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## Growing Multilingualism in India and Russia in the Light of Indigenous Languages

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The concept of multilingualism or polyglotism is being discussed in twenty first century more than it was discussed in twentieth century. This paper focuses on the waves and trends of multilingualism among youth in Russia and India today. The study also attempts to establish the reason why these waves and trends are leading youth to a specific direction in both the countries. Today it has become important to thoroughly look into the progress in the field of multilingualism through technology due to which many languages are dying on one side and many others are blooming with time. It shows the result of the survey conducted among Indian and Russian youth on the same issue.

**Key words:** Multilingualism, Indigenous languages, Multilingualism in India and Russia, Indigenous languages in India and Russia

### 1. Introduction

The theme — Multilingualism is one of the most interesting themes yesterday, today and tomorrow. The reason may be that multilingualism is related to use of language, which every human being use on the planet. While studying this topic it was surprised to find that how individual, groups, states directly or indirectly give importance to the language while making policies for survival or development. Jean-Jacques Webder and Kristine Horner in their book ‘Introducing multilingualism: A social approach’ published in London wrote, “Multilingualism is an exciting research topic to study because it is about people’s use of language in the real world. It is people who code-switch and mix their languages, who set up fixed or flexible educational systems and who have certain ideas about how their societies should deal with multilingualism. And because human behaviors is so multi-faceted, there are always new developments in the study of multilingualism and new research areas opening up.” [1. P. 198].

While moving ahead on the topic it is necessary to begin with the definition of multilingualism by Bloommaert Jan: “Multilingualism...should not be seen as a collection of ‘languages’ that a speaker controls, but rather as a complex of specific semiotic resources, some of which belong to a conventionally defined ‘language’, while others belong to another ‘language’. The resources are concrete accents, language, varieties, registers, genres, modalities such as writing — ways of suing language in particular communicative settings and spheres of life, including the ideas people have about such ways of using their language ideologies” [2. P. 102].

In this study, the concept of multilingualism has been considered as usage of several languages by an individual or community. The person would have acquired two or more

languages through formal or informal training may be called polyglot. The use of multiple languages by an individual has been a part of our society since dawn of the history of human being. The concept of multilingualism or polyglotism is being discussed in twenty first century more than it was discussed in twentieth century. Apart from the term ‘multilingualism there are other terms such as ‘plurilingualism’ (Council of Europe, 2005), ‘polylingualism’ [3. P. 5], ‘interlingualism’ [4], ‘multiplurilingualism’ [5. P. 37], ‘metrolingualism’ [6] etc., but the term ‘multilingualism’ is widely accepted. There may be debates on the definition of ‘multilingualism’, on the terminology, on the usage of language, but we all may agree that it is indeed significant to study such topic today. If there were limited medium in the field of technology in previous century in the society then today there is a vast area for innovations and developments, which is increasing day by day. The super computers, fast internet, smart mobile, software programs, popular radio technology, mass media, etc. are the medium of communication and part of technological development today in modern societies in the world.

The technology has assisted human being in various fields. The multilingualism one of such fields. While talking about the multilingualism in India and Russia, one may acknowledge the vital contribution of technology in the development of multilingualism. However, there are some other sides of development of technology as well. Today it has become important to thoroughly look into the progress in the field of multilingualism through technology due to which many languages are dying such as *Bodo Gadaba* and *Chamalal* languages on one side and some are blooming such as English and Russian with time in India and Russia respectively.

## 2. Discussion

### Multilingualism in India: Background

Indian society has witnessed the multilingualism with the arrival or invasion by various ethnic groups and races since ancient times. The invasions through the history also has also witnessed migration from one society to other society, which exchanged the language, culture of each others’. J.C. Sharma in his study ‘Multilingualism in India’ has given an overview of languages in India. He states that “Sir G. A. Grierson carried out the Linguistic Survey of India (LSI) between 1866 and 1927. This survey identified 179 languages and 544 dialects. The 1951 Census, the first census after India attained its independence, listed 845 languages including dialects, out of which more than 100,000 persons spoke 60 languages/dialects.” (<http://www.languageinindia.com/dec2001/jcsharma2.html>). As per the previous census of 2001 of India, there were 1635 efficient mother tongues, 234 recognisable mother tongues and 22 foremost languages (“Census Data 2001 : General Note”. Census of India). Twenty nine of these languages have about one million (1,00,00,00) native speakers, 60 languages have about 100,000 speakers and 122 languages have approximately 10,000 native speakers [6].

### Multilingualism in Russia

On other side in Russia, which is the largest country on the earth, has over one eighth part of the earth’s land mass. If we go in to history then it can be found that “Russian

expansion may have begun in earnest with Ivan the Terrible. In 1552 he took Kazan and thus put an end to the subjugation imposed on the Russians by the Tartar Khans, which had confined them geographically and isolated them from other Slavs, like the Ukrainians and Poles. About the middle of the Seventeenth Century the Cossacks and Ukrainians were brought under Russian control, and following this, under Peter the Great and Katherine, the Baltic peoples, parts of Poland and later still areas of the Caucasus were incorporated. By 1881 the expansion was virtually complete, with the acquisition of Turkestan by Alexander II. As a result the Russian Empire became an immense multilingual state, consisting of about 180 different linguistic groups.” [7. P. 17].

After the formation of Soviet Union “150 languages were officially recognized in 1926; since then the number has been considerably reduced.” [7. P. 25]. Today there are 35 major languages along with more than 100 minor languages and dialects spoken within the country (<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/guide-to-russia-etiquette-customs-culture-business.html>).

Thus, India and Russia both the countries have past, present and future for multilingualism. However, in the era of globalization and technology question arises whether there is a rush to become multilingual, whether because of learning a foreign language or other state’s language the mother tongue may come in the list of endangered languages, how such kind of wave is effecting people, etc. This study is an attempt to study the waves and trends of multilingualism among youth in India and Russia today. The study also attempts to establish the reason why these waves and trends are leading youth to a specific direction. To find out the opinion from people in India and Russia on the same topic, we have conducted an online survey in which about 150 participants shared their valuable views. The responses were received from the following age groups (Fig. 1).

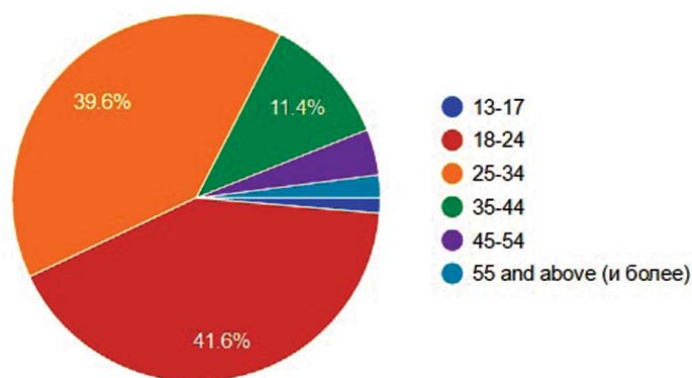


Fig. 1. Age Groups

To know how important to be a multilingual we asked the question: “**Is it important to be multilingual (to know more than one language)?**” (Fig. 2). As per the responses from India about 93% say that it is important where in Russia maximum number i.e 67% of the responded affirmative to the question.

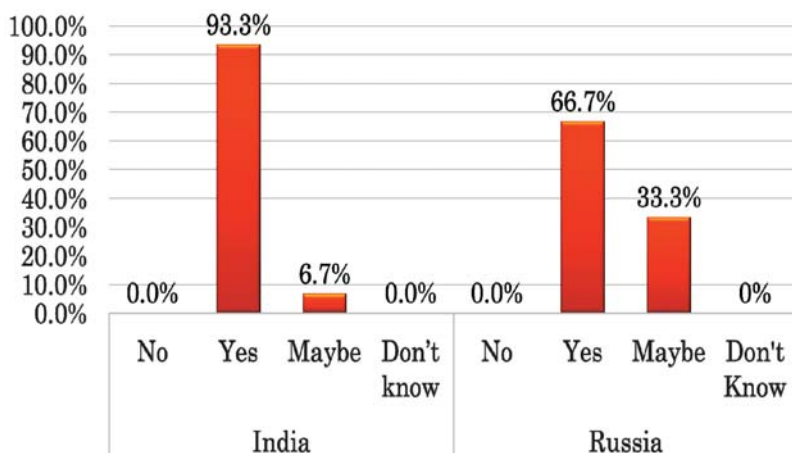


Fig. 2. Is it important be multilingual (to know more than one language)?

To the question whether one can manage with the **knowledge of one language in cities** (Fig. 3), maximum Indian respondents say NO it is difficult to survive with one language in cities. It may be because in cities English is desirable conditions to get the work/business. Whereas in Russia, being Russian as major language they may survive with the knowledge of one language. About 43 percent say yes, they may survive and only 38% say it is difficult.

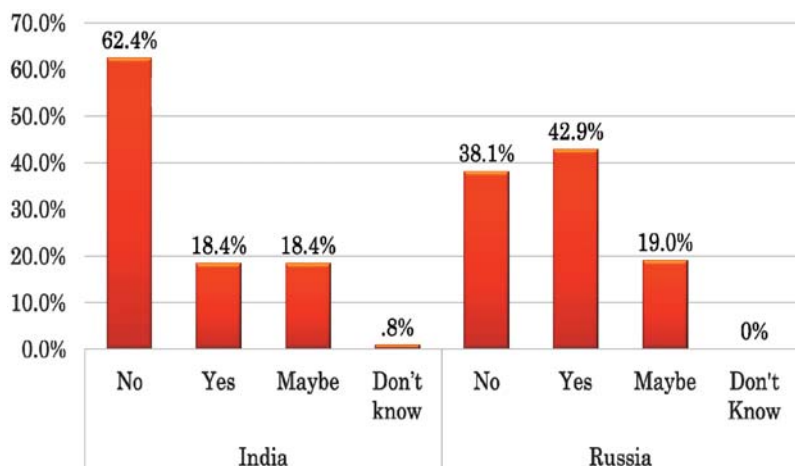


Fig. 3. Is it easy to manage with the knowledge of one language in cities?

Based on different conditions in cities and villages our next question was to know whether it is possible to manage with the **knowledge of one language in villages** (Fig. 4). Here Indian respondents were not sure about that, although 38% responded that yes they may survive. But 29% say No and 29 percent say may be. One can suppose that now a days the trend to be multilingual person is going up. However, Russian respondents were sure that they may manage with knowledge of one language in villages. About 86% affirmed the same.

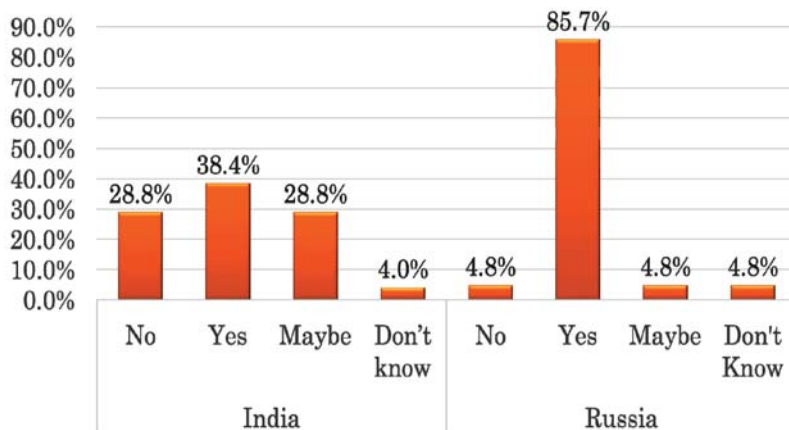


Fig. 4. Is it easy to manage with the knowledge of one language in villages?

To the question whether there is a rush or one can say there is a **wave (rush) towards learning foreign language because of the development in technology and globalisation** (Fig. 5), we got affirmative response from India and Russia. About 87% from India and 95% from Russia say yes, there is such kind of wave nowadays.

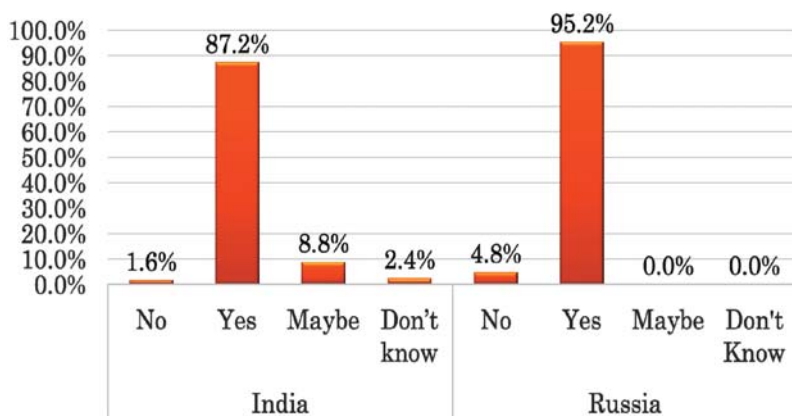


Fig. 5. Do you think there is a wave (rush) towards learning foreign language because of the development in technology and globalisation?

**Foreign languages or other state’s languages** are being offered not only in universities along with the main courses, but also in schools. The trend is growing day by day. If we take example of Public schools in Delhi, India then we have observed that many public schools have introduced foreign/other state’s languages in their curriculum. Apart from the work/business acquiring a new language is also considered as prestige. 65% respondents from India and 94% from Russia agreed on the point that such trend is growing.

The survey concludes that it is important to be multilingual as per trend people migrate from villages to town, from town to cities, from cities to major cities due to various reasons. But one of the major reasons is to manage the bread and butter well. It is indeed that one has to be multilingual in the era of technology in cities (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Usage of content languages for websites, 31 Oct 2018, W3Techs.com

Today learning popular foreign languages has become a mandate to move faster in career. One of the popular languages is English. Today youth globally acquiring at least working knowledge of the same as English is most popular language of internet, which has more than 53% users in the world along with major content share all over the www. The tendency of learning popular languages is leaving behind less popular languages. This is the reason that many languages in the world have found their places in the list of endangered languages.

Language	Percentage, %
English	53.6
German	6.2
Russian	6.0
Spanish	4.9
French	4.1
Japanese	3.5
Portuguese	2.9
Italian	2.4
Persian	2.0
Chinese	1.8%

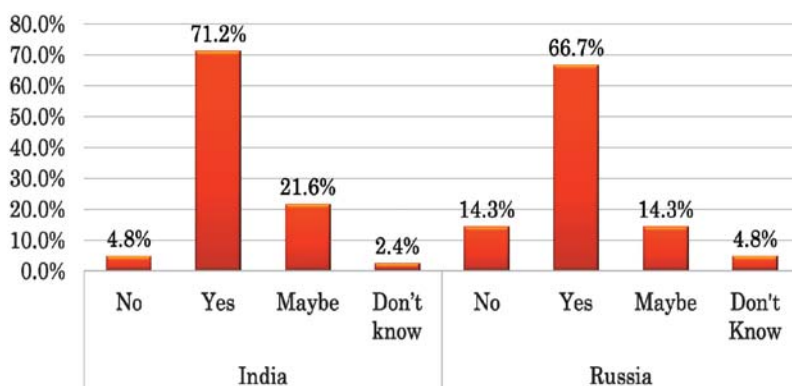
### Endangered languages

Through the trend to learn foreign language/another state's language is growing. However, as per the survey and our observation this wave is to learn such language which add some perks/benefits to the work/business. In this kind of wave one important question arises today that if we all rush towards learning only major languages then what will happen

with our native language or endangered languages of the country. The drastic changes or loss may be observed after several generations. The UNESCO has published the list, according to which about 6000 languages spoken in the world are under threat, seriously endangered or dying”

As per Webder and Horner... there are “two main factors for ‘language death’: first, the politics of nation-state building, with states typically promoting one language as the ‘national’ or ‘official’ language, while often repressing the languages of both indigenous and immigrant minority groups. Secondly, due to the spread of global languages such as English with ever higher instrumental value, there are strong pressures on minority group members to drop their minority languages and to use instead the national or official language of the state plus a global language such as English” [1. P. 53]. However, UNESCO appreciated the steps taken by Indian State to preserve the endangered languages. The scheme “Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India” is working to safeguard, preserve and documents all the mother tongues of India, which has less than 10,000 native speakers [Fig. 7]. Still a lot of efforts are required to achieve the goal.

### Boosting endangered languages through technology



**Fig. 7.** Do you think that through technology (audio-video recording, making the language available on websites) we may preserve and promote the usage of endangered languages among youth?

In order to boost the endangered languages technology may play a vital role. As per the opinion about 71% from India and 67% from Russia agree on the methods such as maximum use of audio-video recording, making language available on websites, will work in positive manner.

Many steps are being taken to preserve the endangered languages by various countries. The concept of **Multilingualism i.e. learning such endangered languages by youth** may also help in preserving and promoting endangered languages of India. To the question “whether the respondent think that Multilingualism may also help in preserving and promoting the endangered language of India/Russia, the response is considerably affirmative from India and Russia.

There are several other methods also to preserve and revitalize the endangered languages. For example. Making endangered language as official language such as “**Maori** became an official language of Aotearoa (New Zealand)-alongside English — in 1987.

According to May [8], this makes New Zealand ‘the only example where the first language of an indigenous people has been made an official state language’ [1]. Another example of revitalization the Hebrew in Israel. The main language of Israel is Hebrew and it is a key symbol of the Jews’ new nation-state. Yet about a hundred years ago, Hebrew was almost a dead language, mostly used only as a sacred language for religious purposes. Thus the story of Hebrew is often presented as yet another story of successful revitalization.

### Conclusion

To conclude we may say that each and every language is precious and equally valuable. The theme — multilingualism may be explored in the way to save and promote local languages of human being. The development and research area in the field of multilingualism will find various methods to develop the society in various ways. As we know language is not only a mean to communicate but it is a kind of culture, tradition, history of the respective group/people. In today’s era of globalization, using technology it is important to preserve and promote all communities and societies.

With the kind cooperation by the respondents from India and Russia we find that there is a wave of multilingualism to learn some specific major languages. This fact indicates that more attention is required in order to preserve and promote the languages, culture, and history of all human kind on the planet.

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## **Многоязычие в Индии и России в контексте местного языкового ландшафта**

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Концепция многоязычия, или полиглотизма, обрела для гуманитаристики в XXI веке еще большую актуальность, чем когда-либо. Настоящая статья посвящена описанию тенденций многоязычия среди молодежи Индии и России. Автор пытается проследить, к чему ведут языковые тренды поликультурных сообществ, и объяснить причины, по которым одни языки умирают, а другие процветают. В статье представлены результаты опроса молодых людей Индии и России, которые могут быть полезны специалистам в области языковой политики и языкового планирования.

**Ключевые слова:** многоязычие, языки коренных народов, многоязычие в Индии и России, языки коренных народов в Индии и России

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