

**“SHOULD SOUTH INDIANS LEARN HINDI?
WHY OR WHY NOT?”
(An Internet discussion analysis)***

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The complicated linguistic situation in India, which is a consequence of the great number of languages in the country and their different status, is regulated by the Constitution of India of 1950. It declares Hindi and English to be the official languages of the Republic of India. Besides these two, it mentions another 122 languages (22 scheduled and 100 non-scheduled ones).¹ The language policy of the Union is further particularized by other laws and regulations, which are issued by the Department of Official Language, and the president's acceptances of language acts and recommendations. Regulations sporadically spark discussions on language. People usually hear from politicians, members of relevant commissions, and journalists, but the views of ordinary speakers of Indian languages are far less known. They are the subject of my analysis of the Internet discussion which appeared on Quora Digest in 2014 – 2017 in response to the actions of Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi and President Pranab Mukherjee, who, in 2014 and 2017 respectively, advocated a wider use of Hindi. The participants in the discussion respond to the question: “Should South Indians learn Hindi? Why or why not?”, which eventually sparked questions about whether they really want to consider themselves as Indians and why South

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¹ Scheduled languages are spoken by millions of people. Eighteen of them have the status of a regional language and are official languages in some of the Indian states. Besides being the official language of the Republic of India, Hindi is also the regional official language in nine Indian states. This categorization of Indian languages affects their status within the country. Scheduled languages are supported by the government, which entails making provisions for them to be used as languages of instruction in the national system of education or to be taught as the second or third language. Non-scheduled languages do not receive such support. Most of them are used by the tribal population in the central and north-eastern states of India. Their rights are protected by the Commissioner of Linguistic Minorities.

Indians do not learn Hindi if they can learn English. The discussion involved about 250 respondents. Its analysis is summarized in the following sections: I. Hindi as the official/national language of the Republic of India; II. Reasons to learn/not learn Hindi, the quality of Hindi instruction; III. Attitudes towards native Hindi speakers; IV. Attitudes towards English; V. Attitudes towards the need for one common language for the whole Union.

Keywords: internet discussion, Hindi in South India, quality of Hindi instruction, attitudes towards Hindi, native Hindi speakers and English, common language for the Union

Introduction

Since India is home to a multitude of languages which are spoken by millions of people and often have a rich history, tradition, and literature, it is quite natural that there are occasional conflicts between language communities struggling for prestige. The role of the language of the ruling class in the vast empires stretching over the Indian subcontinent was in the past first played by Sanskrit and then by the Persian language, which in 1837 was replaced as the official language by English and the domestic languages of some provinces in British India. In North India it was Urdu. Its introduction aroused the indignation of the Hindu elite, who, rivalling the Muslim elite, tried to introduce Hindi into the administration. Language was also part of the political struggle in the periods to come. The conflicts centred mainly on the promotion of Hindi, which caused the displeasure not only of the Muslim cultural elite, but also of the population in the Dravidian part of India. For example, the efforts of the Indian National Congress headed by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari to make Hindi a compulsory language in schools in 1937 led to many protests against this decision, especially in Tamil Nadu (formerly Madras State, part of the Madras Presidency). This opposition eventually resulted in the abolition of the regulation by the British governor Erskine in 1940. The language question also became an inseparable part of the Indian fight against British colonial rule when a decision was being made about which language would become the national or official language in the independent country. During the struggle for independence, the Indian National Congress, in an attempt to unite the Hindus and Muslims, considered Hindustani, a mixture of Hindi and Urdu, which uses either Urdu or Devanagari script. This idea was promoted especially by Mahatma Gandhi. Also most of the members of the Indian National Congress supported this policy in the 1940s. However, when Muslim politicians started talking about creating a Muslim state by separating from India, the plan to make Hindustani an official language was abandoned and, despite the resistance of politicians from the southern part of India where Dravidian languages are spoken, Hindi became the official language of the Republic of India, with

English remaining an auxiliary official language. This is also entrenched in the Constitution of India of 1950. As per Article 343 “Official language of the Union”,

- (1) The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals.
- (2) Notwithstanding anything in clause (1), 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.

Clause (3) of Article 343 makes it clear that the use of English may continue after the lapse of the period of fifteen years:

- (3) Notwithstanding anything in this article, Parliament may by law provide for the use, after the said period of fifteen years, of (a) the English language.

According to the Constitution, English was to be used for official purposes at least until 1965, when it could be fully replaced by Hindi. This provision caused protests in the non-Hindi speaking states, which feared that “may” could mean “can” but “does not have to”. The protests were led again by the Tamil party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Jawaharlal Nehru was afraid that the unrest could also spread to the other non-Hindi speaking states. As a result, in 1963 the Indian National Congress passed the Official Languages Act, which sanctioned the use of English also after 1965. Despite this, 1965 saw another revolt in Madras State. The Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri did his best to appease the situation and assure the protesters that English would continue to be used as the official language as long as the non-Hindi speaking states wanted. The Official Languages Act was eventually amended in 1967 by the Congress Government headed by Indira Gandhi to guarantee the indefinite use of Hindi and English as the official languages.

More language-related protests occurred in Tamil Nadu in 1968 and 1986. The unrest in 1968 was directed at the Three Language Formula, which was formulated in 1968 by the Union Education Ministry (and reiterated in the National Policy on Education in 1986) and which provided for the study of “Hindi, English and modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi speaking states and Hindi, English and the Regional

language in the non-Hindi speaking States.”² In response to the protests, Hindi was eliminated from the curriculum in Tamil Nadu.

Another protest against Hindi broke out in Tamil Nadu in 1986. It was related to the efforts of Rajiv Gandhi to introduce at the national level Navodaya schools for socially disadvantaged children with Hindi as a compulsory language. After the protest, Tamil Nadu remained the only state where such schools were not opened. The present Tamil government firmly supports the two-language education policy in Tamil and English.

All of this demonstrates that the language question was and still is a sensitive issue in Indian politics. The language policy, especially in relation to the wider use of Hindi as the official language and language of education, has received constant attention. Since the creation of the independent Republic of India, several important documents on the subject have been drafted. The most important documents are to be found on the webpage of the Department of Official Language, which was founded as an independent Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs in June 1975. They include: the Constitutional Provision, the President’s Order, 1960,³ The Official Languages Act, 1963,⁴ The Official Language Resolution, 1968,⁵ the Official Language Rules, 1976,⁶ The Official Language Policy of the Union,⁷ the Recommendations of the Committee of Parliament on Official Languages of 2011 and the President’s approval of 2017.⁸

According to the Official Languages (Use for Official Purpose of the Union) rules, 1976 (As Amended, 1987, 2007, 2011), the states of India are divided into three groups: A, B, and C.

Group A includes the states where the official (and regional) language is Hindi. They are Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh,

² *Three Language Formula*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://web.archive.org/web/20120222082907/http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/u/47/3X/473X0I01.htm>.

³ *President’s order, 1960*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/en/president-order-1960>.

⁴ *Official Languages Act, 1963*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/en/official-languages-act-1963>.

⁵ *Official Language Resolution, 1968*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/en/official-language-resolution-1968>.

⁶ *Official Language Rules, 1976*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/en/official-language-rules-1976>.

⁷ *Official Language Policy of the Union*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/en/official-language-policy-union>.

⁸ *President’s Orders on the Recommendations of the Committee of Parliament on the Official Language*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/en/presidents-orders-recommendations-committee-parliament-official-language>.

Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, the Union Territories of Delhi, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Group B consists of the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Punjab, and the Union Territory of Chandigarh, Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

Group C is made up of the other Indian states, i.e. the states and the Union Territories other than those referred to in A and B.

The rules define the position of Hindi, English, and the regional languages in communications from a Central Government office to a State or a Union Territory in individual regions (A, B, and C) or to any office (not being a Central Government office) or person in such a State or Union Territory, as well as setting forth the rules on communications between Central Government Offices. They also stipulate which language should be used by Central Government offices in replies to communications received, applications, representations etc., noting in Central Government offices; it is always Hindi and English.⁹

The basic rules on the use of Hindi and English as the official languages are formulated clearly. However, the recommendations of language commissions seek space for more emphasis on the wider use of Hindi. The problem of language policy in India was again revived after Narendra Damodardas Modi took up the post of prime minister in 2014. He took the oath of office and delivered his first parliamentary speech in Hindi. Encouraged by him, Indian ambassadors also replaced English with Hindi in their official speeches. Modi also spoke Hindi when meeting officials of other Asian countries. His attitude aroused some indignation and perhaps also surprise although it was in fact in accordance with The Official Languages (Use for Official Purpose of the Union) rules, 1976 (As Amended, 1987, 2007, 2011).

The circular of the Home Ministry's Official language department issued on May 27 (2014) requesting all government employees and officials of all ministries, departments, corporations or banks, who have made official accounts on social networking sites, to use Hindi, or both Hindi and English but give priority to Hindi¹⁰ met with resistance, too. It was immediately criticized in

⁹ It follows from the rules that employees at Central Government offices are expected to have a working knowledge of Hindi. An office must be classified as an office which possesses a working knowledge of Hindi. It will become one if 80 per cent of its staff possess a working knowledge of Hindi. There are specific rules for determining who has a working knowledge of Hindi.

¹⁰ JAIN, Bh. Home ministry issues circular promoting use of Hindi on social media. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from *The Times of India*, June 19, 2014. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Home-ministry-issues-circular-promoting-use-of-Hindi-on-social-media/articleshow/36838165.cms>.

Tamil Nadu by the chief of the DMK Muthuvel Karunanidhi¹¹ and by the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayaram Jayalithaa.¹² Also the Communist Party of India (Marxist) joined the protest. The Indian National Congress, the main opposition party, recommended treating this issue with caution.¹³ Palaniappan Chidambaram, a former Union Minister and senior party leader from Tamil Nadu, described the move to use Hindi as being “against the letter and the spirit” of the Official Languages Act.¹⁴ He asked the Prime Minister Modi to suitably modify the instructions to ensure that English was the language of communication on social media.¹⁵

In response to the protests, the government came up with the explanation that the promotion of use of Hindi on social media applied only to the Hindi speaking states.¹⁶ However, the preference for Hindi over English affects all civil servants in federal institutions who are not native Hindi speakers and who often received their education in English.

The recommendations for a wider use of Hindi concern not only federal institutions, but also education. The use of languages in education is regulated by the Three-Language Formula of 1968. Although, according to the formula, schools should teach Hindi, English, and a modern Indian language (preferably one of the southern languages) in the Hindi-speaking states and Hindi, English,

¹¹ KARLA, A. *Modi's push for Hindi struggles to translate in some states*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com).

¹² Press Trust of India. Jayalithaa writes to Modi against the use of Hindi, calls the issue ‘highly sensitive’. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from *The Indian EXPRESS*, June 20, 2014. [indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/jayalithaa-writes-to-modi-against-use-of-hindi-calls-the-issue-highly-sensitive/](https://www.indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/jayalithaa-writes-to-modi-against-use-of-hindi-calls-the-issue-highly-sensitive/).

¹³ PTI. Hindi not being imposed on non-Hindi-speaking States: BJP. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from *The Hindu*, June 20, 2014. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/hindi-not-being-imposed-on-nonhindispeaking-states-bjp/article6133919.ece>.

¹⁴ The regulation indeed states that the use of English for correspondence by the Central Government with the States may be discontinued only after the legislatures of all non-Hindi speaking States have passed resolutions for such discontinuance. However, in the interregnum, for certain specified purposes Hindi alone may be used and for some other purposes both English and Hindi may be used.

¹⁵ SHARMA, A. Non-Hindi speaking states like Tamil Nadu protest over government's move to use Hindi for social networking. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from *The Economic Times. Politics*, June 21, 2014. economictimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/non-hindi-speaking-states-like-tamil-nadu-protest-over-governments-move-to-use-hindi-for-social-networking-websites/article/36906854.cms?from=mdr.

¹⁶ IndiaToday.in. Now govt says use of Hindi on social media only in Hindi-speaking states. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. In *India Today*, June 20, 2014. Available from indiatoday.in/india/north/story/use-of-hindi-on-social-media-only-in-hindi-speaking-states-197693-2014-06-20.

and the regional language in the non-Hindi speaking states, two models are in place in real life. In the non-Hindi speaking states, the first language is the regional language, i.e. the language spoken by most of the population, the second language is the official language of the Republic of India, either Hindi or English, and the third language is again English or Hindi. In the Hindi-speaking states, the first language is Hindi, the second/third language is English, Urdu, or Sanskrit.¹⁷ As is evident from this, Dravidian languages are not taught anywhere except in the southern Indian states.

Discussion on the wider use of Hindi in education was stimulated by the Recommendations of the Committee of Parliament on Official Languages of 2011,¹⁸ which were intended to make Hindi more popular. They included, for example, recommendations to make the Hindi language compulsory in curriculum, to draw up an action plan for implementing a Hindi teaching scheme in all universities/higher educational institutes, to establish Hindi departments so that these departments could extend help in imparting education through the medium of Hindi, to provide financial aid to the voluntary Hindi institutes and to create textbooks. It is recommended that a minimum level of Hindi education be set in all educational institutions, the option of attempting question papers through the medium of Hindi should be given to candidates in the recruitment to Central Government services, a minimum level of knowledge of Hindi for all services should be set and a proposal for making Hindi education compulsory up to Class ten should be introduced in the Parliament.

The rules on Hindi in education also provoked a reaction among ordinary people. This issue is controversial, as already mentioned, especially in the non-Hindi speaking states, mainly in the south of India, and particularly in Tamil Nadu. The attitudes of the inhabitants of this part of India, as well as of other parts of India, are the subject of my analysis.

Internet Discussion

Although Hindi should be compulsory in the curriculum in all Indian states (with the exception of Tamil Nadu, which has won for itself a bilingual system

¹⁷ DURAIRAJAN, G. *Realisations and Perceptions of Preferred Languages in Indian Classrooms : Teacher Education Implications*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332241589_Realisations_and_Perceptions_of_PREFERRED_Languages_in_Education_Implications.

¹⁸ *Recommendations of the Committee of Parliament on Official Languages, 2011*. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from <https://rajbhasha.gov.in/sites/default/files/cpolreport9-chapter15eng.pdf>.

of education), its use is probably insufficient when there are still new recommendations on its introduction to all schools. One of them is the recommendation issued by the Indian president Pranab Mukherjee in 2017 to make Hindi a compulsory subject from Class 8 to Class 10 in all Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)¹⁹ and Kendriya Vidyalaya schools.^{20 21} The approval of this measure became a stimulus for the discussion under analysis.

Respondents answered the question, “Should South Indians learn Hindi? Why or why not?”, which eventually led to further questions: “Do they really want to consider themselves as Indians? Why don’t South Indians learn Hindi if they can learn English?”

The Internet discussion involved about 250 respondents, who came either from the south or from the north of India. Occasionally they included Indians living abroad. In most cases the discussion is not anonymous, the respondents mostly use their full names, often post their photographs, sometimes also mention their occupation²² or use other ways of describing themselves.²³ All but

¹⁹ The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is a national level board of education in India for public and private schools, controlled and managed by the Union Government of India. There are approximately 20,299 schools in India and 220 schools in 28 foreign countries affiliated to the CBSE.

²⁰ Kendriya Vidyalaya schools are a chain of central government schools in India that were set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). It started in 1962.

²¹ The Ministry of Human Resource Development should make serious efforts to make the Hindi language compulsory in the curriculum. As a first step, Hindi should be made a compulsory subject up to tenth standard in all schools of the CBSE and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. (S. No. 33, Ref. Part 3, Chapter 10).

²² Their occupation is given as it was given by them: Co-founder-Director, Newdigm Healthcare Technologies, Newspaper guy, Consultant, Senior Software Engineer at KPIT Technologies, a machine instructor, Network security specialist, works at Amazon, Journalist, A novice writer, MBA marketing and finance, works at Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, works at Rally.org; Hyderabad @ Heart/Brain/Tummy, BITS, eWellness Expert, Civil Engineer, Dev at Microsoft- Ex Amazonian, Ex Yahoo intern, UCLA grad student, Software Developer at Ctel Infosystems, Malayalee doctor, works at Banking, MA Kannada Literature & Dravidian Languages, University of Mysore, Geographer, Branding & Communications, works at Indecomm Global Services, Architect, Director at Csr gateway, works at Idea Cellular, Business Analyst, works at Sapient; Reluctant Banker, works at HCL Technologies, Tech Savy, Shutterbug.

²³ I’m a true-blue Indian from all angles-aerial included!; studied at Delhi Public School, Rourkela; Born in India; Unfuckwithable; Avid Reader and Made in Madras; Floopilicious; proud to be Indian! Having keen interest in South Indian culture and languages, and knows Kannada, Knows 5 languages; Top Writers Class of 2017;

a few contributions are in English, which demonstrates that the discussion was joined only by a certain group of the Indian population and its results need not be representative of the moods and attitudes of the other inhabitants. The Internet discussion gives the respondents an opportunity to voice their opinions on a given question, but the dialogue with the others provokes them into developing them further and perhaps correcting them or placing them in a broader context. The attitudes of the participants in the discussion are most often influenced by their life/work experience, but sometimes also by the extent of their knowledge of the history of the issue (for example, a struggle for a national language before and after winning independence, promotion of Hindi as the official language of the Union, Tamil resistance to it, the issue of a national and an official language, etc.) and by the pride of the inhabitants of South India, especially Tamils, of their language and culture, heavily supported by politicians. The attitudes of the respondents are mostly pragmatically oriented (usefulness or uselessness to learn a foreign language, the necessity/lack of necessity to speak Hindi, the quality of Hindi instruction, the necessity/lack of necessity of one common language for the whole country), sometimes politically oriented (a link between language and national identity or culture, an issue of patriotism), and occasionally the inhabitants of the Hindi belt are accused of racism, laziness, arrogance, hypocrisy, ignorance, etc. As is evident from the questions asked, the participants in the discussion often voice their attitude towards the necessity of a command of English and its status in the Republic of India.

The questions which provoked the discussion are closely linked, and the participants' responses to them often represent a network of interrelated and sometimes contradictory views. Due to the large number of participants, there is a great recurrence of opinions, with greater or lesser variation. In order to organize the views in a way that would allow me to present them with as much complexity as possible, I have identified and focused my analysis on several topics. Each of them is represented by a set of examples.²⁴

The analysis of the discussion is summarized in the following sections: I. Hindi as the official/national language of the Republic of India; II. Reasons for

Listening and Learning from Nature and Traveling; I have lived in Andhra Pradesh; I loved the people; Can converse in 5 languages; Pragmatic Indian; I'm not the person you think I am; Observer of Indian and American politics lived in India...

²⁴ The discussion contributions are quoted as they were posted, without any grammatical or stylistic corrections. The quotations are accompanied by the names of the respondents and their self-description, which are also given in their original wording.

learning/not learning Hindi, the quality of Hindi instruction; III. Attitudes towards native Hindi speakers; IV. Attitudes towards English; V. Attitudes towards the need for one common language for the whole Union.

However, it must be said in the same breath that some participants in the discussion question the legitimacy of the questions which provoked it, plead for a conciliatory solution to the language question, or display readiness to rise above chauvinist, sectarian, or regional interests:

Today what we have according to constitution is right and fair for both the parties. And they agreed and all are happy except for few North Indian Chauvinist Nationalist. The question here like why South Indians don't know Hindi don't have any credibility. When the question is baseless and against the Indian constitution it should be condemned (why I say against Indian constitution is by law the government agreed to continue English along with Hindi as official language, so knowingly target a minority group and asking question for your convenience or to shame them is against law and creates hatred). Tamil Nationalism is only a defense mechanism when the problem itself was solved constitutionally no one is responsible for anyone to answer such questions. We should never encourage language Nationalism on both the sides. We should never encourage this arguments itself. (I did not argue in favor of non-hindi speakers as it looks, I am not defending like Tamil Nationalist, I am trying to change the mentality of Chauvinist Nationalist and directly condemn such baseless questions and their argument which creates unnecessary problems and hatred).

(Arjun Che, Global Citizen, Humanist)

As a common link language English and Hindi are being popularly adopted, out of volition, and for convenience, without any bias, malice, comparison or compulsion to any other language. Sectarian or regional interests should not be translated into linguistic conflicts. It is high time we should rise above it and focus on growth and development on national basis.

(Gopal Sinha, former Civil Engineer)

I. Hindi as the National or Official Language of the Republic of India

Although the discussion under analysis was provoked by the question: "Should South Indians learn Hindi? Why and why not?", several respondents return to the question of Hindi as the national or official language, which was delicate and divisive in multilingual India in the past. Although Hindi is by law considered the official language (*rajbhasha*), but not the national language

(*rashtriya bhasa*), not everyone seems to understand it, even years after the adoption of the Indian constitution:

I really don't know what to believe...some say that Hindi is our national language.
(Raakhee V. Menon, I'm a true-blue Indian from all angles-aerial included!)

This uncertainty is fed even by some journalists, for example, by Kuldip Nayar in the article "Hindi Spread Requires Patience", published in *The Statesman* on 26 July 2017.²⁵ The author, who is introduced as "a noted journalist, columnist and commentator", repeatedly speaks of Hindi as the national language. By saying, "That Hindi is the national language was decided by the constituent assembly," he makes his readers believe this:

In my life in North, whenever someone asks me 'Why people in South don't speak Hindi', I ask the same to them, 'Why people in north don't speak Telugu/Tamil/Malayalam/Kannada'. I get an answer that is standard - 'Hindi is our national language'.
(Kannan, The God)

Basically Hindi is a national language and along with English and local language Hindi is taught as part of curriculum in most of the Indian schools (both south and north).
(Prudhviraj G, works at Banking)

The idea of Hindi as the national language may be imparted by school instruction (particularly at schools in the Hindi belt states where Hindi is the regional and, hence, also the national language), as is suggested by the following contribution, which is a response to the previous one, explaining that Hindi is not the national language:

OK. Thanks for clarifying. I always remember being taught at school that Hindi is our national language.
(Namrata Thyagaraj)

²⁵ NAYAR, K. Hindi Spread Requires Patience. [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from *The Statesman*. <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/hindi-spread-requires-patience-1501104295.html>.

Hindi is also considered the national language by another participant who comes from the south of India, is fluent in several Indian languages, but does not seem to be very knowledgeable about Hindi as the first language in North India. His attitude is, however, formulated more broadly, in the spirit of one country – one common language:

Why do South Indians think of themselves so differently. Why this divide of North and South India. We have only India that is one whole country and Hindi is our national language. Hindi is not the language of North Indians. They have Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Rajasthani, Haryanvi etc. What is the problem with learning Hindi. We teach our kids French, German, Italian etc without having such issues. Can't we teach them the language of our country first. Our mother tongue is our mother tongue. Every child should learn it. But this country is also our mother and learning her language will not make us any less.

(Megha Shenoy)

Other participants question the position of Hindi as the national language:

First of all why is Hindi treated as national language? Our country is so diverse that only language we can say as common is either English or for sake of mother of languages Sanskrit.

(Santhosh Subramonian)

Generally, it may, however, be stated that most participants in the discussion understand that Hindi is not the national language, but the official language of the Republic of India, and confirm it in their contributions. It is attested to by the following statement:

Here's a High Court ruling on the matter, back in 2010: Hindi, not a national language: Hindi is merely the official language, which is a rather different thing.

(Arya Yuyutsu, Born in India)

However, even the respondents who understand the position of Hindi in the Union keep returning to the problem of the choice of Hindi as the official language of the Republic of India. Mostly they feel negatively about it and regurgitate old, often-voiced arguments. They regard the argument that Hindi is the most widely spoken language in India (being spoken by over 40% of the

Indian population), which was used by some promoters of Hindi in the past, as insufficient.²⁶

Should Indians learn Mandarin, the most widely spoken language in the world ? Not necessarily. Languages are not just about numbers.
(Arjun Ramachandran, Unfuckwithable)

People should understand how they will feel if a language is imposed on them only because it has got the maximum speakers in the country.
(Prashant Ramalingam, studied at Delhi Public School, Rourkela)

Others question the argument of the superiority in number of the Hindi speaking population and try to prove that the high percentage of Hindi speakers is due to the fact that the language absorbed other literary languages which were significant in the past:

And I elaborate how the current Hindi version is marginalising Bhojpuri, Avadhi, Mithili etc.
(Kannan, The God)

Several respondents argue why Hindi should not have been selected as the official language of the republic. In their view, it does not stand out among the other Indian languages, but rather the contrary:

Next, none of the major languages lag behind Hindi in any of the qualities be it in history, vocabulary, literature and richness. In fact, Hindi often lags behind many languages on many of these counts. Hence, imposition of Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states is out of question.
(Quora User)

Yet another point we need to take into consideration is the fact that Hindi is being pressed on people who are the products of better developed languages like Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada for example. Just imagine what it would be like for Sri Lanka to threaten the United States of America.
(Padmanabhan Venkatesan, I have lived in Andhra Pradesh. I loved the people.)

²⁶ 43.63% according to Census of India 2011 [online] [cit. 20 June 2020]. Available from https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/C-16_25062018_NEW.pdf.

Several participants in the discussion are concerned about the wider use of Hindi, believing that it may lead to the loss of their identity and culture, which they associate with language:

There is absolutely no need to enforce Hindi language in S. India or any part of India. Indian culture, is diverse, localized, and is the net result of 1000's of years of evolution and passage of values in form of culture from generation to generation. Language is part of the culture. It is the responsibility of individual, family, society and the government to preserve each language, the culture and the art associated with it.
(Rakesh Wagh, Observer of Indian and American politics)

We should respect the mother tongue of all people and not particularly only one language. It is an attempt to effacing the heritage and identity of people who speak different languages. Dominance of Hindi slowly destroying other languages. Believe it or not no other major country has recognized Hindi as an important language. It is a commercial language in India that is it.
(Padmanabhan Venkatesan, I have lived in Andhra Pradesh. I loved the people.)

The discussants also refuse linking Hindi with patriotism:

South Indians will learn Hindi if they have to or if they want to. But they loathe the Northern rhetoric that learning Hindi is an integral part of patriotism. That's the language of imperialism.
It's arrogant and moronic to assume that learning Hindi is a prerequisite to be an Indian. Southerners see no earthly reason why anyone from the Hindi belt should tell other linguistic and ethnic groups to learn Hindi to be Indians.
(K Gopinath, Newspaper guy. Sceptic)

Questioning our patriotism based on our fluency in a language, that isn't our mother-tongue and not one that we use on a daily basis, is completely unjustifiable. What about Kashmiri & North-East? What about them? To me Punjabis, Bengalis, Gujaratis, Kashmiris, Assamese, Odiyas, Tamizh people, Malayalis, Kannadigas, Goans, Marathis, Rajasthanis and every other Indian citizen is one and the same....we are all Indians. That's all there is to it.
(Raakhee V. Menon, I'm a true-blue Indian from all angles-aerial included!)

The author of the following contribution suggests that even mastering Hindi might not eventually be enough for a person to be considered a real Indian. He

thus points to another problem: a conflict between the inhabitants of North India (these are nearly always represented by the inhabitants of the Hindi belt in the discussion) and South (Dravidian) India, but also northeast India:

People of Northeast learn Hindi and they're reviled and humiliated right in the capital of India. Obviously, learning Hindi hasn't made them Indian enough. Perhaps they don't smell like real Indians.
(K Gopinath, Newspaper guy. Sceptic)

Summary I

Although the Indian constitution clearly defines the position of Indian languages in the country, some respondents in the discussion voice the conviction that Hindi is the national language while others note that it is "only" the official language.

The opponents of Hindi keep returning to the question of the selection of Hindi as the official language, expressing disagreement with it. They have several arguments against it: they do not find Hindi suitable merely because it is spoken by over 40% of India's population, they consider the language less developed than many other Indian languages, usually referring only to Dravidian languages. They point out that linking Hindi with patriotism is incorrect. Others are afraid that they will lose their identity and culture if they allow a wider use of Hindi.

II. Reasons for Learning / not Learning Hindi, the Quality of Hindi Instruction

As is evident from the previous sections, many participants in the discussion do not respond only to the question whether South Indians should learn Hindi. Besides the fact that the question is an opportunity for them to express their opinions on the broader language-related problem, they also often place Hindi instruction in the wider context of learning a foreign language. They very often say that people learn a language if they need it as a means of communication. It is a general rule, which is also applicable to Hindi:

We learn any language if the need arises...if we need it to earn our daily bread...be it Hindi or Odiya or Bengali or anything. Otherwise, why **should** we?

(Raakhee V. Menon, I'm a true-blue Indian from all angles-aerial included!)

I think learning a language would become important only if there's a vast majority of people speaking it at the place you live. So if i'm a South Indian telugu guy and most of the people i know speak telugu , i don't really have to learn another language. If it so happens that i live in a North Indian state, and most people there speak another language, i should probably learn that, not just Hindi, say if i stay in Kolkata i should learn Bengali or if i stay in Ahmedabad i should learn Gujarati , but that is because to feel a certain level of comfort with the locals and not be the odd one out , its not necessary as long i can make the day-to-day conversations.

It applies the same to a North Indian guy staying in a South Indian state. (Adithya Gangisetty, I'm not the person you think I am)

Why don't north Indians learn Tamil? Or Bengali's learn either Hindi or Tamil? They just don't need to.
(Arya Yuyutsu, Born in India)

Nobody seems to think that it would be good to have a command of Hindi because it is the official language of the Republic of India. A few say that people are learning Hindi only out of respect for the official language:

We do learn Hindi. At least in Kerala, it is taught in all schools. It is given the respect it demands as a ~~national~~ official language. But that's all there is to it. It is just a subject studied for the sake of information, and not for communication...

(Raakhee V. Menon, I'm a true-blue Indian from all angles-aerial included!)

The respondents oppose the imposition of Hindi on the non-Hindi speaking states, but many find pragmatic reasons for having a command of it, which they have gained thanks to compulsory Hindi instruction, for example, being able to communicate with the inhabitants of the other Indian states, and not only of the states where Hindi is the regional language:

... However, it is a great advantage to learn Hindi for a non-Hindi person. This again depends on his use of learning the language... ... any person searching for a job outside his state or wanting to do business with people of other states would find it convenient as they would be more likely able to find people who too can converse in Hindi rather in Tamil or Telugu. Hence, Hindi would be essentially useful for educated and mobile people.

Lot of South Indians, because of the three-language policy (single-language policy for the cow-belt!!), have benefited from their multi-lingual skills. The gap in prosperity and well-being between the North and South is too obvious.

(Quora User)

Well, since Hindi is not the National language of our country, there isn't any (and should not be) compulsion to learn the language. However, Hindi, apart from English, is the most common language of medium, and hence an effort in speaking and understanding it wouldn't be a waste of time. Especially, in all but TN, Kerala, AP and Karnataka, almost everyone speaks and understands Hindi better than English and hence it would make sense for the south-indians to know passable knowledge of the language.

(NavneetaPathak, Indian)

Pragmatism is also reflected in the denial of the usefulness of Hindi under certain circumstances. It is meaningless for ordinary country people who have lived all their lives in one village, for people who will not look for a job in the Hindi speaking states, and, according to some, for everyone in Tamil Nadu because their state offers them a sufficient number of job opportunities and cultural activities:

What would a small time farmer living in a village in TN or AP do by learning Hindi. He may never come across a Hindi speaking person in his whole life.

(Quora User)

No need for south Indian's to learn Hindi. What is the use? Unless they travel in North and do lot of conversations to local population who does not know any language other than Hindi. If we go to Odisha we have to learn basic ordia. Like Maharashtra, Bengal, Punjab, Gujarat, etc. All North, West and few East Indian languages are Indo Aryan. So i hope learning one will help others.

(Viji Palaniappan, One of the oldest living language)

Tamilnadu is one of the best performing states under various govt schemes. It tries to be self-sufficient in providing jobs to its people and prevents the need of migration. Therefore, arguably there is no need to be able to speak in hindi to make a living. However, the question is what your needs are.

(Saurav Das, Co-founder-Director, Newdigm Healthcare Technologies)

Another reason why tamilians do not learn hindi is because they have a rich well developed entertainment industry. Not that bollywood and tamil cinema are mutually exclusive. They do inspire each other and the veterans in either of them have respect for each other. However, there are enough Illayaraja and A R Rehman melodies to play on the ipod, Gautham Menon movies are beautiful aesthetically mostly abroad, the most popular soaps in north India are dubbed in tamil also.

(Saurav Das, Co-founder-Director, Newdigm Healthcare Technologies)

Another reason why people in the south refuse to learn Hindi is its association with poverty:

Hindi, in the south, during the last decade has come to be related with cheap labor and poverty due to migration from the North. This is another reason why people in the south don't speak this language.

(Nandha Kumar, studied at University of Delhi)

Some respondents justify some Indians' resistance to Hindi by the action of politicians who take advantage of the language issue for advancing their own interests:

This abhorrence of Hindi has more to do with politics rather than logic. Across the Tamil political spectrum, the parties have realised that Hindi will be detrimental to the hegemony of the dravidian political parties and leaders across party lines stand united in their opposition to promoting Hindi in Tamil Nadu.

(Rishi Iyer, Pragmatic Indian)

Yes, from years of experience I can tell that there is an intense hatred towards Hindi and the reason is not the language itself, but the ways it is being thrust on them by English-illiterate North Indian politicians and the government at the center.

(Nandha Kumar, studied at University of Delhi)

Quite a few respondents bear it as a grievance that in the non-Hindi speaking states students have to learn three languages (the regional language, Hindi, and English) while in the states of the Hindi belt students make do with their regional language (Hindi) and English.

Aversion to Hindi in South India may also be caused by the fact that its inhabitants speak Dravidian languages, which are very different from the Indo-Aryan languages which are spoken in the north of India and which include Hindi. As a result, it is not easy for the inhabitants of South India to learn Hindi:

It is really difficult to learn Hindi being a South Indian and learning any of the 4 languages being not from that place, it all comes from practice and depends on person's ability and his interest and needs.

(Prashant Ramalingam, studied at Delhi Public School, Rourkela)

In the end, it must be stated that the respondents quite often ask the opposite question: why do people in North India not learn a South Indian language when the inhabitants of South India are expected to learn Hindi? The following participant replies:

Their commonly used argument - why should we learn Hindi, why don't you learn {Tamil, Telugu etc... } has one major flaw - as a Hindi speaker, I can communicate in about 15 Indian states (Pardon my GK, but I don't know if Hindi is spoken in the North-Eastern states). Even if I learn one of these, which would take considerable effort on my part, I'd still be comfortable in only one of these states. They don't have a common lingua-franca of their own.

(Anonymous)

Hindi instruction at schools naturally raises questions of its effectiveness. Several respondents note that it is insufficient. Although students learn Hindi at school for quite a few years, their knowledge does not correspond with this. Hindi instruction often lays emphasis on the knowledge of grammatical rules, students can at best understand when someone speaks Hindi, but they cannot make themselves understood in the language:

I am not sure about other states but in Andhra Pradesh we study Hindi as a second language right from 1st standard. Would you believe it? Still my brother, my spouse, my dad and lot of others from my extended family and friends can hardly converse in Hindi. We could partly blame the education system for that.

(Krishna Teja Chavali, Infinite CC Engine-er)

I had hindi as my second language from 6 grade. I could understand hindi very well but I cant speak...

(Indu Priya)

I am from small town in coastal andhra prashesh. The main problem is here in rural places we dont find quality teachers who can teach proper hindi. And all of us in school where hindi is secondary language ,we used to feel we should pass the subject . We used to read textbooks and keep in mind without knowing the meaning or vocabulary. The problem is how

school managements treat the language and we dont use it for daily communication as we have our own well developed languages.
(Arun Jimmy, Software Developer at Ctel Infosystems)

Summary II

There is a wide discussion about whether it is necessary for the inhabitants of India to learn Hindi. The attitudes are mostly very pragmatic: those who need Hindi in practical life should learn it. The respondents consider Hindi useful not only in contact with the inhabitants of the northern part of India, but also in contact with the inhabitants of various states in South India. As Hindi is a required subject in almost all schools, people have at least some knowledge of it. On the other hand, many question the efficiency of its instruction.

Many are against the teaching of Hindi, especially if they do not need it in practical life, for example, if they spend their entire life in the countryside where they do not have contact with people from another environment, or if they never plan to visit any of the Hindi-speaking states. They might not need Hindi because their state, Tamil Nadu, offers them enough job opportunities and cultural activities.

Sometimes the attitude towards Hindi is influenced not only by whether a person will need it in communication, but also by its association with poverty since poor Indians from North India come to South India for jobs. Quite a few respondents reject Hindi because it is associated with politics.

Many point to the inefficiency of Hindi instruction, which might be linked with poor educational policy and management, but also with the fact that Hindi as an Indo-Aryan language is difficult for the speakers of Dravidian languages.

III. Attitudes Towards Native Hindi Speakers

The Internet discussion under analysis reflects not only the attitudes towards Hindi as the official/national language and the need to learn it, but also the negative attitudes towards its native speakers, i.e. the people for whom it is the first language. The respondents do not like the fact that Hindi is being imposed on them while the inhabitants of the Hindi-speaking states do not have to or want to learn any of the other Indian languages. They particularly point out their unwillingness to learn Dravidian languages. Some consider the imposition of Hindi and positive linguistic discrimination towards Hindi-speaking people to be the reasons for India's disunity and the hostile relationship between the inhabitants of its northern and southern part:

If Hindis start adopting the local language, then there won't be debates like Tamil vs Hindi or Marathi vs Hindi or Kannada vs Hindi. Non Hindi people will warm welcome the move and it will strengthen national integration. But if, Hindis keep their enforcement stand then we have seen separatist movements in the History which will impact India's growth.

We describe India as Unity in diversity. But this unity should be followed from both sides. When a Tamil goes to Hindi area, he should also not hesitate to learn Hindi but at the same time, Hindi coming to Karnataka must learn Kannada, then and only then we will be able to say all Indians are equal, all Indian languages are equal and we are a country of brotherhood and not the hatred.

(Siddhant Sant, Having keen interest in South Indian culture and languages, and knows Kannada)

Some participants in the discussion believe that the imposition of Hindi entails the imposition of North India's culture on the rest of the country:

I think the major reason everyone hates (okay hate is a strong word) native Hindi speakers is how they assume everyone in India would understand/speak Hindi. Like someone would board a bus in Bengaluru and start blabbering in Hindi. Not even English or broken Kannada. But Hindi, as if entire 1.25 billion people are native speakers. That, I guess is the major pet peeve of North vs South I have seen in the country which is largely a consequence of imposing North Indian culture on the rest of the country.

(Manohar Kanapaka)

Many respondents call people from the Hindi belt by unflattering names. They regard them as arrogant and hypocritical:

The person who has posted this question [i.e. the question which provoked the discussion, A. R.] sounds like a Northie who might have, like lakhs and lakhs of Northies come to study or work in the south, for a survival and expect the entire population to know the language (Hindi) only on the grounds that he is arrogant and a hypocrite.

(Prashant Ramalingam, studied at Delhi Public School, Rourkela)

Others accuse them of ignorance, which is reflected in their lack of knowledge about life and culture in other Indian states; they are offended by the fact that they lump together all the inhabitants of South India and their languages:

The points about the forceful imposition aren't entirely untrue. Most people who spoke Hindi all their life don't try to understand how the life is different in states which are formed because of their linguistic identities.

(Manohar Kanapaka)

North Indians should develop an intellect to differentiate between the four languages and not stereotype the whole of Southern India (It is not rocket science!!) It clearly shows ignorance and carelessness on the part of people when they don't respect the fact that some states have their unique languages.

(Prashant Ramalingam, studied at Delhi Public School, Rourkela)

There are also comments which describe the people from the Hindi belt as racist:

...in places like Bangalore or Mumbai, local people do pick up some Hindi and English to help them in their work, largely because of the demographics of these places – tourists, people who come settle from other places, etc. – but they also usually know Kannada too. That's three languages; very impressive, if you ask me. But if you go up north – Delhi or Punjab and those areas – not only is there an absolute lack of effort to even try and learn a word of the Southern languages, but there is actually a certain sort of racism that marks dark skinned people as ugly.

(Arya Yuyutsu, Born in India)

In the 1950s the federal government introduced a 3-language formula for schools under which students would learn three languages -- Hindi, English and a third lingo. The idea was northerners will opt for a southern language. It didn't turn out that way. Apparently the parents and officials of the north didn't take to the idea of learning the language of an inferior people. End of the 3-language formula.

(K Gopinath, Newspaper guy. Sceptic)

The author of the following contribution blames the behaviour of North Indians on their ignorance. He suggests that it is not caused by hostility or racism, but rather by the fact that they are not familiar with other cultures and they are heavily affected by how the inhabitants of South India and their culture are depicted by Bollywood films:

I agree with you that people from South India at times get to hear racist comments from North Indians. They often use words like Mallu to address almost anyone from South, or even Central India. However, what I've noticed is that this behavior is not due to hostility towards that

certain race. It is more due to lack of knowledge. North Indian people don't know squat about any place other than North India. They don't know about the different cultures. They just make assumptions based on what they see from Bollywood movies, which often depict South Indians as people who speak Hindi in a funny accent and would almost always eat dosa, I'd like, sambhar or rice. Bollywood movies don't show to people the beauty of South, or any other part of India for that matter. They don't show the rich culture that we have all over the country. It can only be experienced by travelling and keeping an open mind. Ultimately, what I want to point out is that North Indians don't intend to give people from South India a hard time. It's just that we're stupid.

(Rakshit Pandey)

Summary III

The imposition of Hindi on the non-Hindi speaking states leads not only to resentment against Hindi, but also to resentment against the native Hindi speakers. The respondents believe that it might be the reason for the disunity of the Union, which is proud of its unity in diversity. Several consider it unfair that they have to learn Hindi while the population of the Hindi belt can make do with the local language. They point to the arrogance and ignorance of the people from the Hindi belt, who expect everybody to speak Hindi and do not bother to learn a South Indian language even if they work in South India. They criticize them for not being familiar with the diversity of Indian languages and cultures, sometimes they even describe them as racists who look down on the people living outside of the Hindi belt. There are numerous comments which have a bitter undertone, but are not explicitly rude or hostile. Sometimes they tend to be apologetic (*what I want to point out is that North Indians don't intend to give people from South India a hard time. It's just that we're stupid.* Rakshit Pandey).

IV. Attitudes towards English

A lot of discussion was raised by the controversial question, "Why don't South Indians learn Hindi if they can learn English?" The respondents claim that South Indians also learn Hindi and offer reasons why it is useful to learn English. Many of them emphasize that people learn languages if they need them in everyday life (business people, tourists...). As a language which facilitates communication in multilingual India, English has the same position as Hindi. Several repeatedly emphasize the necessity to speak their own language:

So each state in South India has its own language and many try and pick up some English as well. That said, in places like Bangalore or Mumbai, local people do pick up some Hindi and English to help them in their work, largely because of the demographics of these places – tourists, people who come settle from other places, etc. – but they also usually know Kannada too. That's three languages; very impressive, if you ask me.

(Arya Yuyutsu, Born in India)

Now going to english language it should be used just as a bridge to connect people multilingual people and nothing more than that. One should always praise and speak in its own language and there should not be any shame in it.

(Rishabh Malik)

It isn't essential to know Hindi to manage in everyday life in south India. English does well enough for the more educated folks.

(Monideepa Sahu, lived in India)

Several say that the advantage of English over Hindi is that it is the language which facilitates contact and communication not only within India, but also between India and the world:

Another practical thing, even if you leave your state, and you know English, it can be used for communication not just in India, but across the world.

(Siddhant Sant, Having keen interest in South Indian culture and languages, and knows Kannada)

Now English suits the constraints of a lingua franca better than Hindi because of 1. Its international status. 2. There are more South Indians relocating internationally than to North Indian states... We should ideally be moving in the direction of everybody knowing English (translates to literacy rate).

(Arjun Ramachandran, Unfuckwithable)

English as an official language is typically considered a bridge between the centre and the individual Indian states and between South and North India.

Because of the diversity of india, Hindi cannot be pushed to be the only official language. So english remains to bridge the Gap between centre, Hindi Speaking states, and Non hindi speaking states. English rather than Hindi has become the defacto bridge between Hindi Speaking and non hindi speaking states in India !!!

(Vivek Ravindranath, Consultant)

Many ascribe importance to the fact that English is used as a working language in international organizations worldwide, India included. They point out that English is learnt not only by Indians from the South, but also by native Hindi speakers:

You can question me as to why ENGLISH... but education system has been designed in such a way and people who employ us want that language. So yes to english.
(Uma Prakash RK, Avid Reader and Made in Madras)

World wide it has commerce value, science is in that language. That's the main reason to learn that language. Even Hindi people learn that language to compete in the world for better prospects. Think now IT is big (one of our main foreign currency earner) in India. Without English is it possible? for example How can you learn a JAVA, C, C++, Oracle, .Net, UNIX, etc & How can you do BPO service without knowing English? It shows English's usefulness in technology and Commerce. I did not specify all other fields.
(Viji Palaniappan, One of the oldest living language.)

They emphasize the significance of English as a global language, the language of science and culture, and give it preference over Hindi:

...be English, a language of culture, free thoughts, technology and much more. All Indians must be made to speak English. They actually do, as a matter of fact. Hindi no.
(Ramesh Krishnan)

According to some respondents, the fact that command of English means not only a good job, money, but also social prestige is not negligible either:

For the SI English is much preferred because it not only brings prestige, good jobs and money but also immense recognition within the communities in which they live and work. Can Hindi give all these or at least a small fraction of it?
(Nandha Kumar, studied at University of Delhi)

The participants in the discussion also hold the opinion that unlike Hindi, English offers equal opportunities to all Indians because it is a foreign language and not the mother tongue of some of them:

It is no Indian's Mother tongue. So it gives equal advantage/difficulty to all. It is fair play. If we use any other language those people whose mother tongue is that, is having advantage over others. Not fairplay.
(Viji Palaniappan, One of the oldest living language)

Quite rarely expressed is the view which defends English as the language of the British who contributed to India's unity:

Like it or not, English direct and indirectly ruled all of the Indian Union for long time is the undeniable fact. I can say present day Indian Union is their valuable gift, otherwise we don't have present Indian Union.
(Viji Palaniappan, One of the oldest living language)

We (Indians) should move towards a goal where every Indian speak English and that unites India. No one be it mughal or Ashok able to unify India, but British started it.
Pls don't English is colonial language. If u think like that means u still have colonial mindset and afraid of British raj. English is also language of India just like Tamil and Hindi.
(Tamilselvam Ranjan)

Negative views of English are very rare. Although the author of the contribution below admits that students in India should learn English at schools, he refers to it as "a curse which was brought by [the] [B]ritish" and considers Hindi the only Indian language which can unite Indians:

Dude english is a curse which was brought by british. hindi is the default lingua Franca of india. The world knows india as Hindi speaking regional languages like Tamil telugu Bengali won't unite with other Indians it's only Hindi. English should be learned but can't serve as the main language of India.
(Shehzad Ahmed Chowdhury)

Another respondent considers English in the role of the official language regrettable, referring to the famous quotation by the Tamil politician Conjeevaram Natarajan Annadurai, who was against Hindi becoming the national language of the Union only because it is spoken by the majority: "If Hindi is to be the national language because the majority speak it then the common crow should be the national bird not the peacock."

Today unfortunately English is our official language. That is akin to choosing national bird of England aka Robin as the national bird of India.

What a contrast. Btw, England has no national bird, it is the unofficial national bird. But I hope you get my point.
(Chandu)

Some point to the different attitudes people take towards learning English and Hindi and disagree with it:

When foreign English is made mandatory, you people are okay but when Indian Hindi is made mandatory, it is termed 'imposition'. What an irony?
(Naman Mathur)

We South Indians (especially the Tamils) are a hypocritic bunch when it comes learning Hindi. South Indians stress on learning English to have better job opportunities in the formal sector, and consider it an important skill to have to be able to take part in the global economy. English is indeed the lingua franca of the world and Tamils realise this fact and give English its due importance. We don't let petty politics and irrational fears could our judgement when it comes to English.

When it comes to Hindi though, we get emotional. A majority of us are suddenly worried about losing our cultural identities and abhor the language to their last bone. On a closer look, it seems all but logical to learn Hindi for the same reasons we learn English. It is the fourth most spoken language in the world and would surely be an help when searching for opportunities in Northern India or even as far as the middle east.
(Rishi Iyer, Pragmatic Indian)

Summary IV

The participants in the discussion very often, probably due to their education, address the question of the position of English in India. Most of them have a positive attitude towards English. Negative views of English as a colonizer's language are rare. English is considered a language which interconnects the centre, the Hindi speaking states, and the non-Hindi speaking states. They think it is useful as the global and international language of science, banking, IT business, etc. In their view, English enables those who speak the language to make themselves understood not only in India, but also outside of the country (unlike Hindi). Having a command of English means a good job, money, social prestige.

The respondents also find it important that English offers equal opportunities to all Indians because it is nobody's mother tongue. This fact is of particular significance for Indians applying for jobs in federal institutions, where non-

native speakers of Hindi or English are at a disadvantage when taking entry tests in Hindi or English.

Some respondents dislike the difference in attitudes towards learning English and Hindi. While the attitude towards English is dominated by pragmatism (learning English is a doorway to a better job, social status), the attitude towards Hindi is primarily influenced by emotions (fear of the loss of cultural identity).

V. Attitudes towards the Need for one Common Language for the Whole Union

Another topic which came up during the discussion was the question of the need for one common language for the whole republic. As with the other discussion topics, the discussion of this one is not consensual either. Some respondents deny the usefulness of a common language; others find the introduction of one common language in the country beneficial. If they admit the importance of a common language, it is always either English or Hindi, the languages which are used as the official languages of the Republic of India today.

The respondents who do not find it necessary for India to have a common language view the situation from different viewpoints. One respondent does not seem to think of a language for all people in the country, but only of a language used in federal institutions. Another participant presents a more global view:

It must be understood that there is no real need of a common national language for smooth functioning of the government, especially in the age of technology where translations are easy and every document could be made available in multiple languages.

(Rakesh Wagh, Observer of Indian and American politics)

And I don't see any benefit if the whole country speaks just one language (even if there is, who are you to decide which language that is?).

(Lalith Mandala, Hum Indians!)

However, there are many more respondents who believe that it would be useful to have a common language. They prefer English, but they also note that Indians should revel in the language diversity which is typical of their country:

I agree that it would be a benefit if the entire country speaks a single language or if everyone knows a common tongue, i.e. English. But let's enjoy the diversity that we thrive on.

(Virang Trivedi, Senior Software Engineer at KPIT Technologies (2017 – present))

They often contrast English with Hindi, and for various reasons, they give preference to English. The reasons are, for example, that the choice of Hindi is unfair towards the other Indian languages, or that the spread of Hindi jeopardizes India's regional languages:

So coming to your notion that it would benefit the whole country if we spoke one language and that being Hindi is chaos because yeah Hindi is spoken by most people but it would be really unfair to all the other languages because all of them have the equal history and some have have been spoken for so many centuries. That's the reason **English** was chosen as a medium of instruction in most of Government institutions and Schools, because honestly its really difficult to keep track of so many languages and giving priority to any of those wouldn't be fair to others. So it made sense to adopt a foreign language like English when you didn't have a conscience over which Indian language to choose.
(Adithya Gangisetty, I'm not the person you think I am)

Sadly, people from the northern states often look down upon people who cannot communicate in Hindi. It is probably a prestige issue. Hindi being a promoted language, obviously has the largest number of speakers in India. However in the process of spreading Hindi, the regional languages are feeling the heat. Today, a Rajasthani, a Chattisgarhi, a Garhwali, a Kumaoni or a Bihari would find it difficult to switch to their erstwhile native tongues – this is causing a loss of diversity as far as languages are concerned.
Instead, a simple solution would be to promote English as the sole lingua franca of India.
(Aniruddha Joshi)

According to some respondents, what speaks in favour of English is the fact that it is taught in almost all schools, anyway, and Hindi as a compulsory subject is an unnecessary burden for non-native speakers:

Whether it is significantly beneficial to have a common language or not, having English as the common language is not just sensible but also rational. Almost any school irrespective of the medium of study teaches English as one of the languages. So this is enough. No need to make Hindi compulsory for non- native speakers. If you seriously believe in a language for unity let it be English. Let us need not burden our fellow citizens whose native is not Hindi. Why should you make non-native Hindi speakers to study both Hindi and English?
(Aravind Vlad, Believer of democracy, equality)

Others claim that many people do not need Hindi in their everyday lives, but English is important. One respondent even says that in his view, Hindi is not “fully native to India”:

If the country will be in benefit when it its able to speak a single language, then make English as the common language. There are issues when you make Hindi compulsory **simply because many people don't need Hindi in their daily lives but English.**

There won't be any such problems when you make 'English' a common/national language. Whats the problem? Even 'Hindi' itself is not fully native to India but of Indo-European origin.

Needless to say how much influence and importance we are getting day-by-day through English. Then let it flow naturally...

(Umashankar Rajaram)

The following participant in the discussion also thinks that it would be good for India to have one common language because the country would then be stronger, more developed, and more unified. He does not deny the importance of regional languages but believes that Hindi should be the common language because it is spoken by the majority, played a role in the country's struggle for independence and in various religious movements. He rejects English, the language of the British, and their divide and rule policy:

If countries as big as China and USA have one language, why can't India? So, I believe if India had one of it's languages understood by all citizen, it would have been stronger and more developed and difficult to divide and rule. Why Hindi? Why not Tamil to be our national language or even English? This is not a question of which language is better or older. Pick one of the Indian languages and make it mandatory in schools, offices etc, slowly everyone will start understanding that. So, which language to pick? The one spoken by majority so that lesser people have to go through the effort to learn. Hindi has played major role in our freedom fight and various religious movements in the past. /.../ I don't mean to kill the regional languages. I am only saying that let students all over India learn one common language apart from regional languages. Can it be English? That would be very unfortunate that we can't pick any of Indian languages and everyone agrees on that. This is what British did with us – divide and rule. We are anyway heading towards this:

(Shiva Raman Pandey, works at eWellness Expert)

Others associate the use of one language – Hindi – with the identification of Indian worldwide:

We just need an Identity in world as Indian...not as North or South Indian
When there is English in America, Russian in Russia, Mandarin in China,
Japanese in Japan, Urdu in Pakistan, Bangla in Bangladesh & even
Sinhalese in Lanka then why can't we have Hindi as a common language
in India. What's the problem?
(Prince Singh)

Several respondents emphasize the multilingual character of India, which is typical of the country, and plead for its preservation. This is logical given the diversity of India's inhabitants, many of whom speak several unrelated languages for very practical reasons – to make themselves understood in the community where they live:

I am also a South Indian. My son's speaks konkani which is my mother
tongue, Hindi which is the language of my country, and English which is
the mandatory foreign language fluently. He also speaks marathi which is
the language of my state though slightly slowly. I speak all of these
fluently. My husband speaks all the above languages plus Gujarati which
was the language of his neighbours and now of his business associates
fluently. I only count it as a blessing that we are all well versed in so
many languages.
(Megha Shenoy)

Summary V

There is a substantial divergence of opinion in the discussion on whether it would be useful for the Union to have one common language. Only a minority of people believe that a common language is not necessary. Those who find the common language useful consider only English or Hindi. Several respondents speak in favour of English, which might be influenced by their education and occupation, where English is an important tool of communication. This is also reflected in the view that English is more important than Hindi in everyday life. These reasons speak in favour of English: the choice of Hindi is unfair vis-à-vis the other Indian languages, which might feel threatened by its spread; English is taught in nearly all schools anyway, and Hindi as a compulsory subject constitutes an unnecessary burden for the inhabitants of the non-Hindi speaking states.

The advocates of Hindi as the common language argue that Hindi is spoken by the majority, Hindi played a significant role in India's struggle for independence and in various religious movements, and Hindi is an important part of Indian identity in the world. In their opinion, making the language of the British into India's common language would be unfortunate and in line with their divide and rule policy.

Conclusion

The questions which provoked the analysed Internet discussion generated a great deal of interest on the part of its participants. It must be repeated that only a certain group of the Indian population joined the discussion, which is inevitably reflected in the positions expressed.

What did the discussion demonstrate?

1. Resistance towards seeing Hindi as the national language, the need to emphasize that Hindi is only the official language of the Union.
2. Unrelenting resistance towards the imposition of Hindi in the Dravidian states of South India; the conviction that languages, Hindi included, should be learnt only if they are needed in practical life, not by command but according to a person's own will.
3. Criticism of the ineffectiveness of compulsory Hindi instruction in the non-Hindi speaking states, but also acknowledgement that any level of knowledge of Hindi facilitates better communication between the inhabitants of South and North India, but also between the inhabitants of the states in South India.
4. Resentment towards the Hindi-speaking population, which is accused on the one hand of superiority, and on the other hand of ignorance and unwillingness to learn about other Indian cultures and languages.
5. Great preference for English (to the exclusion of Hindi) as the international and global language of science, technology, and business, but also as the language which enables better communication within India and the language which does not put the speakers of other Indian languages at a disadvantage.
6. Preference for English over Hindi in the question of one common language for the country.

Respondents cited

Adithya Gangisetty, I'm not the person you think I am; Aniruddha Joshi; Anonymous; Aravind Vlad, Believer of democracy, equality; Arjun Che, Global Citizen, Humanist; Arjun Ramachandran, Unfuckwithable; Arun Jimmy, Software Developer at Ctel Infosystems; Arya Yuyutsu, Born in India; Chandu; Indu Priya; Kannan, The God; K Gopinath, Newspaper guy. Sceptic; Krishna Teja Chavali, Infinite CC Engineer; Lalith Mandala, Hum Indians!; Manohar Kanapaka; Megha Shenoy; Monideepa Sahu, lived in India; Naman Mathur; Namrata Thyagaraj; Nandha Kumar, studied at University of Delhi; Navneeta Pathak, Indian; Padmanabhan Venkatesan, I have lived in Andhra Pradesh. I loved the people; Prashant Ramalingam, studied at Delhi Public School, Rourkela; Prince Singh; Prudhvi raj G, works at Banking; Quora User; Raakhee V. Menon, I'm a true-blue Indian from all angles-aerial included!; Rakesh Wagh, Observer of Indian and American politics; Rakshit Pandey; Ramesh Krishnan; Rishabh Malik; Rishi Iyer, Pragmatic Indian; Santhosh Subramonian; Saurav Das, Co-founder-Director, Newdigm Healthcare Technologies; Shehzad Ahmed Chowdhury; Shiva Raman Pandey, works at eWellness Expert; Siddhant Sant, Having keen interest in South Indian culture and languages, and knows Kannada; Tamilselvam Ranjan; Uma Prakash RK, Avid Reader and Made in Madras; Umashankar Rajaram; Viji Palaniappan, One of the oldest living language; Virang Trivedi, Senior Software Engineer at KPIT Technologies (2017 – present); Vivek Ravindranath, Consultant.

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