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Marathi Linguistic Identity in the Era of Globalisation: A Sociological Study of Youth Language Change in Maharashtra

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Abstract

Globalisation has transformed linguistic practices, cultural interactions and communication patterns in contemporary society. The growing influence of English, Hindi, digital technologies and global media has created new dimensions of language use among younger generations. In a multilingual society such as Maharashtra, these developments raise important sociological questions about regional language preservation, cultural identity and the changing role of mother tongues in everyday communication.

This study examines Marathi linguistic identity in the era of globalisation, with particular emphasis on the changing language practices of young people in Maharashtra. It investigates the influence of globalisation on language preferences, multilingual communication, code-switching, digital media usage and cultural attachment to Marathi. The study adopts a cross-sectional empirical design and is based on an online survey of 456 young respondents from Maharashtra.

Linguistic practices are examined in three domains: family, peer interaction and social media, and educational institutions. The study also explores the relationship between global linguistic influences and the maintenance of Marathi linguistic and cultural identity. Frequency distributions, percentage analysis and confidence intervals for proportions are used for data analysis.

The results show that 84.6 percent of respondents use Marathi (standard or dialect) at home, falling to 61.6 percent with friends and on social media and 52.0 percent in educational institutions, where mixed Marathi-English use is reported by about 37 to 38 percent. Even so, 89.8 percent describe speaking Marathi or a dialect as a matter of pride, 65.9 percent expect its use to increase, and 52.5 percent see globalisation as having both positive and negative effects on the language.

The research contributes to sociological debates on language change, youth identity, multilingualism and cultural transformation in contemporary Maharashtra, and seeks to understand how a regional language can retain cultural significance while adapting to the opportunities and challenges of a globalised, digitally connected society.

Keywords: Marathi Linguistic Identity; Globalisation; Youth Language Change; Sociolinguistics; Multilingualism; Code-Switching; Digital Communication; Cultural Identity.

1. Introduction

Language is more than a medium of communication. It is a repository of collective memory, a marker of belonging and a resource through which social hierarchies are produced and contested. Sociologists and sociolinguists have long argued that language practices reflect the structures of power, opportunity and

identity in a society (Bourdieu, 1991; Fishman, 1991). Under conditions of globalisation, characterised by the intensified flow of people, capital, media and ideas across borders (Appadurai, 1996), these practices are being reshaped at unprecedented speed.

Marathi, an Indo-Aryan language with a documented literary tradition stretching back many centuries, is the official language of Maharashtra and, according to the 2011 Census of India, is spoken as a mother tongue by roughly 83 million people, placing it among the most widely spoken languages in India (Pandharipande, 1997; Registrar General of India, 2011). In 2024 the Government of India conferred classical language status on Marathi, a recognition that renewed public debate about its place in education, administration and popular culture. Yet alongside this symbolic recognition, observers frequently voice concern about the declining use of Marathi in elite schooling, urban professional life and online spaces, where English and Hindi dominate.

Young people are central to this debate. As the generation most exposed to global media, social networking platforms, streaming services and English-medium education, they are both the principal agents of language change and the future custodians of linguistic heritage. Understanding how they use, value and imagine Marathi is therefore essential for any informed discussion on language maintenance in Maharashtra.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Maharashtra is a highly diverse state. Mumbai and Pune are cosmopolitan, globally connected urban centres; Vidarbha, Marathwada, Konkan and Western Maharashtra differ markedly in economic structure, educational access and dialect. Young people across these settings experience globalisation unequally. While some assume that globalisation leads inevitably to language shift towards English, others argue that it produces hybrid, creative and digitally mediated forms of Marathi. There is a need for systematic, empirical evidence on how youth language practices vary by domain, region, class and gender, and on how such practices relate to attachment to Marathi identity.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study is significant for four reasons. First, it adds to the limited body of sociological research on youth language practices in Maharashtra. Second, it moves beyond the binary of "language loss" versus "language vitality" by examining multilingual repertoires and code-switching as meaningful social practices. Third, it provides evidence that may inform language policy, educational planning and cultural institutions. Fourth, it contributes to broader comparative debates on regional languages in the Global South.

1.3 Marathi in Maharashtra: The Present Context

Marathi has a long literary history and is the official language of Maharashtra and the everyday language of most of its people. Its classical language status (2024) and the state's new language policy, reported in the press in March 2024 (Loksatta, 2024; The Times of India, 2024), have kept language high on the public agenda. Newspapers have also drawn attention to youth language in the digital age, the rise of mixed English-Marathi speech in cities and the influence of social media on language behaviour (Sakal, 2024; Maharashtra Times, 2024; Divya Marathi, 2025; The Indian Express, 2024). Commentators have linked changes in mother-tongue education to concerns about identity (The Times of India, 2025). These debates rest largely on observation and opinion. This study adds systematic survey evidence from young people themselves.

1.4 Key Concepts

- **Linguistic identity:** a sense of belonging to a language community, shown through pride, attachment and the wish to pass the language on.
- **Language practice:** the language or languages people actually use in a particular setting, such as home, school or social media.
- **Language mixing (code-switching):** moving between languages, or blending them, within one conversation; here mainly Marathi and English.
- **Globalisation:** the growing movement of people, media, technology and ideas across borders, which in India has widened the reach of English and digital platforms.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Language, Identity and Social Structure

The link between language and identity is foundational in sociolinguistics. Tajfel and Turner (1979) showed that group membership contributes to individual self-concept, and Giles and Johnson (1987) extended this to ethnolinguistic identity theory, proposing that the vitality of a language group depends on its status, demographic strength and institutional support. Anderson (1983) emphasised the role of print language in forming "imagined communities", a perspective relevant to the historical role of Marathi in shaping Maharashtrian regional consciousness. Bourdieu (1991) conceptualised language as symbolic capital whose value is set by the linguistic market; in India, English has acquired exceptional market value in education and employment, shaping parental and youth choices.

2.2 Language Maintenance and Shift

Fishman (1991) argued that intergenerational transmission in the home is the crucial factor in language maintenance, and proposed a graded scale of language disruption. Where children no longer acquire a language from parents, support through schools or media alone rarely suffices. In the Indian context, scholars have noted that the "three-language formula" and the dominance of English-medium schooling create complex patterns of bilingualism rather than straightforward replacement (Annamalai, 2001; Khubchandani, 1997). Mohanty (2006) describes Indian multilingualism as "unequal", with power and prestige distributed asymmetrically among languages.

2.3 Globalisation and Language

Crystal (2003) documented the spread of English as a global language, while Blommaert (2010) argued that globalisation should be understood not as the simple spread of languages but as the mobility of linguistic resources across contexts, producing new forms of inequality and new forms of creativity. Heller (2010) highlighted the commodification of language, in which languages are valued as skills and marketable products. In India, English proficiency is often treated as a gateway to upward mobility, which generates strong aspirational demand, while regional languages are valued primarily for cultural and emotional reasons.

2.4 Code-Switching and Hybrid Practices

Gumperz (1982) showed that code-switching is a socially meaningful strategy rather than evidence of deficiency, while Myers-Scotton (1993) analysed it through the markedness model of social motivations. Rampton (1995) demonstrated how adolescents in multilingual urban settings use language crossing to negotiate identity and belonging. Eckert (2000) established that youth are often at the forefront of linguistic innovation and that style is an active resource for constructing social meaning. In Maharashtra,

mixed varieties of Marathi, Hindi and English are common in conversation, advertising, film and social media, and call for sociological rather than purely prescriptive interpretation.

2.5 Digital Media and Youth Language

Digital platforms have created new communicative domains characterised by informality, speed, multimodality and transliteration. Romanised Marathi (typing Marathi in Latin script) and the use of emojis, memes and short-form video are widespread among youth. These domains can either marginalise a language, if no Marathi content or input tools are available, or revitalise it, when creators produce popular Marathi content for a global audience.

2.6 Marathi and Indian Scholarship

Scholars writing in Marathi and English have long connected language with society and modernity. Sabnis (2018) addresses language and society, and More (2016) addresses Marathi identity in relation to modernity. Khan (2014) presents sociolinguistic concepts and their uses in the Marathi context, while Kale (2012) and Jadhav (2009) deal with globalisation in relation to the Marathi language and Indian society respectively. Sabnis (2022) and More (2017) have also written on linguistic identity, globalisation and the search for "Marathi-ness" in public and periodical writing. These works provide the local intellectual background for the present study.

2.7 Literary and Public Voices

Marathi literature has long been a space where language and identity are debated. Poets such as Mardhekar (1957), Borkar (1965), Godghate, who wrote as Grace (1980), and Dhasal (1972) shaped modern Marathi expression, and Dhasal (1985) also wrote on Dalit literature and language. Their work is a reminder that Marathi identity is not only about standard usage: it includes many voices, registers and social experiences. In the same way, today's newspapers and online discussions show that language remains a matter of public concern (see Section 1.3).

2.8 Research Gap

While the broader literature on language shift, multilingualism and globalisation is substantial, few studies provide statewide, empirically grounded comparisons of Marathi use among youth across domains and regions, or link these practices directly to measures of cultural and linguistic identity. This study addresses that gap.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study draws on three complementary perspectives.

Ethnolinguistic vitality and social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Giles and Johnson, 1987) explains how perceived status, demographic strength and institutional support of Marathi shape the strength of identification with it.

Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital (1991) explains why individuals invest in English and Hindi when these are perceived to carry higher economic value, and how Marathi may retain primarily cultural and symbolic capital.

Sociolinguistics of globalisation (Blommaert, 2010; Appadurai, 1996) frames language change as a consequence of mobility, mediascapes and unequal access to linguistic resources, treating hybrid practices as legitimate objects of analysis.

Together these perspectives support the study's central assumption: language change among youth is neither simple decline nor simple continuity, but a socially patterned negotiation between local identity and global opportunity.

Linking Concepts to Measures

The table shows how each concept in the framework is measured by the questionnaire used in this study.

Concept	Meaning in this study	Questionnaire items
Background	Mother tongue of the respondent	Q1
Language practice	Choice of Marathi, Hindi, English or mixed speech at home, with friends and online, and in institutions	Q3, Q5, Q6
Language mixing	Extent of Marathi-English mixing and the reasons given for it	Q5, Q6, Q7
Perceived effect of globalisation	Whether globalisation is seen as helping, harming or not affecting Marathi	Q8
Social recognition	How society responds to Marathi	Q2
Linguistic identity	Pride in speaking Marathi or a dialect, expectations for its future and belief in its wider role	Q9, Q10, Q4

4. Objectives and Hypotheses

4.1 Objectives

- To examine the language practices of young people in Maharashtra in the family, peer and social-media, and educational domains.
- To analyse the prevalence of mixed Marathi-English usage and the reasons respondents attribute to it.
- To assess how respondents perceive the effect of globalisation on the Marathi language.
- To measure attachment to Marathi, including pride in speaking Marathi or a dialect and expectations for its future.
- To examine perceptions of how society regards Marathi and of its potential as a medium of primary education and a language of livelihood.
- To suggest measures for sustaining Marathi in a globalised environment.

4.2 Research Questions

- How do young people distribute Marathi, Hindi, English and mixed language across everyday domains?

- What reasons do they give for mixed-language use, and how do they judge the impact of globalisation on Marathi?
- How strong is their attachment to Marathi, and how do they see its future?

4.3 Hypotheses

- H1: The share of respondents using Marathi declines, and the share using mixed language rises, from the family domain to the peer and social-media domain and the educational domain.
- H2: Respondents who perceive both positive and negative effects of globalisation on Marathi form the largest group, and those who perceive only negative effects form a small minority.
- H3: A majority of respondents attribute mixed-language use to several interacting factors (technology, the need for modernity and social prestige) rather than to any single factor.
- H4: Attachment to Marathi is high: a majority express pride in speaking Marathi or a dialect and expect its use to grow.

Because the survey did not record respondents' age, gender, residence or schooling, hypotheses comparing social groups could not be tested and are not proposed.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study uses a cross-sectional, descriptive design based on primary data from an online questionnaire survey administered through Google Forms.

5.2 Respondents and Sampling

The survey received 456 responses from young people in Maharashtra. The number of valid answers per item ranges from 450 to 456 because some respondents skipped individual questions. The sample is a non-probability, self-selected online sample, so the results describe the respondents and are not statistically generalisable to all youth in the state. For reference, a simple random sample of 384 would give a 5 percent margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level (Cochran's formula, maximum variability); the 456 responses exceed this threshold, but because the sampling is not random, the confidence intervals reported below are indicative only.

5.3 Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire in Marathi with ten closed-ended, single-choice items was used:

- Mother tongue (Q1).
- Reactions of society towards Marathi (Q2).
- Language used for everyday conversation at home (Q3).
- Whether Marathi can be a medium of primary education and a language of livelihood (Q4).
- Language used with friends and on social media (Q5).
- Language most used in educational institutions (Q6).
- Main reason for mixed-language use among youth (Q7).
- Perceived effect of globalisation on Marathi (Q8).
- Feeling about speaking Marathi or a dialect (Q9).
- Expected future of Marathi use and fondness for Marathi (Q10).

5.4 Method of Analysis

Responses were summarised by the Google Forms response summary. The analysis uses frequency distributions and percentages. For key indicators, 95 percent Wilson confidence intervals for proportions

are reported. Where Google Forms displays only percentages (Q6 to Q10), counts are back-calculated from the percentage and the item's number of responses and are therefore approximate. Cross-tabulation and inferential tests such as chi-square, t-tests or regression were not possible, because the study did not collect background variables and respondent-level files were not used.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and online. The form platform records respondents' email addresses; these are not reported, and all results are presented in aggregate only.

6. Results

Key findings at a glance

- Home is the stronghold. 84.6 percent use Marathi (standard or dialect) at home, and half (50.9 percent) speak a dialect.
- Use falls outside the home. Marathi use is 61.6 percent with friends and on social media and 52.0 Sercent in schools and colleges.
- Mixing grows. Mixed Marathi-English speech rises from 14.5 percent at home to about 37 to 38 percent in the other two domains.
- Several causes. Most respondents (59.8 percent) explain mixing by technology, modernity and prestige together; technology alone leads at 22.5 percent.
- A balanced view of globalisation. 52.5 percent see both benefits and harms; only 10.0 percent see harm alone.
- Strong attachment. 89.8 percent are proud of speaking Marathi or a dialect, 65.9 percent expect its use to grow, and 86.8 percent say it can be a medium of primary education and a language of livelihood.

6.1 Respondent Background

The questionnaire did not collect demographic details, so the profile is limited to mother tongue. An overwhelming majority of respondents (97.8 percent) are Marathi mother-tongue speakers.

Mother tongue (Q1)	Respondents	Percentage
Marathi	446	97.8
Hindi	6	1.3
English	1	0.2
Other	3	0.7
Total	456	100.0

6.2 Language Use Across Domains

Marathi is the dominant language in every domain, but its share falls steadily from home to peers to institutions, while mixed Marathi-English use rises from 14.5 to 36.8 and 37.9 percent.

Domain (item)	Marathi % [95% CI]	Mixed Marathi-English %	Hindi %	English %	N
Home (Q3)	84.6 [81.1-87.7]	14.5	0.9	not an option	456
Friends and social media (Q5)	61.6 [57.1-66.0]	36.8	1.5	0.0	456
Educational institution (Q6)	52.0 [47.4-56.6]	37.9	10.1 combined (see note)		454

Notes: In Q3, the Marathi figure combines standard Marathi (33.8 percent) and dialect or boli (50.9 percent), rounded. In Q6, Hindi and English are small slices that cannot be read separately in the chart, so their combined share (100 minus Marathi and mixed) is shown.

The confidence intervals for Marathi use at home and with friends do not overlap, while those for friends and institutions only just separate. Because the same respondents answered all three items, a formal paired test (Cochran's Q) would need respondent-level data. Hindi is marginal in all domains, and English alone is almost absent (none among friends and social media).

Figure 1. Language used at home, with friends and on social media, and in educational institutions (percent of respondents).

6.3 Mixed Language and Its Reasons

When asked for the main reason for mixed-language use among youth (Q7, n = 453), a majority chose all of the offered reasons together.

Reason	Percentage
All of the following	59.8 [55.2-64.2]
Influence of technology	22.5
Need of modernity	9.3
Social prestige	8.4

6.4 Perceptions of Globalisation and of Society

Half of the respondents see globalisation as having both positive and negative effects on Marathi (Q8, n = 451). Only one in ten sees a purely negative effect.

Effect of globalisation on Marathi (Q8)	Percentage
Both positive and negative	52.5 [47.9-57.1]

Effect of globalisation on Marathi (Q8)	Percentage
Positive	26.2
No effect	11.3
Negative	10.0 [7.6-13.1]

On society's reactions to Marathi (Q2, n = 456), 57.5 percent chose "a good means of expressing ideas", 19.1 percent "positive response" and 18.0 percent "the point is understood quickly", while 5.5 percent chose "ordinary". Taken together, 94.5 percent selected a favourable description.

Figure 2. Reasons given for mixed-language use (Q7) and perceived effect of globalisation on Marathi (Q8), percent of respondents.

6.5 Attachment and Outlook

Attachment to Marathi is strong. Nearly nine in ten respondents describe speaking Marathi or a dialect as a matter of pride (Q9, n = 450), about two-thirds expect Marathi use to increase (Q10, n = 451), and 86.8 percent affirm that Marathi can be a medium of primary education and a language of livelihood (Q4, n = 456).

Indicator	Response	Percentage
Feeling about speaking Marathi or a dialect (Q9)	Source of pride	89.8 [86.7-92.3]
	Necessary	8.4
	Difficult or irrelevant (combined)	1.8
Future of Marathi use (Q10)	Will increase	65.9 [61.4-70.1]
	Will remain the same	13.5
	Cannot say	13.1
	Will decrease	7.5
Marathi as medium of primary education and language of livelihood (Q4)	Affirmative (yes, definitely, certainly)	86.8 [83.4-89.6]
	Uncertain (not sure, cannot say, perhaps)	10.1
	No	3.1

Figure 3. Attachment and outlook indicators with 95% confidence intervals (percent of respondents).

6.6 Summary of Hypothesis Assessment

Hypothesis	Evidence	Assessment
H1: Domain gradient	Marathi 84.6/61.6/52.0 percent; mixed 14.5/36.8/37.9 percent (home/friends and social media / institution)	Supported (descriptive)
H2: Mixed view of globalisation	Both effects 52.5 percent; negative only 10.0 percent	Supported
H3: Multiple reasons for mixing	All reasons together 59.8 percent	Supported
H4: High attachment	Pride 89.8 percent; expect increase 65.9 percent	Supported

6.7 The Results in Plain Terms

Young people in this survey still live in Marathi, especially at home. Outside the home, English enters the conversation, mostly as a mixed style rather than as a replacement: English alone is almost absent and Hindi is marginal. Respondents do not describe this as a crisis. They see globalisation as a mix of opportunity and loss, and they remain proud of their language and hopeful about its future.

Two cautions apply. The sample is self-selected and almost entirely Marathi-speaking, so the figures describe these respondents and not all youth in Maharashtra. The survey also records what people say they do, not what they actually do.

7. Discussion

The findings show a language that is strongly valued but increasingly shared with English in public domains. Four themes stand out.

Domain differentiation. Marathi is strongest in the home and weaker with peers and in educational institutions, a pattern consistent with functional diglossia, in which languages are assigned to particular spheres of life (Fishman, 1991). Home use is notable for its dialectal character: half of the respondents speak a dialect (boli) rather than standard Marathi at home, which suggests that regional varieties are important carriers of intergenerational transmission.

Mixing as accepted practice. About 37 to 38 percent of respondents mix Marathi and English with friends, on social media and in institutions, and most respondents explain this by several factors acting together, with technology the most frequently chosen single factor. Following Gumperz (1982) and Blommaert (2010), this can be read as the mobility of linguistic resources in a digitally connected society rather than as simple decline. Social prestige, the factor most closely linked to Bourdieu's (1991) linguistic capital, is chosen on its own by only 8.4 percent, although it may contribute within the 59.8 percent who selected all factors.

Ambivalence towards globalisation. Respondents are neither alarmed nor uncritical: about half see both gains and losses, and a quarter see only gains. This matches the view that globalisation brings new oppor

tunities and new inequalities at once (Appadurai, 1996; Blommaert, 2010).

Identity beyond use. Pride in Marathi (89.8 percent), confidence about its future (65.9 percent) and belief in its capacity as a medium of primary education and livelihood (86.8 percent) remain high even where daily use is mixed. This supports an ethnolinguistic reading in which perceived vitality and identification stay strong while usage patterns shift (Giles and Johnson, 1987). The favourable descriptions of society's reactions (94.5 percent) are consistent with this, although all but one of the Q2 options were positively worded, which limits how far they can be interpreted.

Policy and public discourse. Press coverage of the state's new language policy and of youth language change (Loksatta, 2024; The Times of India, 2024; Sakal, 2024) shows that language is a live public issue. The survey adds the view of young people: they value Marathi, expect it to grow and accept mixed usage as part of everyday life. Policy that treats youth as partners, rather than as a problem to be corrected, may therefore prove more effective.

8. Implications and Suggestions

The following suggestions follow from the descriptive findings and should be tested in further research.

- Education: Because institutions show the lowest share of Marathi use and the highest share of mixed language, Marathi-medium and bilingual pedagogy deserve strengthening, building on the strong belief that Marathi can serve as a medium of primary education.
- Family and dialects: Home is the main stronghold of Marathi and its dialects; community and cultural programmes can support intergenerational transmission and give dialects visible recognition.
- Digital ecosystem: Mixing is largely attributed to technology, so Marathi input tools, voice interfaces and engaging Marathi digital content are needed to give the language a competitive presence online.
- Livelihood: The belief in Marathi as a language of livelihood can be reinforced by linking it to employment, public services, publishing and the creative industries.
- Inclusive approach: Hybrid youth usage should be treated as part of the language's vitality, not only as deviation.
- Policy and institutions: Language policy can build on young people's strong pride in Marathi by making the language visible and useful in education, public services and digital platforms.

9. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the survey did not record age, gender, residence, region, caste or education, so differences between social groups could not be analysed. Second, the sample is self-selected and online, and it is almost entirely Marathi mother-tongue speakers, so the results cannot be generalised to all youth in Maharashtra. Third, all data are self-reported and may be affected by social desirability, especially for pride and attachment. Fourth, some response options overlap (for example, "yes", "definitely" and "certainly" in Q4) or are all favourable (Q2), which limits interpretation. Fifth, the domain items are not strictly comparable: Q3 counts dialect as Marathi, Q5 merges peer and social-media use, and Q6 does not allow Hindi and English to be read separately. Sixth, percentages for Q6 to Q10 were derived from chart summaries. Future research should add background variables, separate digital and peer domains, include workplace use, and use longitudinal or mixed methods.

10. Conclusion

Among 456 young respondents, Marathi remains the main language of the home and a strong marker of

identity, yet its exclusive use falls to about three in five with friends and on social media and to about half in educational institutions, where mixed Marathi-English speech is common. Respondents tend to explain mixing through technology, modernity and prestige acting together, and they see globalisation as bringing both benefits and harms to Marathi. At the same time, nearly nine in ten are proud of speaking Marathi or a dialect, and about two-thirds expect its use to grow. The evidence supports reading Marathi linguistic identity among youth as resilient and adaptive rather than in simple decline, while pointing to educational and digital spaces as the arenas where its place is most contested. Studies that include demographic variables and probability sampling are needed to test how these patterns vary across social groups and regions.

The way forward is not to resist change but to make Marathi useful, visible and attractive in the spaces where young people spend their time. Families, schools, digital creators and policymakers each have a part to play.

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