LANGUAGES OF SCHOOL-GOING CHILDREN
A Sample Survey in Mysore

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Abstract

This report covers the findings of a survey conducted to estimate the number of children with different native language background studying in schools with English as the medium of instruction in Mysore city, Karnataka, India. The survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire method. A total of 5 schools in Mysore city were surveyed. The results of the survey showed that most of the children (around 67.9%) came from Kannada as their native language background, followed by Tamil (9.4%), Hindi (9.4%), Malayalam (7.5%) and Telugu (5.7%).

Introduction

The survey was conducted in the year 2004-2005 to estimate the number of children with different native language background studying in schools with English as the medium of instruction in Mysore. The survey was conducted as a part of doctoral thesis work which aimed to study "acquisition of biliteracy in children". In order to select children for the above study we required information on the number of children studying in a common medium of instruction i.e., English but who have come from different native language background apart from Kannada (which is the official language in the state of Karnataka) was required. This report is based on the findings of the above survey through questionnaire method.

Background and Context

The multilingual and multicultural character of India with high rate of illiteracy (of 33%) poses a large number of problems for the use of languages in education. Grierson (Koul, 2006, para 6) identified 179 languages and 544 dialects in his Linguistic Survey of India conducted during 1888 and 1927. The 1951 census lists 845 languages including dialects, 60 of which were spoken by more than 10,000 speakers each. The 1961 census lists 1652 mother tongues

corresponding to 193 classified languages. The classified languages belong to four families of languages: Austric (20), Dravidian (20), Indo-Aryan (54), Tibeto -Burmese (98) and one of doubtful affiliation. In the 1971, 1981 and 1991 Census, distribution of household population is presented along with the Schedule VIII languages and other major languages. It is important to note that the percentage of speakers of 18 languages included in the Schedule VIII of the Constitution is about 96% out of the total household population. The percentage of speakers knowing two or more languages according to the 1991 census shows that around 24.04% speak languages other than Kannada in the state of Karnataka. Table 1 below shows percentage of population by language, bilingualism and trilingualism of scheduled languages according to the 1991 census of India (www.censusindia.net).

Table 1: Census of India - 1991
Population by language, bilingualism, trilingualism of scheduled languages
(Source: www.censusindia.net)

Sl.No	Name of the Language	Speakers Strength	% to total Population	Number of persons knowing two or more languages	%of persons knowing two or more languages	Number of persons knowing three languages	% of persons knowing three languages
1	Assamese	13079696	1.56	3650321	27.91	1671331	12.78
2	Bengali	69595738	8.30	9109454	13.09	3266779	4.69
3	Gujarati	40673814	4.85	10109381	24.85	4714942	11.59
4	Hindi	337272114	40.22	37139612	11.01	10065191	2.98
5	Kannada	32753676	3.91	7872367	24.04	2660215	8.12
6	Kashmiri	56693	0.01	33997	59.97	18751	33.07
7	Konkani	1760607	0.21	1306316	74.20	786601	44.68
8	Malayalam	30377176	3.62	8764681	28.85	5965126	19.64
9	Manipuri	1270216	0.15	420216	30.08	278443	21.92
10	Marathi	62481681	7.45	17175894	27.49	7970448	12.76
11	Nepali	2076645	0.25	827088	39.83	417651	20.11
12	Oriya	28061313	3.35	4473909	15.94	2579154	9.19
13	Punjabi	23378744	2.79	8812494	37.69	5412133	23.15
14	Sanskrit	49736	0.01	25660	51.59	6204	12.47
15	Sindhi	2122848	0.25	1347039	63.45	605242	28.51
16	Tamil	53006368	6.32	9930841	18.74	1144532	2.16
17	Telugu	66017615	7.87	13651031	20.68	5482348	8.30
18	Urdu	43406932	5.18	16492480	38.00	5267456	12.14
	Total	807441612	96.30	151142781	18.72	58312547	7.22

The multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic characteristics of India, varying socio-economic strata of people, complex communication patterns were well recognized during pre-independence period. The Constitution of India devotes 9 articles (Art 343-351) to the issues related to language policy of the Central and State governments. While Hindi in the Devanagri

script is recognized as the official language of the Central government along with English as the associate official language. The state governments have a choice to adopt any language or languages listed in the VIII Schedule of the Constitution as the official language in their state. Whereas all the States made a choice in favor of their regional or dominant native language as the official language, Jammu and Kashmir government chose Urdu - a non -native language of the state; some states in the Northeast decided in favor of English.

The government of India adopted a Three-Language Formula in 1968. Under the Formula a child is supposed to learn three languages: mother tongue, Hindi and English. In case the mother tongue is Hindi the child will learn another modern Indian language preferably a South Indian language. The Formula is not however followed strictly in letter and spirit. For instance, Tamil Nadu teaches two languages: Tamil and English; Hindi speaking states teach Sanskrit (a classical language) in place of a modern Indian language. Usually three languages are used in the school education. However, the stages of introducing these languages vary from state to state and one schooling system to another. In some schools two languages are introduced in the first primary itself and the third language is introduced at the sixth grade, in others the second language is introduced at the third standard and the third at the sixth standard. This was reported by Koul (2006) in a survey of language preferences in education in India.

Need for the survey

Language has primarily two roles in education. It is studied as a subject, and is used as medium of instruction. The choice of language as a subject of study and also the choice of language as a medium of instruction has a direct influence on the language in education policy of the country and is determined by various socio-economic and political factors. The so-called globalization and increasing educational technology is also responsible for making a careful choice. Also, it is important to study the language background of children in order to develop any assessment battery to study the acquisition of literacy skills so that the tool is more cultural specific and language appropriate.

Objective of the survey

The objective of conducting the survey was to find out the different language background of children studying in different schools of Mysore, Karnataka.

Method

Mysore is a city where Kannada is spoken predominantly by majority of the people. However, due to its geographical location, educational perspective, migration of people from other states for the purpose of jobs, etc., Mysore city has had people coming from different language backgrounds. These languages include Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi and a very small group of other languages like Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, etc. Children from these families are enrolled for education in schools following state or central syllabus in Mysore.

Design of the questionnaire

In order to find out the different language background of children studying in different schools of Mysore, a questionnaire for parents meant to seek information regarding the name and address (optional), class or standard, age-group, mother tongue and other languages known, languages studied at different levels, medium of instruction that their children studied, the languages they used/preferred while teaching the child at home and the languages their children used/preferred for communication was designed. The parents were requested to respond to these questions on a 3 point scale- most of the time, sometimes and always. Questions 1-7 were based on this scale. The other questions sought information regarding mother tongue, overall performance of the child in the classroom according to the teachers, etc. (See appendix I for details). The questionnaire is given as an appendix to this report.

Procedure

Around 93 questionnaires were distributed to parents of the children studying in 5 different schools in different parts of Mysore city. Only 53 questionnaires could be collected back from the parents. Around 50.71% of questionnaires were received and 49.29% of them were not received.

Before analyzing the responses from the parents, the questions in the questionnaire were divided into numeric questions and questions related to socio-demographic data. Only numeric data was subjected to statistical analysis. The data was initially coded to each of the scales of

measurement i.e., for 'most of the time' condition, 'sometimes' and 'always' conditions for each question. The responses obtained to each of these questions were fed into the SPSS data sheet. The data was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using the SPSS version 14.0 software to know the frequency of responses and the percentage of responses to each question.

The above questionnaires were distributed to the parents. Any one of the parent was requested to answer the questionnaire. Those parents who did not understand the questions were interviewed personally and the examiner assisted them in answering the questions. The questionnaires were collected back from the parents and then subjected for analysis.

Summary of results

A descriptive analysis of the sample collected during the survey was done using the SPSS version 14.0 software. The results of the survey conducted have been summarized in the following sections:

I) The native language background of the children surveyed
II) Languages spoken or used most of the time, sometimes or always by the children at home

The survey conducted across five schools in Mysore showed that around 67.9 % of children had Kannada as their native language background. There were also children from other language backgrounds in smaller proportions studying in these schools. They included children with Tamil (9.4%), Hindi (9.4%), Malayalam (7.5%) and Telugu (5.7%) as their native language background (See Table 2). Thus, as expected these schools had a high of percentage of children from Kannada background enrolled for education (see Figure 1).

Table 2: Native language background of the children surveyed

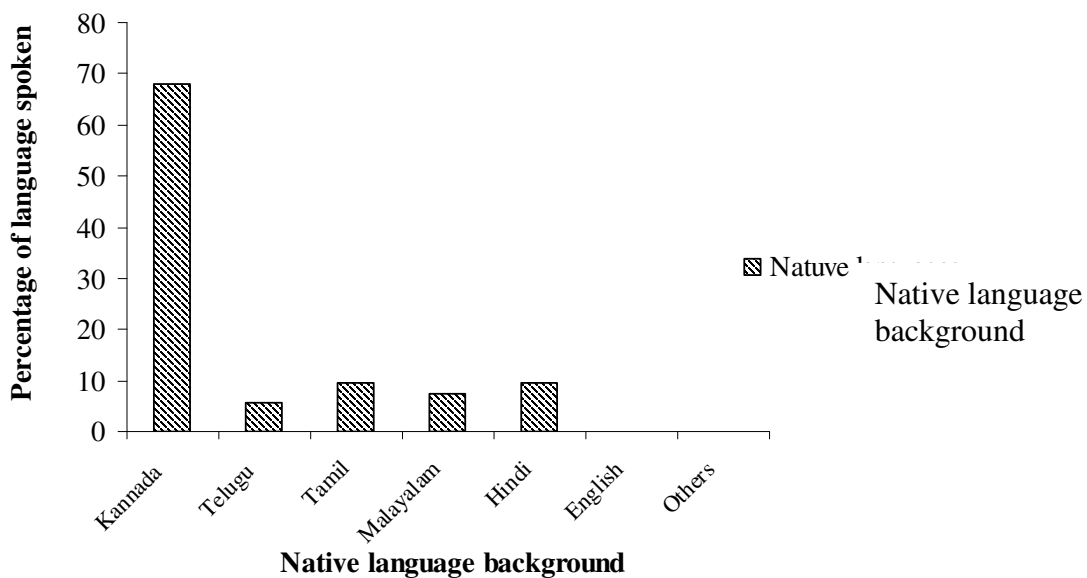| Languages	Native language background (in percentage)
Kannada	67.9
Telugu	5.7
Tamil	9.4
Malayalam	7.5
Hindi	9.4
English	0
Others	0
Total	100.0

Figure 1: Percentage of different language background in Mysore city

A summary of each of the questions answered by the respondents (parents) has been given in the following tables. Numeric questions from the questionnaire were grouped together and analyzed. These questions were grouped together as they had similar responses to be given by the parents-most of the time, sometimes and always. The questions along with their coding to understand the summarized tables and graphs are given below. Please refer back to these questions while referring to the figures below.

Q1 -Language used for communication at school

Q2- Language used for communication at home

Q3- Languages spoken by the child

Q4- Languages spoken by the family members at home

Q5- Languages used by the family members to teach literacy skills at home

Q6- Languages used at school to teach literacy skills

Table 3 shows percentage of responses to the above questions answered for most of the condition. The results are indicative of the following findings,

- Table 3 indicates that around 90.6% of children used Kannada as the language for communication most of the time at school (Q1) though the medium of instruction is English.

- Only around 9.4% of children used English for communication at school. Also what can be noted is that though the children come from different native language background (see Table 2) their language for communication is either Kannada or English.

- Around 52.8% of children used Kannada for communication at home, 20.8% used Telugu, 9.4% used Tamil, and 7.5% used Malayalam for communication most of the time at home (Q2) (see Table 3).

- Table 3 also shows that the languages spoken by the children (Q3) and the languages spoken by the family members at home (Q4) were of the same order as the languages used for communication, i.e., around 52.8% of them spoke Kannada, 20.8% spoke Telugu, 9.4% spoke Tamil, and 7.5% spoke Malayalam most of the time at home.

- Table 3 shows that the languages used to teach literacy skills (Q5) most of the time by the parents was English (around 98.1%) and a very few Hindi speaking families used Hindi most of the time to teach literacy skills at home.

- And almost all the parents responded that English was the language used at school to teach literacy skills (Q6) most of the time. Figure 2 shows the comparison of the languages across each of the above questions answered by the respondents (parents).

Table 3: Percentage of responses to the questions for
'Most of the time' condition

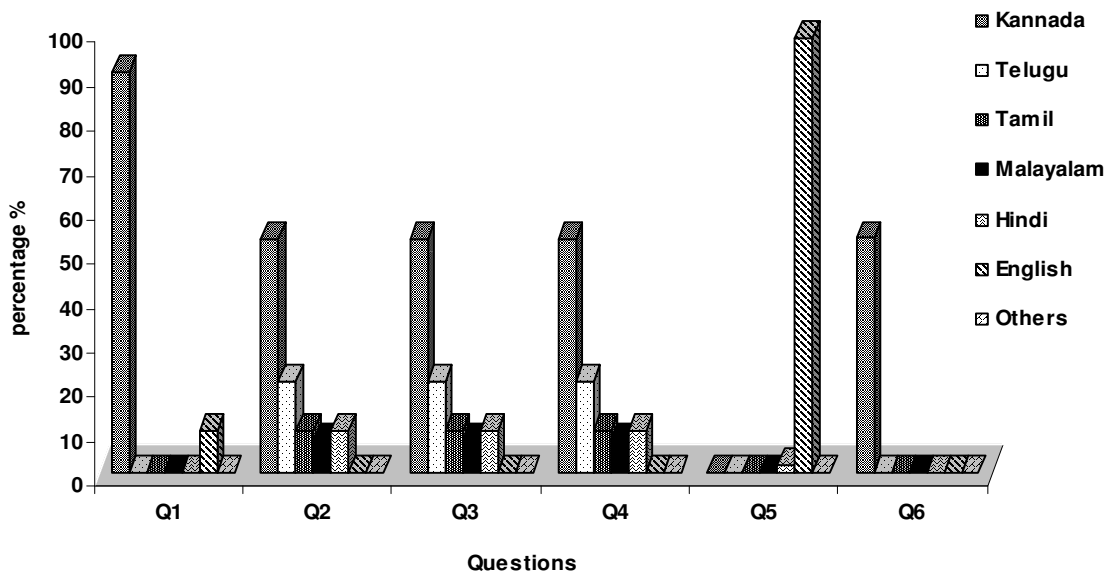| Questions	Responses in Percentage (%)							
	Kannada	Telugu	Tamil	Malayalam	Hindi	English	Others	Total
Q1	90.6	0	0	0	0	9.4	0	100
Q2	52.8	20.8	9.4	7.5	9.4	0	0	100
Q3	52.8	20.8	9.4	7.5	9.4	0	0	100
Q4	52.8	20.8	9.4	7.5	9.4	0	0	100
Q5	0	0	0	0	1.9	98.1	0	100
Q6	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	100

Figure 2: Percentage of responses to the questions for
'Most of the time' condition

Table 4 below shows percentage of responses to the above questions answered for 'sometimes' condition. The results are indicative of the following:

- It indicates that only around 5.7% of children used Kannada as the language for communication at school (Q1) sometimes. Only around 3.8% of children used Hindi for communication at school, around 90.6% used English for communication sometimes at

school. This implies further that, though the children come from different native language background (see Table 2) their language for communication is either Kannada or English.

- Around 37.7% of children used Kannada for communication at home sometimes, and 62.3% used English for communication sometimes at home (Q2) (see Table 4).
- Table 4 also shows that the languages spoken by the children (Q3) and the languages spoken by the family members at home (Q4) were of the same order as the languages used for communication, i.e., around 37.7%% of them spoke Kannada and 62.3% spoke English 'sometimes' at home.
- Table 4 also shows that the languages used to teach literacy skills (Q5) sometimes by the parents was Kannada (81.1%), Tamil (9.4%), Hindi (7.5%) and most of the time English (around 98.1%). Figure 3 shows a comparison of the languages across each of the above questions answered by the respondents (parents).

The most striking feature of the survey was that none of them responded to 'always' condition for any of the questions. This indicates that children in each of the families are not exposed to any one particular language always, however, he/she is exposed to more than one or even two languages for communication as well as for learning literacy skills at home (the details for the 'always' condition has not been depicted as none of them responded 'always' for any of the above questions).

Table 4: Percentage of responses to the questions for
'Some times' condition

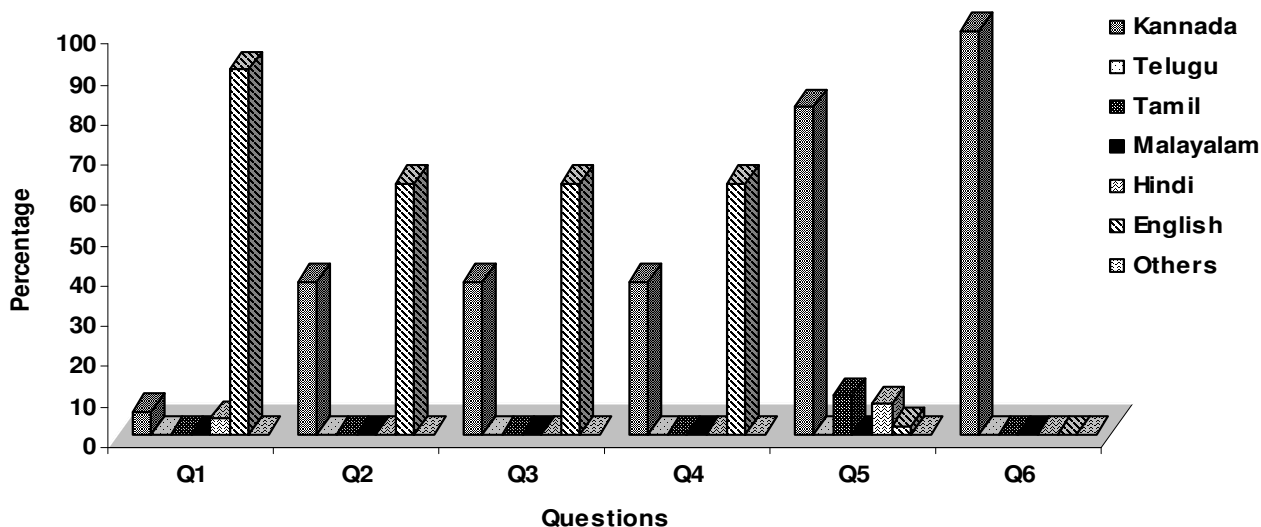| Questions	Responses in Percentage (%)							
	Kannada	Telugu	Tamil	Malayalam	Hindi	English	Others	Total
Q1	5.7	0	0	0	3.8	90.6	0	100
Q2	37.7	0	0	0	0	62.3	0	100
Q3	37.7	0	0	0	0	62.3	0	100
Q4	37.7	0	0	0	0	62.3	0	100
Q5	81.1	0	9.4	0	7.5	1.9	0	100
Q6	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100

Figure 3: Percentage of responses to the questions for
'Sometimes' condition

Conclusion

The aim of conducting the survey was to find out the different language background of children studying in the schools of Mysore, Karnataka. The results of the survey showed that most of the children (around 67.9%) came from Kannada as their native language background, followed by Tamil (9.4%), Hindi (9.4%), Malayalam (7.5%) and Telugu (5.7%). The results also indicated that English was the language used sometimes for communication by all the families at home when compared to their own native languages, for e.g., around 90.6% of the total families surveyed used English sometimes for communication at home. Also, most of the parents (90.6%) agreed that the languages used by their children in school for communication with friends was Kannada and very few (9.4%) used English. While all of them (100%) agreed that English was used for teaching literacy skills in schools.

References

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eCENSUSIndia Newsletter (2002, June). Issue No. 11: page 4. *Study of languages and mother tongue- a feature article.* Retrieved December 2006 from http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci11page5.html

Acknowledgement

Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARENTS

<u>Note</u>: Dear Parents the purpose of this questionnaire is to survey children who use two or more than two languages at school and at home. Read each statement carefully and then answer them.

Name of child: [   ]   Date: [   ]

Age/Sex: [   ]   Grade: [   ]

School: [   ]

Father's Name: [   ]   Phone: [   ]

Mother's Name: [   ]

Address: [   ]

Any significant medical history:

[   ]

The purpose of this questionnaire is to survey children who use two or more than two languages at school and at home.

Read each statement carefully and then answer them:

- Mother Tongue: [   ]
- Medium of instruction at school: [   ]

1) Language used for communication at school (Please specify):

Most of the time   Sometimes   Always

2) Language used for communication at home (Please specify):

Most of the time   Sometimes   Always

3) Languages spoken by the child (Please specify):

Most of the time   Sometimes   Always

4) Languages spoken by the family members at home (Please specify):

Most of the time   Sometimes   Always

5) Languages used by the family members to teach literacy skills at home (Please specify):

Most of the time   Sometimes   Always

6) Languages used at school to teach literacy skills (Please specify):

Most of the time   Sometimes   Always

- Languages known by the child :

- Languages taught as subjects at school:

- Language preference of the child (if any) at school and at home:

- Best performance of the child in any particular language at school (For e.g., performs better in language subjects like English or Kannada):

Overall performance of the child in the class:

Poor	Average	Good

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