

Language As A Mechanism To Identity And Ethnicity Among Oraon Tea Tribe Of Assam

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Abstract

Language is a crucial instrument of identity affirmation and plays an important role in shaping politics of multilingual states like Assam. In recent times it has been observed that dominant group of a particular state has sought to use language to assert its cultural and political hegemony over smaller group. With advents of time the smaller group have organized movement for recognition of their language and linguistic identity and ethnicity.

Keywords: Language, Identity, Ethnicity.

Introduction

Language is an important aspect of identity and it is related to each other. Language influences the identity of a particular group. Language and identity have individual and social aspect and it is changing with course of time. We can understand identity in three different ways: ethnic identity, social identity and cultural identity. Ethnicity mainly concern on identity. In a society a member belong to particular ethnic group or another and such ethnic groups are connected with minority and majority group status. An individual belong to social organization and an individual identify themselves as part of social organization by the knowledge of its group's values and norms.

Social identity is part of society which helps an individual to understand its role in a society and as a member of a social group. One is aware of cultural identity when a particular person is aware of the existence of its own culture in society. Language is an important aspect of one's cultural identity.

Objective

1. To understand the process of shifting from native language to host language of a state lead to change in one's identity.
2. To explore the ways in use of dual language cause an impact on linguistic and cultural identity development.

Methodology

Due to large population of tea tribes who were surrounded by small groups inside the district of Assam, this study used stratified random sampling procedure to cover the four tea garden of Biswanath Chariali district of Assam. A questionnaire to open-ended questions was employed and administered through face to face interview of Oraon working in tea garden. A semi-structured

interview guide was used for in-depth interview with informants. The secondary data was collected from journal, books and local magazines. The data analysis consists of tabulating the data to deal with primary structure of the study.

Review of Literature

A review of existing literature shows that considerable research has been done on language. Some of the significant works are: **Patrick Stevenson and Jenny Carl** in the book (1) have focussed on the dynamics of language and social change in contemporary Central Europe. One of the conclusion of this process has been the reshaping of linguistic environment and relationship between particular language and linguistic varieties, especially newly assertive national language and ethnic minority language.

Prakash Karat in his book (2) discussed the developments on the language façade during the Colonial rule and examined the role of language and class in the strategy of India Communism.

Sandhya Baruah (3) emphasized that language problem can be treated in isolation from the co-relation of class forces existing in any social formation. She studied the language problem in the context of historical stages through which the national problem in India has evolved. In another work (4) she observes that due to long term migratory flow in Assam, it is linguistically and ethnically diversified state. She focuses on the dynamics of relationships between Assamese language and Bengali spoken by minority group of people.

Conceptual Framework

Language means a system of commonly comprehensible vocal symbols by which the members of a society communicates. In anthropological perspective language is part of culture as it is derived system of conscious and sub-conscious pattern shared and transmitted by member of a society from one generation to another. Language is a process by which individual and groups define themselves and defined by others. The rise of consciousness for ones identity and ethnicity is often linked with question of linguistic status and boundaries.

Linguistic Identity of Oraon Tea Tribe

The migration of Oraon from Jharkhand to Assam has led to language abrasion and problem of language changes and retention is important among the Oraon who left their homeland to work in the tea garden. Most of Oraon continued to live within their group which led to the continuation of language and culture for a longer period of time. However after passage of time, for inter-ethnic communication they adopted a composite language known as ‘Sadri’ which is mixture of different language. In order to emerge in the broad continuum of Assamese culture that adapted the dominant culture and the language and labour developed bilingual and multi lingual in order to adjust to the new environment.

Table 1:Kurukh language spoken by Oraon

Sl. No	Use of Kurukh language	No. of Respondent		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		

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1	Yes	115	125	240	38.70%
2	No	200	180	380	61.29%
Total				620	100%

From the above table it can be observed that only 38.70% can speak Kurukh language and remaining 61.29 do not know to speak their mother tongue. Most of the respondents think that if they speak their own language the local people will regard them as outsiders who settled in the state and therefore they have assimilated themselves with the Assamese language and culture. They speak Bongali which is mixture of Hindi and Bengali to communicate with the members of tea garden community.

Sadri Language

Sadri is a mother tongue of Sadans an Aryan group among Non- Aryan in Chotanagpur. It is a link language of the Adivasis living in Chotanagpur plateau. Nagpuri sadri is the second language for the Adivasis. Due to inter community marriages between various linguistic groups the Sadri gradually evolved and for the children of bilingual parents they adopted Sadri as mother tongue. According to 2011 census 2,044,776 Sadri speakers are there in India. Oraon who migrated to tea garden remain in isolation and there is hardly any connection with the outside world. Their life is concerned within the tea garden and remains marginalized from local population. They used Sadri to interact with other communities in the tea garden. Marriage between the different linguistic communities increased the need of Sadri. Sadri spoken in Assam by the tea garden workers has been labelled as Assam Sadri.

Table 2: Percentage of Oraon using other language

Sl. No.	Language	No. of Respondent		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Bagani	130	110	240	38.70%
2	Assamese	60	80	140	22.58%
3	Sadri	100	100	200	32.25%
4	Hindi	20	13	33	5.32%
5	English	5	2	7	1.12%
Total		315	305	620	100%

In the above table it has been observed that 38.70% of Oraon speak Bongali with the other communities in tea garden. Oraon speak Assamese outside tea garden with the other caste group which constitutes about 22.58%. Only 1.112% can speak in English those who are educated.

The use of Kurukh language has minimum functional value as it is used mainly in home between family members and which is marked as group identity. Kurukh language has no status in State and it is not used as medium of instruction in educational institutions. The majority of respondents speaks Bagani and Sadri within their community and speaks Assamese with the local people. In a family some people communicate with their members in Kurukh language while the younger generations are not accustomed with the use of Kurukh language and they mostly speak Bagani dialect or Sadri.

In order to socialize with friends and peer groups they mainly use Assamese with local people as Assamese is dominant language in the state. Hindi and English are used by the educated members who do not share the mother tongue with each other in such situation they use English and Hindi. In public the people use Assamese language in order to have larger perspective of socialization. Oraon use Assamese language in public domain to express their competence and wisdom of significance as well as source of identity in larger context of public domain.

Oraons have shifted their mother tongue by adapting Bagania or Sadri dialect to delineate them and the young people expressed their adherence to the dominant language. In spite of advent of urbanization, industrialization the people still consider language, religion, and customs as cultural identity and consider that adoption of dominant cultural values is not a threat to their identity. Oraon are minority ethnic society and therefore they cast out their mother tongue to have ethnic affiliation with the dominant group. When people come in contact with each of different linguistic group they tried to speak the common language to communicate with other people. In order to overcome the communicative barricade people seek to conciliate their own speech and result in wide variety of linguistic significance. It result in borrowing of lexis and in some other cases it may result in creation of new language which involves influence one language on the other. The respondents prefer other language in respective of mother tongue as they perceive other language more easily and it is easy to pronounce and write. According to the respondents language and culture is closely related and acceptance of other language is not a menace to their identity. They believe that they can preserve their identity through religion and customs while they can dislodge the linguistic identity.

In public realm Assamese language is attributed to education and state official language. The use of Kurukh language reflects little about the educational status of the speaker as Kurukh language is not normally taught in school and children learn Kurukh language informally from their parents. The language at national language as well as state language is an important factor in determining the choice of language among the people. The young generation are less concern about their mother tongue and most of them speak Bagani, Sadri and Assamese language. Oraon consider the cultural identity is changing and they are adopting the cultural ways of Assamese people. The perception of tribal identity and linguistic identity shows permanence and change in erratic degree. The advent to modernization has been as detrimental among Oraons and they want change in their lifestyle and want enlightenment around them. Language act as the bridge to communicate with the different community and therefore linguistic identity and their cultural identity should not disappear from the state.

The change in the pattern of language is due to modernization, urbanization, education and desire for better socio-economic condition have contributed to change in their mother tongue. Kurukh language have showed partial shift to majority language used by different groups in tea garden community. Oraons have shifted their mother tongue by adapting Bagania or Sadri dialect to delineate them and the young people expressed their adherence to the dominant language. In spite of advent of urbanization, industrialization the people still consider language, religion, and customs as cultural identity and consider that adoption of dominant cultural values is not a threat to their identity. Oraon are minority ethnic society and therefore they cast out their mother tongue to have ethnic affiliation with the dominant group. When people come in contact with each of different linguistic group they tried to speak the common language to communicate with other people. In order

to overcome the communicative barricade people seek to conciliate their own speech and result in wide variety of linguistic significance. It result in borrowing of lexis and in some other cases it may result in creation of new language which involves influence one language on the other.

Conclusion

It is evident from the discussion that minority group like Oraon Tea tribe of Assam Tea Garden, language has been an important mechanism for assertion and reservation of their distinct identity and an integral element in the process of ethnic group formation. It has been evident that Oraon migrated from Jharkhand had adjust to new socio-cultural situation within the tea garden and the outside world. Oraon have developed their separate identity and developed a new bond among them as a distinctive community in distinction with the dominant culture of Assam. They tried to assimilate with the regional culture by identifying themselves with the language and culture and both the identities are present in the cultural tradition created by Oraon as the member of tea garden community. The process of socio-cultural adjustment is not consistent among the gender and all age group. The male and the younger generation are more inclined towards the dominant language and culture and whereas the old people and women are less integrated to the dominant culture of local population. There are various factors like location of market and urban centre and education factor plays a very important role in the socio-cultural transformation of Oraon in the recent past. An understanding of dynamic of language of Assam will necessitate an enquiry into all these processes.

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