group is given access to a dominant language, they add on to that language's dominance; while if a group is not being given access to this dominant language, their marginalisation stays at status quo, and they live with the belief that said dominant language is the prestige variety. They are also automatically denied the linguistic capital that the dominant language holds. Mohanty (2018) terms it as the double divide in which Indigenous tribal minority languages are the base level of a pyramid. On top of it are the major vernacular languages which are recognized and on the top of the pyramid are the dominant languages. This can be a continuation of the access paradox and in a way semantically fitting. The dominant languages, supported by government policies are preferred over the recognized vernacular versions used in the country while these vernacular versions are preferred as prestige over the indigenous minority tribal languages. Hence, these ITM (indigenous minority tribal languages) end up being double marginalised and doubly divided. Mohanty also mentions that the stigmatization of ITM languages are present all over the world and it perpetuates a vicious circle of language disadvantage. One such example is also quoted in the book by Mohanty. Bear Nicholas (2009) quotes data in which 29% of aboriginal population in Canada spoke their own languages in 1996. Unfortunately, the number declined to 24% in 2001. Nicholas attributes such a huge change to dominant language being forced on the aboriginal children by schools. Mohanty also provides another example of Kui speaking women in the Kui Odia contact regions. Previously Kui speaking women used to hold business transactions at the marketplace and would use her language as the bargaining tool over the buyers. Eventually rich traders came in and along with them, they brought about their languages like Odia, Hindi, Telugu and English. The Kui women can no longer use their language as a bargaining chip in the marketplaces.

Konkani, a southern Indo-Aryan language and the official language of Goa, is used in multiple states in India and along with being used by multiple states, Konkani (Nadkarni, 1975) can also be written using multiple scripts including the Devanagari, Kannada, Malayalam, Arabic and Roman. After the Sahitya Akademi (led by Suniti Chatterjee at that point in time) recognised Konkani as a language and not a dialect of Marathi (Marathi Language - Wikipedia, 2024) and official protest ("Konkani Language Agitation," 2024) was launched and finally the government of Goa accepted Konkani to be the official language. Unfortunately, only the Devanagari script has been accepted as the script associated with Konkani, ruling out all other voices being scripted using Roman, Malayalam, Kannada and Arabic (Rao, 2024).

The ASER survey (ASER, 2023), a large-scale citizen led survey facilitated by the Pratham Education Foundation has been able to look into some glaring issues in the Indian education scenario. It has spotted the inability of around 43% children in the age group of 14 to 18 to read sentences in English and this increases when we go to the rural counterparts. 25% of children in the age group 14 – 18 struggle to read a class 2 text in their own respective regional languages. A major issue should be pointed out here. An example of Bangla, since I am a Bangla speaker, may be taken (The Wire Staff, 2024). The ASER report was done in the district of Cooch Behar and the regional language determined for the children was Bangla. Just like Agnihotri talks about Hindi in his paper, Bangla has been taken as an envelope term for many languages spoken in the area. Rabha, Rajbanshi, Sylheti, Pabnaiya, Rajshahi, Kamtapuri, Bhatia, Mech, Nepali and Sadri are widely spoken in the district and yet the languages chosen for teaching these children is Bangla, the official language of education in West Bengal. It is also important to notice that statistics regarding the aforementioned report may also be reconsidered if the native tongues, in which the children have native speaker competencies may be considered. The variety or varieties which are spoken there, in spite of them being syntactically similar to Bangla, might have been taken up for the survey. There would have been a possibility of the results changing to some extent had that been done. A variety of language was used to test the children which is one amongst many other varieties used there.



The Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education in the Government of India (Department of Higher Education | Government of India, Ministry of Education, 2024) lists approximately 1652 mother tongues in the country of India and on the very same page it lists 22 scheduled Indian languages listed in the 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Indian Constitution India (8th Schedule of Indian Constitution - 22 Official Languages, 2024). The languages listed are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kannada, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. The conundrum of language choice starts at this very page which mentions at first 1652 languages and then speaks about the absoluteness of the 22 scheduled languages in India. Subtract 22 from 1652 and we get 1630 languages which now enjoy no status in India. 1630 languages have now either been categorised as dialects of a particular scheduled language or been told to be a hybridised language coming from two or more languages in India. Every person not speaking a scheduled language is hence forced to learn one as a language of education in various parts of India. West Bengal is a state with multiple languages and yet only Bangla is taken to be the language of education alongside English. All other languages or varieties of languages are subtly suppressed through the curriculum which grossly favours a scheduled language over the others with 'less repute and power'. The usage of the Bangla script even now for multiple languages in the east of India is a major symptom of the power associated with the language in the recent past. Other examples include the inability of Tulu speakers to get educated in their language and being educated in Kannada in Karnataka; the Lambadi language, a West Indo-Aryan language being spoken in parts of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, all being educated in scheduled languages in the respective states; the Irula language, a Dravidian language being spoken in the Nilgiris being educated in Tamil and Kodagu (Coorgi) language speakers in Coorg being educated in Kannada. Chhattisgarh may also be taken to be a prime example of the same where the local language Chhattisgarhi is deprioritized over the scheduled language Hindi. Hindi speakers have receptive competence in Chhattisgarhi but that does not make them dialects of the same language. Such kind of linguistic levelling and dialect levelling is what is leading languages to their slow deaths, due to disuse in the first place. Using the languages with higher prestige would only push languages which are only considered as dialects at a risk of systematic disuse due to institutionalised prestige language formation.

The Aadhi program being run in the Soliga language community (Zachariah, 2024) near the BR Hills in the Southern Part of the State works on documenting the language as well as keeping the part of the language which already exist. The alphabet of the language, being developed by a linguist as a part of the Aadhi program uses nouns which are from the surroundings rather than commonly used labels like 'A for Apple'. In spite of the Soliga language being close to Kannada in many ways, it is a different language. It is now threatened due to the ever-increasing presence of bigger languages like Kannada. Like a senior, Jadeswamy says, "A language getting lost is an entire culture getting lost".

## 4. Conclusions

UNESCO celebrates every 21 of February as the International Mothers Language Day, to celebrate diversity, to spread awareness regarding beautiful multiplicity in languages around the world. UNESCO believes that people should feel proud of whatever they speak, notwithstanding what people with power or influence have to say about them. It started with a certain language movement in Bangladesh when students at Dhaka University tried to break away from the coerced decision of the Pakistan government for Bangla speakers to use Urdu. Students were open fired on and many died but, in the end, Bangladesh got its independence from Pakistan on linguistic grounds. 21<sup>st</sup> of February every year is celebrated by UNESCO, not to remember the grim memories but the fact that people are willing to put their lives on the line for the identity and independence of their language. It is a reminder that without cognizance of the fact that there are languages which need saving and documentation, entire cultures can perish over time. A similar occurrence can be seen in the case of singer and songwriter. A Nyishi language speaker by birth, Taba Chake understood that his language is vanishing and through his music he is trying to bring back a lot of traditional songs, poems, stories by incorporating it in the lyrics of his songs.

Policy documentations all over the world have favoured only the powerful and elite and examples of that can be seen policies of South Africa, USA and India along with many other countries. While languages can naturally die with the last monolingual speaker of that language dying, languages can also go through rapid genocide when the desires elite individuals are institutionalised as policy and are coerced on the mass who do not use the language of the elite.





With eventual sensitisation policies might be given a slight nudge towards betterment and in a few decades the number of languages which die due to faulty language planning and educational methods, will decrease.

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Yes

### Conflict of interest

The Author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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