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Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.  
Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.  
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Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.  
S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

**Patterns of Indian Multilingualism**

**B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.**

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**Introduction**

Understanding the pattern of existence and use of languages in a country helps in understanding the sociolinguistic position of that country better. When a country is monolingual, it has one kind of issues to be taken into account, and when a country is multilingual, issues to be understood are multiple.

The *Webster's Dictionary* says that "... using or able to use several languages especially with equal fluency" is multilingualism. However, *Wikipedia* identifies multilingualism as "...the use of two or more languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers" and it also says that "... multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population". Hence multilingualism is considered as the norm and mono-lingualism an exception (Peter Auer/Li Wei: 2008).

**Indian Multilingualism**

Indian multilingualism and its society is described using many terms such as melting pot, salad bowl, etc. None of these is able to capture the real texture of Indian multilingualism. Indian multilingualism is unique; it has no parallel anywhere in the world.

**The Focus of This Paper**

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Patterns of Indian Multilingualism

This paper aims to analyze the Census data to capture some aspects Indian multilingualism. The major source to understand Indian multilingualism comes from the decennial census conducted since 1872 till 2001. However the language information is collected only from 1881 Census. In general, the Census data provides inputs to various kinds of planning in the country, and language data helps us to understand the sociolinguistic situation of the country. Unfortunately, in my assessment, the data obtained has not been used much in language planning in post-independence India.

## **Languages in India Today**

The Constitution of India today has 22 languages that are classified as Scheduled Languages since they are in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. In the beginning this schedule is treated as a rigid document, resisting any changes to it through Constitutional amendments. However, in recent decades, the Schedule is treated as an open ended list which has got additions whenever the socio-political conditions forced or favored inclusion of a specific language. Hence the information is available in terms of Schedule Languages and Non-Schedule languages. According to latest information, India is endowed with 22 scheduled languages and 100 non-scheduled languages which include English also. These 22 languages have 243 mother tongues embedded in them. The mother tongues spoken by less than 10000 persons are not accounted.

## **The Question of Mother Tongue in Many Avatars!**

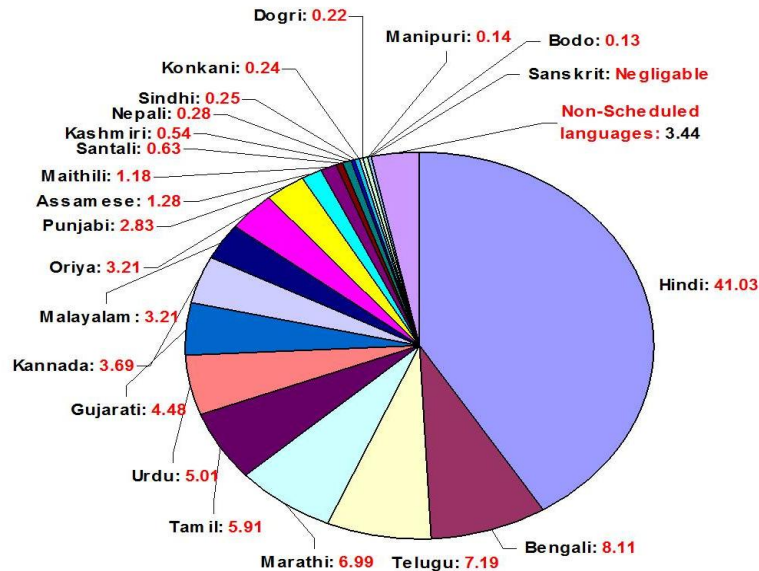
From 1881 Census onward, the question on mother-tongue was included in the census though it was used by the enumerators differently in different Censuses. In the Censuses of 1881, 1931, 1941 and 1951, the question was 'Mother-tongue'. The mother-tongue was defined as the language first spoken by the individual from the cradle. In 1891 Census, the question was 'Parent tongue' which has been defined as the language spoken by the parent of the individual. In 1901 Census, 'Parent tongue' was replaced by 'language ordinarily used'. In 1911 the question was 'language ordinarily spoken in the household'. In 1921 the question was simply 'language ordinarily used'. The question on Mother tongue was repeated from Census to Census from 1931 to 1971. In 1971 Census, the mother-tongue was defined as "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 was recorded as the Mother-tongue".

In Census 2001, mother tongue is enumerated as "...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".

The Census of India reports that in 2001, 96.56% of the population of India is speaking the Scheduled languages and the Non-scheduled languages are accounted to the extent of 3.44% of

the total population of the country. The following is the graphical representation of the linguistic landscape of India in 2001, till the next Census releases its language data.

## Indian Languages: 2001



### Population Ranking of Indian Languages

It may be seen that Hindi language is spoken by 41.03% of the population. Hindi is a *composite* language having around 50 mother tongues in it. Within this overall percentage, Hindi is spoken as mother tongue by 61.12% and the rest 38.88% speak other mother tongues grouped under Hindi. Hence in India 16.52% of the people speaking Hindi language do not have Hindi as their mother tongue but have some other mother tongue grouped under the umbrella language called Hindi. So, in reality Hindi mother tongue population in India amounts to 24.51%.

### Pan-Indian Languages

The Census of India 2001 lists separately fifteen numerically biggest languages state-wise. If we keenly observe the lists, 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 North Eastern Region of the country. Their spread, urban/rural divide are provided in the table given below:

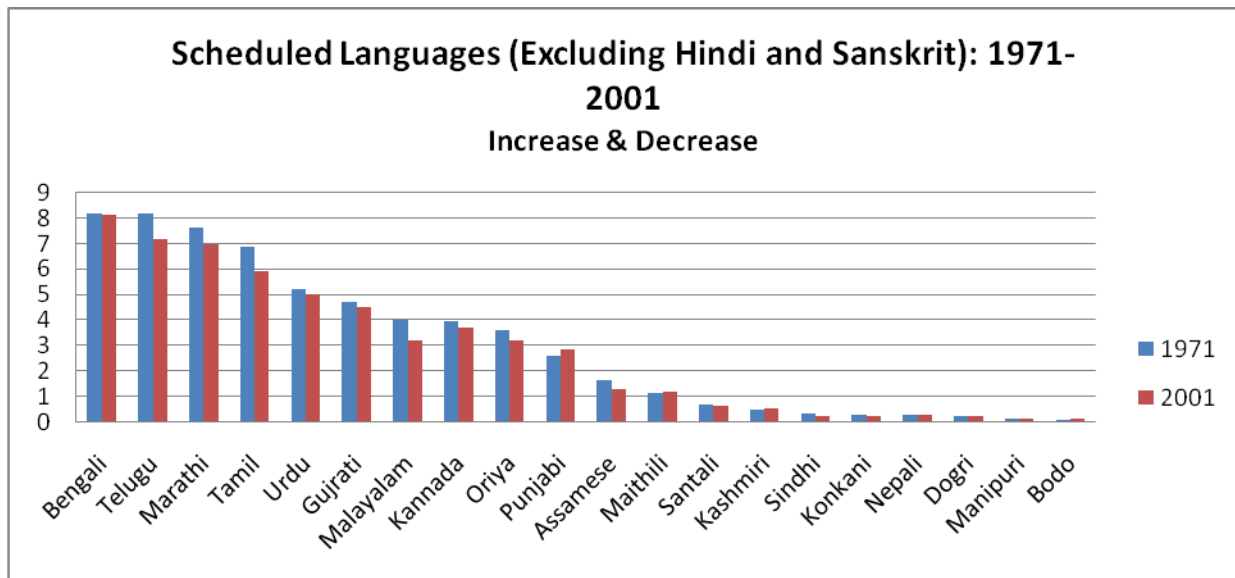
Sl. No.	STATE	HINDI			URDU		
		% of State Total Population	Rural	Urban	% of State Total Population	Rural	Urban

1	Jammu & Kashmir	18.44	88.02	11.98	0.13	47.42	52.58
2	Himachal Pradesh	89.01	90.80	9.20	0.08	65.89	34.11
3	Punjab	7.60	27.01	72.99	0.11	34.98	65.02
4	Chandigarh	67.53	9.78	90.22	0.81	8.51	91.49
5	Uttaranchal	87.95	76.37	23.63	5.86	52.43	47.57
6	Haryana	87.31	71.42	28.58	1.23	87.52	12.48
7	Delhi	80.94	7.67	92.33	6.31	1.77	98.23
8	Rajasthan	90.97	76.92	23.08	1.17	14.79	85.21
9	Uttar Pradesh	91.32	82.37	17.63	7.99	44.87	55.13
10	Bihar	73.06	89.23	10.77	11.39	84.56	15.44
11	Sikkim	6.67	58.90	41.10	0.54	62.49	37.51
12	West Bengal	7.17	35.24	64.76	2.06	19.08	80.92
13	Jharkhand	57.56	76.28	23.72	8.63	64.76	35.24
14	Orissa	2.83	62.55	37.45	1.66	58.03	41.97
15	Chhattisgarh	82.61	80.11	19.89	0.42	32.64	67.36
16	Madhya Pradesh	87.26	73.94	26.06	1.97	17.81	82.19
17	Gujarat	4.71	16.65	83.35	1.09	4.52	95.48
18	Daman & Diu	19.44	81.08	18.92	0.36	45.64	54.36
19	Dadra & N H	15.07	52.22	47.78	0.45	25.75	74.25
20	Maharashtra	11.03	35.45	64.55	7.12	23.86	76.14
21	Andhra Pradesh	3.23	78.62	21.38	8.63	40.38	59.62
22	Karnataka	2.54	63.22	36.78	10.48	36.39	63.61
23	Goa	5.70	23.71	76.29	4.02	14.43	85.57
24	Lakshadweep	0.18	18.52	81.48	0.04	11.54	88.46
25	Kerala	0.08	27.15	72.85	0.04	59.15	40.85
26	Tamil Nadu	0.30	10.76	89.24	1.51	20.66	79.34
27	Pondicherry	0.45	21.23	78.77	0.73	7.91	92.09
28	Andaman & N I	18.23	59.75	40.25	0.45	29.29	70.71
29	Arunachal Pradesh	7.39	52.87	47.13	-	-	-
30	Nagaland	2.86	42.17	57.83	-	-	-
31	Manipur	1.14	54.70	45.30	-	-	-
32	Mizoram	1.19	35.96	64.04	-	-	-
33	Tripura	1.68	77.21	22.79	-	-	-
34	Meghalaya	2.16	37.75	62.25	-	-	-
35	Assam	5.89	68.74	31.26	-	-	-

## Decreases in 2001 Census from the Census of 1971

An interesting picture emerges when we compare the language information of 1971 Census with that of 2001 Census. The result is as follows: proportionate percentage of increase in the number of speakers of Hindi is (+4.4), Punjabi (+0.26), Maithili (+0.06), Kashmiri (+0.08), Nepali (+0.02), and Bodo (+0.03).

However, there is significant decrease in the percentage of speakers of some major languages as follows: Bengali (-0.06), Telugu (-0.97), Marathi (-0.62), Tamil (-0.97), Urdu (-0.21), Gujarati (-0.24), Malayalam (-0.79), Kannada (-0.27), Oriya (-0.41), Assamese (-0.35), Santali (-0.06), Sindhi (0.06), Konkani (-0.04), and Dogri (-0.02). The following graph illustrates the same:



## Indian Multilingualism

We speak of a country as multilingual by taking into account the number of languages being used there. Mere presence of more number of languages will not, I think, make a country multilingual, although this seems to be the most widely accepted belief.

What is more important to be a multilingual nation is more number of speakers of a language being conversant with other languages used in that country. I think that this is true multilingualism.

The next issue is how deep multilingualism is.

## Depth of Multilingualism in India

In India, more number of people is bilingual and multilingual. But clear information about bilingualism and tri-lingualism is not collected by the Census. I think that the present estimate is an underestimation of ground reality.

The Census has been enumerating and registering information on bilingualism from 1901. Till the 1921 Census, the information was collected to know about the 'knowledge of English' only, since for governance and education British India wanted to know about the spread of English in India. It appears that both the British officials and the Indian elite made it their goal to spread the knowledge of English as *the sole* vehicle for obtaining modern knowledge. As we all know, Macaulay's dictum laid greater emphasis on the teaching and learning of English as means to receive western knowledge of arts and science. Thus bilingual knowledge and use of English became the most significant aspect of bilingualism. Bilingualism in Indian languages was not seen to be something that needed to be cherished and further developed. This attitude could have resulted in the focus on obtaining information on bilingualism relating to English. (Readers may like to read STRANGERS IN THEIR OWN LAND! Campbell's Defense of Indian Vernaculars against Lord Macaulay's Minute by M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D. and B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D. <http://www.languageinindia.com/jan2004/campbell.html>.)

## Change in the Direction of Gathering Language Data in Census of India

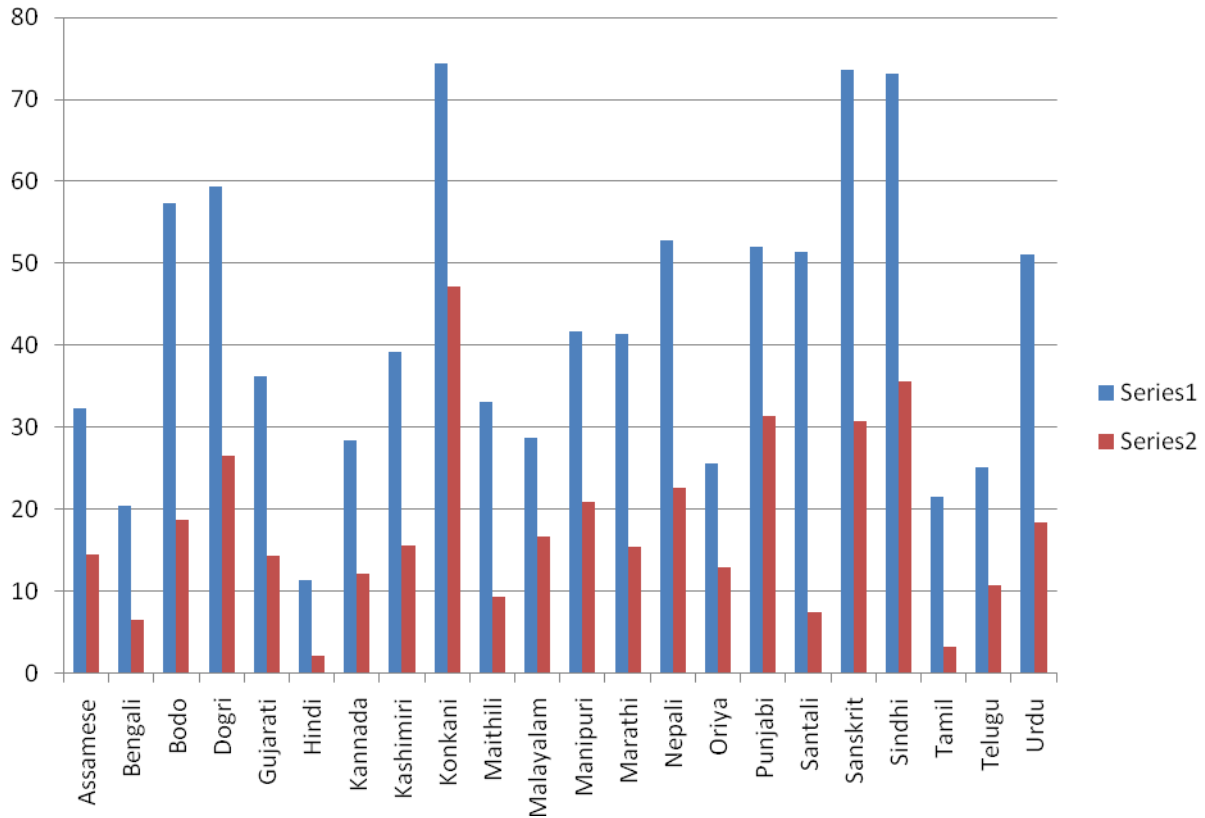
In 1931 and 1941 Censuses the information about 'Other language in common use' was also collected, the Census tried to know the 'name of language' that the person knows in addition to his or her mother tongue. The subsequent Census in 1941 and 1951 the question was restricted to 'only Indian language' and in 1961 Census it was expanded to 'any language' and 'number of such languages' was also expanded to two languages. In 1971 Census, the information on 'Other languages' was again collected from each individual. Changes in information elicitation reflect the linguistic concerns of the nation at that point of time. This is an official recognition of India as a multilingual nation.

Hence, in 1981, information on the number and names of languages known to the person other than his/her mother tongue is collected. It is recorded in "...the order in which he/she speaks and understands them best and can use with understanding in communicating with others. He/she need not be able to read and write those languages. It is enough if he/she has a working knowledge of those subsidiary languages to enable him/her to converse in that language with understanding." The Census of India uses same parameters but uses different terminologies to identify the same concepts. During the year 1981 it is reported as "Persons speaking a language additional to the mother tongue", in 1991 as "Persons knowing three languages", in 2001 "First Subsidiary Language, Second Subsidiary language"

It may be noted that Indian multilingualism is 'self declared' by the language users and not a result of any evaluation of language competence against any set parameters.

## First and Second Subsidiary Languages

The statistical information on the population by bilingualism and trilingualism as per the 2001 Census are available for researchers to look into the pattern of Indian multilingualism. These statements “first subsidiary language” and “second subsidiary language” are interpreted as for bilingualism and trilingualism for the purposes the analysis here (Series 1 – Bilingualism, Series 2 – Trilingualism).



It can be seen that bilingualism is widely prevalent. The following table gives the details of percentage of bilinguals and trilinguals to the total population speaking a particular Indian language. Large number of speakers of Indian languages knows more than one language. Many times they know two languages in addition to their mother tongue.

SL. No.	Languages	% of Bilinguals	% of Trilinguals	SL. No.	Languages	% of Bilinguals	% of Trilinguals
1	Assamese	32.35	14.47	12	Manipuri	41.67	20.81
2	Bengali	20.40	6.52	13	Marathi	41.37	15.45
3	Bodo	57.38	18.64	14	Nepali	52.81	22.54

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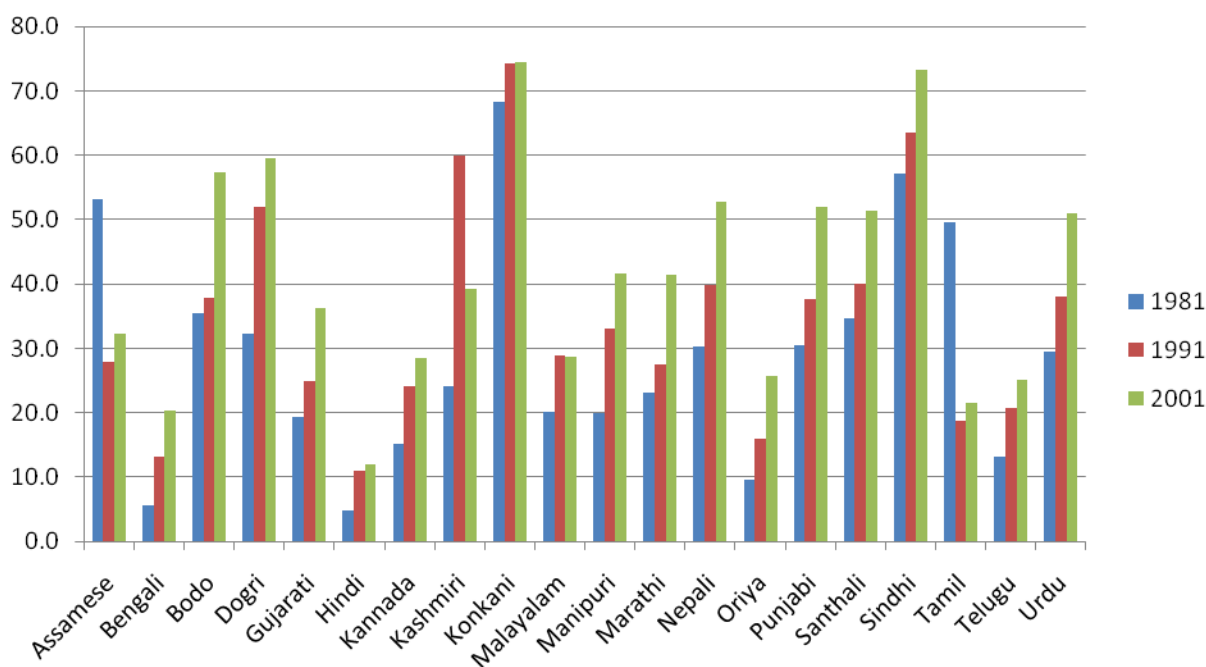
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4	Dogri	59.44	26.49	15	Oriya	25.63	12.88
5	Gujarati	36.25	14.25	16	Punjabi	52.01	31.30
6	Hindi	11.25	2.13	17	Santali	51.43	7.35
7	Kannada	28.44	12.15	18	Sanskrit	73.60	30.80
8	Kashmiri	39.21	15.55	19	Sindhi	73.19	35.58
9	Konkani	74.38	47.18	20	Tamil	21.51	3.19
10	Maithili	33.03	9.25	21	Telugu	25.02	10.69
11	Malayalam	28.75	16.60	22	Urdu	51.03	18.37

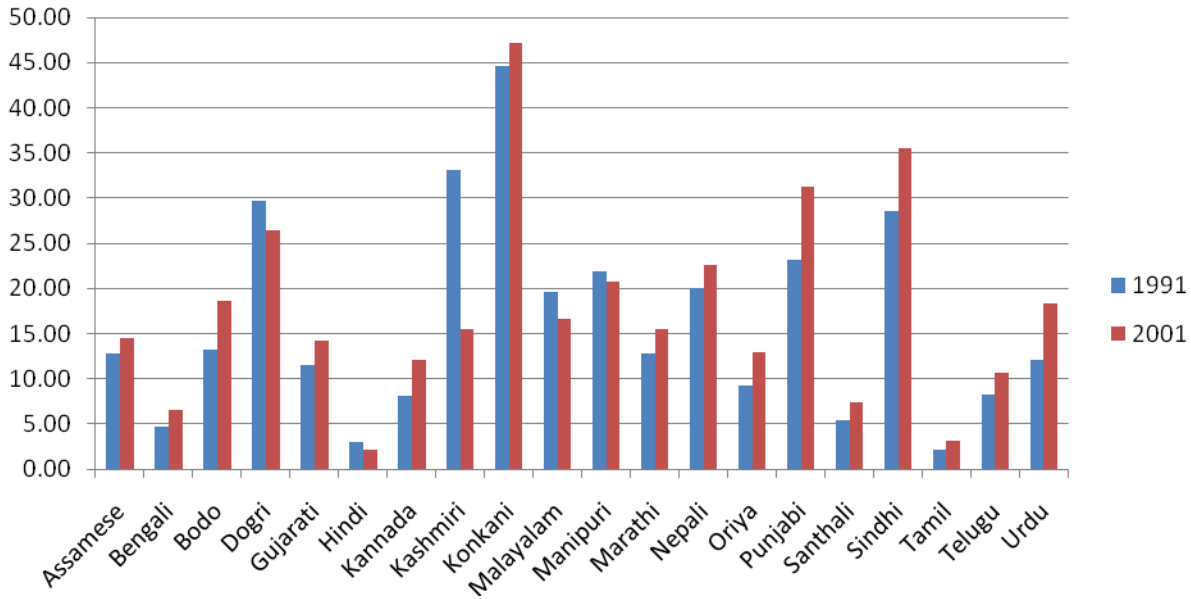
A comparative account of three decades of bilingualism and two decades of trilingualism is provided in the graphs below.

It indicates that in case of Kashmiri speakers bilingualism there is decrease in 2001 than in 1991, but there is an increase compared to 1981. In case of Konkani and Malayalam speakers there is hardly any increase or decrease of bilingualism. But, in case of Tamil speakers there is decrease in bilingualism.



In case of trilingualism, there is negative growth among speakers of Dogri, Hindi, Kashmiri, Malayalam and Manipuri. And increase in trilingualism is far less among the Tamil and Bengali speakers when compared with that of speakers of other languages.





Next important issue is to identify which language or languages other than their mother tongue people have reported that they know. One thing that comes out is that many speakers of the Scheduled languages reported that they know Hindi and English. It can be noticed that more bilinguals (74.38%) and trilinguals (47.18%) are from Konkani mother tongue and least bilinguals (11.25%) and trilinguals (2.13%) are from Hindi language.

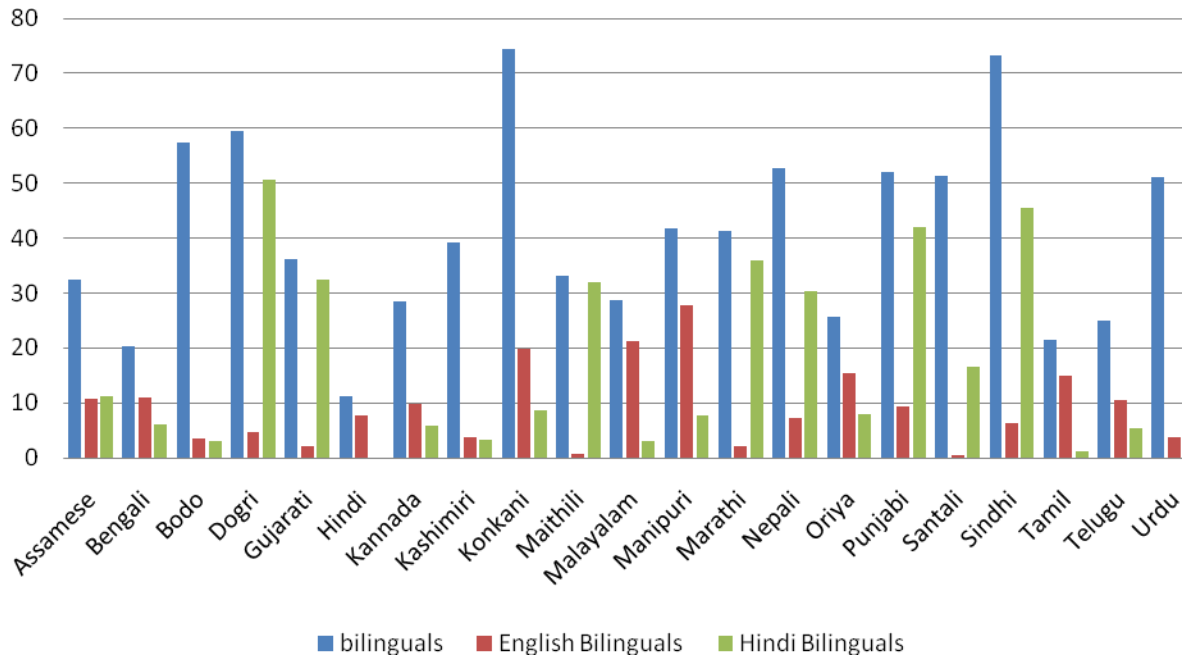
Sociolinguistic situation of both these languages is reflected in the nature of multilingualism they practice. Hindi speakers seem to see that there is no much need for them to learn another language. Konkani speakers are concentrated in Goa but spread over in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, etc. Hence there is a social and economic need for them to be multilingual. Similarly Urdu speakers are next in the list of being more multilingual speakers since Urdu is a language which is not predominant over any language in any state, without a state of its own in a linguistically reorganized country. Moreover, the Urdu speakers are spread all over the country and hence they are more bilingual (51.03%) and trilingual (18.37%). Same is the case of another language Sindhi, which has 73.19% and 35.58% of bilinguals and trilinguals respectively.

### Language Choice and Multilingualism

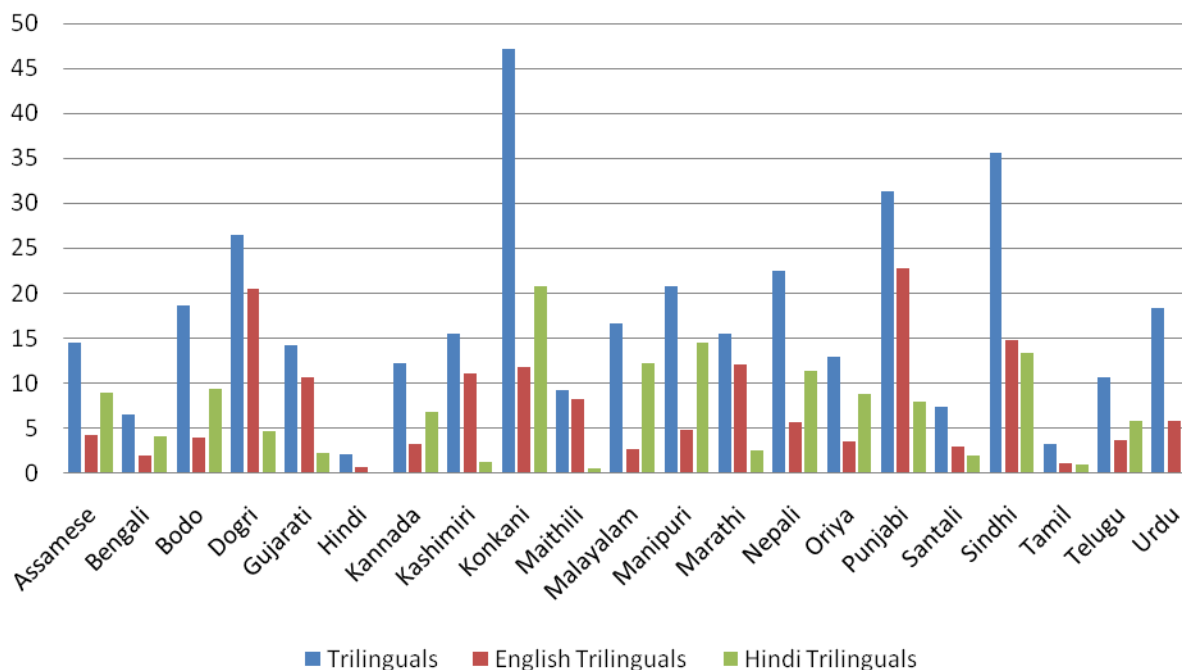
In the context of analysis of multilingualism it is essential to look into the way Indian language speakers look at learning Hindi, the Official Language of the Union of India and English the Associate Official Language. Also, Hindi is one of the languages of the education system in most of the states except in two states Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. English is the contribution of British rule to schooling in India as a subject and also as a medium of instruction at different stages of education. In the Indian context, English is learnt as second or third language due to schooling whereas Hindi is mainly learnt and partially acquired contextually since it is widely

used in the media, as part of entertainment. Most of the other languages are learnt due to their coexistence.

Speakers of Bengali, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Oriya, Tamil and Telugu prefer English as the first subsidiary language. And speakers of Dogri, Gujarati, Maithili, Marathi, Nepali, Punjabi, Santali, Sindhi and Urdu prefer Hindi as the first subsidiary language.



As second subsidiary language Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Oriya, Telugu speakers prefer Hindi, whereas the speakers of Dogri, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Maithili, Marathi, Punjabi, Sindhi speakers prefer English.



### Inductive Multilingualism

Spread of Hindi and English in India among the speakers of other languages is an important factor.

When we observe the bilingual and trilingual figures for Hindi and English comparatively four patterns of multilingualism emerges.

First category is the one in which the languages have more bilinguals and trilinguals in Hindi.

	Languages	% of Bilinguals	% of English Bilinguals	% of Hindi Bilinguals	% of Trilinguals	% of English Trilinguals	% of Hindi Trilinguals
<b>I</b>	Assamese	32.35	10.68	11.13	14.47	4.22	8.91
	Nepali	52.81	7.35	30.27	22.54	5.69	11.39
	Urdu	51.03	3.79	25.45	18.37	5.81	6.33

Second category is the one in which the languages have more bilinguals and trilinguals in English than in Hindi.

<b>II</b>	Kashimiri	39.21	3.86	3.23	15.55	11.02	1.19
	Tamil	21.51	14.88	1.14	3.19	1.10	0.92

Third category is the one where bilinguals are more in Hindi than in English.

<b>III</b>	Dogri	59.44	4.75	50.62	26.49	20.42	4.69
	Gujarati	36.25	2.22	32.40	14.25	10.68	2.22
	Maithili	33.03	0.70	31.92	9.25	8.24	0.56
	Punjabi	52.01	9.31	41.94	31.30	22.82	7.98
	Santali	51.43	0.60	16.64	7.35	2.91	1.97
	Sindhi	73.19	6.22	45.58	35.58	14.74	13.42
	Marathi	41.37	2.22	35.93	15.45	12.00	2.52

Fourth category is the one where bilinguals are more in English than Hindi.

<b>IV</b>	Bengali	20.40	11.09	6.04	6.52	1.92	4.02
	Bodo	57.38	3.54	3.15	18.64	3.87	9.37
	Kannada	28.44	9.82	5.81	12.15	3.22	6.77
	Konkani	74.38	19.86	8.75	47.18	11.81	20.80
	Malayalam	28.75	21.24	3.12	16.60	2.61	12.18
	Manipuri	41.67	27.67	7.81	20.81	4.78	14.55
	Oriya	25.63	15.32	8.05	12.88	3.54	8.74
	Telugu	25.02	10.48	5.37	10.69	3.65	5.84

### Intuitive Multilingualism

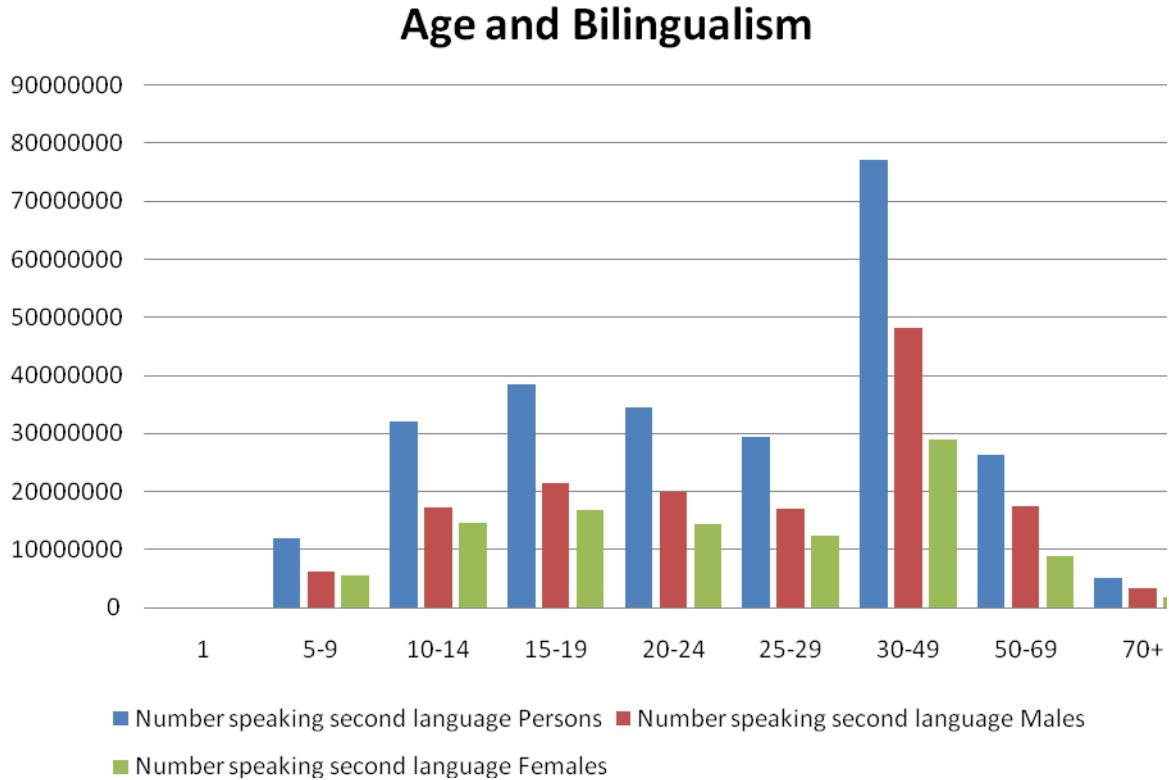
Apart from the need based, essential, compulsory multilingualism, it is very important to note that other than Hindi and English, it is the neighborhood languages that are learnt by different mother tongue speakers as their second and third languages. Languages in the neighborhood and the details of percentage of bilinguals and trilinguals are given below to illustrate this point.

SL.No.	Languages	Multi-Languages	% of Bilingualism	% of Trilingualism
1	Assamese	Bengali	9.54	0.99
		Nepali	0.19	0.10
2	Bengali	Assamese	2.49	0.21
3	Bodo	Assamese	46.44	2.41
		Bengali	3.92	2.33
		Nepali	0.21	0.42
4	Dogri	Urdu	3.33	0.68
5	Gujarati	Marathi	0.7	0.91
6	Hindi	Bengali	0.5	0.09
		Gujarati	0.24	0.03
		Marathi	0.93	0.09

		Urdu	0.9	0.11
7	Kannada	Konkani	0.15	0.04
		Tamil	2.4	0.57
		Telugu	6.66	0.69
		Malayalam	0.13	0.07
		Marathi	2.62	0.61
8	Kashmiri	Urdu	31.76	3.07
9	Konkani	Gujarati	3.89	0.14
		Kannada	20.78	3.29
		Malayalam	1.26	0.3
		Marathi	16.79	5.83
10	Maithili	Urdu	0.22	0.09
11	Malayalam	Kannada	1.45	0.29
		Tamil	1.59	0.56
12	Manipuri	Bengali	4.44	0.89
13	Marathi	Gujarati	0.36	0.28
		Kannada	1.67	0.27
		Telugu	0.56	0.14
14	Nepali	Assamese	11.35	2.07
		Bengali	2.01	1.98
15	Oriya	Bengali	0.53	0.26
		Telugu	0.85	0.07
16	Punjabi	Urdu	0.45	0.17
17	Santali	Assamese	1.22	0.09
		Bengali	26.92	1.86
18	Sindhi	Gujarati	19.1	3.28
		Marathi	1.6	3.43
19	Tamil	Kannada	2.11	0.39
		Malayalam	0.54	0.13
		Telugu	2.51	0.46
20	Telugu	Kannada	3.83	0.33
		Tamil	3.53	0.47
21	Urdu	Bengali	0.5	0.27
		Gujarati	0.47	0.31
		Kannada	5.52	0.73
		Marathi	1.94	1.78
		Tamil	1.24	0.22
		Telugu	5.64	0.85

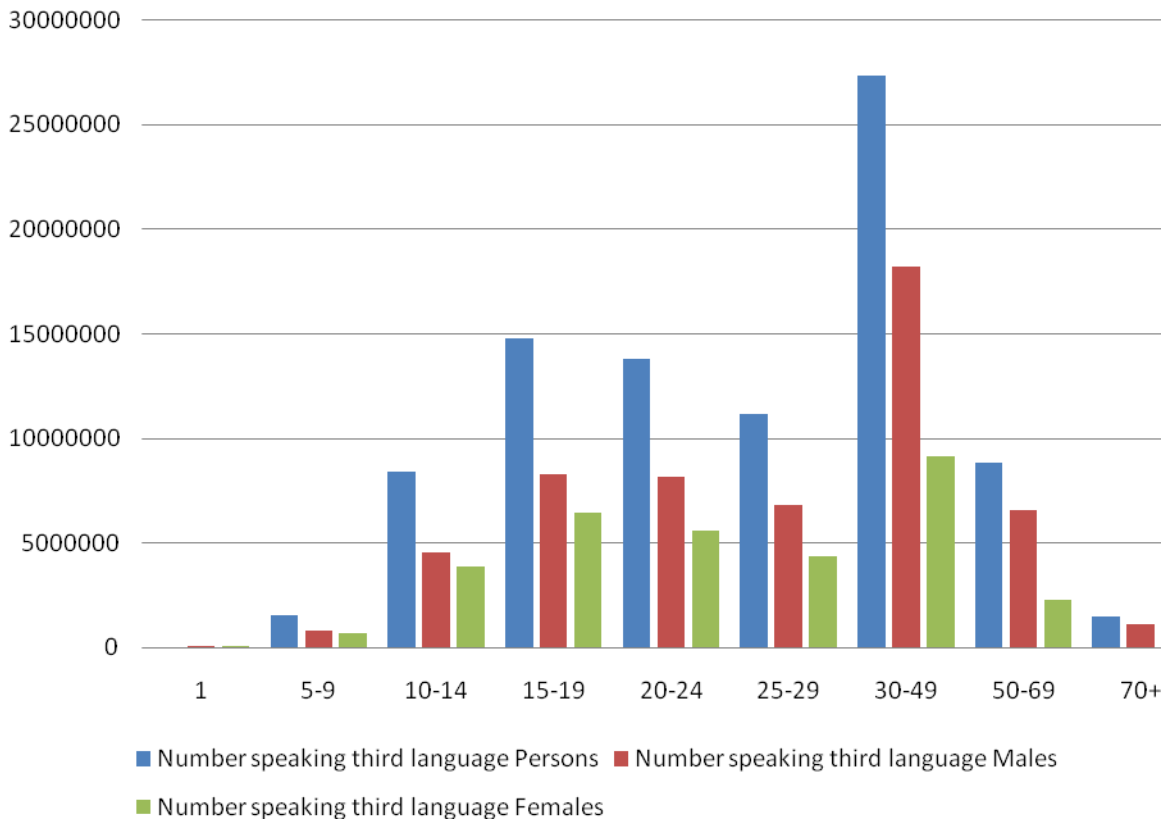
## Age and Multilingualism

Maximum number of multilingual persons in both the categories of bilinguals and trilinguals is found in the age group of 30-49 years. They are born in India after 1947, the year of her attaining independence. They are products of the new education system.



In case of bilinguals other age groups in the descending order are of 15-19, 20-24, 10-14, 25-29, 50-69, 5-9 and 70+.

## Age and Trilingualism



And in the case of trilinguals, other age groups are in the descending order of 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 50-69, 10-14, 5-9 and 70+.

### Multilingualism: Urban, Rural and Gender

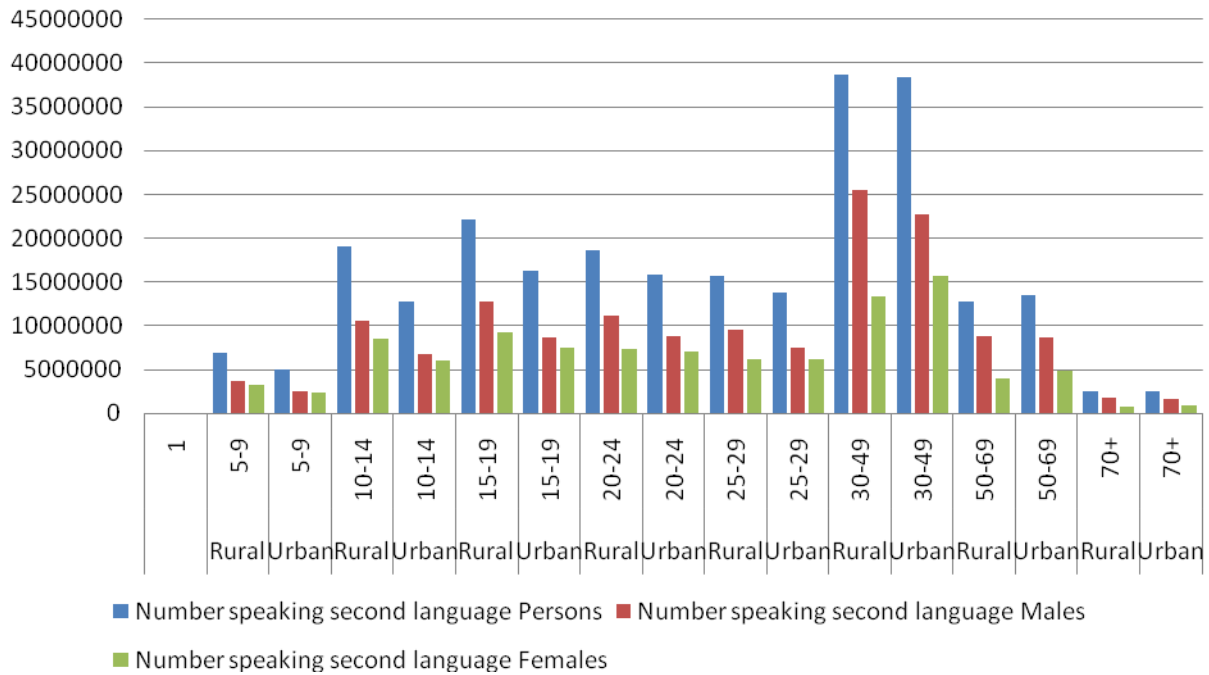
More bilinguals are in rural areas (53.59%) than in urban areas (46.40%). However, in the case of trilinguals, it is reverse. More trilinguals are in urban areas (53.79%) and less trilinguals are in rural areas (46.20%). The table given below clearly illustrates the same.

Gender	Total		Urban		Rural	
	Bilinguals	Trilinguals	Bilinguals	Trilinguals	Bilinguals	Trilinguals
Male	59.40	62.43	57.12	59.15	61.37	66.25
Female	40.60	37.56	42.87	40.84	38.62	33.74

When it comes to genderwise distribution of bilingual and trilingual speakers, it is found that, in general, men outnumber women in being multilingual. Among bilinguals, men amount to

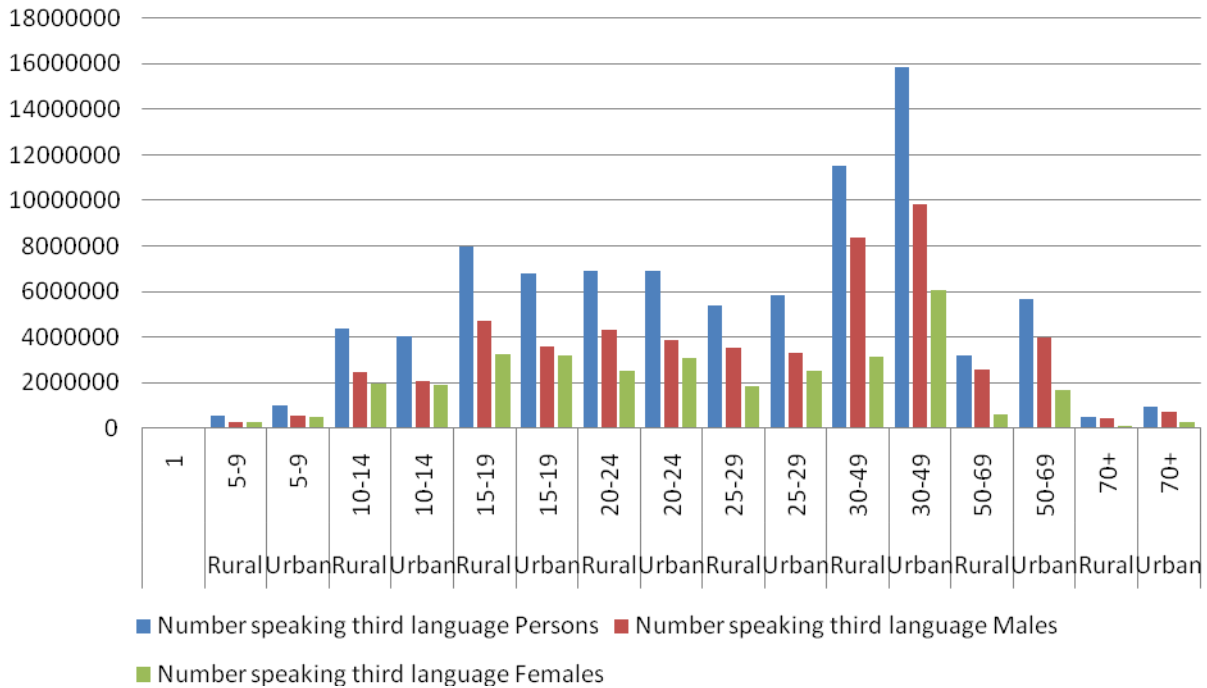
59.40% and women 40.60%. In trilingualism also, it is men (62.43%) who outnumber women (37.56%).

## Rural, Urban, Age and Bilingualism





## Rural, Urban, Age and Trilingualism



### To Conclude

Indian multilingualism demands redefining what bilingualism is. Actual use of two or more languages should come to guide us in defining such concepts. Mere knowledge or temporary and tentative seeking to learn and speak additional languages may not really reveal the underlying currents in a nation. As for India, one notices a continuing effort to cover more aspects of language identity for more than a century. There is some dynamism in this sense in understanding and appreciating the processes of bilingualism in the country. There is certainly some significant growth in multilingual patterns in India since independence in 1947. Formal education, media entertainment extension, and growing population dispersal across the states continue to make the multilingual patterns more dynamic than ever.

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B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.  
Central Institute of Indian Languages  
Manasagangothri  
Mysore 570 006  
Karnataka, India  
[mallikarjun56@gmail.com](mailto:mallikarjun56@gmail.com)