

Urdu in Contemporary India – A Study of the Census Data on Languages

Prof. B. Mallikarjun

Former Director

Centre for Classical Kannada

Central University of Karnataka

Kadaganchi, Aland Road, Kalaburagi District - 585311

Karnataka, India

mallikarjun56@gmail.com

Introduction

In my paper ‘*Patterns of Indian Multilingualism*’ Published in the *Language in India* (Vol. 10:6 June 2010) based on language data of 2001 Census, I had written that ‘... only speakers of Hindi are found in all the States and Union Territories. Next to Hindi, it is Urdu speakers who are found in all the states except in the states of the Northeast region of the country.’ In the Northeast region also, Urdu speakers are there but in very less numbers. Hindi and Urdu languages could be called pan-Indian languages. I wanted to write about the spread of Urdu and multilingualism of Urdu speakers and waited for 2021 Census. But Census 2021 is not held till date, and we do not know when it is going to be held. Hence, I am using the language data of Census 2011 to present the Urdu scenario in the Union and the States and Union Territories. Of course, wherever possible I shall present some comparative information from the earlier Censuses also about Urdu.

In the population ranking of the *Language Handbook on Mother tongues in Census-1971*, Urdu is the 6th largest mother tongue spoken by 28,600,428 persons, where 11,027,864 are males and 10,547,155 are females. In the 2011 Census, ‘*Mother tongue is the language spoken in childhood by the person’s mother to the person. If the mother died in infancy, the language mainly spoken in the person’s home in childhood will be the mother tongue. In the case of infants and deaf mutes, the language usually spoken by the mother should be recorded. In case of doubt, the language mainly spoken in the household may be recorded*’. In the 2011 Census in the order of speaker’s strength Urdu is in the 7th place.

Composition of Urdu

The Census, while rationalizing the data relating to mother tongues and languages, follows a process of inclusiveness. It is not genetic grouping of mother tongues into languages but a functional grouping of mother tongues. Accordingly, all languages are mother tongues, but all mother tongues are not languages. Urdu language is a composite of different mother tongues included under its name. Table-1 below exemplifies the composition of it in 1991, 2001 and 2011. In the 2011 Census, Urdu language is a composite of mother tongues Urdu, Bhansuri and Others (this includes many more unlisted mother tongues). Here it may be recalled that Hindi too is one of the composite languages having more than 56 mother tongues under its umbrella.

Table-1
Composition of Urdu

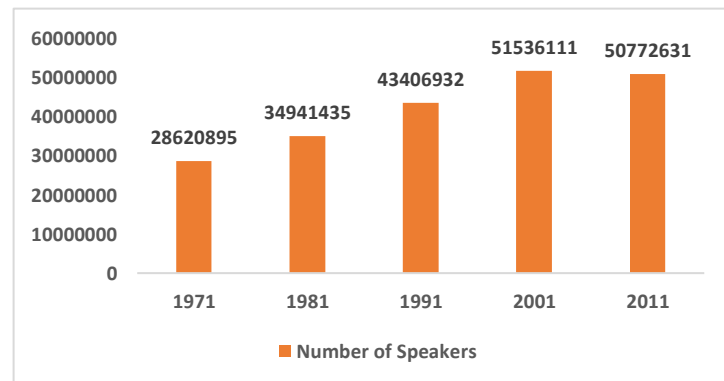
Year	MT Urdu +	Others +	Bhansuri =	Urdu Language
1991	43,358,978	47,954	***	43,406,932
2001	51,536,111	2,157	***	51,533,954
2011	50,725,762	24,063	22,806	50,772,631

Increase in the Number of Urdu Speakers

In tune with most of the non-endangered Indian languages, the number of persons speaking Urdu is increasing from decade to decade. It has increased from 28,620,895 persons in 1971 to 50,772,631 persons in 2011. Table-2 and the chart below provide the details.

Table-2
Increase in the Number of Urdu Speakers

Census Year	Number of Speakers
1971	28620895
1981	34941435
1991	43406932
2001	51536111
2011	50772631

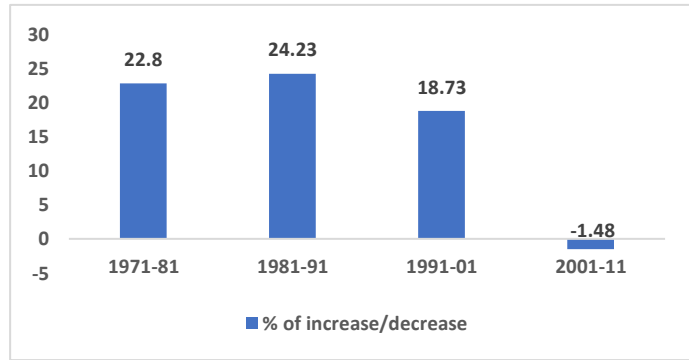


Fluctuation in the Percentage of Urdu Speakers

The decennial statistics show a fluctuation in the increase and decrease of the population of Urdu speakers. In the decade 1971-81, the percentage of Urdu speakers increased by +22.8%, it further increased by +24.23% in the 1981-91 decade. However, decennial statistics for Urdu speakers declined by -01.48% in the decade 2001-11. The table-3 and the chart below illustrate the same.

Table-3
Fluctuation in the Percentage of Urdu Speakers

Period	% of increase/ decrease
1971-81	+22.8
1981-91	+24.23
1991-01	+18.73
2001-11	-01.48

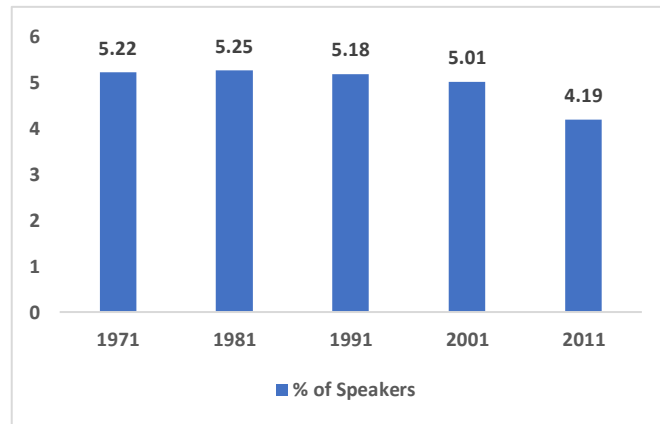


Decline in the Proportion of Urdu Speakers

Now, there is a gradual decline in the proportion of Urdu Speakers in the country. In the year 1971 it was 5.22% and increased to 5.23% in 1981. The trend has changed, it has declined from 5.25% in 1981 to 5.18% in 1991, to 5.01% in 2001 and to 4.19% in 2011. Table-4 and the chart provide the details.

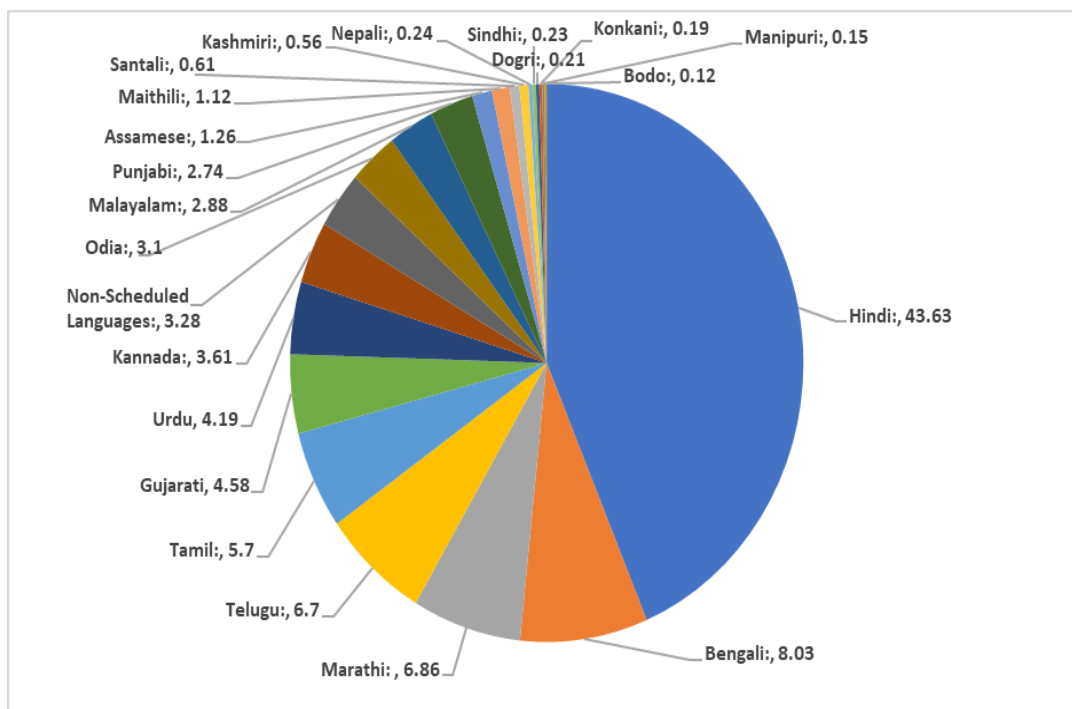
Table-4
Decline in the Proportion of Urdu Speakers

Census Year	% of Speakers
1971	5.22
1981	5.25
1991	5.18
2001	5.01
2011	4.19



Urdu in India at Contemporary Times

The 2011 count of Indian mother tongues/languages informs that the Census had raw returns of 19,569 mother tongues. After rationalization of the mother tongue/language data, a list of 121 languages is arrived at. Among them, 22 languages are part of the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. The rest of the 99 languages are non-scheduled languages. The scheduled languages are spoken by 96.71% and the non-scheduled languages are spoken by 3.29% of the population of India. Urdu is one of the 22 Scheduled languages ranking in 7th place, first being Hindi- 43.63% followed by Bengali -8.03%, Marathi- 6.86%, Telugu - 6.7%, Tamil - 5.7%, Gujarati-4.58%, Urdu- 4.19 and Kannada 3.61%. Details of the percentage of speakers of Urdu and various other scheduled and non-scheduled languages are illustrated in the diagram given below.



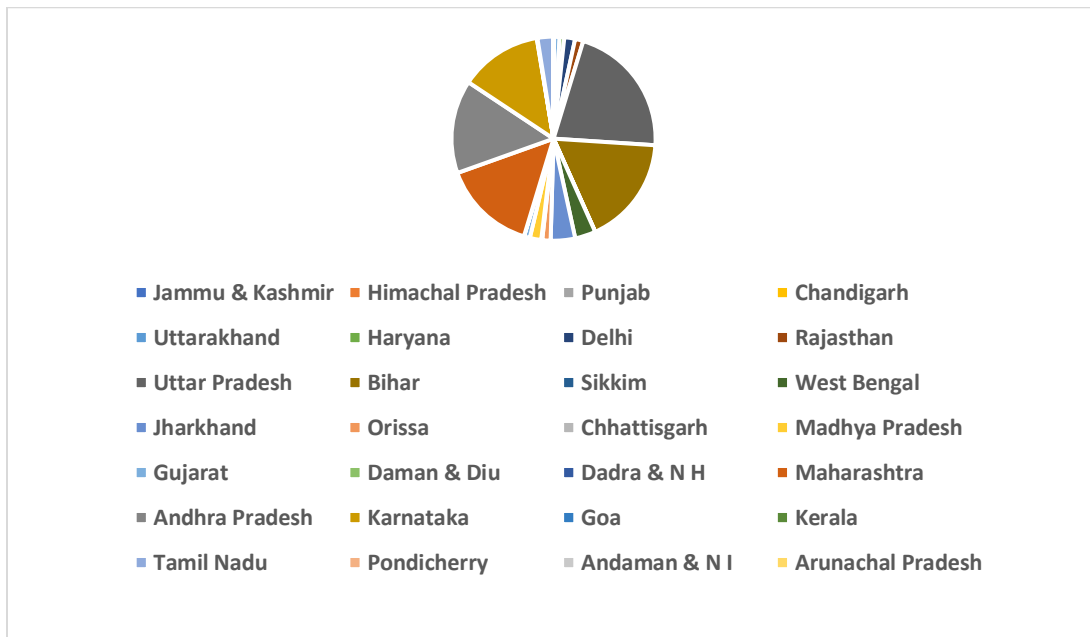
Urdu Speakers in the States and Union Territories: 2011

Though speakers exist it is not a majority language in any of the states and it is a minor/minority language in all the states. It is also a stateless language like Sindhi, in the sense that Kannada, Marathi etc., have a state after the reorganisation of geographical territory on the basis of language. The table-5 illustrates the percentage of distribution of Urdu speakers in the states and union territories in 2011.

Table-5
Urdu speakers in the States and Union Territories: 2011

Sl. No	STATE	2011 %	Sl. No	STATE	2011 %
1	Jammu & Kashmir	0.039	18	Daman & Diu	0.002
2	Himachal Pradesh	0.010	19	Dadra & N H	0.002
3	Punjab	0.053	20	Maharashtra	14.851
4	Chandigarh	0.020	21	Andhra Pradesh	14.782
5	Uttarakhand	0.838	22	Karnataka	13.035
6	Haryana	0.737	23	Goa	0.081

7	Delhi	1.708	24	Lakshadweep	***
8	Rajasthan	1.309	25	Kerala	0.025
9	Uttar Pradesh	21.311	26	Tamil Nadu	2.490
10	Bihar	17.273	27	Pondicherry	0.016
11	Sikkim	0.003	28	Andaman & N I	0.002
12	West Bengal	3.276	29	Arunachal Pradesh	0.002
13	Jharkhand	3.871	30	Nagaland	0.002
14	Orissa	1.320	31	Manipur	***
15	Chhattisgarh	0.157	32	Mizoram	***
16	Madhya Pradesh	1.805	33	Tripura	***
17	Gujarat	0.943	34	Meghalaya	0.001
			35	Assam	0.016



Since it is difficult to capture the percentage of Urdu speakers in some of the states and a Union Territory to help the readers total number of speakers is provided here. They are Lakshadweep - 32; Manipur - 247; Mizoram - 113; Tripura - 526.

It is observed in the above table that in the first category of five states more than 80% of Urdu speakers, that is 81.252% are residing. They are: Uttar Pradesh-21.311%, Bihar-17.273%, Maharashtra-14.851, Andhra Pradesh-14.782 and Karnataka-13.035.

In the second category more than 1% of Urdu speakers are in Jharkhand-3.871%, West Bengal-3.276%, Tamil Nadu-2.490%, Madhya Pradesh-1.805%, Delhi-1.708%, Odisha-1.320% and Rajasthan-1.309% totalling-15.579%. That means 96.831% of Urdu speakers are in 12 states and the rest 3.169% of them are spread over the remaining 23 states and union territories.

Variation in the Percentage of Urdu speakers: 2001-2011

The table-6 and the chart illustrate the variation in the number of Urdu speakers reported in the 2001 and 2011 censuses. There are states where there is an increase in the percentage of Urdu speakers and there are states where there is a decrease in the percentage of Urdu speakers in the concerned decade. Also, there is a state where the percentage has remained constant.

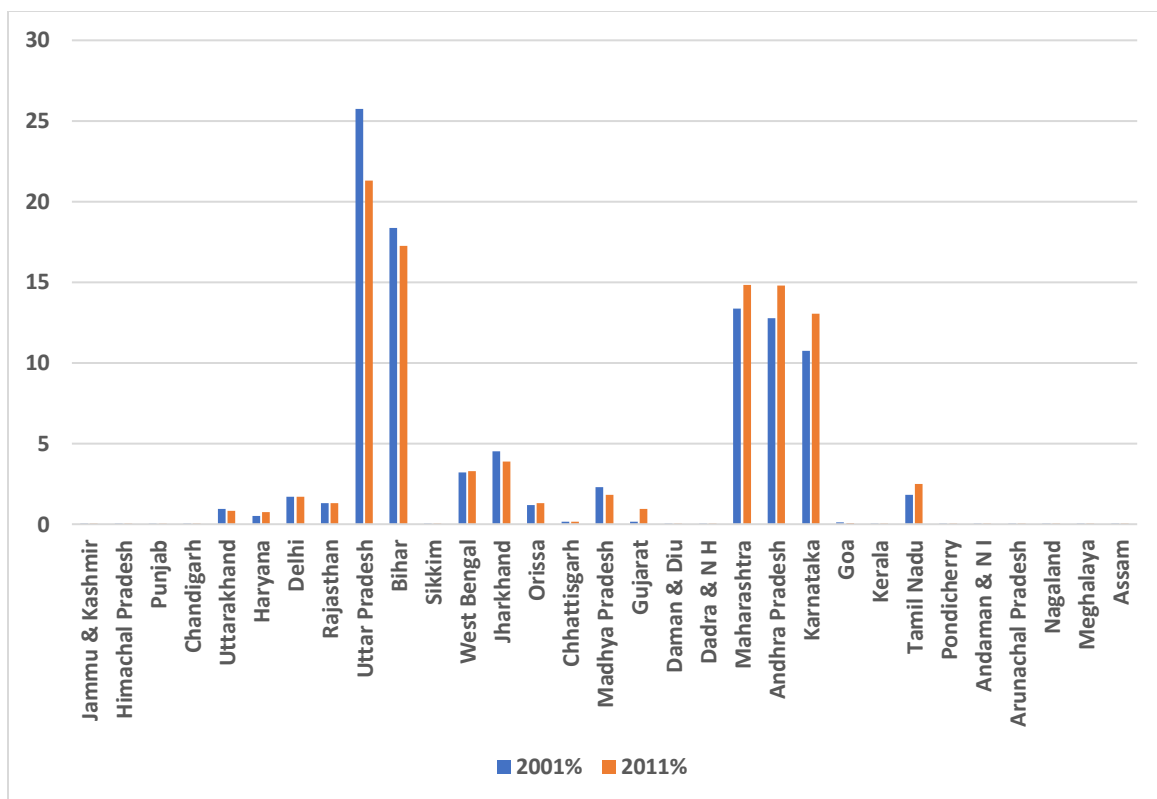
Table-6
Variation in the Percentage of Urdu speakers:2001-2011

Sl. No	STATE	2001 %	2011 %	Sl. No	STATE	2001 %	2011 %
1	Jammu & Kashmir	0.025	0.039	18	Daman & Diu	0.001	0.002
2	Himachal Pradesh	0.009	0.010	19	Dadra & N H	0.001	0.002
3	Punjab	0.053	0.053	20	Maharashtra	13.379	14.851
4	Chandigarh	0.014	0.020	21	Andhra Pradesh	12.758	14.782
5	Uttarakhand	0.964	0.838	22	Karnataka	10.749	13.035
6	Haryana	0.505	0.737	23	Goa	0.105	0.081
7	Delhi	1.696	1.708	24	Lakshadweep	***	***
8	Rajasthan	1.286	1.309	25	Kerala	0.026	0.025
9	Uttar Pradesh	25.752	21.311	26	Tamil Nadu	1.828	2.490
10	Bihar	18.351	17.273	27	Pondicherry	0.013	0.016
11	Sikkim	0.005	0.003	28	Andaman & N I	0.003	0.002
12	West Bengal	3.208	3.276	29	Arunachal Pradesh	0.002	0.002

13	Jharkhand	4.510	3.871	30	Nagaland	0.001	0.002
14	Orissa	1.186	1.320	31	Manipur	***	***
15	Chhattisgarh	0.170	0.157	32	Mizoram	***	***
16	Madhya Pradesh	2.302	1.805	33	Tripura	****	***
17	Gujarat	0.168	0.943	34	Meghalaya	0.004	0.001
				35	Assam	0.009	0.016

In the following states there is an increase in the percentage of Urdu speakers. They are: Jammu and Kashmir-0.025% >0.039%, Himachal Pradesh-0.009>0.010, Chandigarh-0.014%.0,020%, Haryana-0.505%>0.737%, Delhi-1.696%>1.708%, Rajasthan-1.286%>1.309%, West Bengal-3.280%>3.276%, Gujarat-0.168%>0.943%, Daman &Diu-0.001%>0.002, Maharashtra- 13.379%>14.851%, Andhra Pradesh-12.758%>14.782%, Karnataka-10.749%>13.035%, Tamil Nadu-1.828%>2.490%, Pondicherry-0.013%>0.016%, Nagaland-0.001%>0.002% and Assam-0.009%>0.016.

In some of the States there is a decrease in the percentage of Urdu speakers. They are Uttarakhand-0.964%>0.838%, Uttar Pradesh-25.752%>21.311%, Bihar-18.351%>17.273%, Sikkim-0.005%>0.003, Jharkhand-4.510%>3.871%, Chattisgarh-0.170%>0.157%, Madhya Pradesh-2.302%>1.805%, Goa-0.105%>0.081%, Kerala-0.026%>0.025%, Andaman & Nicobar-0.003%>0.002% and Meghalaya-0.004%>0.001%. In two states the percentage of Urdu speakers has remained the same in 2001 and 2011. They are Punjab-0.053% and Arunachal Pradesh-0.002%.



During the 2001 census the following are the number of speakers in Lakshadveep-26, Manipur-483, Mizoram-97 and Tripura-312. It is observed that in these cases too there is variation in the number of Urdu speakers.

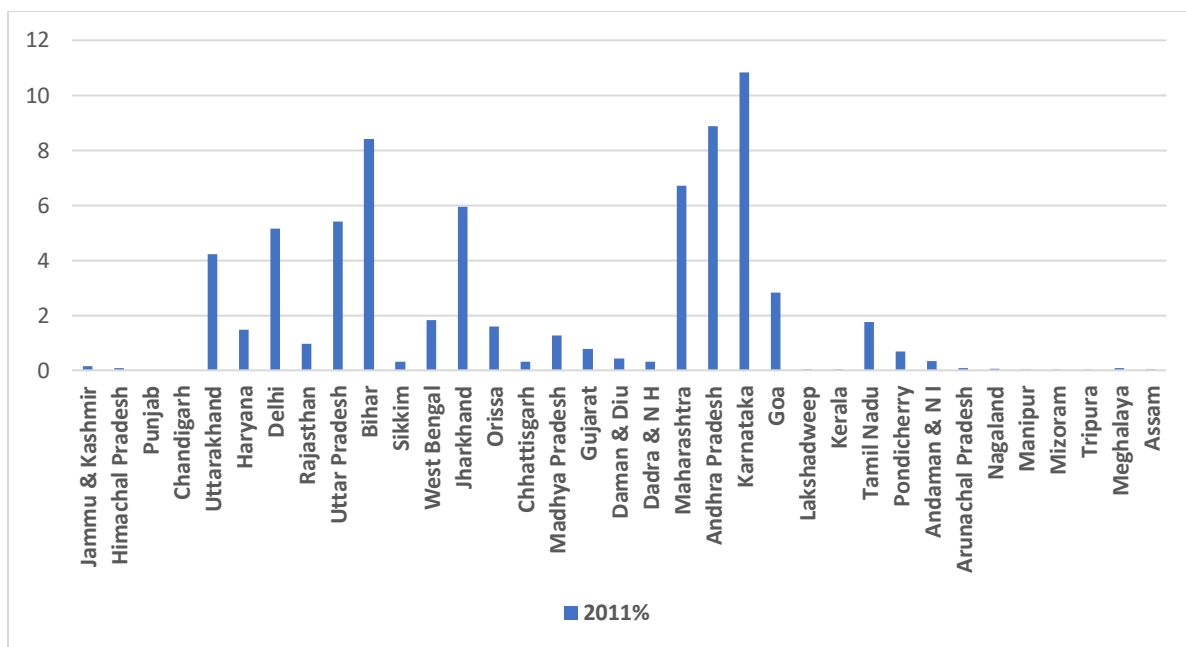
Urdu Speakers in the States and the Union Territories

Table-7 and the chart exemplify the distribution of the percentage of Urdu speakers to the total population of the states and the union territories. It is seen that in the percentage of Urdu speakers to the total population in the state (1) Karnataka stands first with 10.83% of its population are Urdu speakers. The hierarchy of the rest of the states is as follows: (2) Andhra Pradesh-8.87%, (3) Bihar-8.42% (4) Maharashtra-6.71% (5) Jharkhand-5.95% (6) Uttar Pradesh-5.41% (7) Delhi-5.16% (8) Uttarakhand-4.22% (9) Goa-2.82% and (10) West Bengal-1.82%. In the other five states Urdu speakers are one or more than one percent of the total population. They are (1) Chandigarh-1.0% (2) Haryana -1.47% (3) Orissa-1.59% (4) Madhya Pradesh-1.26% (5) Tamil Nadu-1.75%.

In the rest of the twenty states and union territories Urdu speakers are less than one percent of the total population of the concerned state.

Table-7
Percentage to the Total Population of the State

Sl. No	STATE	2011 %	Sl. No	STATE	2011 %
1	Jammu & Kashmir	0.159	18	Daman & Diu	0.42
2	Himachal Pradesh	0.07	19	Dadra & N H	0.31
3	Punjab	0.09	20	Maharashtra	6.71
4	Chandigarh	1.0	21	Andhra Pradesh	8.87
5	Uttarakhand	4.22	22	Karnataka	10.83
6	Haryana	1.47	23	Goa	2.82
7	Delhi	5.16	24	Lakshadweep	0.04
8	Rajasthan	0.96	25	Kerala	0.03
9	Uttar Pradesh	5.41	26	Tamil Nadu	1.75
10	Bihar	8.42	27	Pondicherry	0.69
11	Sikkim	0.32	28	Andaman & N I	0.33
12	West Bengal	1.82	29	Arunachal Pradesh	0.09
13	Jharkhand	5.95	30	Nagaland	0.05
14	Orissa	1.59	31	Manipur	0.008
15	Chhattisgarh	0.31	32	Mizoram	0.010
16	Madhya Pradesh	1.26	33	Tripura	0.014
17	Gujarat	0.79	34	Meghalaya	0.071
			35	Assam	0.026



We have seen the details of the Percentage of Urdu speakers to the total population of the state in 2011 in the previous table.

Similarly, the Percentage of Urdu speakers to the total population of the state in 2001 in some of the states and union territory is also very low and it is difficult to capture it. However, in the 2001 census the following are the numbers of Urdu speakers in Lakshadweep-26, Manipur-483, Mizoram-97 and Tripura-312. It is observed that in these cases too there is variation in the number of Urdu speakers in 2001 and 2011 censuses.

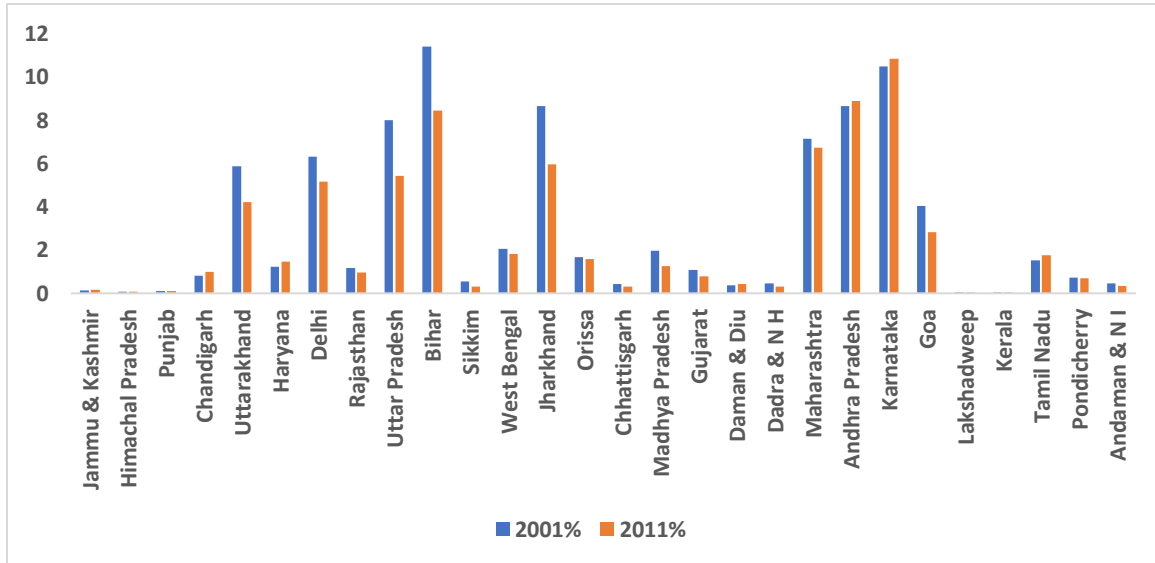
Urdu Speakers in the States and the Union Territories: 2001-2011

Table-8 shows the variation in the percentage of Urdu speakers to the total population of the states and union territories 2001-2011. According to this only in Karnataka-10.48%>10.83%, Tamil Nadu - 1.51%>1.75%, Andhra Pradesh - 8.63%>8.87%, Jammu and Kashmir-0.13%>0.15%, Haryana-1.23%>1.47% and Daman &Diu-0.36%>0.42% there is an increase in the percentage to Urdu speakers to the population of the states and union territory. In all other states and union territories it is observed that there is a decrease in the percentage to Urdu speakers to the population of the respective states and union territories.

Table-8

Variation in the Percentage of the Total Population of the State 2001-2011

Sl. No	STATE	2001 %	2011 %	Sl. No	STATE	2001 %	2011 %
1	Jammu & Kashmir	0.13	0.159	15	Chhattisgarh	0.42	0.31
2	Himachal Pradesh	0.08	0.07	16	Madhya Pradesh	1.97	1.26
3	Punjab	0.11	0.09	17	Gujarat	1.09	0.79
4	Chandigarh	0.81	1.0	18	Daman & Diu	0.36	0.42
5	Uttarakhand	5.86	4.22	19	Dadra & N H	0.45	0.31
6	Haryana	1.23	1.47	20	Maharashtra	7.12	6.71
7	Delhi	6.31	5.16	21	Andhra Pradesh	8.63	8.87
8	Rajasthan	1.17	0.96	22	Karnataka	10.48	10.83
9	Uttar Pradesh	7.99	5.41	23	Goa	4.02	2.82
10	Bihar	11.39	8.42	24	Lakshadweep	0.04	0.04
11	Sikkim	0.54	0.32	25	Kerala	0.04	0.03
12	West Bengal	2.06	1.82	26	Tamil Nadu	1.51	1.75
13	Jharkhand	8.63	5.95	27	Pondicherry	0.73	0.69
14	Orissa	1.66	1.59	28	Andaman & N I	0.45	0.33

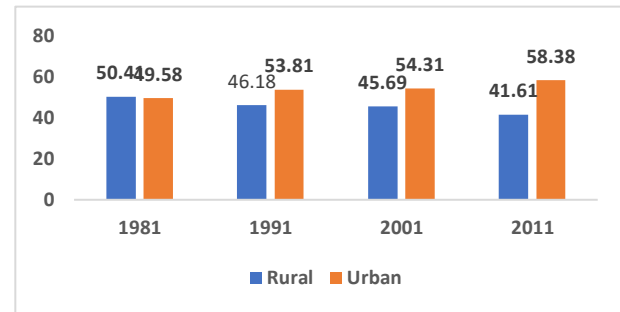


Urdu Speakers in the Urban and Rural Areas

Table-9 provides the details of Urdu speaker's distribution in the Urban and Rural areas. The number of Urdu speakers in the rural areas is declining and those residing in the urban areas is gradually increasing from decade to decade.

Table-9
Urdu speakers in Rural and Urban Areas

Year	Total %	Rural %	Urban %
1981	5.25	50.41	49.58
1991	5.18	46.18	53.81
2001	5.01	45.69	54.31
2011	4.19	41.61	58.38

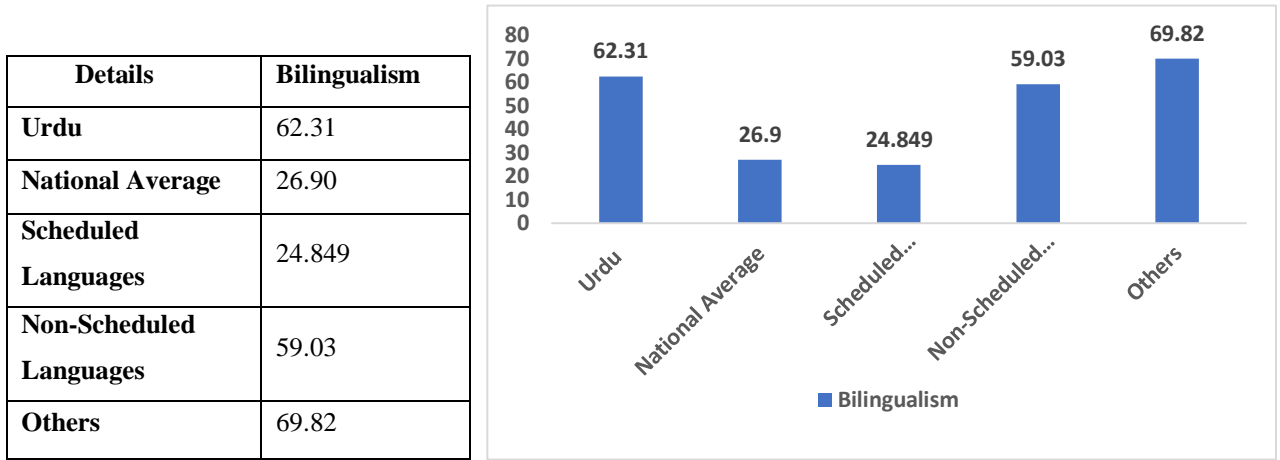


Urdu and Indian Multilingualism

Popular conception of multilingualism is co-existence of more languages in an administrative territory. But in reality, multilingualism is a greater number of speakers of a language being conversant in a greater number of languages. In India multilingualism is self-declared by the speaker of a language and not measured by using any testing scale. Hence it is an important tool to identify and understand the attitude of the speakers of a language towards other languages.

The Census gathers the data on the *first subsidiary language* and the *second subsidiary language* the speakers of a language know. Thus, collected data is interpreted as data on bilingualism and trilingualism. The 2011 Census reports that 62.31% of its population know a first subsidiary language and 15.557% know a second subsidiary language. Urdu is a schedule language, the percentage of Urdu speakers being multilingual is more than double of multilinguals among the scheduled languages. It is observed in the multilingualism table that the national average for bilingualism is 26.90% and trilingualism is 7.35%. The percentage of Urdu speakers being bilingual and trilingual is more than double of the percentage of the national average.

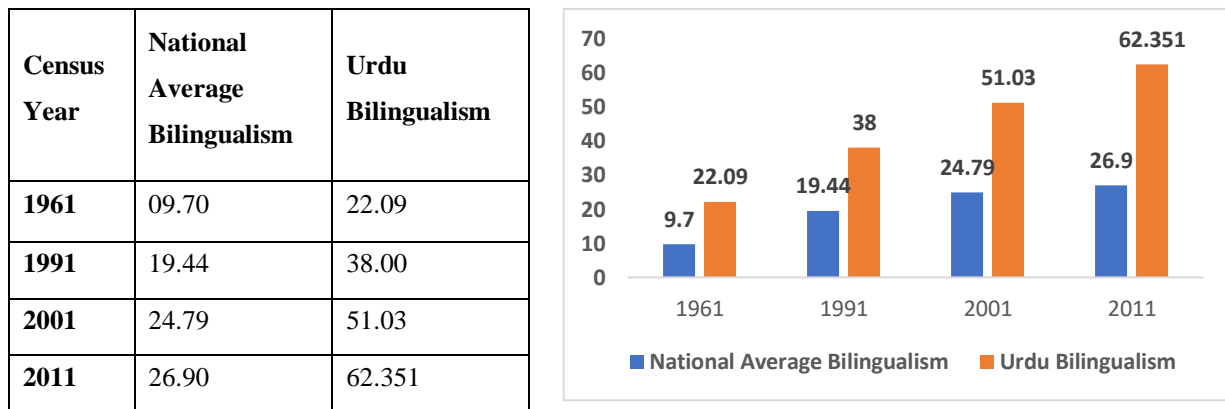
Table-10
Urdu and Bilingualism: 2011



Growth of Bilingualism among Urdu speakers

It can be seen in the table-11 that the national average of bilingualism has increased from 09.70% to 26.90% from 1961 to 2011. So also, more and more Urdu speakers are becoming bilingual from decade to decade. During the same period their percentage was 22.09% in 1961 and the same has become 62.351% in 2011.

Table-11
Urdu and Growth of Bilingualism: 1961 to 2011



Choice of First Subsidiary Language by Urdu speakers

Majority of Urdu speakers prefer Hindi as their first subsidiary language. May be in most of the cases - Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu etc., might have been chosen due to the coexistence of Urdu with them. These languages might have been acquired contextually.

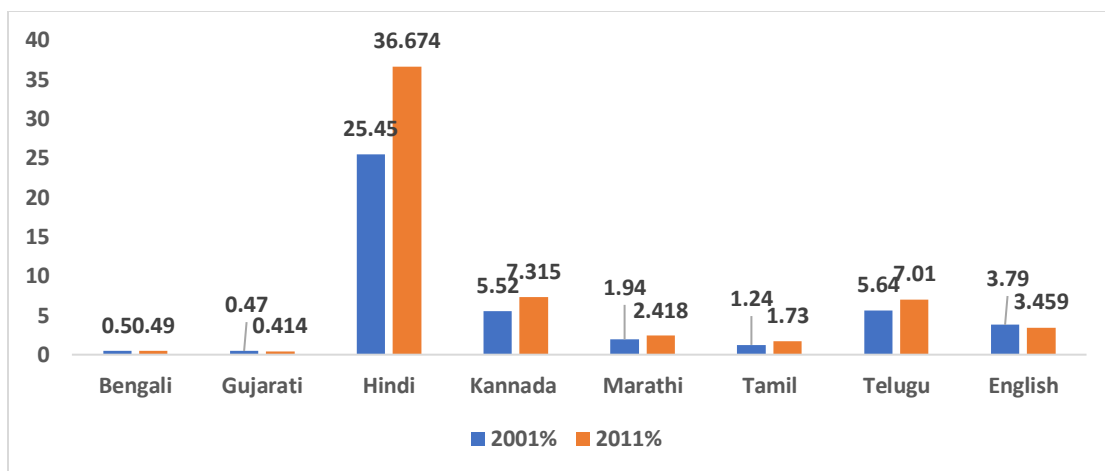
The table-12 on bilingualism among Urdu speakers - choice of first subsidiary language by them in 2001 and 2011 census reveals an interesting opinion.

There is a decrease in the number of Urdu speakers choosing Bengali-0.5%>0.47%, Gujarati-0.47%>0.414 and English 3.79%>3.459% as their first choice of subsidiary language.

During the same period there is an increase in their choice of first subsidiary language like Hindi - 25.45%>36.674%, Kannada- 5.52%>7.315%, Marathi-1.94%>2.418%, Tamil-1.24%>1.730%, and Telugu-5.64%>7.01%. This trend of Urdu relating to some of these languages relating may be reflecting the socio-linguistic trends in the respective regions.

Table-12
Choice of First Subsidiary Language by Urdu speakers

Sl, No	Language	2001 %	2011 %
1	Bengali	0.5	0.49
2	Gujarati	0.47	0.414
3	Hindi	25.45	36.674
4	Kannada	5.52	7.315
6	Marathi	1.94	2.418
8	Tamil	1.24	1.730
9	Telugu	5.64	7.01
10	English	3.79	3.459



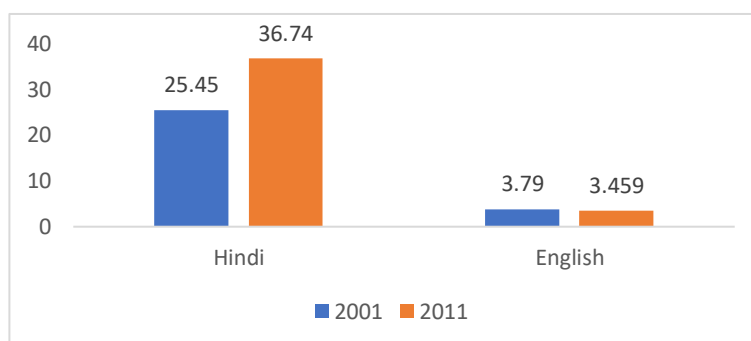
Urdu Speakers' Choice of Hindi/English as First Subsidiary Language

More and more Urdu speakers are choosing Hindi as their first subsidiary language. Their number is increasing, whereas the percentage of Urdu speakers choosing English as the first subsidiary language is decreasing from decade to decade.

Table-13

Urdu speakers' choice of Hindi/English as first subsidiary language

Year	2001	2011
Hindi	25.45	36.74
English	3.79	3.459



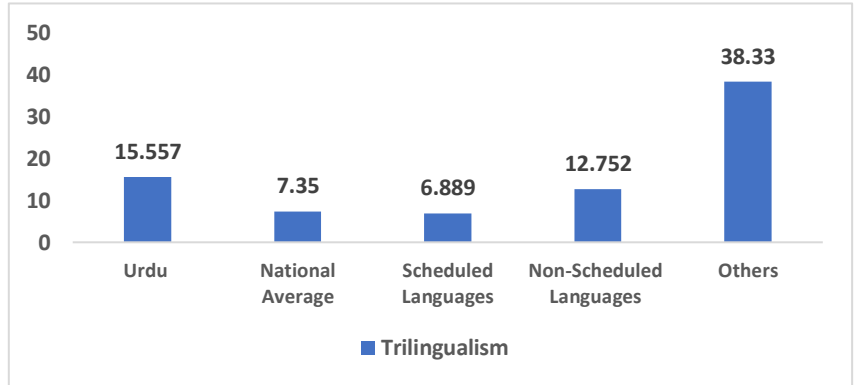
Urdu and Indian Trilingualism

The national average of trilingualism, the number of persons choosing a second subsidiary language has increased from 7.26% in 1991 to 7.35% in 2011. So also, more and more Urdu speakers are becoming trilingual from decade to decade. During the same period their percentage of Urdu speakers choosing a second subsidiary language was 12.14% in 1991 and the same has increased to 15.557% in 2011.

Table -14

Urdu and Trilingualism -2011

Details	Trilingualism
Urdu	15.557
National Avg.,	7.35
Scheduled Languages	6.889
Non-Scheduled Languages	12.752
Others	38.330



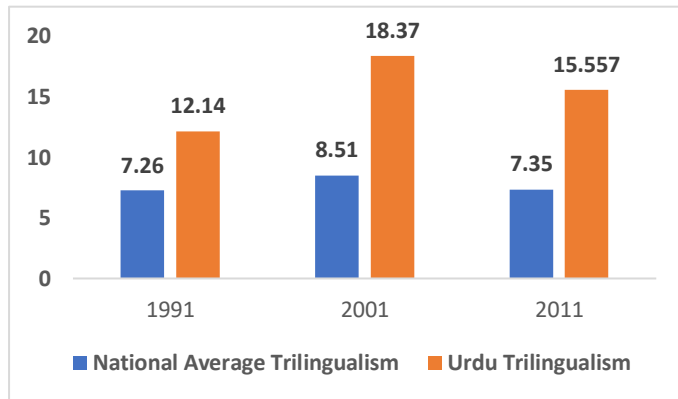
Urdu and Growth of Trilingualism: 1991 to 2011

The number of Urdu speakers declaring that they know a second subsidiary language is above the national average since 1991. It continues to be more than double that average.

Table – 15

Urdu and Growth of Trilingualism: 1991 to 2011

Census Year	National Average Trilingualism	Urdu Trilingualism
1991	7.26	12.14
2001	8.51	18.37
2011	7.35	15.557



To Conclude:

This is the linguistic demographic profile of Urdu in India. Urdu, one of the two pan-Indian languages -- Hindi and Urdu, is having its presence in all the states and union territories of India. The number of its speakers is increasing from one decennial census to another. However, the proportion of its speakers is decreasing in the country. The percentage of Urdu speakers in many states and union territories and the percentage of them as opposed to total speakers of all the languages in the respective states and union territories is also fluctuating. More number of Urdu speakers are residing in the urban areas and the percentage of them in the urban areas is also increasing.

. Multilingualism of Urdu speakers is much beyond the national average for bilingualism and trilingualism. The number of Urdu multilinguals is fast growing. It is one of the languages where more and more speakers are becoming multilingual from decade to decade. There is a noticeable change in the choice of first and second subsidiary languages by the Urdu speakers.

Whenever the language data of the next Census is made available in the public domain, one can compare the analysis presented here with that. If the trend continues, a sociolinguistic study of Urdu in India will help to find the social, economic, linguistic or any other reasons for the same.

Data Source

Language Tables of the Census of India from 1961 to 2011.
