

## Article

# Securitizing Linguistic Diversity: Language Policy and the Politics of National Identity in India

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**Abstract:** In the governance of multilingual nations, language policies are not only about cultural heritage and social equality but also profoundly influence the construction of national identity and political order. This paper uses securitization theory as an analytical framework to systematically explore the development and evolution of India's language policies and their deep-seated connection with national identity. Through an analysis of constitutional texts, policy practices, and social movements, it highlights how the Indian government has politicized issues of linguistic diversity through securitization discourse, thereby elevating Hindi to a central position in national identity. In this process, the rights claim of marginalized language groups are often stigmatized, and language conflicts repeatedly escalate into crises of national identity. This paper argues that while language securitization policies have certain functions in national integration, their exclusionary characteristics also exacerbate dissatisfaction and resistance among local cultures, which is detrimental to the long-term stability and harmony of India's multi-ethnic nation-state. Therefore, future language policies should shift from power-driven approaches to multi-stakeholder governance, establishing an inclusive national identity framework that acknowledges linguistic diversity.

**Keywords:** language diversity; securitization theory; Indian language policy; national identity

## **1. Introduction**

In a country where multiple ethnic groups and languages coexist, language is not merely a tool for communication but also a symbol of identity and political power. As one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, India's language policies have been deeply influenced by the tension between national unity and cultural diversity since its independence. The promotion of Hindi, the continued use of English, and the preservation of regional languages have formed a complex policy landscape under the interplay of various political forces [1]. With the introduction of securitization theory, language issues have increasingly been imbued with security significance by the state, becoming one of the core issues in maintaining national identity and political stability [2]. The securitization of language not only influences the direction of policy-making but also profoundly shapes the pathways of national identity construction. This paper aims to use India as a case study to explore how linguistic diversity is securitized and further analyze the political logic and social consequences of this process in the construction of national identity [3].

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Overview of Language**

### **Securitization**

#### **2.1. The Connection Between Securitization Theory and Language**

Securitization theory, proposed by the Copenhagen School, emphasizes that once an issue is constructed as a 'security issue' through discourse by specific actors (such as states), it can transcend conventional political procedures and gain special treatment. Within this framework, language issues are not inherently part of the security domain but are politicized and further securitized within specific historical and social contexts. Once language is perceived as a threat to national unity, social stability, or cultural identity, its governance tends to adopt more coercive and centralized measures [4]. In multilingual countries, central governments often use language policies to empower specific languages while marginalizing others, thereby

maintaining the state's dominant narrative and identity structure—a clear manifestation of the language securitization process. As shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1**

*Connection Between Securitization Theory and Language*

Aspect	Details
Theory Origin	Copenhagen School
Core Idea	Issues become 'security issues' through political discourse
Language and Security	Language is securitised when seen as a threat to unity or stability
Policy Outcome	More coercive, centralised governance of language
State Strategy	Promotion of dominant language, marginalisation of others
Goal of Securitisation	Maintain national narrative and identity structure

## 2.2. Language Diversity and National Security: Conceptual Definitions

Language diversity refers to the existing number of language systems in a nation or region. While this phenomenon portrays cultural diversity, it can also create issues for national government in areas of unity, communication effectiveness, and identity alignment. In cases of national multiculturalism when political motives come into play and language becomes a key resource for ethnic mobilization, separatism, or protests, the state can be considered as viewing language technology as a potential threat to its security [5]. National security, in this case, is not an absolute military or political security but rather one in which a state tries to stabilize social integration on the basis of identity. Therefore, in certain contexts, language diversity becomes redefined as a non-traditional security issue that warrants different governance frameworks, which is indicative of the state's securitization logic toward cultural diversity [6]. As shown in **Table 2**.

**Table 2**

*Language Diversity and National Security – Conceptual Definitions*

Aspect	Details
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Language Diversity	Coexistence of multiple languages within a nation
Cultural Significance	Reflects richness of cultural heritage
Governance Challenges	Unity, communication, and identity alignment
Political Risk	Language as a tool for mobilisation, separatism, or protest
Expanded Security Concept	Includes social integration and identity stability
Securitisation Logic	Diversity reframed as a non-traditional security issue

## 2.3. The Linguistic Dimension of National Identity

National identity is an important source of internal state cohesion, and language, as a core marker of identity, is imbued with social and institutional meaning in national identity construction. While it may be a matter of administrative convenience to identify a particular language as the national language for a multilingual state, the state language is also a signifier in that it identifies the symbol system of the state. Language determines who is the legitimate speech holder and who is marginalized. Language acts as an important instrument in that it is inclusive and exclusionary, and it will also predetermine a citizen's identity in relation to belonging to that state. Some differences in language can lead to cultural barriers between groups and thus national unity [7]. States therefore, aspire to affirm a national linguistic identity by instilling educational policy on language, regulating the language of media, and prescribing which language should be used to access public services, with the hopes of establishing a singular national imaginary space. For this reason, language can be made to intersect with strategies of national identity, and becomes an important tool for the purposes of state policy and institutional arrangements [8]. As shown in **Table 3**.

**Table 3**

*The Linguistic Dimension of National Identity*

Aspect	Details
Role of National Identity	Source of internal cohesion and unity
Role of Language	Core marker of identity; tool for constructing national identity
Symbolic Function	National language selection reflects state symbolism and authority



Power Dynamics

Language choice defines inclusion vs. marginalisation

Social Impact

Shapes belonging, may create cultural barriers

Policy Approaches

Education, media language control, public service language norms

Strategic Purpose

Builds unified national imagination and identity

## 2.4. Securitization Discourse and Policy Tools

Language securitization occurs not only through policy, but also through the construing of related discourse. State actors will often frame language matters as “security problems” that threaten national unity, social order, or even national sovereignty through political speeches, media framing, and legislative texts. Once discourses are accepted widely in society, they offer legitimization for the use of policy instruments, which are often the restriction of non-official language use, the advancement of education in official languages, and the increasing regulations on language standardization. These not only change patterns of language propagation and language use, but re-formulate the identity recognition of individuals as social members. When discourse defines, and policies factor, education according to language securitization, policy instruments cease to be neutral state governance tools in which state actors are increasingly framing the use of important levers of national identity politics [9].

## 3. The Evolution and Current Challenges of India’s Language Policy

### 3.1. The Indian Constitution and the Official Language System

The Constitution of India has a multifaceted approach and elaborate arrangements for the language question. Article 343 states that Hindi is the official language of the Central government, English is to remain an auxiliary official language, and that states may choose their own official language(s) [10]. In addition to this, Schedule VIII lists 22 languages recognized nationally, and these languages can receive a degree of policy and legal protection. Overall, this constitutional framework reflects the linguistic plurality of India while attempting to promote unity



and pluralism. However, this institutional structure can also breed contradictions: the disparities between the status of official languages, disputes among language groups concerning the ‘national language,’ and lopsided access to resources have become the institutional legacies of future political disputes over languages.

### **3.2. The Promotion of Hindi and Conflicts with Regional Languages**

As the dominant language of Northern India, the government took up the promotion of Hindi in 1947, in the early years of independence, as a way to develop a ‘national language’ that would further help to reinforce unity and identity. Attempting to impose Hindi turned out to be disastrous, met with pushback in the southern region and particularly with pushback in the northeastern states in India. However, the Tamil-speaking people of Tamil Nadu in India, in particular, had a strong opposition to the Hindi language and Hindi hegemony, which eventually played a role in the Hindi language riots of 1965. The 1965 plan to replace Hindi for English as the official language of government was met with extensive protests, forcing the government to back down from replacing English with Hindi. Protests during this period, and others, highlighted that language policy and implementation did not consider broad-based consultations or cultural sensitivity. Promotion of Hindi in India instigated a sense of northern cultural hegemony and increasing regional distrust and political problems.

### **3.3. Language Compromises in the Federal Structure**

India’s language policies exhibit a common form of decentralization, compromise, and federation, which is typical of a federal state, where states could choose their official languages, allowing local languages to be solicited in education, administration, and media. The central government has a dual system for Hindi and English based on the constitutional provisions to meet regional grievances. This compromise comes through the flexibility of shaping policies such as language-based reorganization of states, the proposed language rights bill, and as in the case of state-level public service examinations, multilingual options are available to allow for multilingual realities and national integration.

## **4. The Politics of Language Securitization in the Construction of National Identity**

### **4.1. Case Study of Language Securitization in India**

In India, the language securitization process is not an abstract conceptualization but manifests as a logic of states behavior in particular policies and social practices. For example, when there was a controversy about the promotions of Hindi, the central government justified its modus operandi with the needs of ‘national oneness’ and budgetary savings and framed the language demands from the ‘rival’ non-Hindi regions as a form of separateness. This securitization narration has been institutionalized through media, education policies, and legal texts, providing greater legitimacy and prioritization of resources on the official language. In comparison, advocacy for the protection of certain regional languages has been purposely marginalized or ascribed to the stigmatized description of ‘anti-national behavior’, restringing in a discursive dominance imbalance. This clearly illustrates how the state used a security discourse to politically discipline linguistic identity and as such seeks to silence the identity dilemmas posed by linguistic diversity.

### **4.2. Political Manipulation of National Identity and Cultural Hegemony**

The representation of national identity in multinational contexts often involves the institutional promotion of dominant languages and cultures. The Government of India systematically establishes the status of Hindi as the ‘heart of national identity’ through the education system, the regulation of communicative functions in Broadcasting, as well as through the selection of national symbolic languages. This language supremacy policy effectively demonstrates a form of cultural hegemony which applies and promotes Northern language and culture as the ‘orthodox’ culture of the nation. In this process, the parameters of national identity are constructed as a necessarily political representation limited to exclusive models of linguistic identity, with marginalized languages and speakers automatically relegated to the position of

‘the other,’ and subjects of serious asymmetry in terms of layers of distribution of social and cultural capital. Language is not just a means for communication, but it is also a mechanism for the reproduction of power and symbolic capital.

### **4.3. The ‘Unity’ Narrative and Conflict in Multilingual Countries**

In India, political elites increasingly cite the notion of “unity” as the central narrative for national cohesion. They portray language as a channel for achieving unity. Yet, when invoked as a narrative, unity undermines linguistic diversity as it necessarily reduces multilingual contexts to governance hurdles, achieving “standardization” exclusively through centralized language policies. Of necessity language policies activate dissent and resistance from disadvantaged language groups, preparing the ground for potential conflict between the ideal of national unity and the reality of local identity. The exclusivity of unity narrative overlooks the cultural legitimacies rooted in linguistic differences or the inclusive approaches to governance that multilingual states ought to embrace, thus positioning language politics as a double threat to national stability and identity formation.

### **4.4. Reflections on Language Securitization and Future Directions**

As global awareness of the rights to cultural and ethnic identity continue to develop, India’s preference for language securitization is only facing increasing scrutiny and challenge. On the one hand, while a single-language approach has highlighted the inadequacy of a language policy to respond to social diversity, the potential of local languages facing a long-term marginalization may lead to deeper identity crises. On the other hand, technological development pair with other appropriate governance mechanisms are opening up new opportunities for multilingualism and language coexistence such as AI translation and digital education which can enhance language equity. Language policies in the future should reflect an inclusive approach, and where languages are not considered security risks, but actually a cultural resource. By securing and governing local languages appropriately, national identity will be reconfigured while also respecting society’s diverse languages. Although securitization perspectives must be overcome, the role of languages has the potential to be a positive resource for social integration, and cultural coexistence.



## **5. Conclusion**

In India, language intersects with cultural identity and social power which formulates the political function of language as much more than merely a functional device for communication. An investigation of the historical background and securitization process for the language policy in India shows that the state often utilizes the discourse of “unity” or “security” to legitimate language which furthers a hierarchy of languages in advancing Hindi as the primary foundation of national identity. This discourse not only completely ignores allowances for the surviving and expressive rights for regional languages but also undermines an inclusive basis on which a national identity could rest. Securitization rationales behind governing language policy may redistribute political power in the form of political centralization and efficiency however it will mostly breed cultural exclusion and social discontent making the existing multilingual foundations of harmony and stability even less attainable. The lessons from India’s experience demonstrate that the political deployment of linguistic identity should be limited by institutional norms, and national identities should be imagined and constructed through the lens of equality, respect, and cultural plurality, diversity, and multilingualism. In the case of multilingual societies, harmonious and effective inclusion emerges from open and inclusive language policies instead of from the security logic that presents diversity as a challenge.

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