



**WORKING  
PAPER**

**92**

**COMMUNICATION AND  
LINGUISTIC SITUATION  
IN KARNATAKA :  
DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES**

**M Johnson Samuel**

**INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE**

**2001**

ISBN 81-7791-048-5

© 2001; Copyright Reserved

The Institute for Social and Economic Change,  
Bangalore

*Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) is engaged in interdisciplinary research in analytical and applied areas of the social sciences, encompassing diverse aspects of development. ISEC works with central, state and local governments as well as international agencies by undertaking systematic studies of resource potential, identifying factors influencing growth and examining measures for reducing poverty. The thrust areas of research include state and local economic policies, issues relating to sociological and demographic transition, environmental issues and fiscal, administrative and political decentralization and governance. It pursues fruitful contacts with other institutions and scholars devoted to social science research through collaborative research programmes, seminars, etc.*

*The Working Paper Series provides an opportunity for ISEC faculty, visiting fellows and PhD scholars to discuss their ideas and research work before publication and to get feedback from their peer group. Papers selected for publication in the series present empirical analyses and generally deal with wider issues of public policy at a sectoral, regional or national level. These working papers undergo review but typically do not present final research results, and constitute works in progress.*

# COMMUNICATION AND LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN KARNATAKA: DEMOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES\*

M Johnson Samuel\*\*

## **Abstract**

*Since the formation of Karnataka state on linguistic principle in 1956, the state is moving towards homogeneity with people who claim Kannada to be their mother tongue increasing their share in the population at successive censuses. The linguistic minorities who know Kannada as a second language have grown in number. The paper argues that linguistic homogenization and growing bilingualism in Kannada will bring down barriers to communication within the state.*

## **Context**

Communication is a process both interactive and purposeful. It enables the social system to maintain direction of its efforts towards efficient accomplishment of its purpose. In a democratic polity, the role of communication cannot be overemphasized. It integrates society by promoting consensus on basic policies and facilitates public administration by advising officials of the community's problems and informing citizens of official programmes and strategies. Communication contributes to development, disseminating new ideas - technical and cultural.

Language provides the basis for a common lifestyle and communication pattern. In areas, where illiteracy is rampant, the mother tongue is the principal medium through which individuals communicate with one another. But every language has evolved its own system of spoken and written symbols. Multiplicity of

---

\* This is a revised version of the paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Indian Association for the Study of Population held at Waltair in February 2001. The author is grateful to Prof. Janaki Nair and two anonymous referees for their useful comments.

\*\* Formerly Associate Professor, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. His present address is No. 9, Anbunagar, Gorimedu, Salem - 636 008.

languages in a territory may therefore retard the flow of information.

After independence, there were political agitations in various parts of the country demanding linguistically homogeneous states. As a result, a major reorganisation of states took place in 1956. The state of Mysore, later renamed Karnataka, was born from the merger of the princely state of Mysore with Kannada speaking territories culled out from the Nizam's Hyderabad, Bombay and Madras provinces and the 'C' state of Coorg. Even after reorganisation, many states in the Indian Union were left with varying proportions of major and minor language speakers. Karnataka is one such linguistically very diverse state (Swartzberg, 1985, p. 165-167).

With growing unemployment in the country, dominant linguistic groups in every state have come to believe that migrants from other states, speaking alien languages have snatched away their jobs. They began to make a special claim to the territory they occupy and to much of the economic and educational development that took place within it. They started clamouring for laws and ordinances to prevent outsiders from residing or working in their territory, giving rise to what is known as the 'Nativist Movement' (Myron Weiner, 1978, p. 296).

In Karnataka, the nativist movement became very strong in the 1980s, influencing the policy decisions of the state government. Kannada, the regional language of the State, was made the exclusive medium of instruction up to 7th standard in state-aided institutions. Under the new educational rules, preference is being given to natives of Karnataka for admission to government schools, colleges and even universities. In the area of employment, there is now stricter domicile requirements for registering in the state employment exchanges. For recruitment to state government service, preference is given to those who are fluent in the regional language (T M Joseph, 1998). These are certainly legitimate state interventions for promoting Kannada, the language understood by a majority of the people.

Nevertheless, the principle of linguistic state carries with it the risk of balkanization of the country. The presence of linguistic minorities and inter-state migrants observing distinct cultural practices in a state can immensely enrich the cultural life of people.

In Karnataka many of the linguistic minorities have newspapers and magazines in their own languages. They run educational institutions, libraries, clubs and welfare organisations to nurture their distinct cultural heritage. In a federal set-up like India, a large body of inter-state migrants and linguistic minorities may serve as a bridge between linguistic states and go a long way to promote national integration. Above all, a free flow of migrants between states can help the formation of a national market for labour and optimum utilization of skilled manpower, more so scientific manpower, resources of the country.

The constitution itself gives the linguistic minorities the right to conserve their language, script and culture, right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice and facilities for instruction through the mother tongue at the primary stage of education. It also provides for the institution of a commission for Linguistic Minorities. Besides these constitutional safeguards, there are schemes agreed upon at the all-India level from time to time and they are embodied in the decisions arrived at various forums like the National Integration Council, State Education Ministers' Conference, Chief Ministers' Conference and so on.

### **Focus**

Given this background, the study focuses on the following issues:

1. What was the linguistic make-up of Karnataka at the time of its formation based on the linguistic principle?
2. Has the emergence of Karnataka as a linguistic state accelerated the linguistic homogenisation of its people?
3. Do demographic processes like migration and the natural increase in population play any role in the homogenisation process?
4. How do linguistic minorities respond to the changing scenario?
5. What do the trends imply for the communication environment in the state?

### **Data**

The study relies mainly on the data relating to mother tongue, bilingualism and migration gleaned from the decennial censuses

of the period 1961-1991. It must be admitted that no two Indian censuses have been wholly in agreement with one another in regard to treatment of language returns. It is suspected that census returns on language are vitiated by a certain degree of intentional falsification either by respondents or by enumerators to advance the cause of one or another linguistic group (Sakharov, 1972, p. 394). This is a serious problem in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The four Dravidian languages spoken in the south have a strong degree of separateness from each other. Their language returns show a more steady trend and represent the actual strength and physical distribution of the population concerned more accurately. Karnataka, in particular, is a linguistically stable region where census language returns are stable and mother tongue returns do not oscillate because of shift in mother tongue identification (Khubchandani 1989, p. 401).

Moreover, the boundaries of Karnataka have remained almost stable since 1956. This has provided an ideal background to look back over a thirty-year period and attempt a dispassionate assessment of the manner in which the communication environment has changed since the formation of linguistic states.

According to the 2001 census, the population of Karnataka is 52.7 million. It may take the census at least another five years to publish data on migration and languages spoken by the people. This has restricted the study from going beyond the 1991 census.

## **Mother Tongue**

People easily identify themselves with their mother tongues<sup>1</sup>. Chances of misstatements are few. Linguistic assimilations are few and probably limited to rare cases of inter-linguistic marriages. According to the census of 1991, the first six languages in order of importance and their share in Karnataka's population are Kannada (66%), Urdu (10%), Telugu (7%), Tamil (4%), Marathi (4%) and Tulu (3%). Another three languages Hindi (2%), Malayalam (2%) and Konkani (2%) are spoken by close to one million people each. Coorgi is claimed to be their mother tongue by nearly one lakh people and English by about 15 thousand people. This apart, fifty-four languages have been returned as their mother tongue by smaller groups of varying size. The barriers to communication arising out of this immense diversity can be easily visualized (Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Population by Their Mother Tongue  
Karnataka - 1961 to 1991**

| Mother Tongue   | Year  |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|   | 1961  | 1971  | 1981  | 1991  |
| Kannada   | 65.1  | 66.0  | 64.8  | 66.2  |
| Telugu  | 8.7   | 8.2   | 8.3   | 7.4   |
| Tamil   | 3.6   | 3.4   | 3.8   | 3.8   |
| Malayalam   | 1.2   | 1.5   | 1.7   | 1.7   |
| Marathi   | 4.5   | 4.1   | 4.0   | 3.7   |
| Konkani   | 2.1   | 2.0   | 1.8   | 1.6   |
| Tulu  | 3.6   | 3.6   | 3.4   | 3.1   |
| Coorgi  | 0.3   | 0.2   | 0.2   | 0.2   |
| Urdu  | 8.6   | 9.0   | 9.7   | 10.0  |
| Hindi   | 0.4   | 1.8   | 1.9   | 2.0   |
| English   | 0.08  | 0.05  | 0.05  | 0.03  |
| Other Languages   | 1.82  | 0.15  | 0.35  | 0.27  |
| Total Population  | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Absolute number in thousands  | 23587 | 29299 | 37136 | 44977 |
| Appendix to Table 1   |       |       |       |       |
| Percentage of Kannada speakers living outside the state of Karnataka to total Kannada speakers in the country | 11.7  | 11.0  | 10.0  | 9.1   |

Source: Census of India 1961 - Table C V Mother Tongue  
Census of India 1971 - Table C V Mother Tongue  
Census of India 1981 - Table C 7 Mother Tongue  
Census of India 1991 - Table C 7 Mother Tongue  
Census of India 1981 - Table HH 16 - Part A II  
Language of the Household Population

## Dominant Language

The 1991 census counted 45 million people in Karnataka of whom 30 million reported Kannada to be their mother tongue. In the neighbouring state of Kerala, 97 per cent of the people reported Malayalam as their mother tongue and in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu more than 85 per cent of the state population reported Telugu and Tamil respectively as their mother tongue. Viewed against this, the share of Kannadigas in Karnataka's population is rather low. The Kannadiga share has however increased from 65 per cent in 1961 to 66 percent in 1991 (Table 1). From the communication angle, it is a desirable trend since the population is becoming linguistically more homogeneous.

It would be interesting to investigate which demographic processes caused linguistic homogenisation, albeit in a small degree, of Karnataka's population. If each linguistic group in Karnataka had the same rate of natural increase in their population with balanced in-migration and out-migration, the linguistic composition would have remained unchanged. Between 1961 and 1991, while Kannada, Urdu and Hindi have improved their share, many of the minority languages have lost their share in the total population of the state. This can be attributed to differential rates in natural increase or migration among various linguistic groups inhabiting the state.

Another interesting aspect of Kannada, the regional language of the state also needs to be mentioned. While the Kannadiga presence within the state is on the increase, they are becoming less visible outside their home state. In 1961, about twelve per cent of the Kannadigas lived outside Karnataka and by 1991 the proportion declined to nine (Table 1, Appendix). It is pertinent to mention here that of the 33 million Kannadigas enumerated all over the country in 1991, hardly 3 million were found to be living outside Karnataka. In many northern states, the population of Kannadigas seldom touches the thousand marks. Even in Delhi, where head offices of all the Central Government departments and business houses are located and which has become the abode for linguistic communities hailing from different parts of the country, the presence of Kannadigas is hardly felt. There are barely 9,000 Kannadigas in Delhi's nine-million strong population.



## **Minority Languages**

There are historical and geographical reasons for the pronounced linguistic diversity of the state. Karnataka has three broad groups of linguistic minorities:

### **Speakers of the Regional Language of the Neighbouring States**

Karnataka has a long land border with five other states. Each of these states has a regional language of its own which it is promoting in all walks of life - Malayalam in Kerala, Tamil in Tamil Nadu, Telugu in Andhra Pradesh, Marathi in Maharashtra and Konkani in Goa. All along its inter-state border with other states, there exists a broad transition zone where Kannada loses its dominance and gives way to the regional language of the adjacent state. The transition zone on either side of the inter-state border has a number of linguistic enclaves. The people who got trapped in the linguistic enclaves because of the way the state boundaries were redrawn in 1956, speak the language of the adjacent state. For example, in Karnataka's Kolar district, which adjoins Andhra Pradesh, a large part of their population (1.25 million) speaks Telugu, the regional language of another state- Andhra Pradesh (Schwartzberg 1985, p. 175). The linguistic enclaves explain to a large extent the presence of sizeable minorities speaking any of the five languages in the group.

But the relative size of each individual linguistic group is either inflated by in-migration or deflated by out-migration. The proportion of a linguistic group in the general population fluctuates in response to swings in migration rates. Bangalore City has been a magnet attracting migrants from the nearby states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala (M J Samuel 1995, p. 6). The share of migrants from Tamil Nadu in the city's population fell from 8.1 to 7.8 per cent between 1971 and 1981. During the same period there was a corresponding decline in the percentage of Tamil speakers in the city's population from 25 to 24 per cent.

In this context, an apparent incongruity between migration and mother tongue data must be noted. The percentage of population reporting themselves as migrants from a given state is much lower than the percentage of people reporting the regional language of that state as their mother tongue. The 1991 census

counted 33 lakh Telugus, 17 lakh Tamils and 8 lakh Malayalees in Karnataka. But it netted only 5 lakh migrants from Andhra Pradesh, another 5 lakh migrants from Tamil Nadu and a mere 2 lakh migrants from Kerala. One of the reasons for the discrepancies is that the descendants of migrants continue to claim the language of their ancestors as their mother tongue and census records them as such. As regards to their migration status, they are recorded as locals since they were born in Karnataka, the state of their domicile<sup>2</sup>. The point is that the speakers of the regional languages of the adjoining five states are composed of three sub-groups: 1. First generation migrants found mostly in urban places. 2. Locally born second or later generation of the migrants and 3. Natives born in the enclaves. People in the last two categories are often familiar with two languages - their mother tongue and Kannada the regional language of the state.

In India, people migrate only a short distance to the nearest district even if it happens to be on the other side of the state border. They move into localities where their own kinsfolk practicing a common culture and speaking a common language live. Karnataka has long been an important destination for migrants from densely populated states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. The migrants from these states often settle in and around Bangalore which is close to the boundaries of their own states.

At the same time, Karnataka is also an important source for migrants who move northward to more prosperous Maharashtra and Goa. Unfortunately census does not give outmigration data district-wise. The northern districts of Belgaum, Dharwad and Uttara Kannada are dotted with linguistic enclaves where Marathi or Konkani is widely spoken. Given the fact that Marathi is given prominence in Maharashtra and Konkani in Goa, it is reasonable to infer that most of the Karnataka-born persons living in Maharashtra or Goa have their origin in the northern districts and their mother tongue must be either Marathi or Konkani.

The census does not publish migration data cross classified by the mother tongue of the migrants. But the trends in the two sets of data on migration and mother tongue suggest a strong relationship between rate of migration and share of the five linguistic minorities in the total population even at the state level. In table 2 are shown statewise immigration and outmigration data for Karnataka. Net migration rate shows the overall impact of

migration on the growth of population in the state. If it is positive, the state is gaining population from excessive immigration from another state and if it is negative the state is losing population to another state through excessive outmigration.

Net migration is positive for Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. What is significant is that net migration rates (one for every lakh of Karnataka's population) have dropped steeply between 1961 and 1991 from 1302 to 786 for Tamil Nadu, from 456 to 411 for Andhra Pradesh and 490 to 386 for Kerala. All these suggest that Karnataka is losing its charm as a destination for migrants from these states. As a result, Telugu speakers in Karnataka have shrunk by 2 percentage points from 9 in 1961 to 7 in 1991. The percentage of Tamil speakers increased only marginally from 3.6 in 1961 to 3.8 in 1991 and that of the Malayalee speakers from 1.2 in 1961 to 1.7 in 1991, suggesting some deceleration in migration from the two states into Karnataka (Table 1 and 2).

For Maharashtra and Goa net migration rates are negative and sliding further down. This implies that outmigration exceeds immigration and the gap is widening. For Maharashtra, the excess of outmigration over immigration was 1267 per lakh of population in 1961. The gap widened to 1716 by 1981 and narrowed down to 1212 in 1991. Initially, in 1961 the net migration rate was positive for Goa, being 37 per lakh of Karnataka's population. By next census it turned negative and the excess of out-migration over in-migration is ever on the increase. As a result of rapid growth in out-migration in relation to in-migration, Marathi spoken by 4.5 per cent of the states population in 1961 came down to 3.7 per cent in 1991. Konkani being spoken by 2.1 per cent of the population declined to 1.6 per cent by 1991. This would suggest that Marathi and Konkani speakers are leaving the state in increasing numbers and marching towards Maharashtra and Goa respectively, where their mother tongues enjoy majority as well as official language status (Tables 1 and 2). Most of them probably end up at Bombay, in search of the Eldorado of their dreams.

It was often believed that migration caused linguistic dispersal in India (Bose 1978, p.200). But, our analysis of migration and mother tongue data shows that the reverse can also happen. After the formation of linguistic states, migration has brought about linguistic concentration and homogenisation of Karnataka. It seems

**Table 2: Gain or Loss in Population Due to Inter-State Migration****Karnataka 1961 to 1991**

| Name of the state sending and receiving migrants | Year | In-migrants | Out-migrants | Net Migrants                               |  |
|--|------|-------------|--------------|--|--|
|  |      |             |              | Gain or loss in Population Absolute number | For every lakh of Karnataka's population |
| Tamil Nadu                                       | 1961 | 395902      | 88580        | 307322                                     | 1302                                     |
|  | 1971 | 341139      | 123447       | 217692                                     | 743                                      |
|  | 1981 | 503103      | 138809       | 364294                                     | 981                                      |
|  | 1991 | 480383      | 126564       | 353815                                     | 786                                      |
| Andhra Pradesh                                   | 1961 | 290591      | 183010       | 107581                                     | 456                                      |
|  | 1971 | 335850      | 224421       | 111425                                     | 380                                      |
|  | 1981 | 494157      | 263434       | 230723                                     | 621                                      |
|  | 1991 | 470507      | 285703       | 184804                                     | 411                                      |
| Kerala   | 1961 | 137009      | 21230        | 115779                                     | 490                                      |
|  | 1971 | 176594      | 25220        | 151374                                     | 516                                      |
|  | 1981 | 240168      | 40471        | 199697                                     | 537                                      |
|  | 1991 | 229557      | 55724        | 173833                                     | 386                                      |
| Maharashtra                                      | 1961 | 169287      | 468200       | -238913                                    | -1267                                    |
|  | 1971 | 220160      | 663753       | -443593                                    | -1514                                    |
|  | 1981 | 287740      | 925171       | -637431                                    | -1716                                    |
|  | 1991 | 322227      | 867133       | -544907                                    | -1212                                    |
| Goa  | 1961 | 9815        | 1024         | 8791                                       | 37                                       |
|  | 1971 | 10015       | 33612        | -23597                                     | -80                                      |
|  | 1981 | 8961        | 72120        | -63159                                     | -170                                     |
|  | 1991 | 9910        | 87874        | -77964                                     | -175                                     |

Source: Census of India 1961 Table D II Place of birth

Census of India 1981 Table DI Population classified by place of birth

Census of India 1971 Table DI Population classified by place of birth

Census of India 1991 Table DI Population classified by place of birth

linguistic politics is discouraging minorities like Tamils, Telugus and Malayalees from moving into the state, while encouraging Marathis and Konkans to seek greener pastures elsewhere. It is also plausible that Kannadigas who happened to be living on the other side of the state borders at the time of state reorganisation have started moving into Karnataka in increasing numbers.

## **Speakers of the Languages Indigenous to Karnataka**

Yet another reason for the linguistic diversity of Karnataka is the presence of speakers of Tulu and Coorgi languages which are indigenous to Karnataka. Though the two languages occupy minority status at the state level, at the district level they are dominant languages spoken by a great number of people in certain areas. In Dakshina Kannada district where 88 per cent of the Tulu speakers of the state are concentrated, 46 per cent of the district population reported Tulu as their mother tongue. Similarly, in Kodagu district, 18 per cent of the population reported Coorgi as their mother tongue and about 88 per cent of the Coorgi speakers in the state live in Kodagu district only. At the state level, 3.6 per cent of the population used to speak Tulu in 1961. The percentage came down to 3.1 in 1991. The Coorgi speaking population declined from 0.3 per cent of the state's population in 1961 to a mere 0.2 per cent in 1991. We do not have fertility or mortality data for linguistic groups. Among the districts in Karnataka, Dakshina Kannada and Kodagu have witnessed a dramatic decline in fertility resulting in a much slower growth of their population. While the population of Karnataka state as a whole has almost doubled since 1961, the population of Dakshina Kannada increased by 72 per cent only and that of Kodagu by 51 per cent only. It is therefore safe to infer that the decline in the share of Tulu and Coorgi speakers in Karnataka's population is due to their slackened procreation in relation to other language speakers (Table 1 and 3).

## **Pan-Indian Languages**

Thirdly, there are three pan-Indian languages whose speakers are found dispersed in a discontinuous manner in more than one district or state. According to the 1991 census, at least three of these languages claim more than ten thousand speakers each in the state - Urdu, Hindi and English.

**Table 3: Population Size of the Largest Linguistic Minorities in Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada Districts and Index of General Population Growth in the Two Districts - 1981**

| Year   | Name of the largest linguistic minorities | Percentage of the general population in |                           | District share in Karnataka State's linguistic group |
|--|---|---|---------------------------|--|
|  |   | Kodagu District                         | Dakshina Kannada District |  |
|  | Coorgi                                    | 18.0<br>(81564)                         | Neg                       | 88.3<br>(92280)                                      |
|  | Tulu                                      | Neg                                     | 45.7<br>(1074202)         | 88.2<br>(1217834)                                    |
| <b>Index of Growth of General Population</b> |   |   |                           |  |
|  |   | Kodagu                                  | Dakshina Kannada          | Karnataka  |
| 1961   | Size of the population in thousands       | 323                                     | 1564                      | 23587  |
| Base   | Year                                      |   |                           |  |
| 1961   |   | 100                                     | 100                       | 100  |
| 1971   |   | 117                                     | 124                       | 124  |
| 1981   |   | 143                                     | 152                       | 157  |
| 1991   |   | 151                                     | 172                       | 191  |

*Note:* Neg refers to negligible number

Figures within brackets refer to the population size of the concerned linguistic minorities

*Source:* Census of India 1981, Series 9 Karnataka Table HH 16 Part B II Households and household population by language mainly spoken in the household

Census of India 1991, Series 11 Karnataka Table A2 Decadal Variation in Population since 1901.

Urdu, similar to Hindi in grammatical construction and basic vocabulary, developed as the court or camp language for the Moguls, uses Persian script and largely draws on Persian for its higher vocabulary (Spate, 1972, p.157). In Karnataka Muslims tend to report Urdu as their mother tongue and this gives them both religious and linguistic identity. The share of Urdu speaking population has grown steadily from 9 per cent in 1961 to 10 per cent in 1991 (Table 1). One of the major reasons for their faster growth lies in their educational and economic backwardness, which predispose them to be more prolific. The National Family Health Survey of 1992-93 revealed that while total fertility rate for the state as a whole stood at 2.8, it was 3.9 for Muslims. In other words, a Muslim woman on an average gives birth to one extra child compared to women in other groups.

Hindi increased its percentage from 0.4 in 1961 to 1.8 in 1971. The spurt in the growth of Hindi speakers in the sixties is attributed to exclusion in the 1961 census of many of the Hindi dialects such as Pahari, Hindustani, Bihari, Rajasthani, Bojpuri, Maithili and Chatisgarhi from Hindi language returns and treating them as separate languages. From 1971 onwards, the census has lumped all dialects of Hindi with Hindi language. From 1971 onwards the growth of Hindi speakers has been modest but steady and by 1991 Hindi's share in mother tongue speakers rose to 2 per cent (Table 1). Hindi being the official language of the Indian union may have caused its expansion.

English is the lingua franca among the educated classes and widely used in educational institutions and commercial establishments. The Anglo-Indians who claim English as their mother tongue are a vanishing species in India with many members of this community opting for the former British colonies of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. No wonder the percentage of native speakers of English in Karnataka dwindled to 0.03 per cent in 1991 from 0.07 per cent in 1961 (Table 1).

## **Bilingualism**

The census reports provide data on persons who know more than one language<sup>3</sup>. Linguistic minorities, be they migrants or natives, do not give up their mother tongue totally because it provides them a sense of identity. A Malayalee after long residence in Karnataka still reports Malayalam as his mother tongue and

Kannada as his second language. Even his descendants retain their identity as Malayalees reporting Malayalam as their mother tongue and Kannada as a subsidiary language. Knowledge of a second language is widespread among all classes except the peasantry of a linguistically homogeneous state (OHK Spate 1972, p.154). In a city like Bangalore, a traveller equipped with either Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi or English can be easily understood.

The proportion of bilinguals is large among every linguistic minority. Coorgi speaking persons are the most bilinguals (87%) while Kannada speaking persons are the least bilinguals (20%). The Kannada speaking majorities seem to have little need for a subsidiary language as long as they live in their home state (Table 4).

**Table 4: Percentage of Bilinguals by Linguistic Groups**

**Karnataka - 1961 to 1991**

| Mother tongue of the linguistic group | Percentage of people who know a second language among the linguistic groups |      |      |      |
|---------------------------------------|---|------|------|------|
|                                       | 1961  | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 |
| Kannada                               | 9.1   | 11.7 | 12.5 | 20.1 |
| Telugu                                | 47.1  | 50.1 | 56.9 | 64.2 |
| Tamil                                 | 43.6  | 50.6 | 56.5 | 58.6 |
| Malayalam                             | 51.8  | 55.3 | 62.8 | 73.7 |
| Marathi                               | 36.9  | 40.5 | 47.3 | 50.6 |
| Konkani                               | 67.6  | 70.3 | 78.6 | 82.0 |
| Tulu                                  | 34.6  | 44.1 | 56.4 | 68.8 |
| Coorgi                                | 54.6  | 79.0 | 82.4 | 86.5 |
| Urdu                                  | 47.3  | 49.0 | 52.8 | 57.6 |
| Hindi                                 | 57.3  | 57.2 | 62.4 | 66.2 |
| English                               | 59.3  | 75.9 | 76.8 | 74.4 |

*Source:* Census of India 1961 C VI Bilingualism  
 Census of India 1971 C VI Bilingualism  
 Census of India 1981 C 8 Bilingualism  
 Census of India 1991 C 8 Speakers of each language classified by second and third language



What is important is that bilingualism has increased among every linguistic group. The increase in bilingualism is sharpest among Tulu speakers (34 percentage points) and lowest among Hindi speakers (9 percentage points) (Table 4).

It is not just that linguistic minorities have a flair for learning a subsidiary language but the subsidiary language they know often happens to be Kannada, the regional language of the state. It seems that linguistic minorities take recourse to bilingualism in Kannada in an effort to get integrated with majority language speakers. Thus among linguistic minorities, the percentage claiming knowledge of Kannada as a subsidiary language is very close to the percentage of bilinguals in that linguistic group. For example, 67 per cent of Tulu speakers claimed Kannada as their subsidiary language and the percentage of Tulu speakers who know any second language is not much higher being 69 per cent (Tables 4 and 5).

The knowledge of Kannada as a subsidiary language is high among Coorgis (75%) and Tulus (67%) who speak the languages indigenous to Karnataka. It is moderate among Telugu speakers (55%) who are either long-term migrants or born in linguistic enclaves located along Karnataka's long border with Andhra Pradesh. It is low among Tamil speakers (41%) and native speakers of English (29%) who are recent migrants or birds of passage. This suggests that a linguistic minority must be a native of the state or must have lived in the state at least for some length of time before he or she can have a smattering of Kannada (Table 5).

The incidence of bilingualism is low among Kannadigas. They prefer English to any other language. Thus 10 per cent of Kannadigas know English as a second language. English is perceived by them to be a passport for white-collar jobs. The next two important second languages known to Kannadigas are Telugu (5%) and Hindi (4%) (Table 6).

## **Implications of the Trend for Communication and Administration**

The business of government would be simplified if the population is homogeneous in terms of mother tongue reporting or all the linguistic minorities know the official language. Kannada is the

**Table 5: Percentage of Linguistic Minorities Who Know Kannada as a Second Language  
Karnataka - 1961 to 1991**

| Linguistic Minorities | Percentage among linguistic minorities who can use Kannada as a second language |      |      |      |
|-----------------------|---|------|------|------|
|                       | 1961  | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 |
| Telugu                | 42.5  | 45.8 | 53.8 | 55.1 |
| Tamil                 | 28.7  | 34.2 | 48.9 | 50.1 |
| Malayalam             | 20.0  | 25.7 | 39.4 | 48.7 |
| Marathi               | 28.8  | 31.5 | 37.0 | 36.0 |
| Konkani               | 47.4  | 49.4 | 63.0 | 62.5 |
| Tulu                  | 33.3  | 42.3 | 55.5 | 67.3 |
| Coorgi                | 47.5  | 72.3 | 79.0 | 75.0 |
| Urdu                  | 39.0  | 39.5 | 45.1 | 43.6 |
| Hindi                 | 37.2  | 48.8 | 56.2 | 53.5 |
| English               | 0   | 18.9 | 24.6 | 28.5 |

*Source:* Census of India 1961 C VI Bilingualism  
 Census of India 1971 C VI Bilingualism  
 Census of India 1981 C 8 Bilingualism  
 Census of India 1991 C 8 Speakers of each language classified by second and third language

official language of the state government. At the Centre, Hindi enjoys the status of official language. But English also is given the status of an associate official language. Table 7 provides for each of the three languages the combined strength of the population who knows the language. This is done by adding together mother tongue speakers of a language with those who know that language as a second language.

## Kannada

Kannadigas who know Kannada as a mother tongue and linguistic minorities who know Kannada as a subsidiary language, together constituted 77 per cent of the population in 1961. The combined proportion escalated to 83 per cent in 1991. To put it differently, of the 45 million people of Karnataka, 37 million can speak with each other in the states' official language. The remaining 8 million people are mostly children and housewives from linguistic minority communities. Children remain illiterate in Kannada because they

**Table 6: Percentage of Kannadigas by the Second Language They Know**

**Karnataka - 1961 to 1991**

| Name of the second language known to the Kannadigas | Percentage of Kannadigas who know the language |       |       |       |
|---|--|-------|-------|-------|
|   | 1961   | 1971  | 1981  | 1991  |
| Telugu  | 3.63   | 3.52  | 4.34  | 5.00  |
| Tamil   | 0.28   | 0.31  | 0.54  | 0.51  |
| Malayalam   | 0.02   | 0.05  | 0.06  | n.a   |
| Marathi   | 1.25   | 1.14  | 1.17  | 1.00  |
| Konkani   | 0.09   | 0.12  | 0.14  | n.a   |
| Tulu  | 0.47   | 0.43  | 0.59  | n.a   |
| Coorgi  | 0.03   | 0.02  | 0.00  | n.a   |
| Urdu  | 0.50   | 0.39  | 0.34  | n.a   |
| Hindi   | 0.93   | 1.37  | —     | 3.53  |
| English   | 1.84   | 4.33  | —     | 10.06 |
| Any Second Language                                 | 9.13   | 11.70 | 12.47 | 20.10 |

*Note :* N.a = Not available

— = Figures not given because of printing errors in the census publication.

*Source:* Census of India 1961 C VI Bilingualism

Census of India 1971 C VI Bilingualism

Census of India 1981 C 8 Bilingualism

Census of India 1991 C 8 Speakers of each language classified by second and third language

are too young to learn a second language. Housewives rarely interact with people outside their family circle and do not get the opportunity to learn a second language (J D Gupta and J A Fisherman 1971, p. 228). Had we considered only the adult males who need to enter into transactions with larger community, the knowledge of Kannada would be almost universal in Karnataka. The increasing proportion of population knowing Kannada language has pulled down the communication barriers that existed between linguistic communities. Another spin-off effect is that public affairs is no longer the monopoly of the English knowing elite. It has drawn into public life men and women who are acquainted with Kannada only. Kannada in every walk of life within the state will

**Table 7: Total Population Who Know the Official Language either as Mother Tongue or as a Second Language  
Karnataka 1961 to 1991**

| Name of the official language | Combined group knowing the language either as mother tongue or as a second language |                                  |             |                                  |             |                                  |             |                                  |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
|                               | 1961  |                                  | 1971        |                                  | 1981        |                                  | 1991        |                                  |
|                               | No. in '000   | Percentage of general population | No. in '000 | Percentage of general population | No. in '000 | Percentage of general population | No. in '000 | Percentage of general population |
| Kannada                       | 18215   | 77.2                             | 23327       | 79.6                             | 30403       | 81.8                             | 37313       | 83.0                             |
| Hindi                         | 289   | 1.2                              | 883         | 3.0                              | —           | —                                | 2324        | 5.2                              |
| English                       | 483   | 2.0                              | 1203        | 4.1                              | —           | —                                | 3778        | 8.4                              |

*Note:* — = Printing errors in the census publications

*Source:* As in Tables 1 and 4

undoubtedly prevail in the end and really creative work in Karnataka will tend more and more to be written in Kannada only.

## **Hindi**

In 1961, just one per cent of Karnataka's population knew Hindi. In 1991, nearly 5 per cent of the population knew Hindi either as their mother tongue or as a second language. Hindi has been gaining rapidly by nationalist and official favour. It is still way behind Kannada and English. It will be a long time before Hindi can emerge as a communication language between Karnataka and the rest of India. It is unlikely to emerge as a world language, unlike English which is a world language.

## **English**

Between 1961 and 1991, the percentage of population knowing English more than quadrupled from two to nine. It must be recalled that only a miniscule minority of the population (0.03 per cent in 1991) claimed English as a mother tongue. All the same, it is claimed as a subsidiary language by more persons than those who know even Hindi, the centre's official language. Though only a small proportion of the population is well versed in English, there are many more people who understand English of sorts. English is the only language which has some adherents in every part of the country. In India it has been the language of the most serious scholarship. It can strengthen our communication with the outside world, especially with the main currents of scientific and social thought and international trade and diplomacy.

We must now consider what caused the spurt in the growth of bilingualism in the state. With regionalism growing in strength, the linguistic minorities seem to think that learning a second language which is the official language, either at state or central level, is the most desirable survival strategy. Knowledge of the official language will enable the minorities and their children to compete for jobs and educational opportunities almost on an equal footing with majorities. This is aided by tremendous increase in institutions offering education at various levels. In Karnataka, the general population did not even double over the thirty year-period between 1961 and 1991. But the number of literates has increased three and half times from 6 million in 1961 to 21 million in 1991. Those who have passed high school and above have increased

twelve times from less than half a million in 1961 to five and half million in 1991. The spectacular increase in mass media, like cinema, radio and television, has given a further push to bilingualism.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Summing up the trends from mother tongue returns, all minority languages, with the exception of Urdu and Hindi, are losing ground. With the increasing number of Kannada speakers in the population, Karnataka is slowly but steadily moving towards linguistic homogenisation of its people. From the point of view of communication, it is a desirable change.

Some of this change has come about through demographic processes of migration and a natural increase in population. It needs to be admitted that our inferences about the role of demographic processes in altering the linguistic make-up of the state are based on fragmentary evidence. For example, our inference that migration has caused the decline of Tamils, Telugus, Malayalees, Marathis and Konkanis in the state's population would carry more weight if we can demonstrate it with linguistic affiliation of immigrants and outmigrants. Our assertion that Tulu and Coorgi speakers are losing the number game to more dominant Kannada speakers because of their declining fertility would be more convincing if we could adduce more direct data on fertility differentials among linguistic groups. But such fine grain data are not simply available. One is therefore constrained to making sense out of a very eclectic collection of information. The main point is that all these pieces of information, though often not conclusive enough in themselves, add up to a consistent pattern as in a zigzag puzzle.

Since 1961 bilingualism is growing in the state. An interesting aspect of bilingualism we find in census data is that linguistic minorities are more bilingual than majority Kannadigas. Another interesting aspect is that the subsidiary language of the minorities is ordinarily the regional language Kannada. Bilingualism in Kannada is more common among speakers of Tulu and Coorgi, the two languages indigenous to Karnataka. Kannadigas, on the other hand, have a marked preference for learning English to meet their need for communication with the rest of the world.

That there has been certain amount of unmixing of people along the linguistic front cannot be denied. Yet, far from emerging as a monolithic entity, Karnataka has managed to retain a great deal of linguistic and cultural diversity. Bilingualism in Kannada has made great strides and built bridges across linguistic divides. The Karnataka experience shows that a modernising society can improve its communication environment even when it is bedevilled by plurality of languages.

## Notes

1. The census defines mother tongue as the language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person. In the case of infants and deaf mutes also it is the language usually spoken by the mother. If the mother had died while the person was still an infant, the language mainly spoken in the person's home during his/her childhood is considered as mother tongue.
2. According to 'place of birth' statistics published by the census, an inter-state migrant is a person enumerated in a state different from the state of his birth.
3. The census enumerator after recording a respondents' mother tongue asked the respondent if he knew any other language(s) - Indian or foreign. If the respondent said he did not know any other language, he was considered mono-lingual. In case the respondent said he knew some other languages also, the maximum number of languages recorded was restricted to two. The two languages should be other than the respondent's mother tongue or any dialect of it. When two languages were reported, they were recorded one after the other in the order in which the respondent spoke and understood them best. The person need not necessarily be able to read or write these languages. It is enough if he had a working knowledge of the languages to enable him to converse in the languages with understanding. Though the census recorded the names of two languages other than mother tongue known to the respondent, it confined itself until 1981 to tabulate and present data on the first subsidiary language only. This procedure can to some extent distort the actual currency of a subsidiary language, particularly among the middle class living in polyglot cities. At the state level, those who know two subsidiary languages constitute only a miniscule proportion. In order to make the analysis comparable over time, the present paper takes into consideration only the first subsidiary language.

## References

1. Bose, Asish (1978) *India's Urbanization 1901 - 2001*, New Delhi: Tata McGraw - Hill. p. 201 - 202.

2. Gupta, Jyotindra Das and Joshua A Fisherman, (1971) 'Inter-state Migration and Subsidiary Language Claiming: An Analysis of Selected Indian Census Data', *International Migration Review*, Vol.5, pp. 227 - 49.
3. Joseph, T M (1998) *Politics of Recruitment: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in Urban India*, Jaipur: RBSA Publishers.
4. Khubchandani, Lachman M (1989) 'Language and Population' in Singh S N, et.al (Ed), *Population Transition in India*, Vol.2, Delhi: B R Publishing Corporation, pp. 393 - 404.
5. Sakharov, I V (1972) 'Ethno-Linguistic Geography of India: Facts and Problems in Census of India 1971', *Economic and Socio-cultural Dimensions of Regionalism: An Indo-USSR Collaborative Study*, Centenary Monograph, No. 7, New Delhi: Registrar General, pp. 387 - 426.
6. Samuel, M J (1995) 'Growing Regionalism as a Barrier to Inter-Regional Migration: Evidence from Metropolitan Cities in India', *Indian Journal of Regional Science*, Vol. XXVII, No.1 & 2, PP. 1 - 10.
7. Schwartzberg, Joseph E (1985) 'Factors in the Linguistic Reorganisation of Indian States' in Wallace, Paul (Ed), *Region and Nation in India*, New Delhi: Oxford and I B H Publishing Co. pp. 155 - 182.
8. Spate, O H K and A T A Learnmonth, (1972) *India and Pakistan: Land, People and Economy*, London: Methuen and Co. pp. 153 - 157.
9. Weiner, Myron (1978) *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



# Recent Working Papers

53. **PRABIR KUMAR MOHANTY AND B KAMAIAH**  
Volatility and its Persistence in Indian Stock Market: A Case Study of 30 Scrips
54. **ALLEN ROY, PRAVAKAR SAHOO AND B KAMAIAH**  
A Causal Test of Fiscal Synchronisation Hypothesis in India
55. **ALLEN ROY, B KAMAIAH AND M GOVINDA RAO**  
Educational Expenditure Needs of Large Indian States : A Normative View
56. **G K KARANTH**  
Does Replication Mean Consensus
57. **H G HANUMAPPA**  
State Policy Initiatives and Agricultural Development: A Case Study of Karnataka Province, India
58. **G THIMMAIAH**  
Federalism and Economic Development: Indian Experience
59. **T KANNAN**  
Caste Violence and Dalit Consciousness: A Critical Interpretation of Dominance
60. **K V RAJU AND JEFFREY D BREWER**  
Conjunctive Water Management in Bihar
61. **MADHUSHREE SEKHER**  
Local Organisations and Participatory CPR Management: Some Reflections
62. **PRATAP CHANDRA BISWAL AND B KAMAIAH**  
Stock Market Development in India: Is There Any Trend Break?
63. **SANGHAMITRA SAHU AND B KAMAIAH**  
Some Aspects of Monetary Targeting in India
54. **AMALENDU JYOTISHI**  
Swidden Cultivation: A Review of Concepts and Issues
65. **K V RAJU**  
Participatory Irrigation Management in Andhra Pradesh: Promise, Practice and a Way Forward
66. **D RAJASEKHAR**  
Non-Governmental Organisations in India: Opportunities and Challenges
67. **S JYOTHIS**  
Willingness to Participate in Biodiversity Conservation in Periyar Tiger Reserve: A Contingent Valuation
68. **ANAND INBANATHAN**  
Power, Patronage and Accountability in the Panchayats of Karnataka
69. **PRATAP CHANDRA BISWAL AND B KAMAIAH**  
On Stock Market Development, Banks and Economic Growth in India
70. **N R BHANUMURTHY**  
Testing Long-Run Monetarists' Propositions in Some Industrialized Countries
71. **PRABIR KUMAR MOHANTY AND B KAMAIAH**  
Does Seasonal Pattern in Indian Stock Returns Contain a Unit Root?
72. **V VIJAYALAKSHMI AND B K CHANDRASHEKAR**  
Gender Inequality, Differences, and Identities: Women and Local Governance in Karnataka
73. **DEBASHIS AND B KAMAIAH**  
Simple Sum Versus Divisia Monetary Aggregates: An Empirical Evaluation
74. **T S JEENA**  
Wetland Conversion: The Case of Backwater Reclamation in Kerala
75. **P H RAYAPPA, T V SEKHER, M RAMAKRISHNA REDDY**  
Population Policy for Karnataka: A Suggested Framework

76. **D RAJASEKHAR & P SHOBANA**  
Economic Programmes  
and Poverty Reduction:  
NGO Experiences from Tamil Nadu
77. **PRAVAKAR SAHOO,  
GEETHANJALI NATARAJ, B KAMAIAH**  
Savings and Economic Growth in India:  
The Long-Run Nexus
78. **KAUSHIK BASU**  
A Note on Multiple General  
Equilibria with Child Labour
79. **A S SEETHARAMU**  
Literacy, Employment and  
Social Security: A Review
80. **T V SEKHER**  
Empowerment of Grassroots  
Leadership in Health and Population:  
A Training Experiment in Karnataka
81. **N R BHANUMURTHY,  
M RAMACHANDRAN AND  
PURNA CHANDRA PADHAN**  
Is the QTM Controversy Settled?
82. **KAUSHIK BASU, AMBAR NARAYAN  
AND MARTIN RAVALLION**  
Is Knowledge Shared within  
Households? Theory and  
Evidence for Bangladesh
83. **M THOMAS PAUL, N R BHANUMURTHY  
AND NISHANT BAPAT**  
A Re-Examination of the Long-Run  
Relationship between Money Supply  
and Inflation in India
84. **GEETHANJALI NATARAJ,  
PRAVAKAR SAHOO AND B KAMAIAH**  
Export-Led Growth in India:  
What do the VARS Reveal?
85. **K N NINAN AND JYOTHIS S**  
Social Forestry in Karnataka:  
Cost-Benefit Appraisal of a Project
86. **M D USHADEVI**  
External Supervision Support for  
Enhancing Quality in Primary Education
87. **M JAYA KRISHNA**  
Private Foreign Investment in  
Post-Reform India: A Search for  
Proximate Determinants
88. **V VIJAYALAKSHMI**  
Politics of Inclusion: Scheduled  
Tribe Women in Local Governance
89. **T V SEKHER, K N M RAJU AND  
M N SIVAKUMAR**  
Fertility Transition in Karnataka:  
Levels, Trends and Implications
90. **A S SHRINIDHI AND  
SHARACHCHANDRA LELE**  
Forest Tenure Regimes in the Karnataka  
Western Ghats: A Compendium
91. **VEERASHEKHARAPPA**  
Community Participation in Rural  
Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation:  
A Case Study of Karnataka

ISBN 81-7791-048-5

Price: Rs.30-00



**INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE**

Prof. V. K. R. V. Rao Road, Nagarbhavi, Bangalore - 560 072, India  
Phone : 0091-80 - 3215468, 3215519, 3215592 ; Fax: 0091-80 - 3217008

Grams: ECOSOCI, Bangalore - 560 040

E-mail:kvraju@isec.kar.nic.in