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Dr. Binda Sah



A SUMMARY OF UGC MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT ON “LANGUAGE, ACCULTURATION AND IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE BHOJPURI SPEECH COMMUNITY OF TEZPUR IN ASSAM”.



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ABSTRACT

Language plays a crucial role in the determination of a person's identity. However, this linguistic identity has become problematic in contemporary context due to multiculturalism or cultural pluralism. Like the days of the yore, we cannot conceive of a culturally, linguistically homogenous society in 21st century. Today people of different origin migrate to another places or countries for various reasons. Most migrants are faced with the requirement of adopting the host culture, language or integrating with it to facilitate their socially, mentally healthy life in the new land. This endeavor of the migrants is termed as acculturation in the contemporary social discourses. This paper deals with the acculturation of the Bhojpuri speakers who are migrants in Assam from north India with special emphasis on those living in Tezpur.

KEYWORDS: Language, Acculturation, Identity.

1.INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in the determination of a person's identity. However, this linguistic identity has become problematic in contemporary context due to multiculturalism or cultural pluralism. Like the days of the yore, we cannot conceive of a culturally, linguistically homogenous society in 21st century. The easy accessibility of world through travel has not only benefited tourism, scholarship and commerce, but also allowed immigration. Turmoil and warfare often results in persons being forced to flee their homes. In former times, these refugees might have been forced to live in

refugee camps or hostile neighboring countries. The ability to travel the world in search of new homes has been a boon to emigrants. But many are forced to leave their culture and take up residence in a new land within a new culture. This results in more opportunity, but adds the challenge of adapting to a new culture with new rules, norms and expectations.

Most migrants are faced with the requirement of adopting the host culture, language or integrating with it to facilitate their socially, mentally healthy life in the new land. This endeavor of the migrants is termed as acculturation in the contemporary social discourses. Acculturation explains the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures (Sam, D.L. & Berry, J.W. 2010, 472). The effects of acculturation can be seen at manifold levels in both interacting cultures. At the group level, acculturation often results in changes to culture, customs, and social institutions. Perceptible group level effects of acculturation often consist of changes in food, clothing, and language. At the individual level, differences in the way individuals acculturate have been shown to be connected not just with changes in daily behavior, but with several measures of psychological and physical well-being. As enculturation is used to illustrate the process of first-culture learning, acculturation can be considered as second-culture learning.

The concept of acculturation has been studied scientifically since 1918 (Rudmin, F.W. 2003, 3). As it has been approached at different times from the fields of psychology, anthropology, literary, linguistic and sociology, several theories and definitions have come out to describe elements of the acculturative process. Despite definitions and indication that acculturation involves a two-way process of change, research and theory have mainly emphasized the adjustments and adaptations made by minorities, such as, immigrants, refugees, and indigenous peoples in reaction to their contact with the dominant majority. Contemporary research has basically stressed on different strategies of acculturation, and how variations in acculturation affect an individual's adaptation of the new surroundings.

An individual's adaptation of the new culture and society results in change of his language and identity as well. However, this change is not simple. The process of change or acculturation puts the migrants often in an awkward situation as the two or more cultures or languages pervade in their behaviour whereby problematizing their sense of identity. The proposed project is a study of 'language and identity' in context of acculturation in the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur, Assam.

Tezpur is inhabited by people of different cultures and linguistic groups. The dominant groups are Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalese, Bodos, Biharis. Most of the Biharis belong to the Bhojpuri Speech Community, and their dense population is found in places like Tal Gereki, Garwanpatti, Jahaj Ghat and Kalibari. Tal Gereki is shared by Bodos, Garwanpatti by Bengalis Jahaj Ghat by Assamese and Bengalis and Kalibari by the Assamese. The speakers of Bhojpuri Speech Community have interaction with different languages and cultures, apart from the dominant Assamese culture and language, and this will make a good study of how the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur has maintained their original linguistic and cultural identity, how much acculturation has occurred, what changes have occurred in their language and identity after acculturation.

2. OBJECTIVES:

- (i) To find out the process of acculturation in the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur.
- (ii) To find out the effect of acculturation in the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur regarding language, culture and food.
- (iii) To find out language shift (if any) in the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur.

(iv) To find out identity crisis (if any) in the Bhojpuri Speech

3.METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on J. W. Berry's four- fold concept of acculturation: Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalization, and is conducted through field work, particularly through data collection and personal interview.

4.DATA-ANALYSIS:

4.1. Language :

Regarding language change of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam, the following questions are asked in the questionnaire:

1. Language(s) you can speak
2. Language(s) you can speak and write
3. Which language(s) you can speak at home?
4. Which language(s) do you speak most?
5. Do your parents speak Assamese?
6. Which language(s) do you use with your parents?
7. Which language(s) do you use with your siblings?

Responses:

Q1 The languages given in choice are Hindi, Bhojpuri, Assamese, Bengali Bodo, English and Nepali because these languages are more or less spoken everywhere in Assam. Hindi, Bhojpuri and Assamese is spoken by all the respondents whereas English is used only by those speakers who are having 10+ education.

Q2 As regard to speak and write, Hindi and Bhojpuri are chosen by the elderly person or those who are not born in Assam. Assamese and English are chosen by younger informants who are born, brought up and educated in Assam.

Q3 As regard to the use of languages at home, all the informants have chosen Bhojpuri and Hindi, mostly Bhojpuri. However, the informants, having an Assamese speaker in the family, also use Assamese language.

Q4 All the informants, irrespective of age and education, use Bhojpuri, Hindi, and Assamese mostly for their communication depending on the need of the context.

Q5 & Q6 For these questions, there are two categories of responses: i) the use of Hindi and Bhojpuri with elderly parents/siblings, and ii) the use of Hindi, Bhojpuri and also Assamese with younger parents/siblings.

FINDINGS:

The Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur, Assam has remarkably gone through the process of linguistic acculturation. The stages of acculturation have been significantly noticed. The elderly respondents or the first generation migrants show devotional adherence to their own language, and a ting of reluctance can be felt in them as regard to the acceptance of the Assamese language as their language of communication. The educated and younger informants are enthusiastic about their ability to speak more languages. They put equal emphasis on their mother tongue, national language and the state language. However, from the personal interaction with the few informants, it has been revealed

that Bhojpuri is their personal language whereas Assamese is their public language.

4.II. Acculturation:

To find out the acculturation of the Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur, Assam, the following questions are asked in the questionnaire:

1. Do you celebrate Bihu?
2. Are you invited by your friends and neighbours on the day of Bihu?
3. What dress do you wear on the day of Bihu?
4. What dress do the female members of your family usually wear?
5. Do the female members of your family wear 'Mekhola- Chador'?
6. What food is served on the day of Bihu?
7. Has any member of your family married outside your community?

Responses:

Q.1 &2. All the informants respond that they celebrate Bihu, and they are invited by their friends and neighbours.

Q3. There are two categories of responses for this question. The rural informants wear traditional Assamese costumes while the urban informants wear regular formal dress.

Q.4 &5. For these questions also there are two categories of responses. The rural informants opine that their women wear 'mekhola chador' along with 'sarees' whereas only 'sarees' and other non-traditional costumes are used by the women of urban informants.

Q6. All the informants respond that the Assamese food is prepared and served on the day of Bihu. However, from their personal interview, it has been seen that they prefer to carry on their Bhojpuriya Spice and Cuisine.

Q7. Very few informants respond that their family members have married outside their community. And those who have married do not live with their family. From the interview, it appears that they are not happy with such marriages.

FINDINGS:

From the above responses, it appears that the acculturation is found more in rural informants than the urban ones. This is because of more interaction by the rural Bhojpuri speakers with their neighbouring Assamese speakers. The urban Tezpur has the nature of a city and the people prefer non-traditional costumes and cuisines than the traditional ones. And so is in case of the Bhojpuri speakers. However, on occasions like Bihu, they are one with the Assamese speakers.

4.iii. Identity crisis:

Identity crisis is an integral part of a migrant's life, and to find out it among the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur, Assam the following questions are asked:

1. Do you feel comfortable in the company of other community?
2. Do the guests of other community feel comfortable when you invite them?
3. Do you feel unwanted while participating in Bihu celebration?
4. Do you think your life would be better if you return to the place of your ancestors?

Responses:

Q1 &2. All the informants respond in positive to these questions.

Q3. Mixed responses have been found to these questions in the questionnaire. However, the personal interview reveals that the informants prefer to maintain a safe distance to avoid any kind of cultural misunderstanding or confusion.

Q4. Most of the informants have avoided this question. Yet there are a few informants who have responded negatively without giving valid reasons. From the interview, it is found that the social structure of the place of their ancestor is not suitable for them. However, they also state that fear and insecurity is the part of their life.

Findings:

From the above responses, it has been found that the members of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur, Assam do not like to return to their ancestor's land. However, their life is not socially, emotionally and psychologically balanced as it should be in the land of one's own thanks to the existing political crisis of Assam which has led to their own identity crisis.

CONCLUSION:

Language, acculturation and identity are closely interwoven in the life of a migrant. A migrant undergoes a process of shift from his language to the language of the host land in which he may keep his language, lose his language or arrive at a completely different language of a hotchpotch. This process is highly emotional and psychological as well as tormenting for fear of a humiliating outcome. The language adoption leads to cultural adoption in which a migrant can choose to be assimilated with the host culture by losing one's own or to be integrated with the host one by maintaining one's own. Most of the Bhojpuri speakers of Tezpur, Assam have preferred to be integrated as they want to keep their own culture as well as the Assamese culture. However, they are not without a sense of identity crisis thanks to their inability to fit in the land they left, or because of the existing socio-political factors of Assam which do not permit them to fit in.

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