UK's flourishing tongues: Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati

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London: Three Indian tongues now figure in the list of top six spoken languages spoken in Britain, with Punjabi being the third most common language used in England and Wales, after English and Polish. It is spoken by 2.73 lakh people.

Bengali is the fifth commonest language followed by Gujarati, jointly spoken by 4.34 lakh people in England and Wales. Tamil took 12th spot with just over a lakh people using it as the main spoken language.

The 2011 Census conducted by UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) has for the first time tried to see how well the population could speak English when this was not their main language. It showed English remained the main language for 92% (50m) residents aged 3 and over. The remaining 8% (4m) had a different main language, but most were proficient in English.

The second most reported main language in England and Wales was Polish (1% — 546,000). The top 10 languages included English, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Arabic, French, Chinese and Portuguese.

The census revealed there were 49 main languages (spoken by groups of more than 15,000 people). The top 20 included five South Asian languages and nine European. Interestingly, 22,000 people used sign language.

Of the 4 million residents aged 3 and over with a main language other than English, 1.7 million could speak English very well, 1.6 million well, and 726,000 not well. The remaining 138,000 could not speak English at all.

TOP LINGO

1	ENGLISH	49,808,000	(92.3%)
2	Polish	546,000	1%
3	Punjabi	273,000	0.5%
4	Urdu	269,000	0.5%
5	Bengali	221,000	0.4%
6	Gujarati	213,000	0.4%
7	Arabic	159,000	0.3%
8	French	147,000	0.3%
9	Chinese*	141,000	0.3%
12	Tamil	101,000	0.2%

*excludes Mandarin and Cantonese