



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20677196>

A Socio-linguistic Insight into Current Status and Future Prospects of Maithili

Prof. Sanjay K. Jha
ASLA, Amity University Haryana

Received: DEC. 15, 2025

Accepted: JAN. 12, 2026

Published: FEB. 28, 2026

A Socio-Linguistic Insight into Current Status and Future Prospects of Maithili

Prof. Sanjay K. Jha
ASLA, Amity University Haryana

ABSTRACT

Maithili is one of the major Indo-Aryan languages spoken primarily in the Mithila region of India and Nepal. Despite its rich literary heritage and constitutional recognition in India, Maithili faces various sociolinguistic challenges arising from multilingualism, language contact, migration, urbanization, and the dominance of regional and national languages. This paper examines the sociolinguistic status of Maithili by analyzing its historical development, linguistic identity, language use patterns, multilingual practices, language attitudes, code-switching phenomena, and challenges to language maintenance. The study highlights the complex interaction between language, culture, identity, and social change in the Maithili-speaking community. The findings suggest that while Maithili remains a strong marker of ethnic and regional identity, increasing language contact and globalization have created pressures that may influence its future vitality.

Keywords: Maithili, sociolinguistics, language maintenance, multilingualism, language shift, identity, code-switching

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the sociolinguistic dimensions of Maithili and explores the factors shaping its current status and future prospects. Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a symbol of cultural identity and social belonging. Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, focusing on how social factors such as class, ethnicity, education, gender, and geography influence language use. The inclusion of Maithili in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India significantly enhanced its official status and linguistic recognition (Kumari, 2025). However, the language continues to face challenges related to language policy, educational implementation, migration, and competition from dominant languages such as Hindi and Nepali. Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, focusing on how social factors influence language use. Maithili,

one of the major Indo-Aryan languages, is spoken in the Mithila region of India and Nepal and possesses a rich literary and cultural tradition (Yadav, 2021).

2. Historical Background of Maithili

Maithili belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. The language gained prominence through the works of the medieval poet Vidyapati and other literary figures (Yadav, 2021). Historically, Maithili has faced issues regarding its classification in national censuses, where it was often subsumed under Hindi, affecting its sociolinguistic identity (Jha, 1994). Maithili is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language spoken predominantly in the Mithila region of Bihar, Jharkhand, and the Terai region of Nepal. It possesses a rich literary tradition dating back to the medieval period, particularly through the works of the poet Vidyapati. The language has long functioned as a vehicle of cultural expression and regional identity. The language was traditionally written in the Tirhuta script, although Devanagari is now widely used. The literary heritage of Maithili includes poetry, religious texts, folklore, drama, and modern prose. Despite its long history, Maithili has often faced issues of classification, with some census operations historically grouping it under Hindi. Such categorization has had important sociolinguistic implications for language identity and recognition.

3. Sociolinguistic Profile of Maithili

Maithili functions as the primary language of communication among millions of speakers in India and Nepal (Yadav, 2021). Language serves as a powerful marker of ethnic and regional identity among Maithili speakers. The recognition of Maithili as a scheduled language has strengthened linguistic consciousness and cultural pride (Jha, 1994). The Maithili-speaking population is concentrated in northern Bihar and southeastern Nepal. The language functions as a primary means of communication within families and communities while coexisting with Hindi, Nepali, English, and other regional languages.

Language and Identity

Language plays a crucial role in the construction of Maithili identity. Studies indicate that Maithili speakers generally possess positive attitudes toward their mother tongue and view it as an important component of their cultural heritage (Jha, 2008). However, the increasing dominance of Hindi, Nepali, and English in education and employment has influenced language preferences among younger generations (Gautam & Poudel, 2022). For many speakers, Maithili is not merely a communication tool but a symbol of cultural heritage and regional pride. The recognition of Maithili as a scheduled language has strengthened linguistic consciousness and encouraged cultural revival movements. Nevertheless, concerns regarding linguistic assimilation into Hindi continue to influence language politics and identity formation.

Multilingualism and Language Contact

Multilingualism is a common characteristic of Maithili-speaking communities. Most speakers use Maithili alongside Hindi, Nepali, English, or Urdu depending on the social domain and communicative context (Gautam & Poudel, 2022). Increased urbanization and migration have intensified language contact, leading to lexical borrowing and language mixing (Gautam & Poudel, 2022). Urbanization and migration have increased interaction between Maithili speakers and speakers of other languages. Such contact has resulted in:

- Lexical borrowing
- Structural influence

- Language mixing
- Code-switching
- Domain-specific language selection

Research indicates that language contact has become increasingly common among Maithili-speaking populations, particularly in urban centers. One of the defining sociolinguistic characteristics of Maithili-speaking communities is multilingualism.

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

Maithili exhibits considerable dialectal diversity. Variations occur across geographical regions in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. These dialectal differences contribute to the linguistic richness of the language while also reflecting social and regional distinctions among speakers. Such linguistic practices reflect speakers' ability to navigate multiple linguistic identities and social contexts (Yadav, 2013).

Education and Language Policy

The constitutional recognition of Maithili has encouraged efforts toward language preservation and educational inclusion (Priya & Lata, 2021). Nevertheless, the implementation of mother-tongue education remains limited due to inadequate educational resources and institutional support (Kumari, 2025).

Technology and Digital Development

Recent developments in computational linguistics have contributed to the creation of digital resources for Maithili, including morphological analyzers and language processing tools (Rahi et al., 2020). These initiatives play a crucial role in strengthening the language's presence in the digital era (Yadav et al., 2025).

4. Challenges Facing Maithili

Language shift remains one of the major challenges confronting Maithili-speaking communities. Younger speakers in urban areas increasingly adopt dominant languages for educational and economic purposes (Yadav, 2013). Additionally, the limited availability of educational materials and digital resources restricts the language's broader development (Kumari, 2025; Rahi et al., 2020). Maithili confronts several sociolinguistic challenges:

Language Shift

Younger generations in urban environments increasingly favor Hindi, Nepali, or English for education and professional advancement. This trend may weaken intergenerational transmission.

Dominance of Major Languages

The prestige and institutional support enjoyed by Hindi, English, and Nepali often reduce opportunities for Maithili in formal domains.

Educational Constraints

Limited availability of Maithili-medium education continues to hinder language development and literacy growth.

Digital Resource Limitations

Although recent research has advanced computational resources for Maithili, the language remains underrepresented in digital technologies and natural language processing applications.

Institutional Limitations

Although official recognition has improved the status of Maithili, implementation of language policies remains uneven. Educational institutions and administrative bodies often lack adequate mechanisms to support language promotion (Kumari, 2025).

Globalization

Globalization has increased the prestige of international languages, particularly English. As a result, local languages may experience reduced usage in formal and economic domains. This trend presents a significant challenge to linguistic diversity.

Digital Marginalization

The limited availability of digital tools, online content, and technological resources places Maithili at a disadvantage in the information age. Without sustained technological development, the language risks exclusion from emerging digital ecosystems (Rahi et al., 2020).

Future Prospects of Maithili

Despite the above challenges, the future prospects of Maithili remain promising.

First, constitutional recognition provides a strong institutional foundation for language promotion. Continued implementation of language policies can expand opportunities for education and public use (Priya & Lata, 2021).

Second, growing cultural awareness among younger generations has generated renewed interest in regional languages and heritage preservation. Community-driven initiatives can strengthen language loyalty and encourage active use.

Third, technological advancements offer unprecedented opportunities for language revitalization. The development of digital dictionaries, language-learning applications, machine translation systems, and AI-based tools can significantly enhance accessibility and usability (Yadav et al., 2025).

Finally, collaboration among governments, educational institutions, researchers, and community organizations can create a sustainable framework for language maintenance and development.

5. Conclusion

Maithili occupies a unique position within the linguistic landscape of South Asia. Its rich literary heritage, strong cultural identity, and constitutional recognition provide a solid foundation for continued growth. However, the language also faces significant sociolinguistic challenges arising from multilingualism, language shift, globalization, and digital inequality.

The future vitality of Maithili will depend upon effective language planning, expansion of mother-tongue education, technological innovation, and sustained community engagement. By addressing these challenges and leveraging emerging opportunities, Maithili can continue

to thrive as a vibrant language of culture, communication, and identity in the twenty-first century.

Despite the challenges posed by globalization, migration, and linguistic competition, Maithili continues to serve as a significant marker of cultural and regional identity (Yadav, 2021). Sustained efforts in education, language policy, and technological development are necessary to ensure its long-term vitality (Kumari, 2025; Yadav et al., 2025).

The language demonstrates remarkable resilience through strong community attachment, literary traditions, and growing institutional recognition. However, challenges such as language shift, educational limitations, and digital marginalization require sustained policy interventions and community efforts.

Future development of Maithili depends on effective language planning, expansion of mother-tongue education, technological integration, and continued promotion of its cultural and linguistic heritage. Strengthening these areas will help ensure the long-term vitality of Maithili in both India and Nepal.

References

- Gautam, B. L., & Poudel, P. P. (2022). *Multilingualism and Language Contact in Maithili: Trends, Traits and Impact in Sociolinguistic Spaces*. *Gipan*, 5(1), 1–16. ([Nepal Journals Online](#))
- Jha, N. (2008). *A Sociolinguistic Profile of the Maithili Language of Dhanusha District*. Tribhuvan University. ([TUCL eLibrary](#))
- Jha, S. (1994). *Maithili in the Indian Census*. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 15(5), 385–397. ([Taylor & Francis Online](#))
- Kumari, S. (2025). *Current Status of Education in the Maithili Language and Its Challenges*. *Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary*. ([RR Journals](#))
- Thakur, K. (2014). *Sociolinguistic Variations in the Use of Maithili Language in Siraha District*. Tribhuvan University. ([TUCL eLibrary](#))
- Yadav, R. K. (2013). *Language Shift in the Maithili Speakers: A Case Study of Code-Switching in the Kathmandu Valley*. Tribhuvan University. ([TUCL eLibrary](#))
- Yadav, S. P. (2021). *A Sociolinguistic Study of Maithili*. Faculty of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University. ([TUCL eLibrary](#))
- Priya, S., & Lata, P. (2020). *Language Promotion and Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India*. *ICOLSI Conference Proceedings*. ([ResearchGate](#))
- Rahi, R., Pushp, S., Khan, A., & Sinha, S. K. (2020). *A Finite State Transducer Based Morphological Analyzer of Maithili Language*. arXiv. ([arXiv](#))
- Ranjan, R., Gurve, M. K., Anuj, Nitin, & Prasad, Y. (2025). *SentiMaithili: A Benchmark Dataset for Sentiment and Reason Generation for the Low-Resource Maithili Language*. arXiv. ([arXiv](#))
- Yadav, S., Yadav, R. K., Maskey, U., Hoque, M. A., & Gautam, G. (2025). *Can maiBERT Speak for Maithili?* arXiv. ([arXiv](#))