



# The Invention and Development of Kui Script: A Dravidian Language of Tribal Odisha

*Laxmidhar Behera<sup>1</sup> and Jagannath Dash<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>PhD Research Scholar, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar.

E-mail: [laxmidhar.lb78@gmail.com](mailto:laxmidhar.lb78@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Professor Emeritus, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar

**Abstract:** Odisha, a land of rich cultural diversity and ancient heritage, boasts a unique treasury of tribal scripts. These scripts are a fascinating aspect of the state's history, representing the indigenous languages and cultures of various tribal communities that have flourished during the past few decades. The Kondh tribe of Odisha (India), is a unique indigenous community with a rich cultural heritage dating back to few centuries. In this article, we delve into the invention, development and current status of the Odisha Kondh tribe language script (*KUI LIPi*). The *Kui Script* in this paper has been discussed here for knowing various structural forms of the script and their explanation regarding the matters of invention and subsequent development.

**Keywords:** Language, Tribal Script, *Kui Lipi*, Kondh Language

**Received :** 20 January 2023

**Revised :** 18 February 2024

**Accepted :** 25 February 2024

**Published :** 29 June 2024

## TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Behera, L., & Dash, J. (2024). The Invention and Development of Kui Script: A Dravidian Language of Tribal Odisha, *Society and Culture Development in India*, 4: 1, pp. 55-65. <https://doi.org/10.47509/SCDI.2024.v04i01.04>

## Introduction

In general, language has been thought to be an essential part of human society and culture. It is not simply a kind of verbal expression; it has helped man to express his ideas to the outside world in different ways. Such languages are connected with the sound system, speech types and a medium of expression; it is much more than all these attributes. It is very important to highlight here that, "the grant characteristic which distinguishes man from all other mundane beings is articulated speech. Because of these, Hale continued, it is language alone entitles anthropology to its claim to be deemed a distinct department of sciences." (1891-414) mainly because of this, it is very popularly said that what mathematics is to science, in a similar manner language is to social anthropology. As a mode and medium of expression language has several important roles to play for the whole of mankind. But from

society to society or culture to culture, such mediums of expression differ in so many ways. Despite certain universal features, which are very common to all categories of society and culture, there are variations because of the uniqueness of human culture which is mostly influenced by the physical environment. In modern human society today, almost all communities have their languages with definite scripts. However, among the preliterate communities, the so-called tribal or aborigines, people only go by the spoken languages without any definite scripts. As a result, such tribal language have no written form. Because of such deficiencies or basic attributes, such preliterate tribal communities do not easily suffer in the field of integration and communication with neighboring communities.

In this context, attempts have been made in this paper to highlight certain tribal languages which have brought associated with the invention of tribal script which has broad several associated changes in the concerned tribal society and culture in so many ways. So in the state of Odisha, only four tribal dialects have the rare opportunity to invent specific dialects for the development of the tribal script and language. A language with a script brings in several socio-cultural changes often leading to material or economic development. Initially, we desire to discuss the basic needs, and skillful designing to invent a kind of script along with all justifications as well as an explanation of the invention of different alphabet or syllables in the invented script. The features creature of the tribal script, It seems to have cultural meaning and the specific structural design of the alphabet in a specific form has also some sort of socio-cultural planning. In the paper, all these observations which are seen to be hypothetical have been scientifically examined and explained with concrete evidence with the empirical ideas. The developments of *Kui Script* are systematically presented for understanding and explanation, of the Kondh ways of investigating *Kui Script* and pursue consequent development issues.

### **Invention of the Kui Lipi**

---

The *Kui Lipi* is usually spoken by the Kondh Community in the district of Kandhamal, Odisha, India. The script consists of characters/ alphabets representing human body structure, and it is designed for the *Kui* people to read and write in their language. The *Kui Script* is derived from the local term “*Kuinja*” which means human. The *Kui Lipi* plays a crucial role in preserving the *Kui* language and has contributed to the cultural identity of the *Kui* people. The *Kui Lipi* has an alphabetic writing system with 6 vowels and 23 consonants. It is written from left to right, and it belongs to the Dravidian language family.

In 1982, Dayanidhi Mallick of the village Betikhala invented the *Kui Lipi* after a lot of painstaking Endeavour through several trial and error methods. Dayanidhi Mallick faced many difficulties in this study because he faced a lot of difficulties in reading mainly because Kondh children could not understand anything that the teachers were teaching in Odia language. He thought if people of our community are taught in Odia or English language, we will not understand anything about our culture. So he also thought that without a script in our language sooner or later may disappear. He decided to develop a script and he first invented *Kui script* in 1982 which later came to be known as *Kui Lipi*. Dayanidhi Mallick believed that if a tribal community will have a script, its status will be high in society. He thought for years how to invent the script but he had no idea for long time. Then he started worshipping God and said, Lord, show me the path how can I make the script? One day God comes in his dream and tells him to create a script with the help of the human body structures. Then he followed their vocal language to invent this script. He followed human body parts to invent this script in the beginning. The first alphabet in this way was started from human eye.

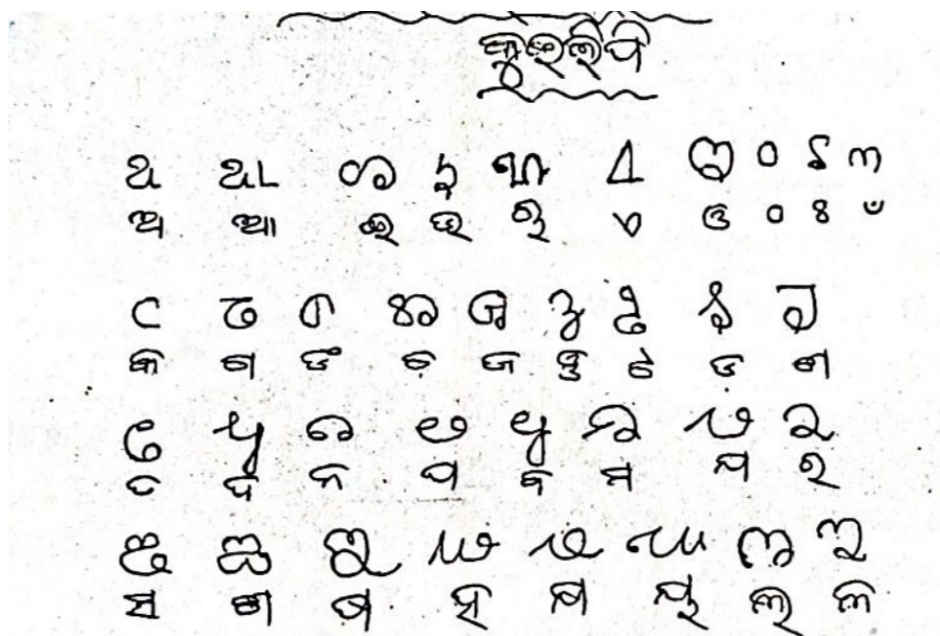
Dayanidhi Mallick finalized the script in two phases. In 1982 he invented the script but during 2006-2010 he corrected by the help of his pupil Lankeswar Kanhar. Both of them gave a new designed to Kui. They just changed the shape of the alphabet it is called (**Ma**). Second time Bhaskar Pradhan president of Nikhil Utkal Kui Samaj Union G. Udaygiri and Bhimsennn Pradhan General Secretary of Nkhil Utkal Kui Samaj, G.Udaygiri helped him to have subsequent correction in the *Kui Lipi*. Currently, Sri Lankeswar Kanhar a disciple of Dayanidhi Mallick is reviving the *Kui Lipi* once again to make it simpler and easier. He also develops a typing keyboard for script. Common people in the Kondh society are very enthusiastic about this script for the protection of the *Kui* language as well as Kondh society and culture. Kondh may not face any problems in education, so our Kondh community can become educated and get jobs

As the common people felt, this script will help them to change their way of life. They said that if books were written in this script and the lessons will be taught in the school, then the children would be more interested about *Kui* culture and go to school happily. As the empirical data show, common people have accepted this script with great joy. Currently, the books written in this script are not taught in schools because of some errors in them. Therefore, Sri Lankeswar Kanhar the disciple of Dayanidhi Mallick is spreading the script after necessary corrections and writing the books. He also wrote a letter to the Government of Odisha requesting to introduce *Kui* books in schools.

### Methodology

The present paper is an exploratory narration of the invention of this script through several trial-and-error methods. As the inventor is no more, now so we have to depend on some of his students as well as assistance for getting into the basic designing, planning and structuring of the alphabets. Therefore, we have to primarily depend on the interview of such key persons and depend on their statements. In this paper therefore the basic technique was the key informant interview. There was very little scope for empirical observation and case study in this investigation. The only technique which very much dependent was the verification of data and cross-examination among the common people especially Kondh in the remote Kondh villages. However, the interview with the assistants and coworkers of the inventor Dayanidhi Mallick was extremely helpful to get into several clues.

### Kui Lipi



### Kui Alphabets

The tribes of Odisha in general were not very much acquainted with any written language and almost all of them (62 tribes in Odisha) were mostly confined to their

respective spoken languages or dialects. Only a few tribes, who had numerical as well as economic dominance among other local tribes, have been very much influenced by the local Odia communities and their development. Because of acculturation, very generally such dominant tribal communities developed in some way, a communal sentiment and tried to develop similar literary achievements to that of the local Odia people. Such dominant tribes were mostly educated in Odia medium schools. As a result of this initially, they developed some kind of personal interest in taking Odia communities as their reference groups mostly in the matter of culture. With such aspirations in the mind tribal languages in the dominant communities like the Santal, the Kondh, the Lanjia Saora and the Bhumij were gradually developed. In this field, the Santal communities took the leadership which was followed by the Saora, Kondh and Bhumij. Here we discussed mostly the invention of the *Kui script* which was a very recent invention and no doubt, it followed the footprints of Santal and Saora scripts directly or indirectly as already mentioned earlier, *Kui* is a Dravidian dialect which has another form known as *Kuvi* spoken by some other sections of generic Kondh tribe. In the following table, we start with the alphabet and its comparison with the local Odia script.

<i>Vowels (Geeragaari)</i> KUI ODLA	<i>Description</i>
୧      ଅ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Ataa</i> ”, which means human eyebrow.
୧୩      ଅ୩	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Aajangaandi</i> ”, which means mother’s body.
୧୪      ଅ୪	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Iaandaaki</i> ” Iaa means mother and Daaki means chest so it comes mother’s chest.
୧୫      ଅ୫	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Unguli</i> ”, which means nail.
୧୬      ଅ୬	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>E-Suddaa</i> ”, it means the shape of the lips when we say A.
୧୭      ଅ୭	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>O-Suddaa</i> ”, the shape of the lips when we say O.
<b>Consonants</b> <i>(Baaraagaaringa)</i> KUI ODLA	

୧	କ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Kreeu</i> ”, which means ‘ear’, and this alphabet is the shape of the Right ear.
୨	ଗ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Gadada</i> ”, which means ‘cheek’, and this alphabet is the shape of a left cheek.
୩	ଝ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Nippi</i> ”, which means ‘shoulder’, it is the shape of our shoulder.
୪	ଚ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Saddali</i> ”, it is a shape of the upper portion of the eye.
୫	ଜ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Jaambaali</i> ”, which is the shape of the lower portion of the cheek.
୬	ଝ	It is derived from the word <i>Nippi</i> which also refers to the left side body part especially the position from the shoulder to the mid-part of the bailey.
୭	ଝ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Tandaa</i> ”, it is the shape of our lip.
୮	ଝ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Dakaa</i> ”, which is the shape of our neck.
୯	ଗ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Nippi</i> ”, which is the shape of the left shoulder.
୧୦	ତ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Tlaamberi</i> ”, which means hair and it is the shape of curly hair.
୧୧	ଦ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Diridi</i> ” It means lower eyelid and it is the shape of the dirty particles oozing out of the eye.
୧୨	ନ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Nippi</i> ”, which means shoulder and it is the shape of an upper portion of the shoulder.
୧୩	ପ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Prhenu</i> ”, which is the shape of a lower portion of the shoulder.
୧୪	ବ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Battarhi</i> ”, which means chin and it is the shape of the right side chin.
୧୫	ମ	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Mungeli</i> ”, which means nose and it is the shape of the left side nose.

	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Yaandaakki</i> ”, which means women’s chest and it is the shape of the right side of the chest.
	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Rerhi</i> ”, which means waist and it is the shape of the left side waist.
	It is derived from the Kui word “ <i>Saddali</i> ” which means the human eyebrow.
	It is derived from the Kui word “ <i>Saddali</i> ” which means the human eye brow also connected to the nose.
	It is derived from the Kui word “ <i>Saddali</i> ” which means the human eyebrow and is also connected with the right side nose.
	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Ha’laakaa</i> ”, it means lung and it is the shape of the space the lungs situated in our body.
	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Yaandaakki</i> ”, which is the shape of one side of the breast of a woman.
	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>Yaandaakki</i> ”, which is the shape of a woman’s breast.
	This letter comes from the local term “ <i>La’rbaa</i> ”, which is the shape of a scar.

## Discussion

The inventor Mr Dayanidhi Mallick was born in Bitikhala, of Kandhamal district in the year 01.07.1924. He was given the credit for inventing *the Kui Script*. He was not very much educated in formal education. He has gone only up to upper primary education and there after developed his intellectual script out of personal experience and intelligence. In 1982 he made a blueprint of the *Kui script*. Though he was inspired by the Santal and the Saora scripts, his factors or structural compositions are completely different from the predecessors. As his coworker Lankeswar Kanhar says, they tried for a long time to develop the *Kui script* for 30 years from 1980 to 2010. They made together several corrections and alterations to bring the *Kui script* to a usable structure by the children as well as adult Kondhs. The *Kui* literature can be developed and documented. In the course of development from the oral expression to written form the intellectual power developed in the minds of young

tribal children. On the whole, the concerned tribal culture will be able to mention its tradition despite several changes due to modernization and acculturation.

Coming to the design and structure of the individual alphabets which have been presented in the above-mentioned table in detail along with the Odia script, very interestingly it is known Lankeswar Kanhar that the inventor Dayanidhi Mallick has developed the design based on various body parts of a man and woman. The first alphabet is “𑎀” (A) set to be derived from the structure of a human eye. But the alphabet “𑎁” (Aa) has been formed out of the chest and belly including for the left arm of a man. As presented in the alphabet table one single “𑎂” (I) is there (Unlike Odia) which has been structured out of the woman’s chest. Similarly, the structure of also the single “𑎃” (U) in the *Kui* alphabet is shaped to be derived from the nails of a finger, even those it has no structural similarities. In the case of the next alphabet “𑎄” (E) the partly opening of both the lips is connected. In the next alphabet “𑎅” (O) the lips are open but in a different manner. The structure of the alphabet resembles the lip position while uttering the word “𑎅” (O) as per the English phonetic system. In alphabets under consonants the syllable “𑎆” (Ka) is there but without the next alphabet “𑎇” (Kha) The alphabet structure of “𑎆” (Ka) is shaped from the shape of a human ear especially the *pinna* of the ear but in the formation of “𑎈” (Ga) the structure does not resemble the left side of the cheek of a person like that of “𑎃” (U). It is directly connected to a human limb or body part. In this case, we can analyze that “𑎃” (U), has been formed out of the word *Unguli* (finger) as a result of which the nail structure has been connected to this alphabet. In a similar manner “𑎉” (Ga) has been also derived from the word *Gaadaa* (cheek) and following the word only it is connected to the left side cheek of the human face.

The structure of the next alphabet “𑎊” (Om) is designed as per the structural shape of the left human shoulder; it resembles the shape of a green mango. As use this entire alphabet connected to the *Kui* words *Oongaa* and *Nippi* but the words are referenced to human shoulder. The next alphabet is “𑎋” (Cha) which is derived from the *Kui* word *Kuchaa* and *Saddali* which means the upper eyelid. However, the structure of the alphabet also connects to the left nose, cheek and left side eyelid. It is quite natural to interpret that both the *Kui* word and body part have a 50-50-contribution to the formation of the alphabet structure. The next alphabet is “𑎌” (Ja), derived from the *Kui* word *Jaambaali* which means the lower part of the cheek. In the next alphabet “𑎍” (Nja) we find it as derived from the word *Nippi* this is also a reference to the left side body part especially the position from the shoulder to the mid-part of the belly. In the formation of the next alphabet “𑎎” (Ta), it is found to be derived from the word *Tandaa* which means the human lips. The next alphabet



“ ” (Da) has been derived from the word *Da-Kaa* which means the front part of the neck. The next Kui alphabet is “ ” (Na) derived from the Kui word *Nippi* which means the lower part of the shoulder. It is very interesting to see that from the same body part, different structural formations of alphabets emerge.

The next alphabet in the *Kui script* is “ ” (Ta) derived from the *Kui* word *Tlaamberi* which means the Curly hair hanging down from the head. The alphabet “ ” (Da) is taken from the *Kui* word *Dirdi* which means the dirty particles oozing out of the eye. The next alphabet is “ ” (Na) its structure is related to the word *Nippi* which refers to the upper part of the shoulder. The alphabet “ ” (Pa) is connected to the word *Prhe-nu* which means the clavicle bone of the shoulder but it resembles the alphabet “ ” (Na) in a reverse manner. The alphabet “ ” (Ba) is similarly connected to the *Kui* word *Baatarhi* which refers to the human chin. The next alphabet “ ” (Ma) is derived from the *Kui* word *Mungeli* which means the human nose. Then come to the alphabet “ ” (Ra) which is linked with the word *Re-Rbi* which refers to the left side waist. The next alphabet “ ” (La) is derived from *La-Rbaa* which means wound marks. The next alphabet “ ” (Wa) which is derived from *Waaskaakaa* refers to the “V” space between the index and middle finger. Next come to the alphabet “ ” (SA) which comes out of the *Kui* word *Saddali* which means the human eyebrow. One more interesting fact is observed here that one the other two types of “ ” and “ ” are very much there in the Odia dominating local language Odia. These three types have been designed in the Odia language as per their phonetic attributes. But in *Kui*, all three types of phonetic “ ” s are consolidated within “ ” of the Odia alphabet. The next alphabet “ ” (Ha) is another interesting *Kui* alphabet which is related to the word *Ha-Laakaa* which refers to the lungs in the human body. Accordingly, the structure of the alphabet has been designed. The next alphabet design “ ” (Khya) refers to one side breast of a woman and the next alphabet “ ” (Ya) refers to both sides breast of a lady. The connection of all the alphabets to the human body has no proper logic behind it. As the inventor and his assistants have stated, the instructions use given to them by the supernatural beings in the dream.

## Conclusion

---

This is a primary paper based on empirical data collection in the field. After examining the alphabets structurally, it is concluded that people’s relation with supernatural entities has been rightly reflected in the design of the script. In a few cases, the repetition of some body parts has been observed either in reverse position or in a similar position. On the whole, it is marked that one or two alphabets are

found absent in *Kui* Script and it is found that due to the lack of usage, they have been omitted. The merging of three “Sa”s into one can be also presented with a similar logic. But it is generally observed that all such alphabets in the *Kui* language have more or less followed the neighbouring Odia script pattern. In the end, it is concluded that though the *Kui* script was invented on the backdrop of local Odia script, the inventor has tried his best to maintain the basic phonetic structure of Dravidian languages along with the *Kui* dialect and culture within the environment of Odisan territory.

## References

- Daggumati, S., & Revesz, P. Z. (2021). A method of identifying allographs in undeciphered scripts and its application to the Indus Valley Script. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1-11.
- Den Dikken, M. (2005). Comparative correlatives comparatively. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 36(4), 497-532.
- Fairservis, W. A. (1983). The script of the Indus Valley civilization. *Scientific American*, 248(3), 58-67.
- Febriantini, W. A., Fitriati, R., & Oktaviani, L. (2021). An analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication in autistic children. *Journal of Research on Language Education*, 2(1), 53-56.
- Jouravlev, O., & Jared, D. (2018). Cross-script orthographic and phonological preview benefits. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 71(1), 11-19.
- Kak, S. C. (1988). A frequency analysis of the Indus script. *Cryptologia*, 12(3), 129-143.
- Kaur, J., & Saini, J. R. (2015). A study of text classification natural language processing algorithms for Indian languages. *VNSGU J Sci Technol*, 4(1), 162-167.
- Kaye, R. C., & Cherney, L. R. (2016). Script templates: A practical approach to script training in aphasia. *Topics in language disorders*, 36(2), 136.
- Kaye, R. C., & Cherney, L. R. (2016). Script templates: A practical approach to script training in aphasia. *Topics in language disorders*, 36(2), 136.
- Kenoyer, J. M. (2006). The origin, context and function of the Indus script: Recent insights from Harappa. In *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable* (pp. 9-27).
- Kenoyer, J. M. (2006). The origin, context and function of the Indus script: Recent insights from Harappa. In *Proceedings of the Pre-symposium of RIHN and 7th ESCA Harvard-Kyoto Roundtable* (pp. 9-27).
- MacKenzie, P. J. (2009). Mother tongue first multilingual education among the tribal communities in India. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 12(4), 369-385.
- McIntosh, J. (2008). *The ancient Indus Valley: new perspectives*. Abc-Clio.
- Merriam, L. L. (2022). Brahmi Script: Origins in the Indus Valley.

- Mishra, M. K. (2016). Multilingual Education in Odisha, India: Constructing Curriculum in the context of Community and Culture. *A Journal of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) Bhubaneswar Odisha, India*, 39.
- Nambissan, G. B. (1994). Language and schooling of tribal children: Issues related to medium of instruction. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2747-2754.
- Nodari, K. E. R., &Corazza, S. M. (2019). Among didactic procedures and scripts of translation-invention conditions/Entre procedimientos e roteirosdidaticos de traducaocondicoes de invencao/Entre procedimientos y guionesdidáticos de traducción--condiciones de invención. *ActaScientiarum. Education*, 41(1), NA-NA.
- Panda, B. K. Transaction of Teaching Learning Process for the Tribal Children Mother Tongue as the Key for Development. *A Journal of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) Bhubaneswar Odisha, India*, 1.
- Papadopoulos, P. M., &Demetriadis, S. N. (2012, July). The impact of script coercion in computer-supported collaboration: a case study on learning benefits when technology makes learners' thinking processes explicit. In *2012 IEEE 12th International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies* (pp. 560-564). IEEE.
- Parpola, A. (1986). The Indus script: A challenging puzzle. *World Archaeology*, 17(3), 399-419.
- Pattanaik, J. K. (2020). Tribal Children in Odisha and their right to Education in the Home Language. *South Asia Research*, 40(2), 163-180.
- Reithinger, N., &Klesen, M. (1997). Dialogue act classification using language models. In *Fifth European Conference on Speech Communication and Technology*.
- Righter, E. (1993). The origin of the Brahmi and Tami scripts. *Ancient Science of Life*, 12(3-4), 320.
- Sarmah, S. K. (2014, January). Script Movement among the Bodo of Assam. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Vol. 75, pp. 1335-1340). Indian History Congress.
- Stone, R. M. (1990). Ingenious invention: the indigenous Kpelle script in the late twentieth century. *Liberian Studies Journal*, 15(3), 135-144.
- Verma, N., &Varma, N. (1991, January). Indus Alphabet and its Script. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Vol. 52, pp. 992-1002). Indian History Congress.
- Wood, B. S. (1976). Children and communication: Verbal and nonverbal language development.
- Woumans, E., Ceuleers, E., Van der Linden, L., Szmalec, A., &Duyck, W. (2015). Verbal and nonverbal cognitive control in bilinguals and interpreters. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 41(5), 1579.