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# Language Policy and Federalism in Independent India

Asha Sarangi  
Abhimanyu Sharma

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# LANGUAGE POLICY IN FEDERAL AND DEVOLVED COUNTRIES

## Project Overview

Language is a highly significant marker of individual and collective identities. It often provides an impulse for national or community affirmation and claims to self-government. Provisions to recognize and accommodate linguistic differences can be particularly salient in federations, many of which have highly diverse populations. Indeed, in quite a few cases linguistic diversity was one of the key reasons why federalism was central to a country's founding framework or the result of its constitutional evolution.

Several federal countries have designated more than one language as official (or national) languages in the federal constitution and/or legislation. In turn, the constituent units (states, provinces, etc.) may accord a similar status to one or more languages. The different designations are not merely symbolic: they usually require or lead to policies, programs and other measures to govern language use. In some nonfederal states where more than one language is spoken, a measure of authority over language policy has sometimes been devolved to regional governments (or the equivalent).

Language rules, including for service provision, are frequently an important dimension of policy sectors that are exclusively or largely the responsibility of constituent unit governments. One such sector is education. In various countries, there are calls for teaching to be given not only in officially recognized languages but also in others that are spoken by minorities that are fearful about the future of their language. Indigenous peoples in particular have concerns about the viability of their languages, many of which have a long history of suppression.

In some countries, language policies are well established and are largely uncontested. In others, the policies and/or their application are controversial – even divisive. This may be true not only in newer federations and devolved systems but also in those with a longer history. Because of their links to identity and culture (among other factors), languages can be – indeed, quite often are – a potent basis for political mobilization.

Even when political dynamics are not highly charged, pressures to change or reform language policies and programs are not uncommon. Some demands are fundamental (e.g. additional or stronger constitutional protection), while others are more administrative or technical. In light of their salience to citizens and their relevance in a range of sectors, it is not surprising that language policies are debated, reviewed and (at least in certain cases) modified.

Although there are a number of individual case studies, particularly covering countries where language has been a flash point for political division, there is a lack of comparative research. Moreover, existing comparative studies often focus on western Europe and North America. As more countries have adopted federal or devolved structures in recent decades, there is a need to expand the scope of research on language policies in plurilingual contexts.

The focus of this project is on language policy (broadly interpreted) in a range of countries that are federations or have a significantly devolved structure of government. It aims to take a holistic perspective on language policy and its place within governance arrangements. In addition to providing an overview of the country's demography, constitutional recognitions and protections, and language laws and policies, in order to encourage comparison authors were asked to address a common set of questions:

- A. What potential changes to the regulation of language – constitutional, legislative, administrative – have been proposed or are currently being debated?
- B. What are the pressures and who are the main actors behind the proposed changes?
- C. Which have received the most attention and/or seem the most feasible?

We hope that the authors' responses to these questions will inform public discussion and understanding in their own countries as well as in others where similar issues are on the agenda.

This project was developed following an initial discussion with Felix Knüpling, Vice-President (Programs) of the Forum of Federations. To provide expert advice, we created an editorial team comprised of the following: Elisabeth Alber (Institute for Comparative Federalism, Eurac Research), Linda Cardinal (Université de l'Ontario français) and Asha Sarangi (Jawaharlal Nehru University). The editorial team commented on the initial outline of the program and provided suggestions for potential authors. We were fortunate to attract leading scholars from a range of disciplines. At least one member of the editorial team reviewed and provided comments on the initial version of each paper.

Felix and I are indebted to Elisabeth, Linda and Asha for their excellent cooperation throughout the process. I would also like to express my appreciation to the authors of the country papers for agreeing to join the project and for their responsiveness to comments on their draft papers. We are grateful to Carl Stieren and Francesca Worrall for copy editing this paper. Finally, a big "thank you" to the Forum of Federations staff who administered the project and prepared the papers for publication: Olakunle Adeniran, John Light, Deanna Senko, George Stairs and Asma Zribi.

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# Language Policy and Federalism in Independent India

Asha Sarangi

Abhimanyu Sharma

## Introduction

The federal structure of independent India rests on division of powers and resources between the union (central) and state governments as well as numerous institutional and procedural norms, policies, and programs. In this paper, we explore language policy in India from the viewpoint of federalism.

According to Sonntag (2019: 70), linguistic federalism has been “a significant component of India’s postcolonial language regime.” Two factors can explain this: the country’s considerable linguistic diversity and an important constitutional provision (art. 345) that allows India’s 28 states and eight union territories to adopt their own official language(s). Hindi and English serve as cross-regional official languages (art. 343). The boundaries of the states were redrawn by the *States Reorganisation Act, 1956*. The new state boundaries were based primarily on linguistic-geographical contiguity. This approach underlined the primacy of language as a significant part of political and cultural identity, which seriously affects the critical domains of education, occupation, administration, economy, politics, art and culture of the states and the country as a whole.

Despite this relatively flexible model that allows states to adopt their own official languages, language policy in India has not been devoid of contestations. These occur in policy areas in which both the central and state governments can devise policies and chart out programs for the promotion of different languages. They also occur because states demand greater representation and recognition in national-level policies for languages spoken by a large number of their people. We explore these contestations to assess how central- and state-level policies interact and shape each other.

We begin with an overview of India’s linguistic demography and language classifications. We then examine the broad policy framework and propose a roadmap for a strong and stable linguistic federalism in independent India. Dominant regional languages are still seeking their due recognition and representation in both the political and policy spheres. For instance, the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India has led to a rivalry among languages for constitutional recognition, while several minority languages are not even mentioned in the census records. India’s three-language formula for educational instruction has not been adequately and uniformly implemented throughout the country. To address these issues, we propose that the central and state governments should offer greater support to minority languages and strengthen the three-language formula. Finally, a policy on sign languages should be further promoted to ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups and disadvantaged sections of society.

## Language Differentiation and Classification

According to the 2011 census, 121 languages are spoken across India. The states and union territories have the authority to adopt their own official language(s); these are listed in Annex I. Twenty-two official languages are recognized as ‘scheduled languages’ (explained below) under the constitution. India’s language policies are not merely about determining language use in certain policy domains. Rather, they are inherently intertwined with socio-political, cultural, and economic concerns. A useful approach is to look at the officially recognized language categories to explain the role of different stakeholders in influencing and determining language policies. The central government uses three broad categories for languages in India: official, scheduled and classical.

*Official languages*

When the Indian constitution came into effect in 1950, Hindi in the Devanagari script was declared as the official language of the Indian Union (art. 343.1). Furthermore, the constitution provided that “for a period of fifteen years from the commencement of this Constitution, the English language shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union for which it was being used immediately before such commencement” (art. 343.2). Language riots in different parts of southern, western, and north-eastern India in the early 1960s led to the amendment of the original plan, which would have established a Hindi-only policy. Instead, English was allowed to continue as the medium of communication between the central government and the states in which Hindi was not spoken (cf. Brady 1965; Sharma 2019: 136). Thus, since India’s independence, both Hindi and English have played the role of official languages in the legislative, administrative, economic, occupational, cultural, educational, and judicial spheres. Furthermore, the administrative domains at the central and state levels use Hindi and/or English along with any other dominant regional languages of the state as the official languages to issue orders, decrees, and communications of various kinds between states and between the states and the central government (art. 345–347).

*Scheduled languages*

The term ‘schedule’ in ‘scheduled languages’ refers to the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Indian Constitution contains various schedules that offer, for example, a list of states and union territories (Schedule 1), provisions about the president or governors of states (Schedule 2) and the powers of the union and state governments (Schedule 7). The Eighth Schedule offers a list of languages that widely perceived as official languages of India. At present, the Eighth Schedule lists 22 languages (see table 1). As noted above, although these languages are widely perceived as official languages of India, the constitution does not describe them as such. Only Hindi is referred to as the official language of the Union (art. 343.1). The scheduled languages could be viewed as associate or additional official languages. As Sarangi (2009, 27) points out, the category of scheduled languages is “a powerful source to provide formal and constitutional recognition to various languages and their communities in the spheres of administration, education, economy, and social status.”

**Table 1. Languages Listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution**

Language	Number of speakers (2011 Census)	Number of speakers (2001 Census)	Rank (2011)
Hindi	528,347,193	422,048,642	1
Bengali	97,237,669	83,369,769	2
Marathi	83,026,680	71,936,894	3
Telugu	81,127,740	74,002,856	4
Tamil	69,026,881	60,793,814	5
Gujarati	55,492,554	46,091,617	6
Urdu	50,772,631	51,536,111	7
Kannada	43,706,512	37,924,011	8
Oriya	37,521,324	33,017,446	9
Malayalam	34,838,819	33,066,392	10



Panjabi	33,124,726	29,102,477	11
Assamese	15,311,351	13,168,484	12
Maithili	13,583,464	12,179,122	13
Santali	7,368,192	6,469,600	14
Kashmiri	6,797,587	5,527,698	15
Nepali	2,926,168	2,871,749	16
Sindhi	2,772,264	2,535,485	17
Dogri	2,596,767	2,282,589	18
Konkani	2,256,502	2,489,015	19
Meitei	1,761,079	1,466,705	20
Bodo	1,482,929	1,350,478	21
Sanskrit	24,821	14,135	22

Source: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India (2001, 2011).

One might question the purpose of the Eighth Schedule when it was not intended to provide a list of the official languages of India. After the end of British colonial rule in India, policymakers wanted to replace English as the language of administration with Indian language(s). The reorganization of the states primarily on the linguistic basis soon after independence underlined the significance of dominant regional languages for political and administrative communication between and among states and the central government.

Official policy states that the purpose of the Eighth Schedule is to list languages from which forms, style, expressions, and vocabulary could be assimilated into Hindi to enrich the Hindi language (art. 351). However, as Austin (2009, 81) argues, the real purpose was to give status to regional languages and to protect them from being ‘wiped out’ by Hindi. In 1950, the list consisted of 14 languages, namely Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Assamese, and Sanskrit. Since 1950, there have been three amendments that added languages to the Schedule: Sindhi was included in 1967; Konkani, Manipuri, and Nepali in 1992; and Maithili, Santali, Bodo and Dogri in 2003 (Singh 2006, 40). As a result, India currently has what are in many respects 22 official languages—not counting English, which has become one of the most important languages at the official level but is not listed in the Eighth Schedule. The Eighth Schedule indicates how policies evolve through negotiation between stakeholders at the central and the state levels. At the same time, the Eighth Schedule serves as an example of an attempt to strike a balance between “state traditions based on plural, democratic, federal, and liberal principles and a language regime based on notions of collective rights of language users and language communities” (Sarangi 2015).

The prestigious nature of the Eighth Schedule has led to rivalry among speakers of various languages to be added to the list (Sarangi 2009, 27f.). In 2020, Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State for Culture, stated that as many as 38 languages had demanded inclusion in the Eighth Schedule (Rajya Sabha

Debates 2020a).<sup>1</sup> This rivalry is complicated by the ambiguous nature of the criteria for including a language in the Eighth Schedule. According to Krishnamurti (1995, 10), “the major languages with literary traditions, having scripts of their own, and already in use in newspapers and the radio became the natural and undisputed candidates for inclusion in the Eighth Schedule.” However, Saxena (1997, 272) argues that “there are no demographic, cultural, or linguistic criteria for inclusion or non-inclusion” in the Eighth Schedule, and that “it has evidently depended largely on the ability of a language group to influence the political process.” The demand for the inclusion of a particular language in the Eighth Schedule can be raised by a member of the Parliament in either upper or lower house when in session. Both the BJP and Congress Party along with regional political parties have continued to raise language-based issues of identity and their political representation.

### *Classical languages*

As newer languages are demanding inclusion in the Eighth Schedule, the older scheduled languages are gradually demanding distinctive recognition as classical languages.

To qualify as a classical language, a language needs to have:

- a recorded history over a period of 1500 to 2000 years;
- a body of ancient literature, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers; and
- an original literary tradition not borrowed from another speech community, where the classical language and literature are distinct from the modern form of the language (Rajya Sabha Debates 2014)

The first language to be given this status was Tamil (2004).<sup>2</sup> In 2005, Sanskrit was given this status, followed by Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).

The “classical language” status enables a particular language to acquire significant historical, cultural, and social recognition with possible state protection and support. As a result of the financial incentives and prestige associated with this category, more languages have been demanding ‘classical’ status.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> These languages are Angika, Banjara, Bazika, Bhojpuri, Bhoti, Bhotia, Bundelkhandi, Chhattisgarhi, Dhatki, English, Garhwali (Pahari), Gondi, Gujjar (Gujjari), Ho, Kachachhi, Kamtapuri, Karbi, Khasi, Kodava (Coorg), Kok Barak, Kumaoni (Pahari), Kurukh, Kurmali, Lepcha, Limbu, Mizo (Lushai), Magahi, Mundari, Nagpuri, Nicobarese, Pahari (Himachali), Pali, Rajasthani, Sambalpur/Kosali, Shaurseni (Prakrit), Siraiki, Tenyidi and Tulu.

<sup>2</sup> Declaring Tamil as a “classical language” was part of the Common Minimum Programme, the document outlining key policy priorities of the first United Progressive Alliance government (2004–09). Tamil was recognized as a “classical language” via the Ministry of Home Affairs’ notifications No. IV–14014/7/2004–NI–II dated 12.10.2004 and 29.10.2004 (Rajya Sabha Debates 2004).

<sup>3</sup> By “financial incentives,” we refer to the funding allocated by the central government for “classical languages.” For example, in the financial year 2018–19, the funding allocated to Kannada, Sanskrit, Telugu, and Tamil respectively were as follows: INR 9.9 million (USD 0.15 million), INR 3167.64 million (USD 48.64 million), INR 46.5 million (USD 0.71 million) and INR 9.9 million (USD 0.15 million). See Lok Sabha Debates (2020; 2021).

2014, India's Human Resources Development Ministry (currently known as the Ministry of Education) announced that it would institute two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages, establish a Centre of Excellence for studies in classical languages, and set up new chairs in the universities funded by the central government (*Indian Express* 2014). During parliamentary debates in 2020-21, the Ministry of Education reported that seven institutions had been established so far for the promotion of classical languages (Lok Sabha Debates 2020; 2021).<sup>4</sup>

In 2020, the demand to give Manipuri classical status was raised in the Rajya Sabha by MP Leishemba Sanajaoba (Rajya Sabha Debates 2020b). He argued that Manipuri fulfilled the criteria to be designated as a classical language and emphasized the need to recognize Manipuri as a classical language because no language from the Tibeto-Burman language family had been considered for this status. Another language demanding this recognition is Marathi. In August 2021, Arjun Ram Meghwal, the Minister of State for Culture, stated that the proposal for granting classical language status to Marathi was under active consideration (*Hindu* 2021). These competing demands and language categories show how policies in India are not just about determining language use but are used to gain cultural capital that is intertwined with their political and social significance and financial resources.

### **Federal Framework for Language Recognition, Protection and Promotion**

In the previous section, we outlined the various categories and hierarchies engendered through central government policies and interactions between the Centre (Union) and the States. In addition, the central government employs several policy mechanisms, most of which are mentioned in Part XVII of the Indian Constitution (Articles 343–351). Articles 29–30 and 129 outline the framing of language policy after independence. In addition to these, President's Order 1960, the Official Language Act 1963 (amended in 1967), and the Official Languages Rules 1976 (amended in 1987, 2007, 2011) focus on language uses. Since covering policies in all domains is beyond the scope of this paper, in this section we discuss three key policy domains: administration, provisions for linguistic minorities, and education.

#### *Administration*

The central level policies in administration generally take a Hindi/English bilingual approach. However, they make room for other languages wherever required. The Official Languages Rules 1976 decree that “all manuals, codes and other procedural literature relating to Central Government offices shall be printed or cyclostyled, as the case may be, and published both in Hindi and English in diglot [bilingual] form” (art. 11.1). The forms and headings of registers used in any central government office must be in Hindi and in English (art. 11.2). In addition, all nameplates, signboards, letterheads and inscriptions on envelopes and other items of stationery written, printed, or inscribed for use in any central government office must be in Hindi and in English (art. 11.3).

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<sup>4</sup> These are for Sanskrit: Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi; Maharishi Sandipani Rashtriya Ved Vidya Pratishthan, Ujjain; Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha, Tirupati; and Sri Lal Bahadur Shastri Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi. For Telugu and Kannada: Centres of Excellence for Studies in the respective languages at the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) established by the Human Resource Development Ministry in 2011 and for Tamil: Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT), Chennai.

The policy of institutional bilingualism also applies to parliamentary affairs. Article 120 stipulates that business in Parliament shall be transacted in Hindi and/or English. However, Members of Parliament who cannot adequately express themselves in either language, are allowed to use their mother tongue. The languages to be used in the state legislatures include Hindi, English or the official language(s) of the given state (art. 210). State legislatures—as well as Parliament—can allow the use of a mother tongue other than one of the three mentioned in the constitution. The multilingual policy is different when it comes to communication between the central government and certain states and union territories as stated in art. 3, Official Languages (Use for Official Purposes of the Union) Rules 1976. While the central government communicates with non-central government offices located in certain states only in Hindi (Category A) or requires a translation in Hindi if English is used (Category B), communications with some states are only in English (Category C) (see table 2). However, for communications received in Hindi, central government offices must reply in Hindi (art. 5).

**Table 2. Communications between the Indian Government and State Governments**

Category	States	Union territories	Language of communication
Category A	Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh	Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Mandatory use of Hindi
Category B	Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab	Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	Mandatory use of Hindi or translation into Hindi required for communications in English
Category C	Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, West Bengal	Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Puducherry	English

Source: Official Languages (Use for Official Purposes of the Union) Rules 1976

### *Provisions for linguistic minorities*

Article 350a of the constitution decrees 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 and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.” Article 350b states that “there shall be a Special Officer for linguistic minorities to be appointed by the President.” The duty of the Special Officer is to investigate all matters relating to the safeguards provided for linguistic minorities under the constitution and report to the President, who will have all such reports tabled in each House of Parliament and sent to the government of the states concerned. Until recently, minority languages — especially those spoken by fewer than 10,000 speakers — were largely ignored in central government policies. However, in the past few years the Indian government has launched initiatives such as the 2013 *Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages* as well as *Bharatvani* (established in 2015) to protect these languages (SPPEL 2016;

Bharatavani s.a.). While the first project focuses only on endangered languages, the second is dedicated to creating a knowledge repository in and about all Indian languages (Sharma 2019, 144).

Despite such measures, there are certain issues that the central and the state governments need to address. The central government could revise a policy called “rationalization,” the approach used by census enumerators to measure the number of languages in India. According to the 2011 census, the number of languages spoken in India is 121. However, whether this is a realistic figure is open to debate because under the “rationalization” approach, census enumerators categorize what respondents describe as their “mother tongue” as varieties of numerically and/or politically stronger languages (Census of India 2011, 3f.). The census defines “mother tongue” as “the language spoken in childhood by the person’s mother to the person” (ibid.).<sup>5</sup> The 2011 Census mentions that “the respondent was made to feel free to return the name of his mother tongue and the same was recorded faithfully by the enumerator” (Census of India 2011, 4). This led to a very large number of “mother tongues.” The 2011 Census recorded 19,569 “raw returns of mother tongues” which were first “rationalized” into 1369 mother tongues then further “rationalized” into 121 languages (ibid.).

Three observations can be made about ‘rationalization.’ First, this approach can be viewed as a linguistic standardization policy that leads to the lack of recognition for various smaller languages. Second, the category of “language” used by census officials subsumes dialects that are already seeking official language status. For example, Bhojpuri, which has more than 50 million speakers and is demanding official status, is considered a dialect of Hindi (Census of India 2011; Sharma 2015). Moreover, languages with fewer than 10,000 speakers are not even recognized as “languages,” as they are put under the category “others” in the census. Currently, there are 64 such languages (Annex II). The rationalization principle shows that, at least in terms of census records, official policy needs to take a more careful approach to protect India’s linguistic diversity.

As reported in Annex II, endangered languages are mainly located in 10 states and two union territories. Out of these, the greatest proportions of endangered languages are in Arunachal Pradesh (21 languages) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (10 languages). However, according to the latest report of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, these states have not taken any substantial measures to stem language endangerment (Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities 2016). The Arunachal Pradesh government has not offered any grants-in-aid to minority language institutions because it did not “identify or notify any language as minority language so far” (Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities 2016, 55). Except for Manipur, there are no data available for funding or promotional schemes for minority languages in any of the states or union territories mentioned in Annex II (Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities 2016).<sup>6</sup> Of all the states and union territories, only five states and two union territories have established academies for minority languages, listed in Annex III (Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities 2016). The preceding examples show that there is a need for state governments to invest more resources in protecting minority languages.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Census report, if the mother died while her child was an infant, the language mainly spoken in the person’s home in childhood will be the mother tongue (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> The aforementioned report does not mention the union territory of Ladakh because it was not created at the time of the report (CLM 2016).

### *Education*

A key component of the government of India's language policy is the three-language formula (TLF), which was introduced in the National Policy on Education in 1968. That policy stated that "at the secondary stage, the state governments should adopt, and vigorously implement, the three-languages which include the study of a modern Indian language, preferably one of the Southern languages, apart from Hindi and English in the Hindi-speaking States, and of Hindi along with the regional language and English in the Non-Hindi-speaking States." This policy was carried forward in the 1986 Policy as well as in the 2020 National Education Policy (NEP). However, the mandatory teaching of Hindi to every student in India was dropped in August 2020 (Chakrabarty 2020). As far as the media of instruction are concerned, the NEP proposes that "wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother-tongue/local language/regional language" (National Education Policy 2020, 13). This approach is known as mother-tongue based multilingual education. It is to be noted that NEP aims to encourage teachers "to use a bilingual approach, including bilingual teaching-learning materials, with those students whose home language may be different from the medium of instruction" (National Education Policy 2020, *ibid.*).

The NEP also aims at the development of bilingual manuals, print materials and translations of important texts in world languages. Originally, education was on the list of state responsibilities under the Indian Constitution. However, this changed in 1976 when, as a result of the 42<sup>nd</sup> amendment, education was moved to the list of concurrent (union and states) powers. As a result, both central- and state-level policies in this domain apply to states and union territories. The recommendations of the NEP can thus be mandatory for the states, including the provision of mother-tongue based education as a medium of instruction till Grade 8 (age 13–14) in both private and government schools. In addition, it also aims to provide resources for official, scheduled, dominant regional, and minority languages, including:

- digital translation
- writing and publication of textbooks
- recruiting teachers for mother tongues and classical languages<sup>7</sup>

The Indian Constitution requires states to ensure that linguistic minorities can pursue schooling in their mother tongue (art. 350a). However, there are three main issues with this. First, ensuring mother tongue instruction to linguistic minorities can be challenging in view of the three-language formula because state-level policies are aimed at promoting local dominant languages in schools instead of considering minorities' own languages. Such dominant languages are the official languages of different states and/or constitutionally recognized languages under the Eighth Schedule. Except for Manipur and Puducherry, no other state or union territory offers instruction in languages that are not recognized either at the state- or central-level. This policy is not favourable for minority languages (Annex IV).

The second issue with providing linguistic minorities with mother-tongue schooling concerns the proper implementation of the three-language formula (TLF) by the states. As Annex V shows, almost

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<sup>7</sup> For all references to NEP 2020, see the Ministry of Education, Government of India on <https://www.education.gov.in/en> See also [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mbrd/files/NEP\\_Final\\_English\\_0.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mbrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf)

all the states have adopted the TLF. However, Vishwanatham (2001, 318) argues that certain (mainly Hindi-speaking) states do not follow the formula “in its true spirit” because they offer Sanskrit as the third option in the three-language formula. The ideal choice would be another dominant (regional) Indian language in view of the fact that the motto of the three-language formula is to promote national integration.<sup>8</sup> The third issue for linguistic minority languages concerns the position of English. Meganathan (2011, 28) notes that “English today is almost a compulsory second language,” and is the only language apart from Hindi that is offered as a subject in all the states and union territories. Moreover, a growing number of schools have started offering English as the medium of instruction (EMI) for all subjects, which reflects the dominance of English in the educational domain (Sharma 2019, 149). As Table 3 shows, the number of schools offering EMI at all levels has increased over time.

**Table 3. English as a Medium of Instruction in the Indian Educational System**

	1993	2002	2009
Primary	4.99%	12.98%	15.49%
Upper Primary	15.91%	18.25%	21.08%
Secondary	18.37%	25.84%	28.73%
Higher Secondary	28.09%	33.59%	33.06%

Source: Meganathan 2011; 2006; NCERT 2016

In the field of language policy and planning, the dominance of English has been viewed from two different perspectives. While in earlier policy research English was associated with linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992), recent research has described it as a tool of decolonization, especially because English has been viewed as a facilitator of social mobility (Vaish 2005). These seemingly intransigent positions are reflected in the current scholarly discourse in India. This discourse is split into two schools of thought. The first argues that English should be the medium of instruction for Dalits so that they could free themselves from caste-based discrimination (Prasad 2015). The second school of thought is the contrary position, advanced by scholars such as Meena (2016), which emphasizes the need to promote the teaching of minority languages and in minority languages to hold back the loss of identity.

## Remapping Linguistic Federalism: The Road Ahead

### *Inclusion of sign languages*

So far in this paper, we have discussed policies at various government levels and their impact on dominant and non-dominant languages. A key policy area that has largely been ignored by both central- and state-level policies is that of sign languages. According to the 2011 census, there are 5,071,007 persons with hearing disabilities and 1,998,535 persons with speech disabilities in India. However, until recently, policies did not consider the needs of sign language users. For example, both the National Policy on Education 1968 and 1986 do not address the issue of sign languages in India. The central government policies are slowly becoming more inclusive in this area. In 2015, the central government

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<sup>8</sup> The National Policy on Education (1968: 38) states that “a radical reconstruction of education ... is essential for economic and cultural development of the country and national integration.”

established the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre (ISLRTC 2019). In 2018, the ISLRTC launched the first Indian sign language dictionary.

In 2020, the Indian government, through its National Education Policy (NEP), declared that the “Indian Sign Language (ISL) will be standardized across the country.” In addition to the standardization initiative, the NEP states that “national and state curriculum materials will be developed for use by students with hearing impairment. The NEP states further that “local sign languages will be respected and taught as well, where possible and relevant.” The NEP can aim to be more inclusive by adding “wherever needed” to this provision so that the needs of sign language users of local languages are also considered. Finally, in recent years, activists have been campaigning for official recognition of the Indian Sign Language. We propose that both the central and state governments might consider giving it official language status so that it leads to greater awareness of sign languages and leads to its greater use.

### *Support for minority languages*

There is a need for greater support of minority languages on the part of the states and union territories. As discussed above, only a few states and union territories have taken measures to promote minority languages. Those with a high concentration of languages with fewer than 10,000 speakers need to become especially active in the protection of these languages. We propose that the state governments liaise with the Central Institute of Indian Languages or linguistics departments at Indian universities with expertise in language endangerment research to develop proposals for determining and taking measures to protect these languages. Moreover, it should be made compulsory for the state governments to respond to questions of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities. As the latest report indicates, only a few states and union territories respond to the questions of the commissioner, and without such responses it becomes difficult to assess the endangerment status of minority languages and propose appropriate measures.

### *Revival of the three-language formula*

The National Education Policy 2020 contains some valuable proposals such as investment in large numbers of language teachers in all regional languages around the country, bilateral agreements between states to hire teachers in large numbers from each other to satisfy the three-language formula in their respective states and use of technology for teaching and learning of different languages. These proposals could prove highly effective if implemented properly. We propose that the central and state governments conduct assessments of the language needs of pupils in this regard, invest in resources as appropriate and carry impact assessments.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have tried to show the mapping of language policy by the central and state governments since independence. Our point of departure was the contestations between the central government and the states that have shaped India’s language policies. As discussed, such contestations are evident in the recognition of languages as official languages, scheduled languages and classical languages. India’s intense and complex language diversity has led to constant interaction between political regimes and language communities. There have been demands and negotiations on language rights and recognition in the spheres of administration, education, employment, art, culture and political economy over the last seven decades.



For language rights, we have focused on three policy areas that need to be addressed at both the central and state levels. These include official recognition of sign languages, greater support for minority languages and revival of the three-language formula. Greater attention on part of both the central and state governments to these three policy areas could serve as a potential strategy for remapping linguistic federalism.

## ANNEXES

## Annex I: Languages Spoken in India Based on 2011 Census

	Language	Speakers		Language	Speakers		Language	Speakers
1	Adi	248,834	41	Khasi	1,431,344	81	Monpa	13,703
2	Afghani/Kabuli / Pashto	21,677	42	Khezha	41,625	82	Munda	505,922
3	Anal	27,217	43	Khiemnungan	61,983	83	Mundari	1,128,228
4	Angami	152,796	44	Khond/Kondh	155,548	84	Nepali	2,926,168
5	Ao	260,008	45	Kinnauri	83,561	85	Nicobarese	29,099
6	Arabic	54,947	46	Kisan	206,100	86	Nissi/Dafla	406,532
7	Assamese	15,311,351	47	Koch	36,434	87	Nocte	30,839
8	Balti	13,774	48	Koda/Kora	47,268	88	Odia	37,521,324
9	Bengali	97,237,669	49	Kolami	128,451	89	Paite	79,507
10	Bhili	10,413,637	50	Kom	15,108	90	Parji	52,349
11	Bhotia	229,954	51	Konda	60,699	91	Pawi	28,639
12	Bhumij	27,506	52	Konkani	2,256,502	92	Phom	54,416
13	Bishnupuriya	79,646	53	Konyak	244,477	93	Pochury	21,654
14	Bodo	1,482,929	54	Korku	727,133	94	Punjabi	33,124,726
15	Chakhesang	19,846	55	Korwa	28,453	95	Rabha	139,986
16	Chakru/Chokri	91,216	56	Koya	407,423	96	Rai	15,644
17	Chang	66,852	57	Kui	941,488	97	Rengma	65,238
18	Coorgi/Kodagu	113,857	58	Kuki	83,968	98	Sangtam	76,000
19	Deori	32,376	59	Kurukh/Oraon	19,88,350	99	Sanskrit	24,821
20	Dimasa	137,184	60	Ladakhi	14,952	100	Santali	7,368,192
21	Dogri	25,96,767	61	Lahauli	11,574	101	Savara	409,549
22	English	259,678	62	Lahnda	108,791	102	Sema	10,802
23	Gadaba	40,976	63	Lakher	42,429	103	Sherpa	16,012
24	Gangte	16,542	64	Lalung	33,921	104	Shina	32,247
25	Garo	1,145,223	65	Lepcha	47,331	105	Sindhi	2,772,264
26	Gondi	2,984,453	66	Liangmei	49,811	106	Tamang	20,154
27	Gujarati	55,492,554	67	Limbu	40,835	107	Tamil	69,026,881
28	Halabi	766,297	68	Lotha	179,467	108	Tangkhul	187,276
29	Halam	38,915	69	Lushai/Mizo	830,846	109	Tangsa	38,624
30	Hindi	528,347,193	70	Maithili	13,583,464	110	Telugu	81,127,740
31	Hmar	98,988	71	Malayalam	34,838,819	111	Thado	229,340

32	Ho	1,421,418	72	Malto	234,991	112	Tibetan	182,685
33	Jatapu	20,028	73	Manipuri	1,761,079	113	Tripuri	1,011,294
34	Juang	30,378	74	Mao	240,205	114	Tulu	1,846,427
35	Kabui	122,931	75	Maram	32,460	115	Urdu	50,772,631
36	Kannada	43,706,512	76	Marathi	83,026,680	116	Vaiphei	42,748
37	Karbi/Mikir	528,503	77	Maring	25,814	117	Wancho	59,154
38	Kashmiri	6,797,587	78	Miri/Mishing	629,954	118	Yimchungre	83,259
39	Khandeshi	1,860,236	79	Mishmi	44,100	119	Zeliang	63,529
40	Kharia	297,614	80	Mogh	36,665	120	Zemi	50,925
						121	Zou	26,545

Source: Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, 2011.

## Annex II: Indian Languages with Fewer than 10,000 Speakers

	State/Union Territory	Language	Number of speakers
	<b>State</b>		
1	Arunachal Pradesh	Aka	4000
2		Aka (Jebel Sillok)	300
3		Bokar	5000
4		Bori	2000
5		Dakpa	1000
6		Khamba	1500
7		Khowa	1000
8		Lishpa	1500
9		Miji	5000
10		Miju	6700
11		Milang	2000
12		Motuo Menba	9000
13		Mra	350
14		Na	350
15		Pasi	1000
16		Sherdukpen	3000
17		Singpho	5000
18		Sulung	6000
19		Tangam	100
20		Taruang	9332

21		Zaiwa	1000
22	Assam	Aiton	2000
23		Mech	1000
24		Tai Nora (also known as Khamyang)	100
25		Tai Phake	2000
26		Tai Rong	100
27	Jharkhand	Asur	7000
28		Birhor	2000
29	Himachal Pradesh	Baghati	3976
30		Bharmauri	3976
31		Bunan	4000
32		Darma	1761
33		Handuri	138
34		Jangshung	2000
35		Kanashi	1500
36		Tinan	2000
37	Maharashtra	Nihali	2000
38	Manipur	Aimol	2643
39		Koireng	1056
40		Kom	5000
41		Moyon	3700
42		Purum	503
43		Tarao	870
44	Orissa	Geta	3000
45		Gorum	20
46		Pengo	1254
47		Remo	2500
48	Tamil Nadu	Kota	2000
49		Toda	1006
50	Uttarakhand	Byangsi	1734
51		Rongpa	8000
52	West Bengal	Toto	1000
53		Turi	5000
	<b>Union Territory</b>		

54	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	Great Andamanese	5
55		Jarawa	31
56		Lamongse	400
57		Luro	2000
58		Onge	50
59		Pu	5000
60		Sanenyo	1300
61		Sentinelese	50
62		Shompen	100
63		Takahanyilang	3000
64	Ladakh	Brokshat	3000

Source: UNESCO 2021.

Note: Mech is also spoken in West Bengal in the districts Jalpaiguri and Goalpara. Turi is also spoken in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

### Annex III. Academies for Minority Languages in Indian States and Union Territories

State/Union Territory	Establishment of academies for minority languages
<b>State</b>	
Chhattisgarh	Establishment of Academy for Urdu (2003)
Haryana	Establishment of Academies for Urdu (1986) and Punjabi (1997)
Karnataka	Academies established for Urdu (1977), Konkani (1994), Tulu (1994) and Beary (2007)
Manipur	Establishment of Department of Language Planning and Implementation 2014 for promoting Manipur (state language) and minority languages
Uttar Pradesh	Establishment of Academies for Urdu (1976), Sindhi (1996) and Punjabi (1998)
<b>Union Territory</b>	
Delhi	Establishment of Academies for Urdu (1981), Punjabi (1981), Sindhi (1994) and Maithili & Bhojpuri (2008)
Lakshadweep	Development of minority languages undertaken by Lakshadweep Kala Academy

Source: Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, 2016.

### Annex IV: Languages as Media of Instruction in Different States and Union Territories

	Classes	Medium of instruction
<b>State</b>		
Andhra Pradesh	I-X	Telugu, English, Urdu, Hindi
Arunachal Pradesh	I-XII	English

Assam	I-V	Data not available
	V-VIII	Data not available
	IX-X	Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Hindi, Manipuri, English
	XI-XII	Assamese, Bengali, English
Bihar	I-XII	Hindi
Chattisgarh	I-XII	Hindi, English
Goa	I-IV	Marathi, Konkani, English, Urdu, Kannada, Telugu, and Hindi
	V-X	English, Marathi, Kannada, and Urdu
	XI-XII	English
Gujarat	I-XII	Gujarati
Haryana	I-XII	Hindi
Himachal Pradesh	I-VIII	Hindi
	IX-XII	Hindi and English
Jammu & Kashmir	I-XII	English
Jharkhand	I-V	Hindi and Urdu
	VI-XII	Hindi
Karnataka	I-V	Kannada or mother tongue medium is compulsory
	VI-X	Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu, and English
	XI-XII	Kannada and English
Kerala	I-X	Malayalam, English, Tamil and Kannada
	IX-XII	English
Madhya Pradesh	I-VIII	Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Urdu, Marathi, and Sindhi
	IX-XII	Hindi, English, Urdu, Marathi, and Sindhi
Maharashtra	I-XII	Marathi, English, Urdu, Gujarati, Sindhi, Hindi, Kannada, and Telugu
Manipur	I-V	Major Indian languages. Generally Hindi, Manipuri and recognised Tribal dialects
	VI-VIII	Major Indian languages. Generally Hindi, Bengali and Manipuri
	IX-XII	English
Meghalaya	I-V	Mother tongue (Khasi, Garo)
	VI-XII	English
Mizoram	I-VIII	English and Mizo
	IX-XII	English
Nagaland	I-V	English, mother tongue
	VI-XII	English
Odisha	I-X	Odiya
	XI-XII	English
Punjab	I-V	Punjabi and English

	VI-XII	English
Rajasthan	I-V	Hindi and English
	VI-XII	English
Sikkim	I-XII	English
Tamil Nadu	I-XII	Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Malayalam, English, and Kannada
Tripura	I-V	Bengali, English, Hindi, and Kok Barak
	VI-XII	Bengali, English, and Hindi
Uttar Pradesh	I-VIII	Hindi
	IX-XII	Hindi and English
Uttarakhand	I-XII	Hindi
West Bengal	I-XII	Bengali, Hindi, English, Urdu, Nepali, Telugu, Oriya and Santhali
<b>Union Territory</b>		
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	I-XII	Hindi, English, Bengali, Tamil, and Telugu
Chandigarh	I-XII	Hindi, Punjabi, and English
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	I-XII	Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, and English
Daman & Diu	I-XII	Gujarati and English
Delhi	I-V	English and Hindi
	VI-XII	English, Hindi, and Urdu
Lakshadweep	I-XII	English and Malayalam
Puducherry	I-XII	Tamil/Malayalam/Telugu/English/French

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2014 and Ministry of Education, Government of India.

Note: The Roman numerals represent different years of schooling; e.g., Grade I stands for the first year of schooling, while Grade XII represents the twelfth year. Schooling in India is generally divided into pre-primary, primary (Grades I-V), secondary (Grades VI-X), and higher secondary (Grades XI-XII).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As this report was published before the reorganization of Indian states and union territories took place in 2014 and 2019 through the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act 2014, the Reorganisation Act 2019 and the Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (Merger of Union Territories) Act 2019, it does not show an updated list of states and union territories.

**Annex V: Three Language Formulas (TLF) in Different Indian States and Union Territories**

State/Union Territory	Hindi		English		State Language	
	Compulsory	Optional	Compulsory	Optional	Compulsory	Optional
<b>State</b>						
Andhra Pradesh	VI-X	XI-XII	III-XII	-	I-X	XI-XII
Arunachal Pradesh	I-X	XI-XII	I-XII	-	-	-
Assam	V-VII	XI-XII	IX-XII	-	IX-XII	IX-X
Bihar	I-XII	-	I-XII	-	I-XII	-
Chhattisgarh	I-XII	-	I-XII	-	I-XII	-
Goa	V-X	XI-XII	I-XII	-	I-X	XI-XII
Gujarat	V-IX	I-IV X-XII	I-IV	V-IX X-XII	-	-
Haryana	I-XII	-	I-XII	-	-	-
Himachal Pradesh	I-VIII	-	I-XII	-	-	-
Jammu & Kashmir	I-XII	NA	I-XII	NA	NA	NA
Jharkhand	I-XII	NA	VI-XII	NA	NA	NA
Karnataka	IV-X	XI-XII	I-X	XI-XII	-	-
Kerala	V-X	XI-XII	III-XII	-	I-IV	XI-XII
Madhya Pradesh	I-XII	-	I-XII	-	-	-
Maharashtra	V-VIII	IX-X	I-X	-	I-X	-
Manipur	III-VIII	IX-XII	III-XII	-	-	-
Meghalaya	-	VI-XII	VI-XII	I-V	VI-XII	-
Mizoram	V-X	IX-X	I-XII	-	I-XII	-
Nagaland	I-VIII	IX-XII	I-XII	-	I-VIII	IX-XII
Odisha	VI-VIII	IX-XII	III-XII	-	I-XII	-
Punjab	IV-V	-	I-XII	-	I-V	-
Rajasthan	I-XII	XI-XII	VI-XII	XI-XII	-	-
Sikkim	IV-VIII	IX-XII	I-XII	-	-	-
Tamil Nadu	-	-	I-XII	-	I-XII	-
Tripura	-	I-XII	I-XII	-	I-XII	-
Uttar Pradesh	I-XII	-	VI-VIII	IX-XII	I-XII	-
Uttarakhand	I-XII	-	I-VIII	IX-XII	I-XII	-
West Bengal	I-XII	VI-VIII	I-XII	-	I-XII	-
<b>Union territory</b>						
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	I-X	I-XII	I-XII	-	-	VI-VIII



Chandigarh	IV-VIII	IX-XII	I-XII	-	-	-
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	IV-VII	I-XII	V-X	-	-	-
Daman & Diu	III-IX	X-XII	V-XII	X-XII	I-XII	-
Delhi	I-X	XI-XII	I-X	XI-XII	-	VI-XII
Lakshadweep	V-X	-	I-XII	-	I-IV	V-XII
Puducherry	-	I-XII	I-XII	-	I-XII	-

Source: Ministry of Human Resources Development, 2014.

Note: The Roman numerals represent different years of schooling; e.g., Grade I stands for the first year of schooling, while Grade XII represents the twelfth year. Schooling in India is generally divided into pre-primary, primary (Grades I-V), secondary (Grades VI-X), and higher secondary (Grades XI-XII).

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