

(BOOK OF ABSTRACTS)



EMERGING ISSUES OF LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT IN NORTH -EAST INDIA

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Emerging Issues of Language Endangerment In Nagaland

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Abstract

This paper will deal with the recognized languages of Nagaland in terms of the definition of language endangerment given by the UNESCO. It highlights the actual language scenario. Respective language status in the fields of academic with special reference to formal education sector, religious and social institutes will also be enumerated. Keeping in view of unimpressive development of literature by the native speakers important factors will be projected for discussion. It will also provide important factors that hinder the growth of language and literature of native languages of the Nagas since the statehood.

Based on the theme of this seminar, the paper attempts to highlight the emerging issues towards languages for preservation, promotion and enriching language and literature.

Apart from the issues not only to safeguard the indigeneous languages from being moving towards serious endangerment, but also discussing the challenges the impact of literature development for mass social transformation to modernity. As a matter of fact, language by virtue of being a universal medium of knowledge cultivation, the native speakers with special reference to those academicians who are active participants of respective language developmental process challenges are to be viewed to embrace development of science, mathematics and technology.

Linguistic Diversity of Northeast India: Present Scenario

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Abstract

The linguistic diversity of Northeast India makes this region unique. Linguists and researchers working in the region have documented a handful of lesser known and lesser researched languages. Institutes like CIIL have played a major role in documentation of some of these minor languages. Yet, there are innumerable

languages that need to be documented otherwise the rich and valuable sources of linguistic wealth will perish in no time.

Factors related to endangerment and eventual death of these languages are well known to us. The language policies of the country, role of agency like the Census of India with regards population count, the socio-political situations at the local level, rise of lingua francas in the region and the shift to one of the dominant languages have all contributed to this detrimental situation. The entire linguistic landscape of this rich diverse region is bereft of the presence of this rich heritage.

Now with the introduction of the New Education Policy 2020, we have to see how it impacts on these minor languages. We need to investigate if the state governments have taken measures to maintain these endangered languages.

In this paper, I shall discuss my experience of working in some of the less populated endangered languages of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland primarily. The other states of the region will be referred to validate some points raised in the paper.

Challenges to the Endangered Languages of North East

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Abstract

Language is a property of human beings; he owns it and he goes with it to his grave. To an endangered language it matters a lot though it does not matter to a majority one. The North East is very diversified in culture, language, food habit and in exotic flora and fauna. In one way it can be said that it is a mini-India having varied culture, having four language families- Indo-Aryan, Auto-Asiatic, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burmese languages which is concentrated in this region.

There are around 43 endangered languages in the North East. Among these there are more lesser speakers languages, like, Purum and Tarao in Manipur and Bawm and Ralte in Mizoram. Purum and Tarao are less than 600 speakers while Koirang is less than 2000 speakers. In Manipur there are some new speaking forms, namely Khongde, Ngari, Oinam and Thiwa (in Senapati district) which are not included in the Government list of the languages of Manipur. Preliminary reported they are different from each other. Classification is not yet done.

One big problem to the North East endangered languages is the exiting use of English and Hindi. This can be seen in this way: good promotion of Hindi in Arunachal Pradesh, fairly baptised by English in Nagaland. Two states like Manipur and Tripura mostly use of Manipuri and Bengali respectively while Meghalaya use Khasi, Pnar and Garo. There are two schools giving emphasis in two languages from the beginning. English medium is widely entertained in Mission schools, Convent schools or Private schools. On the other hand, Hindi is in the Kendra Vidyalaya (the Central Schools). The Government schools follow the 2020 NEP, what it says is upto class 5 or 6 education is to give in mother tongue or regional language, local, etc. A question is that why the tribal students of North East cannot shine in Science. It is because of English.

**From the Margin to the Mainstream:
Resurrection of Three North-Eastern Languages**

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Abstract

There are 7117 (seven thousand, one hundred and seventeen) languages in the world and there is a chance that half of these languages will disappear from this planet within the 21st century. Bharatchandra Ray (1712-1760), a very renowned Bengali poet of the 18th century, wrote in his 'Annadamangal' kavya, 'If the city is on fire, the temple cannot be saved.' This is true about the future of languages also. If the world loses half of its linguistic Identity, India cannot sing in a full throated voice like P B Shelley's Skylark. India, which speaks in more than 1000(one thousand) languages, would have to face the same situation and 220 languages of the North-Eastern region will have its own share of the linguistic mortality. Many of these languages will wither away if no fruitful initiative is taken by the native speakers, academic institutions, institutes of languages, state and central academies and the concerned state governments. It is not impossible to revitalize a language but it should be identified which factors are causing the erosion of a language. The speakers may shift from one language into another for economic, political and social reasons. Sometimes the numerically bigger languages of the same region may kill the smaller ones as big fishes gobble up the small ones. There are other reasons too. In the face of such challenges, some languages have revived themselves. The revitalization of the Hebrew language is

one such example. The Cornish language of the southwestern Britain is coming back to life and literally activities in this language have already started. The Kokborak language, which had only oral Identity in the 19 th and 20th centuries , has become the medium of school education in a considerable part of Tripura. Three other marginal languages, namely Mishing, Ao and Mog have made their presence felt not only in the North-East but outside the region in the last three decades. Along with the linguists, some poets, translators, oral narrators and singers have given these languages a new vitality. In my paper I will try to discuss these points limiting my area to three North-Eastern languages, namely Mishing, Ao and Mog.

A Skeletal Demographic Context of Language Contact and the Emergence of North-East India as a Linguistic Area- Some General Observations

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The linguistic wealth that North-East India possesses has not been thoroughly evaluated. The linguists still could not identify all the languages possessing linguistically autonomous systems or otherwise. The eight states of North-East India are small in size and low in population compared to other states of India. But the linguistic and ethnic diversity is very high because this area is marked by fuzzy linguistic boundaries between languages around the states and international borders and also because the speech forms are many a time differentiated on socio-cultural and political grounds.

The languages of different families traditionally identified mainly with certain regions are more and more spread out as the speakers of these languages have moved out from their traditional homelands to different parts of the country accompanied by increased contact with languages of other language families. The spread of languages has led to increased contact and bilingualism facilitating sharing of different features. Starting from Emeneau's pioneering work (1956), *India as a Linguistic Area* is well explored and documented by Masica (1976) and many others. Many of the common linguistic features such as retroflexion, echo-formation, reduplication, expressives, compound verbs, word order, numerals and numeral classifiers, etc. are also attested by the reports of the *Linguistic Traits Survey* conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India (1990) and *Language Information Service India (LIS)* conducted by CIIL, Mysore during (2002-2007) with a few indications of newer evidences as well.

In Nagaland several related but mutually unintelligible languages of the Tibeto-Burman family spoken by different indigenous tribes are used alongside other unrelated languages of the Indo-Aryan family, viz., Nagamese, English and to some extent Hindi, to cater to the communicative needs of the Naga society. By and large same is the case with other seven states also.

KeyWords: ethnic diversity, linguistic boundaries, language contact, bilingualism, linguistic area, Nagamese, Indigenous

Status of Linguistic Minority with special reference to some North-Eastern languages in Multilingual India

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Abstract

The Linguistic Minority discourse in India, within her particular multilingual past and present, is always an open-ended issue for discussion; due to the interpreter's preoccupied propositional axioms, distribution of multi-linguality, and desire of the language users, till the date, the interpretations are made from different angles. The factual status is else and does not go with these observations. Most of the resulted statements are more or less rationalized one. Descriptively an attempt will be made here to revisit the status of these languages in the North-Eastern provinces, based on the secondary data, prepared by the Government of India with a view to have an idea on factual truth.

Key Words: Multilingualism, linguistic minority, language family, Census, mother tongue, language planning etc.

Maintenance, Marginalization and Shift of Languages in Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Arunachal Pradesh is a reservoir of diverse indigenous communities with 32-34 languages comprising a broader Sino-Tibetan language family and a small group

of surviving Tai Kadai language family. Each district of the state bears a different linguistic picture – some are inhabited by similar linguistic groups with dialectal variations, others share the space with varied tongues. The district wise linguistic scenario of the state is complicated compared to the one listed in the census reports. The speakers’ identification may not match their linguistic affiliation owing to political and administrative factors. The place names indicate the original settlers and the prominent communities. Thus, marginalisation and issues of language endangerment is affected in various dimensions across the state.

The past records of the allocation of space and reorganization of districts provide a comprehensive account of the settlements of various communities and a better understanding of the linguistic shared properties owing to either cognancy or areal factors.

The languages of the state show diverse typological characteristics and yet exhibit interesting correlation with topographical gradients, onomatopoeic expressions, reduplication, polysemy of ‘dwell’ and ‘posture’ verbs, predicate derivations, mention may be made of Tai Khamti, Nocte, Olo, Khappa, Tutsa, Wancho, Singpho, Nyishi, Galo, Sherdukpen, and many others.

The various indigenous communities of the state believe in indigenous Gods and Goddesses which connects them to spirits, agriculture, and natural elements like Earth, Sky, Mountains which leaves a rich repository of creation myths and folk tales. Aka-Hrusso’s faith in Nyezi-No (Earth-Sky) depicts the origin of the universe with terminology pertaining to natural science.

Presently, the population of the state show awareness to preserve their language and their oral heritage. The communities like Tai Khamti, Nyishi, Wancho, Aka-Hrusso, Galo, Mishmi, Lisu and many others take initiative in creation of scripts and development of primers.

The present study focuses on – political and administrative history, status of linguistic communities and their affiliation, reorganisation of districts – ethnic and cultural shift, indigenous faith & creation myths, typological characteristics and creation of scripts of the above-mentioned languages.

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Language Attitudes of Naga youth towards Mother Tongue

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Abstract

The paper sought to investigate the language attitudes of the Naga youths towards their mother tongue. Naga languages are all vulnerable and likely to be endangered. The development of most of the Naga languages are slow and the lack of written literature in indigenous languages is a complex issue that stems from various historical, social, and cultural factors. The indigenous languages often face marginalization and the erosion of their usage due to the dominance of more widely spoken languages, such as English or Nagamese. The survival of the indigenous languages largely depends on the youth and their attitudes towards their mother tongue. Language attitudes can impact how people perceive and interact with others who speak a different language or dialect. These attitudes can influence communication, social interactions, and even broader societal issues such as language policies and language preservation efforts. Attitudes towards one's mother tongue can significantly impact the phenomenon of language endangerment. Attitudes play a crucial role in determining whether a language is maintained, revitalized, or ultimately lost. The data in this paper are collected randomly from participants between the age of 18-23, whose mother tongue is one of the indigenous languages of Nagaland. The data used are the data obtained through questioners, observations, and in-depth interviews to know the attitude of the young speakers of Naga youth. The paper will observe whether the young speakers have a positive or a negative attitude towards their mother tongue.

Positive attitudes can lead to language maintenance, revitalization, and transmission, while negative attitudes can contribute to language decline and assimilation.

**Preservation and Promotion of the ‘Naga’ languages:
A review on the progress and challenges faced by the State Government
and the stake holders in preserving, promoting and revitalizing the State
recognized languages of Nagaland**

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Abstract

The preamble of UNESCO document on *Language Vitality and Endangerment*, expresses the importance of language documentation and preservation, stressing further the vital necessity to implement it. In recent times, there is an increased awareness to preserve and promote indigenous languages, especially endangered languages.

The State Government of multilingual Nagaland, is providing assistance and sponsoring projects to preserve and promote its 18 recognised languages (listed in the table below), in the form of developing common textbook contents and grammar. The initiative of the Government also aims to achieve and implement the Three Language Formula for State education. This research paper will investigate the progress and the challenges confronting the State Government projects, focussing on different Tribal Literary Boards which are in the process of elevating their language to formal education as well as expanding the functions of their language.

This research paper also intends to understand and present the process of language standardisation of the tribal languages which are in the process of standardisation, and presents the progress as well as the challenges. The process of language standardisation can be broadly classified under these stages: selection, codification, elaboration of function, and acceptance (Haugen, 1966). From ongoing research, it is understood that the language standardisation of some of the recognised Naga languages is at its preliminary stage where the issues on codifying words, spellings, graphemes, and grammar are work in progress. The proposed paper aims: (i) to review the progress of the Naga recognised languages in formal education, (ii) to analyse the challenges of developing educational materials for languages with limited written

sources/references and, (iii) to provide practical suggestions to revitalize the Naga indigenous languages.

Background of the present study

Naga languages primarily follow the oral tradition, and it was only with the advent of Christian missionaries who came to Nagaland in the early 1870s, that some Naga languages could commence with written literary works. In the affairs of language and literature among the State recognized tribes and languages, there is a non-uniformity and wide gap in the availability of literary material among the different tribes. Therefore, the paucity of written material, especially with less progressive tribes, makes it very challenging for a parallel progress in formal education for all the Naga languages. This study will present the strategic methods adopted by the State government to balance issues as cited, and also delve into the complexity of multilingual settings.

Tenyidie (Angami)	Kuzhale Khezha	/	Zeme	Konyak	Chokri
Ao-Chungli	Sangtam		Liangmai	Khiamniungan	Phom
Lotha	Yimkhiong		Pochury	Nthenyi	Kuki
Sümi	Chang		Nzonkhwe		

Table: The 18 recognized languages of Nagaland

Diminishing Cultural knowledge and its Impact on Language

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Abstract

Over more than decades or so much importance has been given to the issues of language endangerment. Most of these researches have tried to ascertain the endangerment status of various languages in whole by considering mostly the number of speakers. The talk will however take a different approach on this subject of language endangerment. Rather than looking at the language as a whole, the talk will focus on gradual loss of some of the cultural aspect of the language amongst the Ao Naga. With advancement in technology and global cultural interaction, many of our traditional knowledge and practices are slowly disappearing. When such cultural practices discontinues or cultural knowledge

disappears, it does impact language use in the cultural sphere. It is generally acknowledged that language and culture are integrated and that the two influence each other as such any change in the culture is bound to affect the language of that particular community. The central claim of the talk is that language endangerment is gradual. It starts with the loss of some vital aspects of the language thereby losing its communicative relevance in certain domain. If this trend continues, and more domains lose their communicative relevance, if unchecked, might lead to an eventual total loss of the language.

Linguistic Status of Uipo (Khoibu) and Chang

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Abstract

Uipo which is also known as Khoibu is an endangered and understudied Naga language spoken in the Indian state of Manipur, whereas Chang is a lesser-known and understudied Naga language spoken in Nagaland, India. The present paper is an attempt to explore the linguistic situation in these two languages. Both languages don't have their own script, they used Roman script for writing purposes. The first part of the paper will delve into an overview of the current status of both languages and in the last part, it will discuss the causes for endangerment in detail. In terms of population, Uipo has around 2000 speakers in nine villages and language usage is very limited to certain domains. Whereas, Chang has around 60000 speakers in 36 villages. In UNESCO's Scale of Endangered Language Atlas, Chang doesn't fit to be described as an endangered language because of its number of speakers, having said that there are certain factors despite having sixty thousand speakers, it can be considered as an endangered language, one incident is language usability and the attitude of the speakers towards the language. Uipo has not yet been introduced as a language in school education, whereas, Chang has introduced till class eight standard. Both languages have few linguistic and documentation works. External and internal factors are responsible for language endangerment in many languages and for Uipo and Chang, there is no exception to this notion. It may be worth mentioning that this paper may give an overview of the linguistic situation in two

neighbouring states, Manipur and Nagaland, taking Uipo and Chang as a case study. Towards the end of the paper, the prospective revitalization measures of these languages will also be discussed.

Keywords: Uipo, Chang, Tibeto-Burman, Language Endangerment

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The Language of Narration: Exploratory Study of the Naga Oral Tradition(s)

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Abstract

Naga society and culture today is the product of the discursive cultural and historical processes that have defined, shaped and sustained what we understand today as the “Naga” experience. The Naga languages are instrumental in unlocking pathways through which a fragmented, rudimentary and archaic sense of history can be accessed. Nagas across geographies share a contiguous border defined by similarities in the lived cultural experience encapsulating not only grand narratives of Oral Tradition and material culture such as the culture of victuals that permeates through everyday life, but also in the often overlooked domains of religion, and significantly in the making of the “Nation” – a discourse that has been at the heart of Naga community. The Naga tribal identity in this sense is cultivated by a shared historicity between tribal groups. In the absence of a written script documenting the history of the Naga tribes, traditionally passed-on narratives were birthed in what Walter Ong calls a “primary orality” culture,

and today can be read as fragments of folk history that have been sustained as and in part of the storytelling tradition. However, given the context of globalisation, language devolution and collective cultural amnesia fostering critical swift cultural changes, the nature of oral tradition and the language of narration/story-telling is accruing and shedding layers, and this is manifest in the ways oral narratives are being told today. Taking this as a point of departure, the paper offers an exploratory study of the impact of culture and language change on the erstwhile robust Naga Oral tradition.

Keywords: culture, language, oral tradition, tribal, indigenous

Nature and Extent of Language Endangerment : Case Studies of Lepcha, Tiwa and Koch

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Abstract

A language of high vitality usually generates strong centrifugal forces, which is resolved on contact with other languages of lower vitality, into centripetal (pressure) forces. This gives rise to a tendency of lower vitality languages not to increase their level and range of usage which slowly leads to language attrition. As a result, in course of time some kind of imbalance is created among existing opposing forces which influence the language vitality of each of the languages in the network. Such a situation leads to language endangerment which inevitably varies from one to another. Any language becoming endangered and ultimately becoming extinct should be considered as a loss to mankind in general and to the people of the linguistic area in particular. Language apart from being a set of arbitrary vocal symbols meant for communication also stands for identity of a speech community. Therefore, loss of language or mother tongue means loss of identity of a community which ultimately leads us to interrogate the situation in the light of the socio-political issues. Hence the need for identifying the nature of language endangerment of minority speech community becomes imperative in the multilingual and multicultural context of India.

UNESCO (2002-2003) provides us with a list of endangered languages and has also tried to categorise them into different categories like 'vulnerable', 'definitely endangered', 'severely endangered' and 'critically endangered'. But in order to make an objective statement for each of the languages in question, detailed enquiry of these lesser-known languages needs to be undertaken. Without such objective case studies, the understanding of the nature and extent of language

endangerment of each of these languages becomes difficult and thus the purpose of revitalization of the language/ language planning is defeated. Therefore, three major parameters--- (1) Dimensions of Language Growth (2) Language Attitude and (3) Ethno-linguistic Vitality, are being proposed to examine the nature and extent of language endangerment.

In the present paper only the 'Dimensions of Language Growth' will be discussed at length keeping in view the data of three languages--- Lepcha, Tiwa and Koch. All the three languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family and are spoken in the North-Eastern part of India. The three case studies will reveal three different scenario of language endangerment.
