

Language Death in the Context of Assam

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Abstract

Assam is a multilingual state where various Aryan and Non-Aryan lingual families have been living. There is reciprocal influence between Assamese and other languages. The Non-Aryan lingual families usually belong to Sino-Tibetan, Austric, Dravidian etc. Most of the languages belong to these families have extincted from the scene. Assamese turns to be the mother tongue of the tribes whose language was died as they adopt Assamese as their second language. The imposition of Assamese culture and language brings uncertainty to the Non -Aryan languages. Unawareness of the people regarding language also contributes to it. The objective of the paper is to study the dead languages and its reasons in the context of Assam.

Key words: Language, death, Assamese.

Objective

The main objective of the paper is to study the dead languages of Assam and also to bring the factors into light.

Methodology

Analytical method and survey has been used in this study.

Scope

Attempt is made to present a description of the reasons of the dead languages. The scope of the study is confined only to the languages of Assam.

1.0 Linguistic Situation of the languages of Assam.

Dead language brings not only uncertainty to the tribe or community, but also impacts its respective state. No language can be alive without its study and expansion and many

languages across the world died due to it. Similar circumstances can also be found even in Assam. Assam is a multilingual region. In Assam, various Non-Aryan languages have already died. It turns necessary to identify the linguistic identity and to preserve with appropriate survey. Statistical data on such dead linguistic numbers was found only in 1971 census.

There are many factors behind the death of any language and globalization is one of them. The extinct languages of Assam had been suffering from long and globalization strengthened them. In order to study the dead languages, one must acquaint to the linguistic circumstances too. Some of the factors have been analysed below:

Linguistic minority

Most of the tribes that have been living in North East India are migrants for social, political and economical reasons. They needed to live in separate groups in different regions being parted from their lingual group. The languages of various tribes of Assam such as Bodo, Mising, Deuri, Rabha, Tiwa, Dimasa are minor in comparison to Assamese. These tribes had scattered in different geographical regions. Therefore, they had better communication with the neighbouring lingual communities rather than their own fellow. As a result, it affected in the development of their language. They needed to submit themselves to the major lingual group. Their own languages confined only to the family or the tribe.

Lack of awareness

Lack of awareness among the tribe or community regarding the language is another influential reason of the death of language. The socio-economical condition of the tribes keeps them away from the issues of language and culture. They must keep themselves busy with livelihood instead of working for language and literature. Lack of education also causes the lack of awareness. A few people are privilege enough to earn education and their effort is one in a million. Even, modernity and city centric tendency also endangers their indigenous language. On the other hand, ignorance of the new generation to mother tongue also pushes their language to be minor.

Varieties of Dialects

Every language has some dialects including the languages prevailing in Assam. Geographical location is a reason of it. For instance, the language of the Mising has nine

groups and six of them- *cha:yang, ayan, pagro, dambug, doulu, moying*- use their own language which have its own significance. These sub lingual varieties also hamper in the development of a particular language.

Lack of Script and popularity of Roman script

Most of the tribes of Assam don't have a script of their own apart from some Non-Aryan languages. Among them *khamti, phake, Aiton, Turung, Ahom* are the languages and they use their own Tai Script. On the other hand some of the Tibetan languages like *Mising* adopted Roman script while *Deuri* and *Rabha* use Assamese and the *Bodo* utilizes Devanagari script. Although, some tribes are rich in their oral literature, these have not been preserved due to the lack of their script.

Tonal language

Most of the languages belonging to Sino-Tibetan are tonal. Three to six tones to be found in some of them. Because of such diverse tonal features, it turns difficult for other to learn the language. As result, it directly influences the expansion of the language.

Multilingualism

Most of the tribes or communities of Assam are either bilingual or multilingual. Apart from their own, they use Assamese, Hindi and English as their communicating language. Moreover, some sub-tribes of *Tiwa, Deuri, Rabha* etc are seen to embrace Assamese as their mother tongue. On the other hand, the tendency of taking education in English medium is also increasing. This multilingual existence of the tribes is harmful in the case preserving and studying of their own language. Lack script also withstands some languages from growing.

City centric life

Globalization and scientific improvements made people city centric. People need to away from their cultural tradition due to education, profession etc. The new generation who were brought up in city are deprived of their cultural heritage. Even, some of them are hesitant to identify their root. Eventually, it contributes to the death of the particular language.

Impact of globalization

Language and culture is also not free from the hands of globalization. It also impacts the indigenous culture and language. Popularity of multinational economy also influences the transformation of language. New market items push the indigenous goods to periphery. A few get the opportunity to have education in Assamese, English and Hindi, hence the literacy rate is very low among the tribes. Rapid improvement of globalization and low literacy of the tribes make them unaware regarding the language.

Influence of Assamese as lingua franka

Influence of Assamese, the state language of Assam, is conspicuous on almost every tribe. The tribes use Assamese with their own pronunciation and tune. Importance must be given to Assamese for education, commerce, administration etc. With the increasing usage of Assamese in daily life, it influences the other minor languages. Gradually, Assamese, the connecting language, turns to be the mother tongue of most of the tribes and the tradition and distinct identity of their language move to margin.

Influence of Hindi and English

In the time of globalization, English is recognised as international language. Scientific data, knowledge etc are available in English. English as a medium of education also influences almost all the tribes and communities. The guardians also prefer English medium to provide education to children. Gradually, the attachment, preservation, expansion of the language started going away and the language moves to be on the way out.

Ignorance to mother tongue and lack of its medium

During globalization, everybody seems to be attracted to Western Culture. Sometimes, the profession also keeps people away to be concerned for language. People need to migrate for education and profession. Words from English, Hindi etc find its way in the mother tongue. As, the usage of mother tongue is limited to the family, it is obvious for the new generation find no interest in it. Thus, the study on the language starts decreasing.

Hybridity of language

In Assam, Assamese has been used as the common language by the tribes to communicate. Usage of English and Hindi is also increasing simultaneously. The tribes started using the elements of English and Hindi accordingly. In the long run, due to the

limited use of their own language, the speakers grow a hybrid language of their own which pushes the indigenous language to its end.

Economical backwardness

Economical backwardness is another reason of the extinction of language. Due to the imposition of indigenous economy by globalization, numbers of people migrated to different states. Because of the life struggle, they cannot afford to think about language and literature.

2.0 Language Death in the context of Assam

A language is said to be dead when no one speaks it any more. It may continue to have existence in a recorded form, of course-traditionally in writing, more recently as part of a sound or video archive(and it does in a sense 'live on' in this way)-but unless it has fluent speakers one would not talk of it as a 'living language'. And as speakers cannot demonstrate their fluency if they have no one to talk to, a language is when there is only one speaker left, with no member of the younger generation interested in learning. A common sense classification recognizes three levels: languages are safe, endangered and extinct. To this, Michael Krauss adds a notion which has been widely taken up: languages which are no longer being learned as a mother tongue by children are said to be moribund.

The extreme point of a language transformation is the death of the language. When a lingual group adopts another language as mother tongue, their own language started dying. Later on, it is considered as death. The process of the language death is recognised differently-

1. Gradual Language Death(process to leading death, i.e. a community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual in another language, and gradually shifts allegiance to the second language until they cease to use their original(or heritage) language.)

2. Bottom to Top Language Death (cessation of the use of language except in special circumstances)

3. Top to Bottom Language Death (when language change begins in a high-level environment such as the government)

4. Radical Language Death (the disappearance of a language when all speakers of the language cease to speak the language)

5.Linguicide (also known as sudden death, language genocide, physical language death, biological language death)

6. Language Attrition(the loss of proficiency in a language at the individual level)

Practice, study, preservation of a particular language is dependent on the lingual environment of the place. In Assam, the reasons of the death of the language are lying behind the lingual environment. A numbers of non-Aryan languages have already died and there is no any statistic data on such dead languages. It is inevitable to identify the languages and also to take necessary action to restore them. There are certain songs which are running in the mouth of a few people, while some are prevailing in the folk literature only. It is called moribund. Examples can be made of Khamyang and Ahom, Chutia, Koch etc respectively.

Various articles have been written on those dead languages. Keeping the articles in the view, an attempt has been made to provide a glance of some of the dead language. A few examples are- Chutiya, Koch, Tiwa, Khamyang, Sonowal Kachari, Moran, Motok etc.

Moreover, there are numbers of dead sub languages of many tribes such as Samguriya, Tamar, Bankuwal, Bihiya of Mising; Duhari, Pati, Bitoliya, Tutola of Rabha; Pator gonya, Borgoyan, Tenga Potiya of Deuri. These groups accept Assamese as their mother tongue. Ambeswar Gogoi opined, “This led to the imposition of Assamese as a language over several linguistic minorities; who eventually lost their languages over the last few years.”

Disregarding the distinct identity of a language is another issue associated to it. Example can be mentioned of the Chutia. Similarly, language of the Koch and Rajbonshi has been attributed as the same language. Ambeswar Gogoi commented, “we found through the participation of the native speakers that koch spoke kochkar, which follows an entirely differernt linguistic structure. Rajbanshi, on the other hand, has a very different structure.”

3.0 Statistical data of some dead languages of Assam

Tiwa

There are about twelve branches of Tiwa. The Tiwas have been scattered in undivided Nagaon, South East part of Kamrup, Dhemaji (18 villages), Darang (8 villages), Sivsagar (2 villages), and Sadia. According to the census of 1991, the population of the Tiwa was 32,663 and 33,746 in Assam and all over India respectively. In 2001, it reduced to 21,072. Tiwa

language is mostly prevailing among the Tiwas living in the hilly areas. Although, the Tiwas living in the valleys adopt Assamese as mother tongue, their own language has its role in the social cultural life.

Khamyang language

The Khamyangs are to be found in Nosyam Gaon, Balijan gaon and Betorbari Shyam gaon of Jorhat, Solapothar Syam gaon, Rohon Syam gaon, Sola Moniting, Disang pani, Owguri Shyam gaon of Sivsagar, Margherita, Digboi of Tinsukia and also in Bordumsa, Dirak, Namsai etc

Although, the Khamyangs are rooted to the Tai, they embrace Assamese as their language. Many Tai words found its expression in their daily life. Khamyang language is limited only to the a few elders living at Pawoi much in Digboi.

Sonowal Kachari

The Sonowal Kachari is one of the remarkable tribes who merged themselves in the process of building larger Assamese culture. The language of the Sonowal Kachari is limited to the *haidang geet*, *puhari geet*, *borgeet*, *huchori*, *aainaam*, *dihanaam* etc.

Moran-motok language

Apart from a few words, no existence of the language of the Moran and Motok is to be found. According to Ambeswar Gogoi, “Sonowal, Mowron and Motok, all a part of Indo-Burmese groups, have no speakers left. The newergenerating mostly belonging to subgroups of larger kachari group, cannot even utter a word of their mothertongue, some speaks Karbi, those in Upper Assam, speak Assamese, speak Assam.”

In Assam, various linguistic groups can now be considered as indigenous group. Most of them are unaware of their language. They are victims of the imposition of Assamese. The new generation is ignorant to their language. Existence of their languages is only prevailing in the oral literature, and also among the elders. The process of the death of language can be discussed in different ways-

1. Radical Language Death (Moran, Motok, Chutiya, Koch language)
2. Language Attrition(Sonowal Kachari, Tiwa language)
3. Physical Language Death (Khamyang language)

Conclusion

Various dead languages have been recognised by the surveys of UNESCO. In Assam, Assamese influenced the Aryan and non Aryan languages to the door of death. In certain place, the new generation are found to have interest in restoring the language. Without proper survey, it is impossible to identify the endangered languages. So it turns inevitable to have appropriate survey of the dead languages.

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