

# Language policy and practices in the Global North and South: Challenges, opportunities and future directions

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Prof. Udaya Narayana Singh, Amity University, India

## Lessons from the language policy initiatives in India

### Abstract:

India is usually projected as the best-case scenario in terms of linguistic resilience with 1,576 rationalized mother-tongues, and 1,796 other mother-tongues as per her latest Census figures. The numbers kept on changing with changes in linguistic identity. But the recent socio-political changes such as reorganization of states, constitutional recognition of newer languages, new sets of education policies (such as NEP 2021), technological advances, urbanization and globalization together have rapidly influenced or changed the linguistic tapestry of India - upsetting, in some ways, the linguistic equilibrium.

It is a different matter that since the Indian independence in 1947, the political establishment did make pronouncements in favour of (i) linguistic diversity, (ii) linguistic rights (of the minorities), and (iii) promotion of less privileged groups (including their languages) by means of introducing several language policies and laws. However, partly because of social factors – such as large population growth, low literacy level, disparity between rich and poor at the bottom of the pyramid, the widening gap between the urban and rural areas – effects of these government policies have not been as visible as one would have liked to.

There have been several attempts at policy formulations – through constitutional provisions and amendments, initiatives through national-level institutions such as the following: National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and its branches at the provincial level - SCERTs, Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NEUPA) and projects such as National Curriculum Framework (NCF), National Translation Mission (NTM), establishment of numerous language universities, and impetus to Classical Languages research and Language Development Board through the *Sahitya Akademi*, the national academy of letters. But it is a fact that the country houses the largest number of endangered languages (UNESCO Atlas, 2010). The paper attempts to present a narration of various language policy initiatives in India and their effects as well as what one could learn from this difficult language management exercise.



An expert in Linguistics, Culture Studies and Translation, Singh is a Chair-Professor and Dean (Arts), Amity University Haryana. He was the Director of CIIL, Mysore and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. Singh had set up the National Translation Mission, and taught at the Universities of Hyderabad, Delhi, South Gujarat and MSU-Baroda. With seven collections of poems in Maithili and Bangla, six books of essays, twelve plays, he translated many and published 250 research papers, and created 545 documentaries on language, literature and culture of Bangla, Tamil, Kannada and Marathi. A poet-invitee at the Frankfurt Book Fair (2006), London Book Fair (2009), and Leader of Cultural Delegation of Writers to China (2007), he visited and lectured around the world.

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**Coordinator: Dr. Anik Nandi**  
Leiden University Centre for Linguistics (LUCL)  
[a.nandi@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:a.nandi@hum.leidenuniv.nl)