

‘One Language, Many Tongues’ An Exploration into the Mother Tongues of Hindi

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“... the old name Hindi, meaning nothing more than a bundle of related speeches, was applied with avidity and without questioning. And after that ‘Hindi’ gradually shed its dialectal implications... ‘Hindi’ became the name of a single Monolithic speech...North Indian people adopted this new, narrowed-down sense of an old name as applied loosely to a number of different speeches; and the rest of India followed them in this matter.”

- Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji

The Online Journal – *Language in India* published the paper *Metamorphosis of ‘Hindi’ in Modern India – A Study of Census of India* in August 2019 (Vol.19 Issue 8). ‘The Hindu’ newspaper on Sep 17, 2019 in its Data Point portrayed Hindi as ‘*One Language, many tongues*’. This paper explores the statistical realism of Hindi language and the mother tongues of it with the help of the Census data of post-independence India.

The makers of the Constitution of India were clearly aware of the difference between *mother tongue* and *language*. Hence the Constitution differentiates between these concepts. The Article 120 states that in the Parliament ‘... business shall be transacted in Hindi or in English but ... the Speaker of the House may ... permit any member who cannot adequately express himself in Hindi or in English to address the House in his *mother-tongue*.’ Similarly, in case of the Legislature the Article 210 states that ‘... business in the Legislature of a State shall be transacted in the official language or languages of the State or in Hindi or in English,’ but... ‘the Chairman of the Legislature ... may permit any member who cannot adequately express himself in any of the languages aforesaid to address the House in his *mother-tongue*.’

Not only in this domain of official transaction but also in the domain of education the Article 350A states that ‘It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority

within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the *mother-tongue* at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups;’ (italics mine). Hence in India, both ‘*mother tongue*’ and ‘*language*’ are not only linguistically but also educationally, socially, and politically relevant, important, and different concepts.

Now, Hindi language is an inimitable formation, unheard elsewhere, an abstract entity; mother tongue components of it are concrete entities. As Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji wrote, it was man-made by bringing together several inherently related and now functionally beneficial mother tongues also. The Census of India elicits information of mother tongues of citizens, not of languages and processes and collates them into languages. Thus, in India *language* is abstract and *mother tongue* is authentic.

In the 1961 Census, Hindi - a composite language - had 97 different mother tongues (including Hindi mother tongue) under its umbrella. Many of them were spoken by a small number of people. Not only numerical strength of each mother tongue but also number of mother tongues of Hindi language are undergoing changes in each Census count: 48⁺ in 1991, 49⁺ in 2001 and 56⁺ in 2011. Mother tongues are the building blocks of Hindi.

The Table-1 and the graph there on, provide the details of percentage of speakers of Hindi mother tongue and Hindi language from 1991 to 2011. During this period the percentage of Hindi language speakers in India has increased from 40.21% to 43.63%, an increase of 3.42%. Here, Hindi language is inclusive of Hindi mother tongue. During the same period the population of Hindi mother tongue speakers has gone down from 27.83% to 26.61%, a decrease of 1.22%. Even within Hindi language the percentage of Hindi mother tongue speakers is decreasing from decade to decade. It was 69.21% in 1991 and it is 60.98% in 2011. A drop of 8.23%. This could be due to the speakers of other mother tongues within Hindi language are returning to their original mother tongue identity. Thus, we can notice that the number of speakers of Hindi as mother tongue is plummeting from decade to decade and the number of speakers of Hindi language is swelling. The percentage of population of other mother tongues in the umbrella language Hindi is generally increasing.

Table-1
Composition of Hindi in India

| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Hindi Language | 40.21 | 41.03 | 43.63 |
| Hindi MT in India | 27.83 | 25.07 | 26.61 |
| Hindi MT in Hindi Language | 69.21 | 61.11 | 60.98 |

Percentage of the top 10+1 mother tongues of Hindi language are presented in the Table-2. This illustrates the numerical strength of 10+1 mother tongues within the Hindi language in the respective Census year. The eleventh mother tongue(s) *others* include all mother tongues other than 56 in 2011 census but could not come to the level of having 10,000 speakers. This group has 3.162% (1,67,11,170 speakers) of population which is fourth in terms of numerical strength among Hindi language speakers. Their numerical strength is enormously increasing from decade to decade. The percentage of speakers of Hindi and Chhattisgarhi mother tongues within Hindi language is decreasing. In case of other nine mother tongues the percentage is increasing.

Table-2
Top 10+1 Mother tongues in Hindi Language

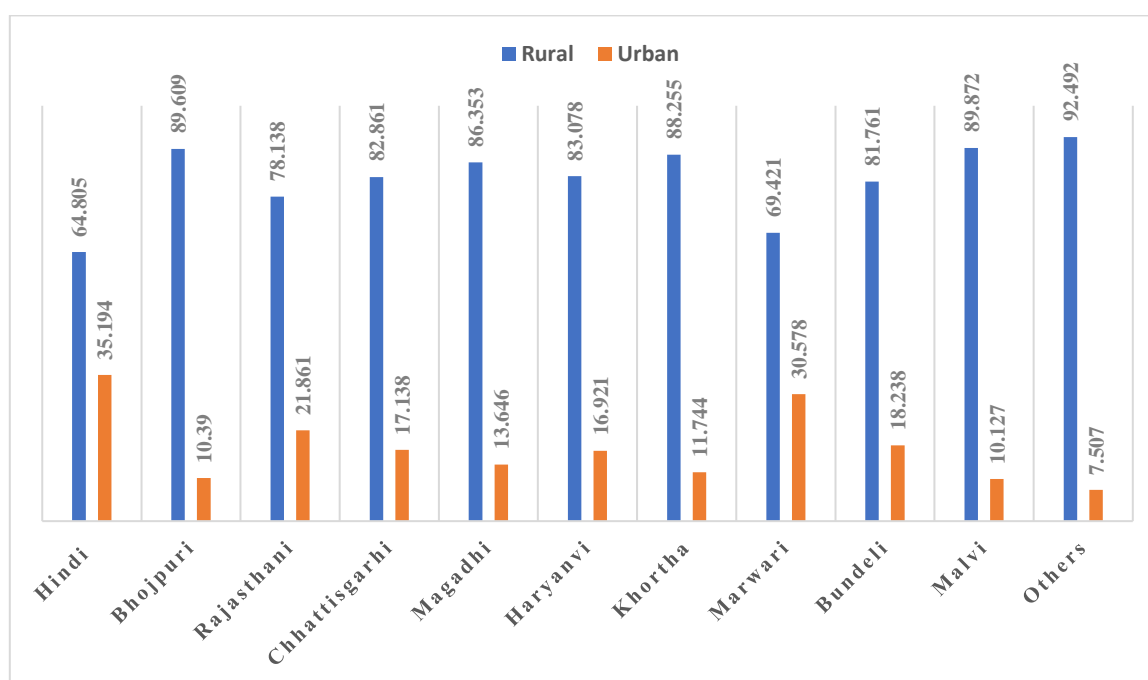
| | Mother tongue | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|----|----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | Hindi | 69.21 | 61.111 | 60.98 |
| 2 | Bhojpuri | 6.849 | 7.842 | 9.57 |
| 3 | Rajasthani | 3.951 | 4.349 | 4.884 |
| 4 | Chhattisgarhi | 3.141 | 3.141 | 3.074 |
| 5 | Magadhi/Magahi | 3.133 | 3.312 | 2.405 |
| 6 | Haryanvi | 0.107 | 1.894 | 1.856 |
| 7 | Khortha/Khotta | 0.311 | 1.119 | 1.521 |
| 8 | Marwari | 1.385 | 1.880 | 1.482 |
| 9 | Bundeli/Bundel khandi | 0.491 | 0.727 | 1.06 |
| 10 | Malvi | 0.880 | 1.318 | 0.986 |
| 11 | Others | 1.376 | 3.501 | 3.162 |

More speakers of Hindi language are in the rural areas -73.23% compared to the urban 26.77% areas. The Table-3 and the chart there on illustrate the rural and urban distribution of 10+1 mother tongues of Hindi speakers. It is interesting to note that apart from Hindi mother tongue speakers only Marwari mother tongue speakers are above the percentage of speakers of Hindi language in urban areas. The speakers of the mother tongue 'Others' are largely residents of the rural areas-92.492%. Here it could be hypothesised that the urban resident speakers of different smother tongues of Hindi (other than Hindi mother tongue) identify with Hindi mother tongue whereas the rural speakers remain loyal to their mother tongue identity.

Table-3
Hindi mother tongues-2011: Rural and Urban Distribution

| | Mother tongue | Rural | Urban |
|----------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1 | Hindi | 64.805 | 35.194 |
| 2 | Marwari | 69.421 | 30.578 |
| 3 | Rajasthani | 78.138 | 21.861 |

| | | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|--------|--------|
| 4 | Bundeli/Bundel khandi | 81.761 | 18.238 |
| 5 | Chhattisgarhi | 82.861 | 17.138 |
| 6 | Haryanvi | 83.078 | 16.921 |
| 7 | Magadhi/Magahi | 86.353 | 13.646 |
| 8 | Khortha/Khotta | 88.255 | 11.744 |
| 9 | Bhojpuri | 89.609 | 10.390 |
| 10 | Malvi | 89.872 | 10.127 |
| 11 | Others | 92.492 | 7.507 |



Due to the policy of the Census of India not to list the mother tongue with less than 10,000 speakers, many mother tongues went out of the Hindi language count as specified mother tongues due to their diminishing numerical strength. The Table-4 gives the details of two mother tongues who were part of 2001 count, but not in the 2011 count.

Table-4
Deletions of mother tongues

| | Deletions | 2001 |
|----------|-----------------|-------|
| 1 | Khairari | 11937 |
| 2 | Labani | 22162 |

The reverse process of accumulation due to the increased number of speakers of mother tongues is also evident. The Table-5 provides the details of such additions. In 2011 nine new mother tongues have surfaced due to the surge in the number of their speakers. All of them had less than 10,000 speakers in 2001 Census.

Table-5

Additions of mother tongues

| | MT Additions | 2011 | | MT Additions | 2011 |
|---|--|--------|---|-------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | Baghati/ Baghati Pahari | 15,835 | 6 | Padari | 17,279 |
| 2 | Bhagoria | 20,924 | 7 | Palmuha | 23,579 |
| 3 | Bishnoi | 12,079 | 8 | Pando/Pandw ani | 15,595 |
| 4 | Gawari | 19,062 | 9 | Puran/Puran Bhasha | 12,375 |
| 5 | Handuri | 47,803 | | | |

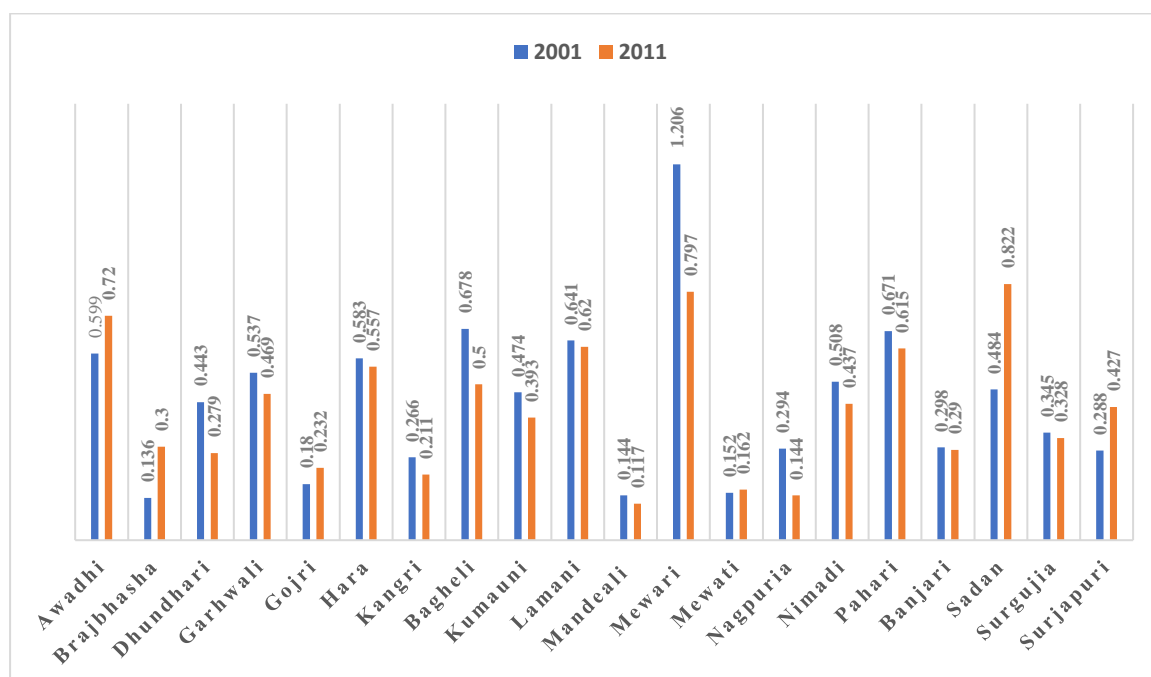
The numerical strength and the changes taking place in their position in Hindi of the remaining mother tongues is presented in Table-6 and Table-7 and the respective charts. The tables present the changes that have taken place during 1971-2011 and the charts present the changes during 2001-2011.

The Table-6 shows that during 2001-2011, percentage of speakers of Awadhi, Brajbhasha, Gojri/Gujjari, Sadan/Sadri, and Surjapuri has increased. At the same time the percentage of speakers of Dhundhari, Garhwali, Gujar, Hara/Harauti, Kangri, Bagheli/Baghel Khandi, Kumauni, Lamani/Lambadi / Labani, Mandeali, Mewari, Mewati, Nagpuria, Nimadi, Pahari, Banjari and Surgujia has decreased.

Table-6
Mother tongues and their percentage in Hindi from 1971-2011

| | Mother tongue | 1971 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|-----|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| 1. | Awadhi | 0.067 | 0.142 | 0.599 | 0.72 |
| 2. | Brajbhasha | 0.012 | 0.025 | 0.136 | 0.30 |
| 3. | Dhundhari | 0.076 | 0.286 | 0.443 | 0.279 |
| 4. | Garhwali | 0.629 | 0.555 | 0.537 | 0.469 |
| 5. | Gojri/Gujjari/ Gujar | 0.162 | No info | 0.180 | 0.232 |
| 6. | Hara/Harauti | No info | 0.366 | 0.583 | 0.557 |
| 7. | Kangri | 0.027 | 0.144 | 0.266 | 0.211 |
| 8. | Bagheli/Baghel Khandi | 0.11 | 0.411 | 0.678 | 0.50 |
| 9. | Kumauni | 0.609 | 0.509 | 0.474 | 0.393 |
| 10. | Lamani/Lambadi/ Labani | 0.593 | 0.609 | 0.641 | 0.620 |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 11. | Mandeali | 0.119 | 0.130 | 0.144 | 0.117 |
| 12. | Mewari | 0.403 | 0.626 | 1.206 | 0.797 |
| 13. | Mewati | 0.046 | 0.030 | 0.152 | 0.162 |
| 14. | Nagpuria | 0.165 | 0.230 | 0.294 | 0.144 |
| 15. | Nimadi | 0.391 | 0.421 | 0.508 | 0.437 |
| 16. | Pahari | 0.626 | 0.646 | 0.671 | 0.615 |
| 17. | Banjari | 0.23 | 0.263 | 0.298 | 0.29 |
| 18. | Sadan/Sadri | 0.398 | 0.465 | 0.484 | 0.822 |
| 19. | Surgujia | 0.264 | 0.309 | 0.345 | 0.328 |
| 20. | Surjapuri | 0.078 | 0.109 | 0.288 | 0.427 |

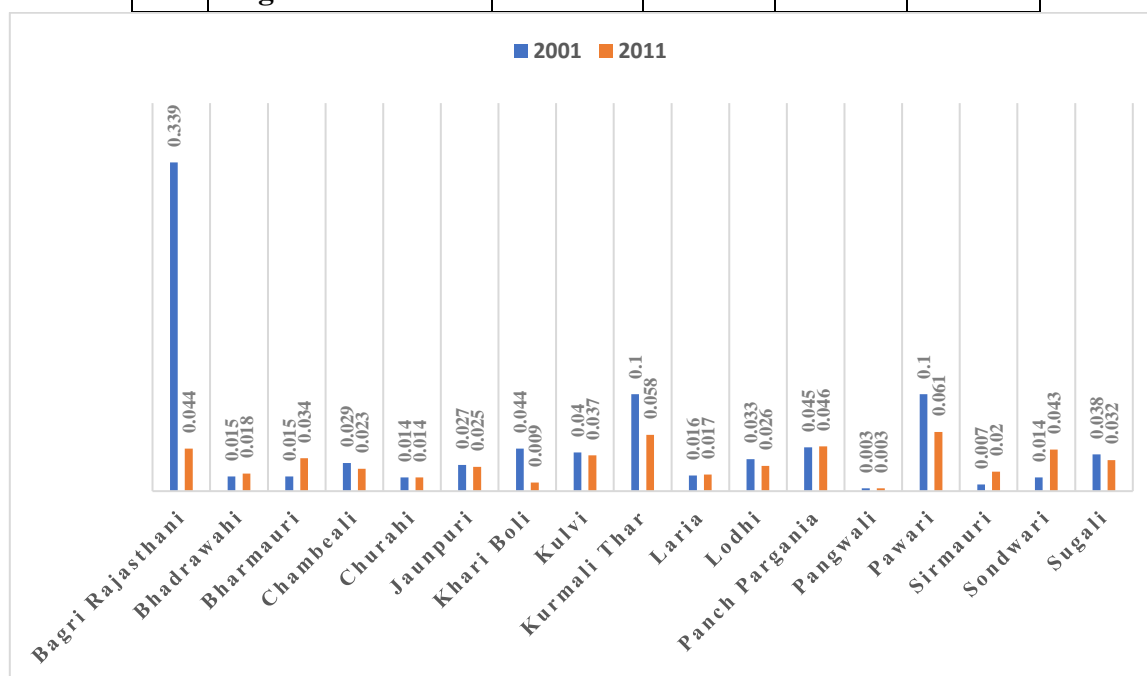


The Table-7 indicates that during 2001-2011, percentage of speakers of Bhadrawahi, Bharmauri / Gaddi, Laria, Panch Pargania, Sirmauri and Sondwari has increased. During the same period the percentage of speakers of Bagri Rajasthani, Chambeali/ Chamrali, Jaunpuri/Jaunsari, Khari Boli, Kulvi, Kurmal Thar, Lodhi, Pawari/Powari and Sugali has decreased.

The case of the mother tongue *Khari Boli* is mesmerizing. When mother tongue classification was done in 1961 Census, it had of 59,89,128 speakers- 0.0448%, it is reduced to – 47,730 speakers in 2001 Census, and in 2011 Census it has 0.009% - 50,193 speakers. Substantial drop in number of speakers of *Khari Boli*. This could be due to the speakers identifying with some other mother tongue or abandoning their mother tongue in favour of some other one. This needs detailed socio-linguistic study.

Table-7
Mother tongues and their percentage in Hindi from 1971-2011

| | Mother tongue | 1971 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|-----|----------------------------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| 1. | Bagri Rajasthani | 0.176 | 0.176 | 0.339 | 0.044 |
| 2. | Bhadrawahi | 0.019 | No info | 0.015 | 0.018 |
| 3. | Bharmauri/Gaddi | 0.03 | 0.005 | 0.015 | 0.034 |
| 4. | Chambeali/Cham rali | 0.026 | 0.018 | 0.029 | 0.023 |
| 5. | Churahi | 0.017 | 0.0133 | 0.014 | 0.014 |
| 6. | Jaunpuri/Jaunsari | 0.027 | 0.028 | 0.027 | 0.025 |
| 7. | Khari Boli | No info | No info | 0.044 | 0.009 |
| 8. | Kulvi | 0.031 | 0.045 | 0.040 | 0.037 |
| 9. | Kurmali Thar | No info | 0.070 | 0.100 | 0.058 |
| 10. | Laria | 0.022 | 0.019 | 0.016 | 0.017 |
| 11. | Lodhi | No info | 0.020 | 0.033 | 0.026 |
| 12. | Panch Pargania | 0.078 | 0.044 | 0.045 | 0.046 |
| 13. | Pangwali | 0.086 | 0.004 | 0.003 | 0.003 |
| 14. | Pawari/Powari | 0.086 | 0.063 | 0.100 | 0.061 |
| 15. | Sirmauri | No info | 0.005 | 0.007 | 0.020 |
| 16. | Sondwari | 0.043 | 0.011 | 0.014 | 0.043 |
| 17. | Sugali | No info | 0.033 | 0.038 | 0.032 |



Some of the mother tongues of Hindi have other status too. (a) Maithili once considered as a mother tongue of Hindi was recognized ‘as a major modern literary language’ by the Central Sahitya Akademi in 1965 and it became a Scheduled language due to its inclusion in

the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution in 2003. Among other mother tongues: (b) Rajasthani was recognised as a language of literary importance in 1971 by the Central Sahitya Akademi. Also, it has identified, Magahi, Bhojpuri, Pahari (HP), Bundeli for encouraging literary activities; (c) Chhattisgarhi in Devanagari Script is recognised as the Official Language of the Chhattisgarh State by the Chhattisgarh Official Language (Amendment) Act, 2007, Act 14 of 2008. In this way some mother tongues of Hindi are also languages in different domains of their use. The *Position of Languages in School Curriculum in India* by the NCERT (1976) reports that Ardha Magadhi was taught as a subject language in schools in two states. The Registrar of Newspapers for India in the report *The Press in India 2016-17* informs that – Awadhi, Banjari, Bhojpuri, Haryanvi, Khorta, Magahi, Marwari, Nagpuri, Pahari and Rajasthani have registered newspapers and magazines.

The mother tongues group ‘Others’ which has 1,67,11,170 (3.162%) speakers and fourth in terms of numerical strength among Hindi language speakers is linguistically very important cluster. Needless to say, that 92.492% of them are in the rural areas and only 7.507% of their speakers are in the urban areas and may be retaining their identity with their mother tongue. If a mother tongue has less than 10,000 speakers, it will not be identified in the list of mother tongues, so one can imagine how many mother tongues that 1,67,11,170 ‘Others’ may be embedding. Now is the time for the Census to release the names of these mother tongues, their number of speakers including the places where they are in actual use. Unlike most of the other Indian languages, the composition of Hindi language is changing from decade to decade through addition, deletion, and attainment of different roles by some of its mother tongues.

The *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger* by the UNESCO does not speak about mother tongues - their rejuvenation or survival or extinction. In India, all mother tongues are not languages and all languages are mother tongues. Languages exist because of mother tongues. Mother tongues too need attention for their development. When languages like Hindi become power centres, their mother tongues lose their individuality and identity.

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