

Role of Multilingual Communication in Business Operations around Shirdi Sai Baba Temple: A Study of Challenges and Opportunities among Local Service Providers

Prof. (Dr.) Ravindra A. Jadhav

(Professor), Faculty of Commerce & Management,

K.J. Somaiya College of Arts, Commerce & Science, Kopergaon

Email: ravindrajadhavite@gmail.com

Abstract:

Multilingualism significantly influences business operations in pilgrimage destinations with diverse visitor populations. Shirdi Sai Baba Temple attracts devotees from across India, particularly from southern states, resulting in language barriers that impact business communication. This research explores the role of multilingual communication in business effectiveness among shopkeepers, restaurants, hotels, travel services, and local sellers. Data were collected from 100 respondents through structured questionnaires and interviews. Findings reveal that language barriers significantly affect customer satisfaction, sales efficiency, and service delivery. The study highlights the importance of multilingual strategies to enhance business performance and recommends language training and the use of technology to bridge communication gaps.

Key Words: Multilingualism, Business Communication, Shirdi Temple, Language Barrier, Customer Satisfaction, Service Sector

Introduction:

Shirdi, a major pilgrimage centre in Maharashtra, attracts millions of devotees from all parts of India and abroad. A significant proportion of these visitors are from southern states (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala) and speak languages different from Marathi and Hindi. Businesses around the temple—such as shops, eateries, hotels, and local sellers—face communication challenges when serving multilingual customers. Effective communication is essential for customer satisfaction and sustainable business operations. Thus, understanding multilingual dynamics in this context is crucial for improving service quality and economic performance.

Review of Literature:

Prior studies indicate that language barriers in service sectors lead to misunderstandings, reduced customer satisfaction, and revenue loss. Kumar and Singh (2018) found that linguistic diversity in Indian pilgrimage sites affects transactional efficiency. Patil (2020) discussed the need for multilingual signage for visitor-oriented businesses. Sharma (2019) emphasised the role of technology (translation apps) in overcoming language gaps in tourism locations. However, specific research focusing on Shirdi's unique demographic and linguistic challenges is limited, highlighting the need for this study.

Need for Study:

Shirdi's pilgrimage economy depends heavily on visitor experience. Language barriers create misunderstandings, reduce sales opportunities, and lead to unsatisfactory services. There is a research gap in understanding how multilingualism affects business categories differently, especially in the context of diverse

regional visitors. This study seeks to fill that gap and propose strategies to improve business communication in Shirdi.

Research Questions:

Shirdi is the second-largest religious tourism centre in India after the Tirupati Balaji Temple. Devotees visit from different states of India whose languages are different, and basically, Maharashtrian people are most familiar and understand the native language, i.e. Marathi and Hindi, as its script is similar to Marathi. So this is the one basic problem that arises for local business owners in Shirdi to deal with different types of devotees from different areas of India. Considering all these things following are some research questions that need to be discussed.

- a. What are the ‘language-related’ challenges faced by business owners in Shirdi?
- b. How does the language barrier influence service delivery and customer satisfaction?
- c. What strategies do businesses currently use to handle multilingual customers?
- d. How can businesses enhance multilingual communication for improved performance?

Objectives of Study: Based on the above research questions, the following objectives are formulated.

- a. To identify ‘language-related’ challenges faced by the business owners
- b. To examine the effect of multilingual communication on customer satisfaction.
- c. To analyse existing strategies for multilingual communication used by businesses.

Research Methodology:

1. **Research Design:** In the present study, the issues of the Role of Multilingual Communication in Business Operations Around the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple are described. Since the study aims to describe issues and challenges, descriptive research design is followed.
2. **Methods of Data Collection:**

Primary Data: Structured questionnaires and interviews with 100 respondents from five business categories.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was collected from books, journals, and research articles (from both online and offline).

3. **Sources of Data Collection:**

Primary sources: Local business owners, managers, and staff are the respondents for collecting primary data.

Secondary sources: Academic journals, government tourism reports, and previous studies are used as secondary sources of data.

Sampling Method: Purposive sampling to select 20 respondents from each business category as follows as samples.

Business Category	Respondents	Percentage
Shopkeepers	20	20%
Restaurants	20	20%
Hotels	20	20%
Travel Services	20	20%
Local Sellers	20	20%
Total	100	100%

Tools of Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics, such as tabulation and simple percentages, have been used.

Data Analysis & Discussion:

A. Language-related challenges faced by the business owners:

From Table 1, it can be seen that 42% of the total respondents always face ‘Language-related’ problems, and 36% often face such problems. While 6% of the total respondents rarely face such problems, 14 % face this problem ‘sometimes’. Only 2% of the total respondents are found to have ‘never’ had this problem. It indicates that almost all the business owners in the study area who were considered for the present study face challenges related to ‘language problems’. Hence, it can be said that *language is the major problem in dealing with the customers by local business houses in Shirdi.*

B. Impact of Language Barrier on Customer Satisfaction:

The findings, which are shown in Table 2, show that language barriers have a negative effect on customer satisfaction. While 38 % of the total respondents reported it as ‘highly negative’ 29% of the total respondents reported it as ‘negative’. It indicates that the local businesses are not able to properly communicate with customers. However, 33 % of the total respondents responded that ‘language barriers’ do not have no impact.

C. Language barrier in business revenue

Regarding this, from Table 3, it is found that more than half (64%) of the total respondents reported revenue loss due to communication difficulties. Out of them, 31 % reported as ‘Significant Loss’, and the remaining 33 % reported as ‘Loss to some extent’. It indicates that if there is no language barrier, the revenue of the business will increase.

- (a) Methods used to overcome language barriers: Use of basic English is the most commonly used method to handle multilingual customers. The details are shown in Table 4.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents based on the ‘Language Related problems’

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Always	42	42%
Often	36	36%
Sometimes	14	14%
Rarely	6	6%
Never	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Source: field survey

Table 2: Impact of Language Barrier on Customer Satisfaction

Impact Level	Respondents	Percentage
Highly Negative	38	38%
Negative	29	29%
Not at all	33	33%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table 3: Effect of Language Barrier on Business Revenue

Effect on Revenue	Respondents	Percentage
Significant Loss	31	31%
Loss to some extent	33	33%
No Change	21	36%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table 4: Methods Used to Overcome Language Barriers

Method	Respondents	Percentage
Basic English	66	66%
Multilingual Staff	14	14%
Gestures	9	9%
mobile translation tools	8	8%
No Method	3	3%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field survey

Discussion: The study indicates that language barriers are a persistent issue in Shirdi’s business environment. Restaurant owners reported frequent misunderstandings during order taking with non-Hindi/Marathi speaking visitors. Shopkeepers often struggled to explain product details. Hotels reported that check-in/out communication delays affected room allocations. Traveller services, such as taxi drivers and guides, highlighted reliance on gestures or basic English. Local sellers felt that lack of language skills reduced bargaining effectiveness with customers.

Furthermore, businesses that use basic English and translation apps reported better customer satisfaction scores. Younger employees proficient in multiple languages significantly improved service delivery compared to older monolingual staff.

Major Findings

- 1. Prevalence of Language Barriers:** Majority (78%) of the respondents reported frequent communication challenges.
- 2. Impact on Business Performance:** Majority (64%) of the respondents acknowledged that language difficulties had negatively affected sales.
- 3. Existing Strategies:** Majority (66%) of businesses used basic English; 28% attempted basic multilingual training.
- 4. Customer Satisfaction:** Businesses using multilingual communication performed better in customer feedback.

Suggestions:

The findings clearly reveal that there is an existence of a communication challenge that affects the business operations negatively. Since tourists come from various places and communication through verbal language is one of the most important elements to grow business in the study area, the following suggestions are put forward:

- 1. Language Training Workshops:** Organise basic language classes (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, English) for business owners and employees.
- 2. Use of Technology:** Encourage the use of translation apps and multilingual POS systems.
- 3. Multilingual Signage:** Install signs in five major languages.
- 4. Hiring Practices:** Prefer recruiting staff with multilingual skills.

5. Community Collaboration: Form local business associations to share language resources.

Conclusion:

Multilingual communication plays a crucial role in enhancing business operations around the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple. Language barriers hamper service efficiency and customer satisfaction, particularly among non-Hindi/Marathi-speaking visitors. Businesses that adopt multilingual strategies perform better and attract repeat customers. Implementing language training and supportive technologies can lead to improved economic outcomes and a more inclusive environment for devotees from all linguistic backgrounds.

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