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# "Comparing Multilingualism in India and Britain: A Study of Linguistic Diversity and Its Impact"

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**Abstract.** India is a country with a rich linguistic diversity. The Indian Constitution recognizes several languages, including English, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi, and Maithili. English and Chinese are also considered major languages. Tribal languages also play an important role. The late Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee suggested that there were 15 major languages in India, and Rajasthani and Bhojpuri also were notable. India's strength is its unity amidst the linguistic variety, and even though language-related issues crop up, they can be sorted out through democratic policies. To preserve national integration, the rights of all ethnic groups should be respected, ensuring that the languages of marginalized communities also have the opportunity to flourish.

Similarly, England is a multilingual nation with languages such as English, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic, French, Chinese, Portuguese, and Swedish spoken. In England, multilingualism serves functions like social communication, business, and fostering social cohesion, much like in India. This paper aims to explore the multilingual landscapes of both countries.

**Keywords:** Multilingualism, Linguistic diversity, Language ethnic, mother tongue, foreign language

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It refers to the coexistence of multiple distinct languages within a particular space. Individuals who speak several languages can easily communicate with people with varied linguistic backgrounds, widening their social network. Multilingualism is an asset for acceptance into different cultural communities. For example, if immigrants can communicate using the local language, they are considered to belong to the native population; this will give them a sense of security and belonging. Another positive aspect of multilingualism is that it gives an individual access to and appreciation for literature in other languages, which adds diversity to their thoughts and knowledge sources. In a world where having codified knowledge is a form of power and access to it is limited, being literate in multiple languages confers an advantage.

As stated, "Multilingualism in India dates back to ancient times when ethnic groups and races came in contact with one another through migration from one region to another" (Sharma, 1). It has resulted from close contact between the four language families. It is a product of its history and reflects its diverse cultures.

The languages of India have emerged from four main language families: (i) the Indo-Aryan family, (ii) the Dravidian family, (iii) the Austric (Austro-Asiatic) or Eastern family, and (iv) the Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Chinese) family. The Austric or Proto-Austroloid people include the Kol, Munda, and other related communities, with languages such as Kol and Mundari and Santhali belonging to this group. The Dravidian language family is prominent in Southern India, comprising four major languages: Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada. The Sino-Tibetan family, typically associated with the Mongoloid ethnic group, is also present in India and adds to the linguistic variety. Most of the Indian languages come from either the Indo-Aryan or Dravidian families. Through more than four millennia of known history, "the linguistic families which co-existed together have continuously interacted with each other and achieved a pan Indian character which is unique in itself, firstly, in the matter of sentence structure and secondly, in the number of shared items of vocabulary." (Prasad, 43)

Sir G.A. Grierson conducted the Linguistic Survey of India (LSI) between 1866 and 1927, identifying 179 languages and 544 dialects. The 1951 census recorded 845 languages, including dialects, of which at least 100,000 people spoke 60 language dialects. The 1961 census reported 1,652 mother tongues, classified into 193 languages, grouped into four language families: Austric (20 languages), Dravidian (20 languages), Tibeto-Burman (98 languages), and Indo-Aryan (54 languages). By the 1991 census, the number of recorded mother tongues had increased to 10,400. This was later refined into 1,576 rationalized mother tongues, grouped into 114 languages based on linguistic principles. Eighteen languages are now included in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the Constitution of India, English, Sanskrit, Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Sindhi, Maithili, are foreign languages. Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, and tribal languages are also important. Late professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has declared, "There are in effect 15 major languages in India." (Haldhar 16) The third All India Education survey records that 58 languages are included in the school curriculum, and 47 are used in public administration. Newspapers are published in 87 languages, and radio broadcasts are made in 91 languages.

India is a pluralistic country with differences in ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. This diversity is one of the defining characteristics of this country, weaving together its complex social fabric. Of the various dimensions of this pluralism, linguistic diversity appears to be one of the most salient features of the country. India is remarkable for its multilingualism; indeed, people speak multiple languages fluently, depending on the region, community, and context.

Bilingualism is widespread throughout India, and many individuals converse in at least two languages. It is not a preserve of cosmopolis or metropolis, but it prevails in rural and urban regions. Many Indians speak the dominant language of a neighboring state in addition to their mother tongue. This linguistic fluidity springs from geographical proximity, historical interactions, and social integration.

Linguistic diversity in India is not just a matter of the sheer number of languages and dialects the country boasts. It also represents an important part of the broader cultural mosaic that has evolved over centuries. Acquiring and using multiple languages is an integral part of India's composite culture, shaped by influences from various regions, communities, and historical events. This multilingual heritage enables people to relate to various cultural traditions, DNS, and communities, making linguistic diversity a core part of India's identity.

Bilingualism is a widespread phenomenon in India. Several Indians speak at least two languages. It is certainly not the specialty of the cosmopolis or metropolis alone since both urban and rural India have spread to it. Actually, it is said that the predominant language of the nearest neighboring state is known among several Indians, apart from the mother tongue. All this linguistic fluidity derives from geographical propinquity, historical intercourse, and social assimilation.

India's linguistic diversity goes beyond the number of languages and dialects; it is also part of the broad cultural tapestry that has been crafted over centuries. Multiple acquisition and usage of languages is part of the composite culture of India, bearing influences of regional influences, communities, and history. This multilingual heritage brings people together and connects them with different cultural traditions and communities, so linguistic diversity is a core element of Indian identity.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are recognized as a necessity for social cohesion in India. In response to the demands of linguistic minorities, most states have adopted a few official languages. The proper safeguards in the Constitution of India for linguistic minorities ensure that their rights are guaranteed and even conserves their respective linguistic identities. The legal structures along with the constitutional provisions successfully safeguard these minority interests. Additionally, multilingualism is an important characteristic of the Indian education system because each state provides education in multiple languages. The country's three-language formula is thus intended to foster and sustain the multilingual character of the educational system.

The conflict of the speakers of different languages is long-standing and linguistic diversity.

It plays a very significant role in the concept of multiculturalism. More than 700 languages are spoken across India. South Asia's lack of centralized political authority did not bring much social tension until British rule. During the mid-19th century, the British tried to centralize administration beyond the use of English, which exposed and exploited the linguistic divisions in India to exert control. In adopting a "divide and rule" strategy, the British initiated the Hindi-Urdu controversy during the late 19th century, an issue often considered to be the trigger for the Hindu-Muslim divide in the country.

It further deepened this divide that the imperialist Indo-Aryan theory postulated a long-standing socio-cultural division between the Aryan-dominated North and the Dravidian-dominated South. This was compounded by caste-based distinctions, which led to radical movements along with the broad nationalist struggle. Intellectuals like E.V. Ramasamy (Periyar) and C.N. Annadurai (a prominent follower of Annadurai), who were part of the middle class, spearheaded the Dravidian movement. This movement initially sought to oppose Brahmanism and the imposition of Hindi in southern states, eventually evolving into a push for separation from India. Although the demand for secession was

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officially banned in 1963, the movement prevented the complete phasing out of English, thereby blocking Hindi from becoming the sole national language in 1965.

The movement led to the establishment of the three-language formula, which proposed that certain states support education in a primary vernacular language alongside English and Hindi, the two official languages of India. States like Maharashtra and Odisha implemented this formula, but Tamil Nadu's assembly rejected it. C.N. Annadurai, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, opposed the requirement for non-Hindi speakers to learn both Hindi and English. He criticized judging the compatibility of languages and cultures based on an incomplete and controversial theory with imperialist origins. It is important to avoid evaluating languages merely by their artistic features or regional boundaries, as this approach does not address the modern needs of diverse communities. As one perspective rightly notes, "The role of languages in modern India is best understood by their ability to connect people from different cultures. Assessing languages by their artistic elements or strict regional boundaries does not meet the contemporary needs of the people" (source: Fair Observer).

As a nation, India is supposed to work on unity and diversity; this is why there are different languages in India. Language problems, though they may occasionally emerge, are solvable issues. The government should develop democratic policies that can support the growth of the language of the marginalized ethnic group. Ensuring linguistic rights to all communities will keep India united and integrated. Viv Edwards observes:

Although linguistic diversity has always been a defining feature of the British Isles, it has assumed new proportions in recent years, during which a corresponding flow of languages has accompanied the transnational flow of people. (<https://we.uri.edu>)

Census data from England and Wales in 2011 reveals that the most commonly spoken languages include English, Welsh, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic, French, Chinese, and Portuguese. In contrast, languages like Swedish, Manx Gaelic, Scottish, and Romany have fewer speakers. It is striking in the context of globalization that England is very linguistically diverse and cannot be counted accurately as speakers of minority languages. It was through the 2001 census that disparities in the distribution of minority ethnic communities could be highlighted. Indians account for 2% of the population in England and Wales, but for instance, they make up 25.7% of Leicester's population in the Midlands. Bangladeshis are 0.5% of England and Wales's population but 33.4% of Tower Hamlets in London.

Baker and Eversley (2000) state that over 300 different languages are spoken by about 850,000 schoolchildren in Greater London, with languages such as Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Turkish, Arabic, English-based creoles, Yoruba, and Cantonese spoken by roughly 40,000 children. French, Arabic, Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, and Russian each have over 200,000 speakers. According to a CILT (2005) survey, approximately 300 languages were spoken by 702,000 children in England, 98 languages by 8,000 children in Wales, and 104 languages by 11,000 in Scotland.

While multilingualism is primarily an urban phenomenon, minority languages are also increasingly present in rural areas. Following the expansion of the European Union in 2004, 427,000 East Europeans registered to work in the UK, with Poles making up 62% of the new arrivals, Lithuanians 12%, and Slovaks 10%. Salveda(2006) notes that around 25 languages besides English are used for religious purposes in London. For example, Polish is used for mass and confession in South-East England, and Arabic is used alongside other languages within the Islamic community. The Qur'an translation is available in various languages, including Albanian, Chinese, English, French, Korean, Polish, and Spanish. Minority languages are employed in religious worship and play a role in social and cultural activities organized by religious groups.

Ethnic economies are a salient feature of the UK, especially in places like the Bangladeshi neighborhoods of East London, the Mirpuri Punjabi areas of Bradford, and the Gujarati communities in Leicester. Restaurants, food shops, and clothing stores are typically owned and operated by members of the ethnic communities and provide significant employment opportunities. Minority languages are usually employed by workers and customers when both of them come from the same community. Most businesses have realized that this minority group is an essential market segment. Additionally, minority languages play an important role in the global market, and knowledge of foreign languages offers a competitive advantage in business. English remains the primary language for educated elites, but many of the global population speak their local language.

The minority press also highlights the vitality of ethno-linguistic groups. Approximately 40 newspapers and periodicals cater to various language communities in the UK. In London, newspapers in Chinese (Sing Tao), Polish (Dziennik Polski), and Italian (London Sera and La Voce Sera) are available. London is also a hub for Arabic publishing, and publications like Parikiaki offer news in Greek for older migrants while using English for younger generations. Minority radio and television stations are key in transmitting new languages and cultures. With the advent of digitalization, minority media have expanded, offering more opportunities for cultural exchange. For instance, a Cypriot household in North London can watch evening news from Greece. Meanwhile, networks like Zee TV offer entertainment in English, Urdu, and Hindi to viewers from the Indian subcontinent. The internet has transformed the way of communication in minority communities, with an increased number of websites on minority languages.

Linguistic minorities play a very important role in the UK's cultural life. The multiplicity of art forms corresponds to these communities' different identities. Take Indian weddings, for example; they are often supplemented with heavy songs or religious music like Qawwali among Pakistani communities. Another example that shows the amalgamation of languages and cultures is musical fusions, such as Bhangra, which has some influence on the West. Multilingualism also enhances intercultural relations in Britain, increasing people's ability to work, study, and travel internationally. Language skills are crucial for fostering understanding of different ways of life and promoting tolerance and positive social relations. Industries such as finance, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, automotive, IT, and the rest require a lot of languages, and business leaders know the importance of language in going international. Moreover, using multilingual strategies is basically linked to success in terms of exports. Public services need to be linguistically accessible for efficiency, quality, and inclusiveness.

The state's involvement in multilingual matters operates at multiple levels. The EU promotes trilingualism, encouraging proficiency in a home language, another EU language, and a global language. Public discourse on multilingualism in the UK supports bilingualism, especially through formal learning. This concept of bilingualism is said to be an asset once learned rather than acquired. All governments, businesses, and public service providers have had to develop effective language policies. These employers address the needs at the workplace by recruiting in other countries, but all this can be made successful by mobilizing local sources and educational processes. Emphasizing the value of language skills in business and employment can help elevate the status of these skills among language learners and community speakers.

Linguistic factors must form part of the assessment processes regarding public service provision and access. Sensitivity to linguistic issues matters for healthcare and legal services. Lack of fluency or poor translation can produce misunderstandings or even miscarriages of justice. Gaps relating to different language communities and public services must be solved. Education is more fundamental in promoting multilingualism among UK citizens. Language education must incorporate cultural learning and leverage linguistic diversity among its students. Schools must cultivate friendships among

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linguistically diverse students, facilitate participation through text messaging or social media, and enable schools to use their languages as an advantage for their benefit in other activities such as sports, drama, and art to create language exchange and development. Bilingualism improves students' speaking and reading skills, boosts their confidence, and fosters greater enthusiasm for language learning. The value of all languages, regardless of perceived status, should be recognized.

The multilingual nature of England contributes to the country's success in a globalized world, supporting diplomacy, security, international relations, and efficient trade. Like India, multilingualism in England is used for social communication, business, work, services, and social cohesion. India's multilingualism is vast, with over 1,600 mother tongues, reduced to about 200 languages, spoken by a population of around 1.27 billion. Many linguistic minorities in India have larger populations than European countries (Annamalai, 2001). This massive scale of multilingualism has led scholars to explore how communication and social cohesion are maintained (Annamalai, 2001).

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