

Abstract

India is a multilingual country with 121 languages and 22 official languages. In order to safeguard the interest of a language and its speakers, the Constitution of India has made the Eighth Schedule (ES) provision. Observing the common trend when the languages are included in the ES, it is used for administration, education, and mass media in their respective states. In 1950, there were 14 languages in ES, which has now increased to 22 in 2003. Different language communities across India have raised movements from time to time to get their languages included in the ES. In this context, it is relevant to ascertain the impact of the ES inclusion on a language's vitality. The present study aims to investigate the case of the Maithili language, which was included in ES in 2003, after a long political movement.

The study explores how the ES inclusion of Maithili has helped in its maintenance or shift. This study has also been intended to assess the vitality of the Maithili language along UNESCO's LVE (Language Vitality and Endangerment) framework to understand the effectiveness of ES inclusion of the Maithili language. This study assesses the status of Maithili on different parameters to understand the factors which lead to shift or maintenance. Mixed-method data collection has been used for the study, including questionnaires, focused group discussions, and unstructured interviews.

The analysis of data based on the self-reported language proficiency indicates that the intergenerational transmission of Maithili is broken, which is reflected from the decline in the language proficiency in the age cohort that corresponds to the relatively younger respondent. The concept of intergenerational transmission is extended to the attitude and beliefs of the community members to understand the beliefs and opinions of the Maithili speakers towards their language. A generational shift in the attitude of the respondents (the second component of the research

question was to investigate the role of attitude) is perhaps the most crucial factor affecting language shift in Bihar districts. Based on the analysis, there is a correlation between the factors of caste and religion and the speakers' attitude, which is also reflected in their linguistic behaviour.

Coming to Maithili's usage in different domains, findings indicate that Maithili is mainly used in the home domain by speakers of almost all age groups. Apart from this, the usage of Maithili is marred by Hindi in other domains such as administration, mass media and education. Although Maithili is a constitutionally recognized language, the shift of Maithili speakers towards Hindi suggests that inclusion into the ES has so far been of not much help in the maintenance of the language. Constitutional recognition may help enhance the status of a language, but if a language is not associated with economic opportunities and school education, speakers get discouraged in maintaining it.

Further, the present study observes that bilingualism with Hindi has become almost apparent among Maithili speakers in Bihar. Some Maithili speakers have shifted to only speaking Hindi that is indicative of an unstable state of bilingualism. Maithili might not be at risk of mass shift or endangerment, but if necessary, steps are not taken, Maithili might experience endangerment in the future. Maintenance of Maithili in the future is not possible without an active effort and the proper implementation of language policy and educational policy. The present study can serve as a model to understand that status planning in the form of inclusion is not effective until acquisition planning is taken into consideration.