

Endangered State of Language

Dr. Dalima Kakti
Asstt. Professor
Dept. of Assamese
Loknayak Amiya Kumar Das College
Dhekiajuli, Sonitpur (Assam)

Summary :

Language is always changeable. There can be many reasons behind an endangered language. Sometimes because of lack of consciousness, an endangered language becomes obsolete. In this discussion, we are going to discuss about the ways by which a language can become endangered .

Key Words :

Language, endangered, obsolete, Assamese, form.

Field of study :

In this research paper, causes behind endangerment of a language has been discussed.

Purpose and Aim of the study :

In the backdrop of Assam, it can be said that the subject of endangered language has never been discussed separately. Judging by that we picked this topic for this discussion.

Research method:

In this paper, we have used descriptive method.

Sources of study :

Field study has been used as the main resource of the study and as minor resource, help has been taken from various books related to the topic.

Discussion of the main Topic :

1.0 Language : Human beings can express their feelings through various means with the help of the senses in the body and sometimes even silence can show the thinking of people. Tears, sweat, trembling, springing up of hair in the body etc. physical changes can expose people's inner thoughts. The origin of the word 'Bhasha' has come from the Sanskrit 'dhatu' 'Bhas'. Its meaning is spoken sentences. Spoken sentence is voiced through a person's vocal organs. With the help of sound and listening, people cooperating by expressing their thoughts to one another is called as language.

1.01 Endangered language : According to Michael E. Krauss, the survey of 2007 shows that there are 6000 languages being used in the world. (1) All these language were not created in a single day, and all the languages that were created, could not make it to the future. Many languages have already been lost from this world, some are on the verge of it. It is sad for a language to be obsolete, or being close to it. Because a language is not only a medium of communication, Literature- culture and society are all related to a language. Some living languages in the present have also showed signs of dying in the near future absolute. Such languages are called as endangered language. After crossing many stages an endangered language can become extinct. Sometimes an endangered language can emerge as a strong one. In simple words, this process of extinction is called as endangered language. Some opinions related to the theory of endangered language are as such –

According to UNESCO :

- a) A language is endangered when its speakers cease to use it, use it in fewer and fewer domains, use fewer of its registers and speaking styles, and /or stop passing it on to the next generation. No single factor can determine that a language is endangered. (2)

According to Michael E. Krauss :

“Children will probably not be speaking them in 100 years. Approximately 60-80% languages fall in to this category” (3).

According to a survey published in The Telegraph :

- b) “Language become extinct or died when it was not spoken by the people”(4).

1. Krauss, Michael. E (editors) : Keynote – mass language extinction and Documentation : The Race against time” The vanishing language of the Pacific rim.
2. UNESCO.
3. Krauss, Michael E. 2007 : “Keynote-mass language Extinction and Documentation : The Race Against Time”.
4. The Telegraph – Thursday March 3-2011.

1.02. Reasons behind endangerment of language :

There is a cause behind every action. There are causes for endangerment of language too. These reasons :

- a) Sometimes language stays confined in the particular language,
- b) Sometimes it is influence by other languages.

(a) Reasons behind endangerment of languages confined in the particular language -

Every language on earth evolves from the old form to new forms. In fact, such changes prove the dynamic of the language. This change is natural one of the characteristics of a living language is that it is always moving, changing. So, in order to keep a language alive, we have to accept the dynamic. But in this journey, the old form that is lost, usually becomes obsolete. The old Latin language from the Indo-European family of language has changed and in turn has created the new Latin language. In time, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French etc languages have sprung from the new Latin language. Similarly, the old English language from the Indo-European family of language has evolved into the modern English language. In the same way, Koine language from the Greek branch has given birth to the modern Greek language. If we observe the Indian Aryan language, we can see that with the change in time, Indian Aryan language has changed into middle Indian Aryan language, and from that it has created modern Aryan language. In the same way, pre-Shankari, Shankari and post Shankari forms of the Assamese language can be considered as dead. Some dead language goes out of practice. But some languages like Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, etc though are longer in verbal use, but they are still used in academic purposes. In this case, the old form the language is an endangered language. Language has a method of phone, morph, meaning and sentence. The changes is the phone, morph, meaning and sentence of the language causes the creation of new language from the older version. If we look at Assamese language, it become clear that the 999 phonemes of the foundation languages-Vaidic and Sanskrit has become obsolete in Assamese.

Similarly, though Assamese language has written forms of $\text{Ö}, \text{Ø}, \text{Û}, \text{Ü}, \text{Þ}$ phonemes from the base language, their spoken use is now almost not in existence.

' $\text{ã}, \text{é}, \text{ê}, \text{ë}, \text{ì}, \text{ô}, \text{ø}$ ' - consonant sounds of the Assamese language are also dying.

Because of the lack of difference in pronunciation, these phones were taken over by other similar sounding phones, and gradually they became obsolete.

For the case of pronunciation too, people wish to simplify hard or Compound phones. As a result, many such phones changed into simplified phone forms in Assamese language –

Prothesis :- $\text{ÄZ}_{\pm 1}$ (Dwar) $\text{ǻÄǻ}_{\pm 1}$ (Duwar)

βÁí (Kan)

ÕβÁí (Akan)

Elision :- !š±ò (Sthan)

ï±ò (Than)

öÂKl×ĭ (Bhanti)

öÂòĭ (Bhani)

Anaptyxis : βÔÁĭø, (Krishi)

ĭβÁĭÄĭø, (Kirshi)

Âõí Ç (Barna)

Âõí (Baran)

Epentnesis :- 1±æÃÉ (Rajya)

1±ý×ÃÄæÃ (Raij)

ÕòÉ (Onya)

Õý×ÃÃò (Oin)

These causes are naturally true for all languages. These causes change various levels of a language. Such internal changes can gradually change the whole language giving it a new form. Mass acceptance of the new form leads to the demise of the old form.

- (b) Influence from other language can also endanger a language. Impact from other language can change internal stages of a language and sometimes the whole language can die because of that –

Changes in internal stages :-

Linguistic features of other languages can change various forms of a language. For Example, using word forms of other languages in place of Assamese word forms can make such replaced words disappear.

Endangered Assamese word

Words from other language is use

ÕA±ĭùβÁ± (Attalika) :

Building

ÕüÁĭÂõñ± (Osubidha):

Problem

ŌŷÃÃÑŷÁ±1 (Ohongkar):	Proud
Ō±ûŷŷÁ1 (Aikar) :	Income tax.
Ɔø,ñ±ùûŷ (Ousadhalay) :	Pharmacy.
ĴŷÁ±ø,±á±1 (Koshagar) :	Treasury.
à±÷ (Kham)	Envelope.
äÂ÷ÇË1±á (Sarmarog) :	Skin disease.
ÿäÂÿŷÁËÿŷÁ (Sikitsak)	Doctor
üöÂ± (Sabha)	Meeting – etc.

In case of Assamese language, we have to accept words like – t.v, mobile, internet, which are root names. As such things are used in our everyday life, naming them in local language may not be acceptable for everyone. Of course, it is not like that a language has to be kept within four walls within the advancement of time and development in travel and communication system, one or more languages impact can be seen on a language.

Change in the entire language :

In the book, 'Cambridge Handbook of Endangered Languages', published by Cambridge University Press, there has been mentioned four causes behind endangerment of a language. These are (5) –

1. Natural calamity, famine, epidemic : The language of Andaman Islands became endangered after the earthquake and tsunami in Indian Ocean in 2004.
2. War and genocide : Niskito language (Nicaragua) and Mayan language (Guatemala) were endangered because of war.
3. Political ban : Betron in France, Kurdish in Turkey, etc. language were endangered because of political reasons.

4. Cultural, political, financial reasons : Welsh language in Great Britain, Ainu language in Japan were endangered because of the upper – lower class division created by cultural, political, financial backgrounds.

Sometimes, the mentality of the language community also aids in endangering a language. The feeling of respect for one's own language saves it from disappearing. At some point of time, the English language had tried to overthrow the Irish language, but because of the love of the Irish speaking people, this is now a famous language. Here, we can mention the 'Parler' and 'Patois' as told by Upendranath Goswami. When people feel ashamed of their dialect, that dialect reaches the stage of 'Patois'. On the other hand, when people are conscious and careful toward their dialect, it reaches the stage of 'Parler' Travel and communication system also can cause a language's demise.

In his book, 'Bhasa Bigyan', Upendranath Goswami has also said about death of a language(6)

–
"Assamese is the main language of Assam. Apart from those whose mother tongue is Assamese, if people from other language also starts giving more importance to Assamese than their own language, then those languages would die one day because of the influence of the Assamese language.

The topic of immigration too brings changes to a language. When a language community decides to live in a different language area permanently, that immigrating language community gets attracted to the language of the area where they are migrating to. Because of such attractions to a group of people can take another language as their own. In the setting of Assam, it can be seen that –

Whether because of the natural beauty of Assam, or the thinking that they can live with the people here in harmony, people from different community and religion have come to Assam. Many have come as prisoners of war. Mughal, Ahom, British – all these people who had come to Assam, could think of Assam as their native place. People of Muslim religion had come to Assam in 7th century A.D. itself. The Arabs come to Malabar coast in India for trading. Many Muslims from Turkey, Afghanistan and Persia came to India to trade. Those people, who came in different time periods didn't bring women with them. So, they married Indian girls and settled here permanently. The succeeding generations of these people had taken Indian languages as their mother tongue and it helped in the disappearance of their former language.

The Ahoms came to Assam in 1228 A.D. These people stayed here and established relationships with the people of Assam, later on they embraced Assamese as their own language.

Most of the Marwari people who have been living in Assam for a very long time, have accepted Assamese language as their own as well.

Religious causes too helps in endangering a language. If a group of people convert to another religion, the language spoken by the majority in the religion becomes acceptable to the newly converted people. The Ahoms had converted to Hinduism and accepted Assamese language.

Once upon a time, the Muslims had gained their might after conquering most parts of India. Many Hindus had converted to Islam not wanting to be suppressed by the Muslim rule. After converting, they gave up their original language. Even the Ahoms converted to Hinduism before changing their language to Assamese. Thus, religious background is also related to language.

Political causes are also one of the influences the can change the linguistic field. At one point of time, the Latin speakers had established their monarchy in Italy after defeating the Etruscan, Gal and Oscans. After the Roman empire started spreading out, Latin language also spread from British Islands to North Africa. Mainly the extension of the political power and political patronage helped this language to extend through vast area.

In Assam also, the political power had contributed in establishing Assamese language. Ruler of Barahi, Mahamanikya had Madhav Kandali write the Ramayan in Assamese. Under the patronage of Kamata King, Durlav Narayan, Hemsaraswati had authored the book, Prahlad Charit' Such royal patronage aided Assamese in becoming gaining importance in Assam. The matter of which language would become stronger in the society, is also connected to respect. Royal Patronage is also a recognition. Moreover the idea of official language or national language is also connected to respect. Languages recognized as state official language, national language, international language attracts people from other language groups, in that way the original language becomes endangered.

Every country recognizes one language from the country as national language, for administrative purposes. Parliament, Legislative Assembly use that particular language for official purposes. Like wise, states also select official language for state Government related works. Common people feels attraction towards such official languages. So, they become eager to use such languages un personal and private life too. As a result, difficulties come to other languages in the country or the state.

So times, a language can become endangered because of provocations of malicious people. Here Assamese language is worth mentioning. In accordance to the landabu treaty of 1826 Assam went under the British rule. The British officials had brought many laborers to Assam to Work in the tea gardens. At that time people assisting the British had told them that Assamese language is actually a dialect of the Bengali language.

1.03. Stages of language endangerment :

A language does not disappear in a single day. It is a very lengthy process. Keeping the next generations (age 20-30) in mind, Michael E. Krauss has divided stages of endangered language in some parts (7).

- a) Safe : If it can be assumed that the next generations will use the language for the next 100 years.
- b) Endangered : If the next generation will stop using the language in less than 100 years.
- c) Dying : If the new generation has already given up the language.

UNESCO has divided the same into six stages.

These are –

- a) Safe
- b) Vulnerable
- c) Definitely endangered
- d) Severely endangered
- e) Critically endangered
- f) Extinct

UNESCO has defined these stages as such –

- a) Safe : People of all age groups use the language.
- b) Vulnerable : Majority the young generation uses it, but because of some disabilities the language is limited.
- c) Definitely endangered : Young generation will not use it for long.
- d) Severely endangered : Only the older generation can speak the language. The next generations are not able to use the language to express themselves, though they can understand it.
- e) Critically endangered : Only the elders from the grandparents generation use the language at times. But the use is not regular.
- f) Extinct : In this stage, there is no one who uses the language.

1.04. Decision :

A language becomes endangered for various reasons. An evolving language sometimes changes its phonology, morphology, meaning and sentence, which is only normal. But gradually such

reformations change the entire language. Then the old forms of the language becomes endangered.

Because of external influences, such changes bring transformation of the language. Another reason is changing one's language because of social pressures. After that the new language becomes the mother tongue for the next generations.

Whether it is natural or because of circumstances, extinction of a language is a matter of regret.

Source :

Assamese books :

1. Goswami, Upendranath : 'Bhasa Bigyan', mani Manik publication, Panbazar, Guwahati 2002.
2. Bhattacharjya, Pramodchandra : Asamar Janajati, Published by Lower's Book stall on behalf of Asam Sahitya Sabha, Guwahati : 2003

