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Language, Identity, and Integration: From the Tower of Babel to Contemporary Indian Language Policy

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how language simultaneously fragments and integrates societies by juxtaposing the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel with the historical and contemporary evolution of Indian language policy. It first examines the linguistic reorganization of Indian states and the constitutional accommodation of diversity, highlighting both the empowerment of regional identities and the emergence of new forms of exclusion. It then analyses current debates on Hindi imposition as struggles over cultural legitimacy and federal balance, especially in non-Hindi-speaking states. The discussion finally evaluates the role of English as an associate official and link language that facilitates inter-state coordination, higher education, and global engagement without displacing regional tongues. The paper argues that a signage and policy framework that visibly includes all constitutionally recognized languages, anchored by English as a connecting language, offers a pragmatic route to reconciling unity, equity, and plurality in India's multilingual public sphere.

Keywords: *Language policy; Multilingualism; Indian Constitution; Linguistic reorganization; Hindi imposition; English as link language; Federalism; Tower of Babel metaphor; Sociolinguistics; Education policy.*

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1. Introduction

Language has long been recognized as both a vehicle of social cohesion and a marker of difference, structuring how individuals and communities imagine belonging, authority, and identity. From ancient narratives of linguistic rupture to contemporary debates over official and educational language, conflicts over "who speaks what to whom" reveal underlying struggles over power, legitimacy, and access to resources. In plural societies, language policy is thus never merely a technical instrument of administration but a deeply normative project that shapes the terms of citizenship and the contours of the public sphere. [11]

The biblical account of the Tower of Babel has served as a foundational narrative for reflecting on the origins and consequences of linguistic diversity. Situated at the threshold between a mythic past of unified speech and a world of multiple tongues, the Babel story condenses fears about fragmentation with an awareness that plurality is now the human condition. The narrative portrays linguistic diversification as both judgment and dispersal, interrupting a project of centralization and forcing communities into differentiated histories.

Modern exegetical and linguistic scholarship has reinterpreted this account less as a literal etiology of language families and more as a metaphorical template for thinking about how language boundaries emerge, harden, and acquire moral significance[2,10,3]

India's language policy represents a complex interplay between its rich multilingual heritage and the practical and political exigencies of forging national unity in a newly independent state. Following independence in 1947, the framers of the Indian Constitution chose Hindi as the official language, envisioning it as a unifying force, while laying out a plan to phase out English, a colonial legacy, in favor of indigenous linguistic identities. However, the decades that followed exposed profound challenges. Historical ties to Sanskrit, the influence of foreign languages, and the deeply entrenched pride in regional languages fueled resistance, most acutely in non-Hindi-speaking regions like Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Efforts to promote Hindi through policy initiatives such as the Three Language Formula often encountered both practical failures and political backlash, culminating in fervent protests, especially in the southern states, against the perceived

imposition of Hindi. These linguistic tensions revealed the delicate balance between regional identities and national aspirations, further complicated by the instrumental role of politicians who capitalized on language-related grievances for electoral gains. Despite official narratives, large swathes of India, especially among the educated classes, continued to regard English as an essential tool for upward mobility and administrative efficiency. Over time, demographic pressures and pressing socioeconomic needs relegated language conflicts to the background, allowing, in practice, for a more pluralistic accommodation of multilingualism. The persistent ambiguity between "national language" and "official language" underscores the symbolic and pragmatic dimensions of India's language debate. The history of India's language policy illustrates that no single language can effectively serve as a universal symbol of national identity without creating perceptions of unfairness or exclusion. Instead, a dynamic coexistence, shaped by compromise and mutual respect, has emerged as the pragmatic foundation for India's continuing linguistic diversity [1]

India's language policy, as encapsulated in the Official Languages Act of 1963, reflects the nation's complex multilingual fabric and historic sociopolitical negotiations. At independence, the ambition was to elevate Hindi, written in Devanagari, as the unifying official language, replacing English after a transitional period. However, strong resistance from non-Hindi speaking regions, especially the Dravidian south which resulted in the continued joint official status for both Hindi and English, reframing language as both a political tool and a compromise. The Act's provisions establish a framework wherein both Hindi and English are used for central government communication, with states retaining autonomy to designate their own official languages. The "three-language formula," which is central to India's education policy and seeks to advance Hindi, English, and regional languages across public education, ideally fostering multilingual competence and cultural tolerance. However, its implementation varies widely and often disregards mother tongues, limiting its effect on cognitive development and social integration. Furthermore, while 22 languages are legally recognized, the selection process is charged with political considerations, omitting widely spoken languages like Bhili. Ultimately, India's language policy is characterized by ongoing negotiation and compromise, perpetually adapting to the nation's dynamic sociolinguistic reality, yet falling short of ensuring full representation and linguistic justice for all its citizens [16;13]. The linguistic reorganization of Indian states in the 1950s represents a critical moment in this process. Responding to popular mobilization and long-standing demands, the State Reorganisation Act 1956 and related constitutional amendments redrew internal boundaries so that major regional languages broadly coincided with state territories. This reconfiguration produced significant gains: it enabled vernacular schooling and administration, strengthened regional political participation, and reduced some historical frictions where language groups were fragmented across provinces. At the same time, it generated new exclusions and anxieties for linguistic minorities within the newly consolidated states, and it emboldened "sons of the soil" discourses that framed migrants and non-dominant language speakers as demographic and cultural threats. The Indian case thus illustrates how attempts to align political units with linguistic communities can both mitigate and reproduce the dilemmas dramatized at Babel.

Contemporary controversies around "Hindi imposition" further illuminate the political stakes of language choice. Proposals to expand the mandatory use of Hindi in education, administration, and digital governance have met with sustained opposition in several non-Hindi-speaking states, especially in southern and western India, where the regional languages anchor long-standing claims to autonomy and distinctiveness. Critics argue that such initiatives risk transforming a numerically dominant language into a symbolic test of loyalty, thereby undermining the pluralist and federal commitments of the constitutional order. Supporters, by contrast, frame a stronger role for Hindi as essential for national integration and for reducing dependence on English, which is often perceived as socially exclusionary and linked to elite privilege. The enduring contestations surrounding language choice in India underscore how deeply embedded linguistic identities are in socio-political power dynamics, creating a continuous negotiation between national integration efforts and regional cultural preservation.

English occupies a distinctive and ambivalent position within this landscape. Introduced and entrenched under colonial rule, it has endured as an associate official language and as a primary medium of higher education, law, science, and international communication. Various commissions and policies since independence have endorsed a multilingual framework that grants primacy to the mother tongue in early education while retaining English as a "library language" and link language, particularly for interstate and global engagement. This settlement has enabled English to function as a relatively neutral bridge among regional elites, even as it reproduces stratification between those who can access English-medium schooling and those confined to under-resourced vernacular systems. Against this backdrop, the present paper brings into conversation the metaphorical resources of the Babel narrative, the historical experience of late antique Christianity, and the institutional complexities of Indian language policy. It argues that treating linguistic diversity as a structural feature of human societies rather than as a deviation from an imagined monolingual norm yields a more coherent framework for evaluating contemporary policy choices. By tracing how different traditions have responded to the challenges and opportunities of linguistic plurality, the paper seeks to illuminate the normative assumptions embedded in current debates over Hindi, English, and regional languages in India.

2. Review of Literature

The article by Gian Sandhu critically examines the post-colonial dynamics of language and education policy in India, with a specific focus on the contentious imposition of Hindi and English in the wake of independence. The study contextualizes language policy within India's diverse linguistic landscape, noting over 22 scheduled languages and thousands of mother tongues. Initially, English persisted alongside Hindi for administrative ease, necessitated by the realities of colonial governance and international communication, but was simultaneously rejected as a "national" language due to socio-political symbolism. Historically, the gradual push for Hindi culminated in significant resistance from non-Hindi-speaking states, exemplified by agitations in Madras (now Tamil Nadu) in 1965, which forced policy compromises keeping English as a co-official language. Nevertheless, successive governments have steadily promoted Hindi, often through institutional mechanisms and cultural channels, such as cinema and official mandates, resulting in wide-reaching impacts.

The ramifications of Hindi imposition include restricted access to public services, documentation, and education for non-Hindi speakers, perpetuating social exclusion and marginalization. The process of "Sanskritization" in language policy, as discussed, intensifies casteist hierarchies and religious exclusivity, where the purification of Hindi erases centuries of multicultural integration. The article contends that such majoritarian impositions threaten the pluralistic formation of Indian identity and democratic equity, warning against reductionist policies that ignore the country's lived linguistic realities. Ultimately, Sandhu argues for a more inclusive approach, urging the translation of key materials into multiple Indian languages and educational reforms that value linguistic diversity, to avoid perpetuating discrimination and cultural erasure, while reaffirming that Hindi is not the constitutionally mandated national language. [15]

The discourse surrounding the concept of 'One Nation, One Language' in India is rooted deeply in debates over the nation-state construct and linguistic imperialism. Despite its classification as a nation-state in contemporary political terms, India's historical and sociolinguistic realities reveal profound diversity, questioning the legitimacy and desirability of promoting a singular national language. The government's assertion to promote Hindi as the 'official language' is perceived by many as an imposition, which is essentially a subtle form of linguistic dominance rather than a genuine step toward national integration. This policy move is viewed as arbitrary due to India's rich tapestry of regional languages, dialects, and cultural identities. The imposition of Hindi is argued to threaten the autonomy and survival of regional tongues, potentially leading to a new form of internal imperialism. Such initiatives ignore the pluralistic ethos of Indian society and risk undermining constitutional values and democratic principles by marginalizing linguistic minorities. The debate also evokes concerns over the historical struggle against colonial and later central forms of authority, highlighting that national unity must embrace linguistic multiplicity rather than suppress it. Indeed, India's experience with language policy underscores the importance of maintaining multilingualism as a cornerstone of national identity, reflecting its distinctive sociopolitical makeup. The pushback from diverse linguistic communities and political actors exemplifies the resilience of regional languages and the ongoing contestation over the meaning of nationhood, identity, and integration in contemporary India. In sum, the 'One Nation, One Language' proposition not only poses critical challenges for federalism and social cohesion but also invites deeper reflection on the role of language in the sustainable development of democratic communities. [5]

The article by Jolad and Agarwal investigates the intricate reality of India's linguistic diversity and critiques the Census of India's classification practices, which, according to the authors, significantly minimize the representation of the country's substantial array of languages. India is renowned for its linguistically diverse population, ranking fourth globally by the number of languages spoken. Yet, efforts to enumerate and classify these languages have historically been fraught with contention and have critical implications for the legitimacy of linguistic identities. When examining language in India, the authors highlight the blurred distinctions between 'language' and 'dialect', which are heavily influenced by political and social power rather than strictly linguistic criteria such as mutual intelligibility.

Dominant languages gain official status while regional or less standard forms are relegated to dialects, often obscuring the true scope of linguistic variation. Historical surveys, such as Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India and the People's Linguistic Survey report counts ranging from hundreds to nearly a thousand, while the Ethnologue and Census data offer divergent, lower numbers. Notably, the Census has, since 1971, excluded languages and mother tongues spoken by fewer than 10,000 people, aggregating them into "other" categories and thus rendering many minority languages effectively invisible. The Census 2011 process, comprising rationalization and grouping, reported 19,569 mother tongue returns, which were condensed to 1,369, then further grouped into 270 mother tongues (spoken by more than 10,000 people) and just 121 languages. Of these, 22 are 'Scheduled', politically recognized and promoted through state mechanisms, while 99 are 'non-Scheduled'. This administrative process largely erases linguistic minorities, despite large speaker bases in some excluded languages surpassing those of small countries. Linguistic diversity is quantified using Greenberg's Diversity Index (LDI), which demonstrates the extent to which true diversity exceeds what official statistics suggest. The article finds that including mother tongues raises India's LDI from 0.78 to 0.9, more closely matching UNESCO's estimation of 0.93. States with significant tribal and ethnic populations, such as Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, exhibit higher diversity, whereas homogenized regions like Kerala display lower LDI, a reflection of sociocultural diffusion. The 'Hindi belt' exemplifies homogenization: multiple distinct mother tongues are subsumed under the rubric of Hindi, diminishing the linguistic rights and representation of their speakers, especially in education and administration. This categorization suppresses the unique identities of languages such as Bhojpuri and Rajasthani, which, although widely spoken, lack official status. The state machinery's promotion of select languages, as enshrined in the Constitution and through political maneuvering, has led to the dominance of scheduled languages and marginalization of both non-scheduled languages and many mother tongues. The reorganization of states along linguistic lines since the 1950s attempted to address minority rights but ultimately reinforced dominant language identities at the state level. Despite constitutional directives supporting instruction in the mother tongue at the primary education stage, practical implementation remains deficient, with only 28 languages used nationally as the main medium of instruction. The advocacy for 'One Nation, One Language', typified by the push for Hindi, perpetuates monolingualism to the detriment of multilingual practices. The authors argue for urgent reforms in census enumeration and classification to ensure transparency, inclusivity, and a reflection of India's true linguistic tapestry, thereby safeguarding the cultural and educational rights of minoritised linguistic communities. [6]

Socially, language policies shape perceptions of self and community, contributing to the prestige of English and dominance of widely spoken regional languages while accelerating the decline of minority languages and eroding cultural diversity. There exists a parental bias toward English-medium education due to its market value, often fostering negative attitudes towards native languages and exacerbating social divides. Effective reform would require raising awareness about multilingualism, increasing flexibility in the choice of instructional language, improving pedagogical resources, ensuring seamless transitions across media, and creating

employment opportunities for those educated in regional languages. The sustainability of India's language diversity hinges on a comprehensive, equitable, and well-implemented language policy that not only guards against language hegemony but also safeguards the cultural mosaic of the nation. [11]

India's language policy in schools is shaped by its linguistic diversity, with 22 official languages and no declared national language. States operate along linguistic lines, with native languages as official, while English is widely perceived as vital for upward social and economic mobility. This has led private schools to operate predominantly in English, advancing aggressive English-speaking pedagogy and often discouraging the use of native languages, even among peers and at home, which can inadvertently cause students to devalue their mother tongues. Public schools prioritize regional languages and introduce English as a second language only from grade five, resulting in perceived disadvantage for these students and fueling higher private school enrollment. The divide in approaches between private and public schools predominantly reflects economic, market, and political demands, rather than rigorous evidence from child language development research. Scientific studies show that children are innately capable of acquiring multiple languages and that exposure before age five to seven is crucial, as early language experience builds efficient neural pathways and natural proficiency. When bilingualism is delayed, the brain must work harder to process the second language. Research supports that early bilingual exposure yields advantages beyond language: improved cognitive flexibility, better control and attention, structural brain benefits, and delayed cognitive decline are observed in bilingual individuals. Although bilingual children may experience modest delays in speech onset and have slightly less lexical recall, especially for home vocabulary, their academic vocabulary remains unaffected. Any early disadvantages are minor and quickly resolved, with bilinguals demonstrating clear phonological awareness for each language by 14 months. Thus, scientific evidence overwhelmingly favors bilingualism, not only for cognitive gains but also for competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized world. The article recommends that schools foster daily use of at least two languages from kindergarten onward, striking a balance between phonological development and immersive language use. Children should be allowed free rein to express linguistic understanding, rather than be limited to formal writing and speech alone. Parents are encouraged to maintain strong mother-tongue engagement at home, while schools should increase English communication in middle years, ensuring formal and informal language skills develop in parallel. By coupling policy with research and prioritizing early, sustained bilingual education, India can prepare students for academic and social success on a global stage. [8]

The literature on India's language policy vividly portrays a nation grappling with the tension between fostering national unity and honoring its profound linguistic diversity. However, critical research gaps remain. Current studies extensively document the political contestations around Hindi imposition, the educational challenges of multilingual instruction, and the constitutional framework supporting linguistic pluralism. Yet, there is insufficient analysis of how these debates and policies translate into lived experiences across different linguistic communities, particularly marginalized and minority language speakers.

Furthermore, the uneven and inconsistent implementation of the three-language formula across states reveals a need for comprehensive, up-to-date data on language use, pedagogical efficacy, and community attitudes that existing literature does not fully provide. Additionally, the evolving role of English as a link language amid digital transformations and global pressures warrants further exploration, especially concerning access and equity. Addressing these gaps through cross-disciplinary, grounded research will be essential for devising adaptable, context-sensitive language policies that reconcile India's linguistic plurality with its democratic and developmental aspirations.

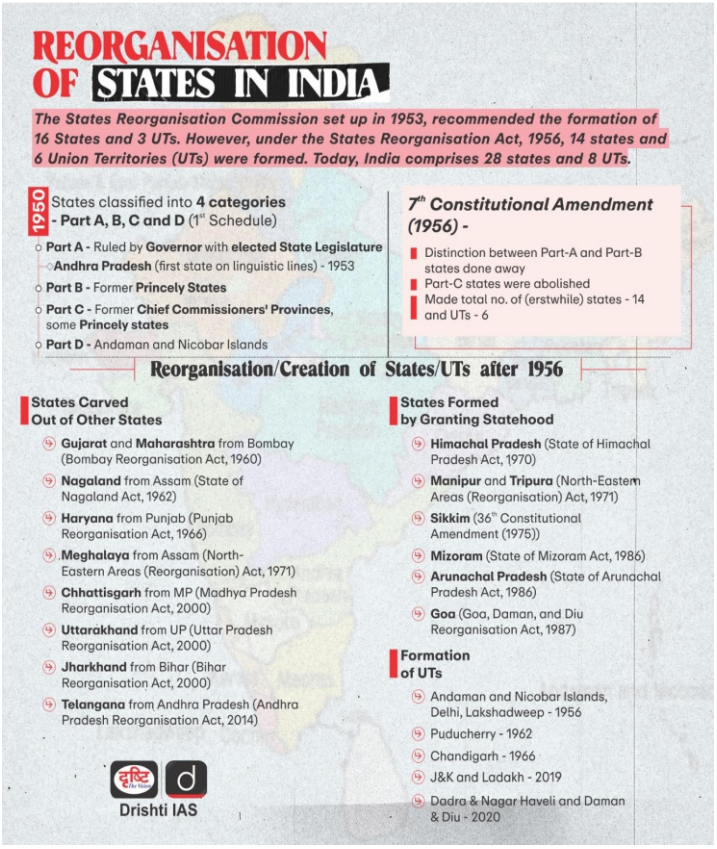
3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology combining historical–institutional analysis, textual exegesis, and critical policy review. It first undertakes a close reading of biblical and late antique Christian sources to interpret the Tower of Babel as a foundational metaphor for linguistic fragmentation and identity formation. It then employs documentary analysis of constitutional provisions, commission reports, and secondary scholarship on the linguistic reorganization of Indian states, Hindi imposition debates, and the status of English as an associate official language. Newspaper reports and contemporary commentaries are treated as contextual evidence illuminating ongoing contestations over language policy and regional assertions. Throughout, the paper uses comparative reasoning to relate sacred narratives to modern state practices, drawing out how ideas of linguistic plurality, unity, and "otherness" shape institutional design and public discourse in India's multilingual federal polity. This approach situates biblical metaphor, historical institutionalism, and contemporary policy discourse in a unified analytical framework, enabling a comprehensive exploration of India's ongoing language policy challenges.

4. Analysis

The linguistic reorganization of Indian states stands as a pivotal chapter in the nation's post-independence history, reflecting the complex interplay between regional identities, administrative pragmatism, and national integration. At independence, the Indian subcontinent was an intricate mosaic of British provinces and over 500 princely states. The process of integration and administrative rationalization required urgent attention, and language soon emerged as a powerful marker for reconfiguration. Historically, India's linguistic abundance—with the 1961 census recording 1,652 major languages, had been both a source of rich cultural continuity and persistent administrative complexity. British colonial policy had often disregarded linguistic boundaries for administrative convenience, as in the divisive partition of Bengal in 1905. These interventions, paradoxically, fostered linguistic consciousness and mobilized movements demanding state boundaries based on language. The Indian National Congress had, by 1917, favored linguistic provinces and institutionalized the principle from its Nagpur session in 1920, organizing itself along linguistic lines encouraged by Gandhi. Yet, after independence, apprehensions about divisiveness and national unity led the Congress to resist the immediate creation of linguistic states, fearing regional separatism. This institutional hesitation was quickly challenged by popular mobilization, as seen in the tragic hunger strike of Potti Sriramulu in 1952, which culminated in the violent agitation for an Andhra state.

The resultant formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1953, separating the Telugu-speaking regions from Madras, marked the genesis of linguistic reorganization. Earlier commissions and committees, such as the Dhar Commission (1948) and the JVP Committee (1949), offered cautionary arguments against linguistic criteria, instead advocating historical and administrative considerations. The Fazl Ali Commission, however, shifted the paradigm in 1953 by legitimizing language as the principal basis for reorganization, albeit rejecting the exclusivist "One-Language-One-State" notion to safeguard national unity. Intellectual voices varied: B.R. Ambedkar supported linguistic provinces but cautioned that state languages should align with the central government for cohesion, while K.M. Munshi and Jawaharlal Nehru warned against linguistic chauvinism and potential communalism. The State Reorganization Act of 1956, supported by the 7th Constitution Amendment, implemented these recommendations, abolishing prior classifications and sharply redrawing boundaries to create fourteen new states and union territories. The linguistic model yielded substantial benefits: it nurtured regional languages and cultures, consolidated federal structure, enabled vernacular education, facilitated democratic participation, eased administration, and fostered political representation for marginalized linguistic communities. Notably, alignment of language and government improved citizen-state interaction and reduced inter-regional territorial disputes. Nevertheless, challenges rapidly surfaced, identity politics fueled regionalism, linguistic chauvinism, and exclusionary "sons of the soil" ideologies. Distributional inequalities in jobs, education, and political power persisted, and linguistic minorities sometimes faced marginalization. Demands for new states on the grounds of backwardness and ethnic distinctiveness, particularly in the Northeast, threatened territorial cohesion. Interstate disputes over language identities further complicated the landscape, often undermining national unity and exacerbating regional loyalties. Recognizing these dangers, constitutional safeguards were enacted: Articles 30 and 347 protected linguistic minorities' rights in education and enabled official recognition of minority languages, while a Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities was appointed to monitor implementation. The central government's proactive role contrasted with uneven enforcement by state governments, resulting in satisfactory outcomes in some states yet unsatisfactory conditions for minorities elsewhere. Overall, India's linguistic reorganization embodied both nation-building and accommodation of diversity, developing federal structures attuned to cultural plurality. While it fortified unity compared to other multinational states, evident in the contrast with Yugoslavia's disintegration, the reorganization continues to present challenges, requiring ongoing vigilance in balancing regional aspirations, minority protection, and national integrity. [14]



Source: (Drishti IAS, 2025)

4.2 Language Division: The Tower of Babel

The reconciliation of linguistic evolution with the biblical account of the Tower of Babel necessitates an integrative approach that draws on scriptural exegesis, archaeological evidence, historical context, and principles of language development. Genesis 11 describes a unified human civilization, characterized by a single language and collective ambition, ultimately culminating in the construction of the Tower of Babel as a symbol of pride and autonomy. Divine intervention resulted in the instantaneous diversification of languages and the subsequent dispersion of peoples. This biblical narrative, traditionally situated a few generations after the Flood, finds echoes in ancient Mesopotamian ziggurats and Sumerian temple-building traditions, as well as widespread cultural memory of a once-unified humanity. Linguists document that languages typically evolve through gradual migration, social intermingling, and cultural exchange, yielding complex language families like Indo-European that branch and transform over centuries. The Babel event can be interpreted as a primordial fragmentation generating distinct proto-languages, which then underwent conventional linguistic evolution which was characterized by borrowing, phonological shifts, and morphological changes, resulting in the polyglot tapestry of tongues evident today.

Archaeological discoveries of early writing systems and material culture across the Near East further reinforce the narrative of a central hub that radiates outward, consistent with both biblical claims and secular theories of cultural and linguistic dispersal. Theologically, Babel underscores God's sovereignty and the enactment of judgment, framing linguistic and cultural divergence because of humanity's quest for renown apart from divine purpose. Philosophically, for those seeking convergence between faith and rational inquiry, Babel models the dynamic interplay between divine decree and observed natural processes, implying that divine action catalyzed initial differentiation while subsequent language development unfolded through standard mechanisms. The ongoing evolution of language not only evidences adaptive ingenuity but also enriches cultural heritage, affirming the diversity and unity intrinsic to human societies. Ultimately, the event at Babel may be seen as the introduction of major language families that subsequently evolved through time, with archaeological and historical data providing corroborative material for this complex process. This holistic perspective permits divine sovereignty and scientific understanding to coexist, as the original singular speech fragmented into evolving branches, aligning scriptural testimony with the documentary patterns confirmed by modern linguistics and archaeology, thereby demonstrating the consonance of biblical tradition and linguistic science within human history[2]

Yuliya Minets' "The Slow Fall of Babel" presents a nuanced exploration of linguistic diversity and identity formation among Christian elites in the late antique Mediterranean world. The work pivots on the metaphor of the "Tower of Babel," representing not only the classical paradigm of linguistic unity or privileged bilingualism where Latin and Greek reigned supreme but also the gradual awakening to "linguistic otherness" that accompanied the expansion and intellectual transformation of Christianity in the late antique period. Minets frames her study around the erosion of a virtual monolingualism that characterized classical thought, wherein even Latin was sometimes considered a subordinate dialect to Greek. With the Christianization of Mediterranean elites, there was a growing awareness and internalization of the existence and significance of multiple languages. Early Christian intellectuals began to grapple with the implications of this diversity for the structuring of the Christian universe, viewing language as not just a vehicle for communication but as a central component in the shaping of religious and confessional identities. The introduction situates the book as a precursor to Umberto Eco's reflections on linguistic thought, focusing on the first signs of a flood of linguistic theorizing that would fully manifest in the High Middle Ages. Minets outlines the process by which Christian writers and thinkers interpreted biblical narratives, especially the story of the Tower of Babel and the Pentecostal gift of tongues, as formative sites for theorizing linguistic diversity, identity, and boundary-making. These biblical stories became foundational for Christian conceptualizations of linguistic difference and the incorporation of foreign language speakers into a new, distinctly Christian worldview. Central to Minets' argument is the concept of the "alloglottic Other"—individuals or groups marked primarily by their use of different languages—and the role of linguistic objectification in the constitution of identity. Drawing from cognitive and social theory, Minets discusses how Christian elites came to reflect upon and objectify their own linguistic codes, often prompted by interactions with speakers of other tongues.

The production of dictionaries, grammar books, and metalinguistic commentaries in Christian literature signaled an increasing reflexivity about linguistic boundaries and identities. The book reviews recent scholarship on sociolinguistics in the ancient Mediterranean, alluding to the works of J.N. Adams, Fergus Millar, Bruno Rochette, and others, but shifts focus to how Christian elites in Late Antiquity conceptualized language as an element of group identity. Minets draws attention to the dynamic interplay between actual multilingual practices and the ideological and rhetorical strategies used by Christian writers to negotiate linguistic difference, often mapping social, confessional, and cultural markers onto linguistic boundaries. Methodologically, Minets foregrounds primary sources such as metalinguistic comments in Christian narratives, which include references to code-switching, diglossia, foreign words, interpreters, and linguistic miracles (e.g., xenoglossia). She analyzes how these comments express linguistic awareness and inform broader social and cultural judgments about language, noting the emergence of stereotypes about the prestige or roughness of tongues. Minets also examines the limitations of source material, particularly the underrepresentation of Coptic perspectives in linguistic debates, despite late antique Egypt's reputation for multilingualism. She argues that living in a multilingual milieu did not always lead to heightened linguistic awareness; sometimes it suppressed explicit reflection on linguistic identity. Chronologically, the study spans from the second and third centuries, when Christian writers first addressed language issues, through the fourth to sixth centuries, focusing on Greek, Latin, and Syriac writers. The book demonstrates that Christianity's spread brought new prestige to non-classical languages in literature and religious performance, shifting away from the classical preoccupation with Greek and Latin as carriers of cultural value. In summary, Minets' work reveals how linguistic diversity and the objectification of linguistic otherness became central to the formation of Christian identities in Late Antiquity. Through biblical exegesis, sociolinguistic commentary, and the lived experience of multilingualism, Christian elites reimagined linguistic boundaries and their social significance, laying the groundwork for future reflections on language, identity, and religious difference. [10]

The Tower of Babel stands as a powerful metaphor for linguistic fragmentation. According to the biblical narrative, the proliferation of languages at Babel disrupted previously unified human cooperation, leading to social isolation and cultural dispersal. Scholars debate whether the division was intended to scatter people or whether the scattering itself resulted in language diversification. This paradigm is mirrored in historical societies, where language divides have often hampered communication and cohesion, contributing to societal decline or regional isolation. This metaphorical lens helps frame India's own experience, where linguistic reorganization sought to manage diversity institutionally, yet periodic conflicts over language hierarchies and state boundaries echo Babel's tensions between cooperation and fragmentation. This metaphor not only contextualizes historical linguistic dispersion but also illuminates the ongoing institutional challenges India faces in balancing unity and diversity through language governance.

4.3 Hindi Imposition: Contemporary Debates

The article on "What India's Battle Over Hindi Really Means", analyzes the sociopolitical controversy surrounding the imposition of Hindi in Indian educational institutions, illustrating how language policy debates serve as proxies for larger questions of national identity and political power. While Hindi is the most spoken language in India, resistance in southern and western states, particularly Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra, highlights the defense of linguistic plurality against centralizing tendencies perceived in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) push for Hindi as a marker of ideal citizenship. The article traces historical roots to movements before Indian independence, illustrating how language debates are interwoven with ideological struggles for cultural hegemony, notably by organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Recent events, including recommendations by state commissions and policy shifts in response to popular opposition, reveal that language imposition is perceived as a threat to regional cultures and as a mechanism for the political assertion of identity. The authors contend that contemporary language debates function as a contest over cultural legitimacy, and the imposition of a "pure" form of Hindi is framed as a religious and political project rather than a neutral policy initiative. This ongoing discourse underscores the complexities of governance in a multilingual society and the tensions inherent in constructing a national identity amid profound linguistic diversity. [9]

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has asserted that the central government neglects the Kannada language while promoting Hindi, claiming a pattern of systemic injustice and reduced fiscal allocation to Karnataka despite its substantial contribution to national revenue. Siddaramaiah characterized this as "step-motherly treatment" and called for public opposition to anti-Kannada policies. He further argued that the emphasis on Hindi and English as mediums of instruction undermines local talent and cultural identity, advocating for legislative measures to establish the mother tongue as the primary medium in education. Siddaramaiah contended that current funding priorities favor Hindi and Sanskrit development, resulting in insufficient support for Kannada as a classical language, and urged the Centre to reconsider its approach to linguistic equity and regional development. [12]

The controversy over Hindi imposition has become a focal point of India's language politics. Recent government proposals to make Hindi mandatory in schools and official settings have sparked fierce opposition in states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, where regional identity and language pride are deeply rooted. Critics argue that such policies threaten local languages and cultures, undermining the federal spirit and India's pluralistic ethos. These conflicts reveal that language policy functions not only as an administrative tool but also as a site where competing visions of citizenship, federalism, and cultural authority are negotiated.

These debates are not solely linguistic disputes but entangled struggles over political authority, cultural representation, and federal equilibrium, reflecting divergent visions of citizenship and national identity across India's diverse regions.

4.4 English as the Link Language

The paper by Dr. Rinkal Sharma provides a comprehensive historical and policy analysis of the role of English as a link language in India, tracing its origins from colonial administration to its contemporary significance in education, communication, science, technology, diplomacy, and commerce. Following Bloch and Trager's linguistic framework, the study examines how the East India Company's rule facilitated the establishment of English both as an administrative and instructional medium, supplanting earlier vernacular and classical languages, through missionary and reformist interventions. The colonial period's Anglicist-Orientalist controversy, notably resolved by Macaulay's Minute in 1835, institutionalized English in schools, which persisted with the support of figures such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Post-independence, several government commissions, starting with the University Education Commission (1948) chaired by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, acknowledged both the divisive impact and the indispensable intellectual value of English, recommending its continued study, not as a state language but as an access point to global knowledge. The Secondary Education Commission (1952) and subsequent education policy reports advocated for a balanced, multilingual approach led by the mother tongue, Hindi, and English, with English holding a secondary but vital position. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) reinforced the need for English as a 'Library Language' and as a permanent feature in higher education due to the country's ongoing technological and scientific aspirations. Policy iterations such as the three-language formula allowed regional flexibility, ensuring English did not displace local tongues yet remained available for students seeking broader opportunities. Further constitutional developments, especially the 92nd Constitutional Amendment, expanded recognition of Indian languages; however, despite not being included as an official national language in the Constitution, English remains protected for its critical role in national integration, judicial administration, and inter-state government communication, especially as the 'Associate Official Language' following parliamentary debates and legislation in 1963. The paper highlights English's capacity for bridging educated citizens across linguistically diverse states, facilitating both national unity and the professional mobility necessary for national development. In science and technology, English is identified as the unrivaled medium for instructional and research discourse, with attempts to indigenize scientific vocabulary largely inadequate; technical literature continuously employs English terminology, underscoring its importance for educational attainment and innovation. Internationally, English acts as India's conduit for diplomatic engagement, trade negotiations, participation in global organizations such as the United Nations, and the execution of treaties and communiqués, symbolizing India's connection to the global community and international goodwill. The domains of trade and commerce further reinforce English's significance, as transactions, legislative documentation, and international finance, such as dealings with the World Bank or IMF are conducted predominantly in English, impacting economic development strategies. The author concludes that while English cannot serve as a mass link language, given the dominance of regional and mother tongues in everyday communications, it remains indispensable for the educated classes, interstate exchanges, scientific progress, and international relations. Any abrupt withdrawal would pose psychological, social, and educational risks, and historical experience evidences English's efficacy in sustaining unity and fostering national advancement. Challenges persist regarding linguistic equity and the tension between native language prioritization and English's entrenched academic, technical, and diplomatic functions, but the synthesis of these forces

positions English as an enduring, if sometimes contested, pillar of India's social infrastructure, meriting its ongoing policy protection and academic investment. [16]

English occupies a unique position as India's associate official language, functioning as a bridge between diverse linguistic communities for administration, education, and commerce. Its neutrality and wide acceptance among the educated class promote cooperation and inclusiveness, enabling effective inter-state and national communication. Although English does not function as a grassroots vernacular, it occupies an indispensable role as an interregional lingua franca, facilitating administrative coordination, advanced education, scientific innovation, and India's integration into global networks.

5. Suggestions

Considering India's complex linguistic landscape and the multifaceted challenges exposed by historical experience and contemporary debates, several policy recommendations emerge as critical for fostering inclusivity, equity, and cohesion within the nation's multilingual public sphere. First, the exigency of visibly and substantively including all constitutionally recognized languages in public signage, official communication, and administrative use cannot be overstated. A standardized multilingual signage regime, listing each of the 22 scheduled languages alongside English as a functional link language, would symbolically acknowledge the equal constitutional status of these languages while pragmatically facilitating inter-regional interaction. The presence of English, sustaining its associate official status, functions not only as a neutral bridge language but also as an enabler of access to higher education, science, technology, and global engagement. Such inclusive representation would counteract perceptions of linguistic hegemony, particularly those arising from perceived Hindi imposition, thus mitigating regional anxieties, and reinforcing the federal spirit enshrined in the constitution.

Second, education policy must prioritize mother tongue–based multilingual instruction initiated from the earliest years of formal schooling, consistent with growing neurocognitive and pedagogical research affirming the benefits of early bilingualism and multilingualism. Implementation of the three-language formula should be reimagined with genuine flexibility and adequate resource allocation toward vernacular languages, rather than remaining a top-down prescription that often relegates regional tongues to marginal status. Curricula can be designed to encourage translanguaging practices that reflect lived linguistic realities and validate the diverse repertoires students bring to the classroom. Teacher training and material development must be systematically intensified to ensure high-quality instruction across multiple languages, with particular attention to historically underserved languages and minorities. Moreover, English language provision should be integrated thoughtfully to build both formal and informal communicative competence without displacing foundational vernacular literacy, thus preparing students for participation in both local and global spheres.

Third, census enumeration and linguistic classification require urgent reform to enhance transparency, inclusivity, and accuracy in capturing India's true linguistic diversity. Current aggregation practices obscure many minority languages and dialects, limiting their representation in policy formulation and resource distribution. Recognizing and legitimizing these micro-languages is essential for safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting educational rights.

This recalibration would allow more equitable recognition of linguistic minorities and provide empirical grounding for targeted language support programs, mitigating historic marginalization perpetuated by exclusionary statistics.

Fourth, policy frameworks must address the sociopolitical dimensions of language choice, recognizing language as a site of identity, power, and contestation rather than merely a communication tool. Government initiatives must avoid instrumentalizing language for political consolidation or cultural homogenization while fostering dialogue among linguistic communities to build mutual respect and mitigate exclusionary "sons of the soil" narratives. Digital platforms offer new venues for multilingual content dissemination and cultural exchange, and investments in technology solutions that support language pluralism can enhance democratic participation and social cohesion.

Finally, ongoing oversight and evaluation mechanisms, such as the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, should be empowered and adequately resourced to monitor language policy implementation consistently, ensuring accountability across central and state governments. Policies must remain adaptive to shifting demographic, social, and technological realities, institutionalizing flexibility without sacrificing the core constitutional commitments to linguistic pluralism and federalism.

Collectively, these recommendations envision a language policy framework that embraces linguistic plurality as a democratic strength and a constitutive feature of India's national identity, where unity does not require uniformity, and diversity is a source of collective enrichment rather than division.

6. Conclusion

Language has historically divided as much as it has united. The lessons from the Tower of Babel inform modern policy-making in multilingual societies like India, where linguistic reorganization empowered local identities but also created new divisions. Policy approaches such as integrating all official languages into signage and using English as the connecting language can foster inclusivity and national cohesion, balancing diversity with unity. Operationally, this would entail a signage regime that lists all 22 scheduled languages in a standardized order, supplemented by English for inter-regional readability, alongside parallel reforms in school curricula and digital platforms to normalize multilingual communication rather than privileging any single Indian language.

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