Impact of Foreign Languages, Especially English, on the Nyishi Language: A Study of Palin, Kra Daadi District

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Abstract

The increasing spread of foreign languages, particularly English, has brought significant changes to the linguistic ecology of indigenous communities in India. This study examines the impact of English on the Nyishi language with special reference to Palin in Kra Daadi district of Arunachal Pradesh. Drawing on primary data collected from 100 respondents, including local community members and leaders, the research analyses patterns of language use, fluency, and attitudes across domestic, educational, peer, and public domains. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights to capture both observable trends and community perceptions. The findings indicate a noticeable shift towards English, especially among younger generations, resulting in reduced everyday use of Nyishi, declining fluency, and increased code-mixing. English has emerged as the dominant language in education and institutional settings, extending its influence into peer communication and domestic spaces. As a consequence, Nyishi is increasingly confined to informal and cultural domains, with limited visibility in public and formal contexts. However, the study also reveals strong community awareness regarding the importance of preserving the Nyishi language. Respondents emphasise the role of family-based language transmission, bilingual education, and cultural activities as key strategies for sustaining linguistic heritage. The paper argues that language shift in Palin is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a socio-cultural process shaped by educational aspirations, institutional practices, and changing attitudes. It concludes by advocating a balanced multilingual approach that promotes English for functional purposes while ensuring the continued vitality of the Nyishi language.

Keywords

Nyishi language; English influence; language shift; indigenous languages; bilingual education; Arunachal Pradesh; Kra Daadi district

Introduction

Language plays a central role in shaping cultural identity, social relationships, and collective memory, particularly among indigenous and tribal communities. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Nyishi language has traditionally functioned as a vital medium for transmitting oral traditions, customary laws, rituals, and indigenous knowledge systems. However, in recent decades, processes of modernisation, formal education,

and increased interaction with dominant languages have significantly altered the linguistic landscape of the region. Among these influences, English has emerged as a powerful language associated with education, administration, and socio-economic mobility. The expansion of English-medium schooling, government institutions, and digital communication has intensified language contact in tribal areas, including Palin in Kra Daadi district. While English provides access to wider opportunities and global connectivity, its growing dominance has raised concerns about the gradual marginalisation of indigenous languages like Nyishi. Language use in domains such as the home, school, peer groups, and public spaces is increasingly shaped by pragmatic considerations, often favouring English over the mother tongue. This shift has implications for intergenerational language transmission, fluency, and the long-term vitality of Nyishi.

The present study seeks to examine the impact of foreign languages, particularly English, on the Nyishi language in Palin by analysing everyday language practices and community perceptions. By focusing on local experiences and attitudes, the study aims to understand how linguistic change unfolds at the grassroots level. The research contributes to broader discussions on language shift and indigenous language preservation by highlighting the need for balanced multilingual strategies that accommodate modern education while safeguarding cultural and linguistic heritage.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire survey administered to 100 respondents, including local community members, elders, and leaders from Palin, Kra Daadi district, who have directly witnessed linguistic changes over time. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions to examine patterns of language use across various domains and open-ended questions to capture personal observations and preservation strategies. Secondary data were drawn from academic literature, government reports, policy documents, and previous studies on language shift and indigenous languages in Arunachal Pradesh. Quantitative responses were analysed using percentage-based methods and represented through graphs, while qualitative responses were thematically analysed to interpret broader socio-cultural implications.

Findings and Analysis

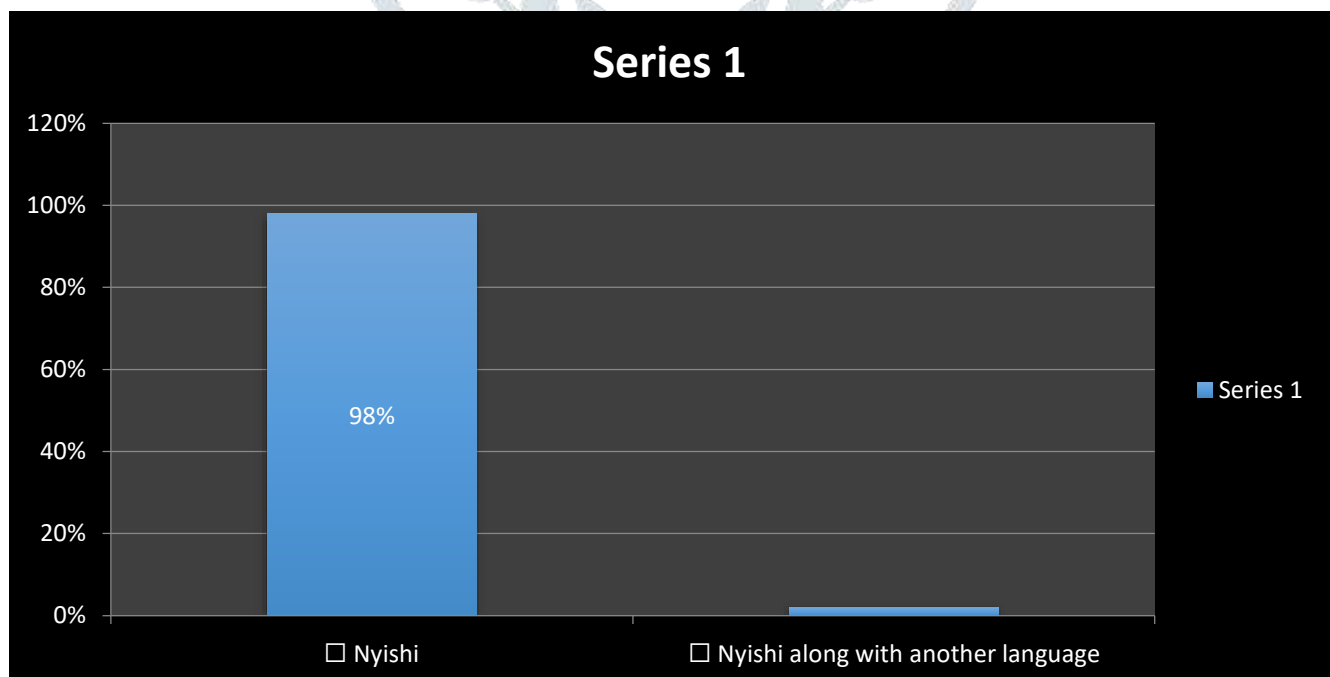**Graph 1: Mother Tongue of the Respondents**

Figure 1 Field Survey

This graph establishes the linguistic background of the respondents and provides the foundational context for the study. The dominance of Nyishi as the mother tongue among respondents confirms that the survey largely represents indigenous speakers who are directly affected by ongoing linguistic changes. The presence of respondents reporting Nyishi along with another language reflects the growing bilingual environment in Palin. This bilingualism is not merely a result of migration or external influence but is largely shaped by education, media exposure, and institutional interaction. While bilingual ability can be seen as an asset, it also marks the early stage of language contact where functional boundaries between languages begin to blur. This graph thus sets the stage for understanding how English enters the linguistic lives of Nyishi speakers and gradually influences language practices across different social domains.

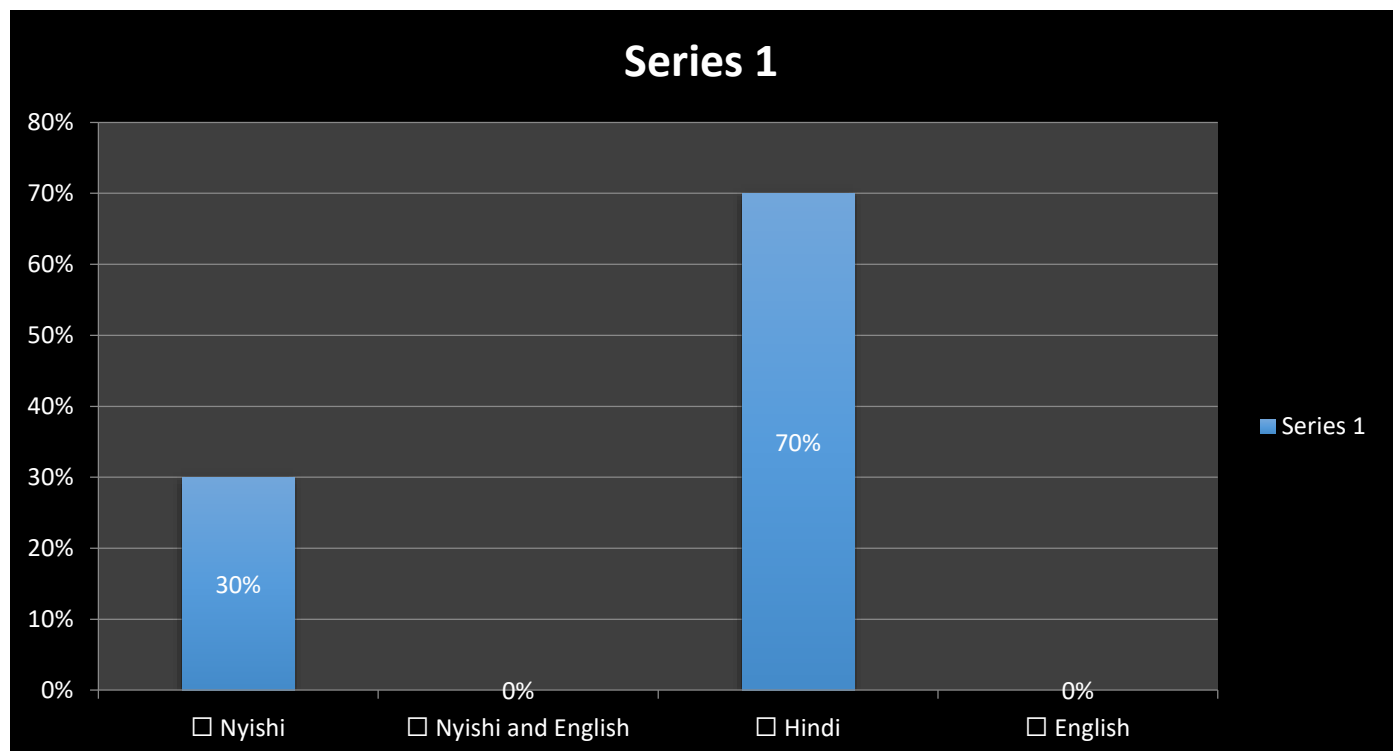**Graph 2: Language Mainly Used at Home**

Figure 2 Field Survey

Language use within the home is crucial for the survival of any indigenous language, as it ensures natural and continuous transmission across generations. This graph indicates that although Nyishi continues to be used at home, its exclusive dominance is gradually declining. The increasing presence of English and mixed language use within domestic spaces reflects changing parental attitudes toward language and education. Many parents consciously introduce English at home to help children perform better in school. While this strategy is driven by practical concerns, it reduces children's exposure to Nyishi during early childhood. As a result, Nyishi increasingly shares space with English even in traditionally secure domains, signalling a weakening of intergenerational language transmission.

Graph 3: Language Used in School/College or Workplace

Series 1

- English: 15%
- Nyishi: 7%
- Hindi: 78%
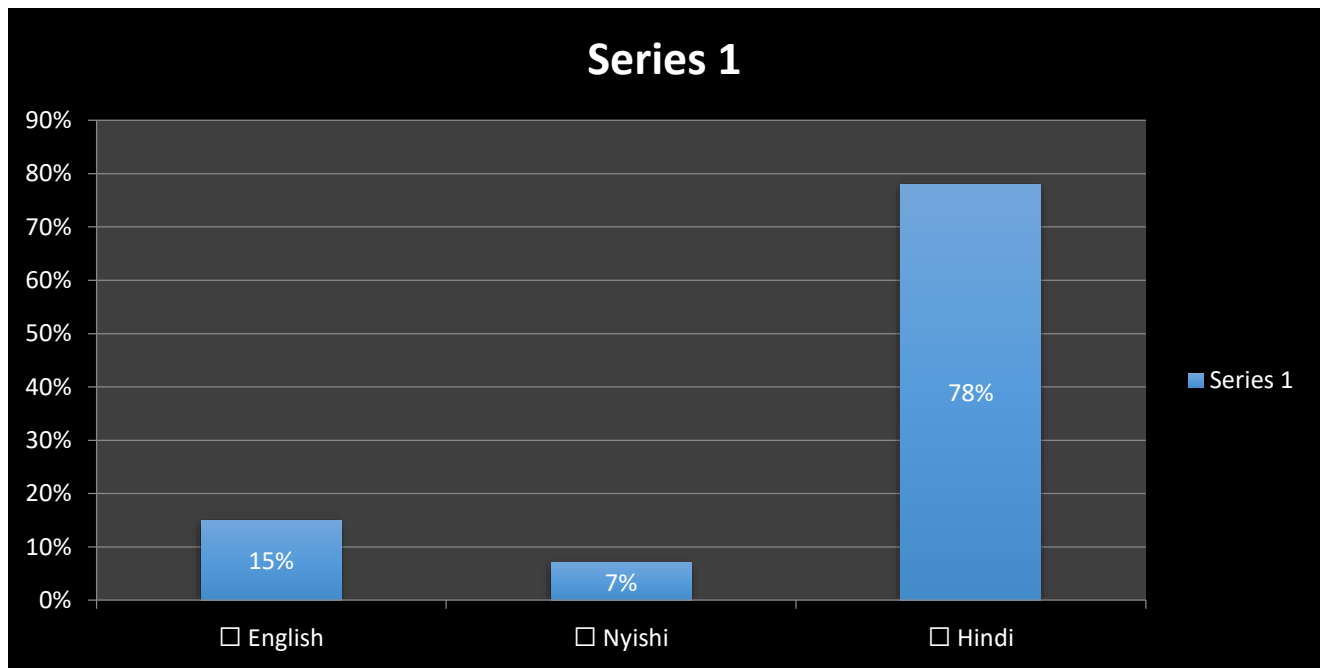
Figure 3 Field Survey

This graph highlights the strong institutional dominance of English in educational and professional settings. Schools, colleges, and workplaces in Palin largely operate in English, reinforcing its position as the language of authority and knowledge. Continuous exposure to English in these environments shapes linguistic habits and influences attitudes toward other languages. Nyishi remains largely absent from these domains, limiting its functional range. This imbalance contributes to a hierarchy of languages where English is perceived as essential for success, while Nyishi is seen as less relevant in formal contexts. The graph illustrates how institutional structures act as powerful agents in accelerating language shift.

Graph 4: Language Used with Friends of the Same Age Group

Series 1

- Nyishi: 25%
- English: 0%
- Hindi: 75%
- Mixed (Nyishi + English/Hindi): 0%
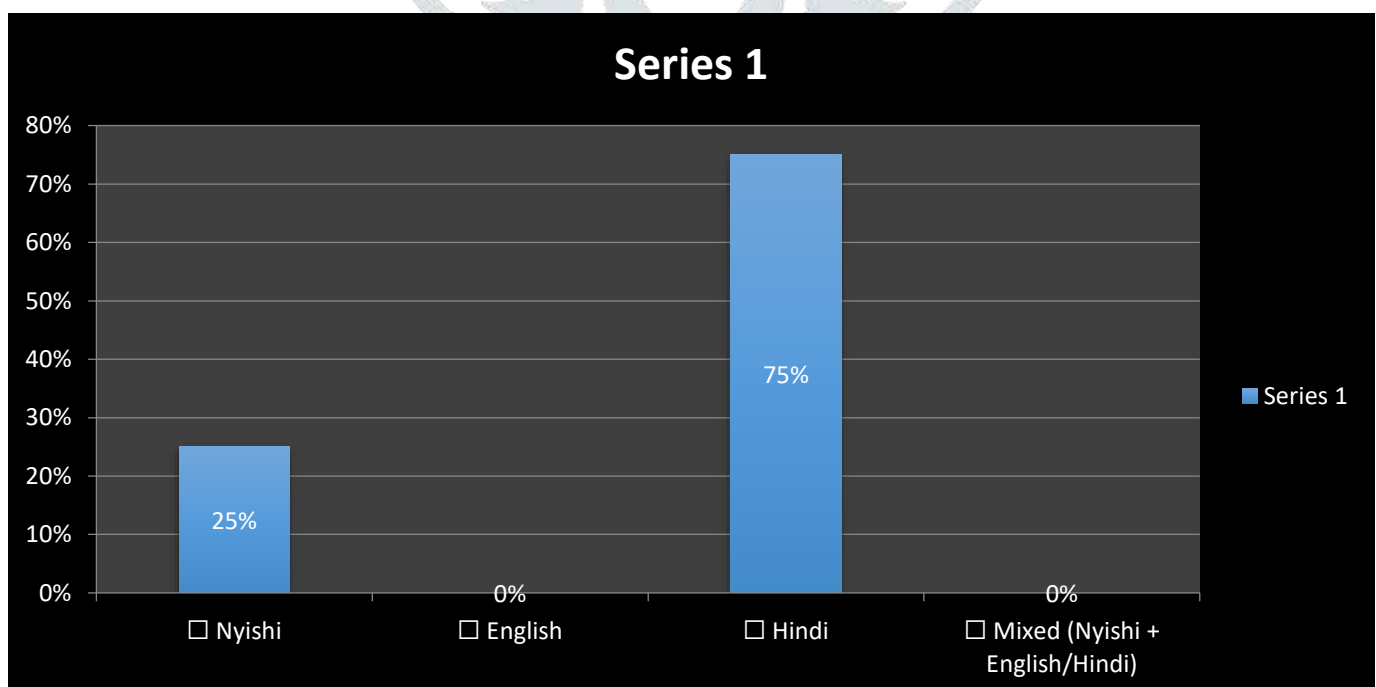
Figure 4 Field survey

Peer interaction plays a significant role in shaping language behaviour, particularly among youth. This graph shows a growing preference for English and mixed language use in conversations among friends of the same age group. The use of English in peer settings reflects its association with modern identity, confidence, and social mobility. When Nyishi is less frequently used in informal peer communication, it loses its relevance among younger speakers. This shift is particularly concerning, as languages that are not used socially often fail to sustain long-term vitality. The graph reveals how language shift is reinforced through everyday social interaction rather than imposed through formal policy.

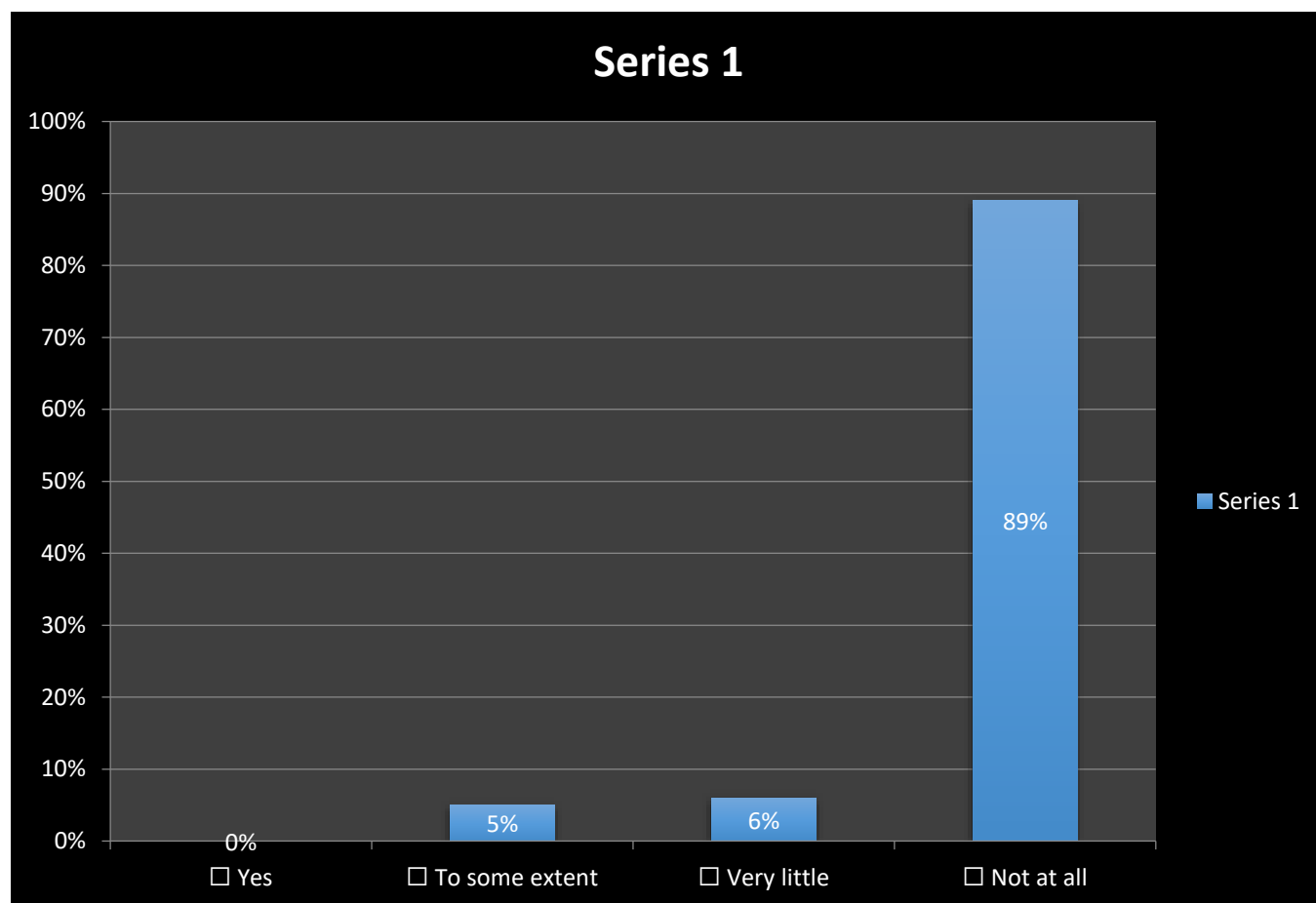**Graph 5: Fluency of Children in Speaking Nyishi**

Figure 5 Field survey

This graph provides insight into the linguistic competence of the younger generation and highlights the future prospects of the Nyishi language. The data suggests varying levels of fluency, with many children speaking Nyishi only partially or with limited confidence. Reduced fluency can be directly linked to decreased exposure and practice in both home and social environments. Children who primarily use English in schools and peer interactions often lack opportunities to develop strong Nyishi language skills. This pattern indicates a growing generational gap in linguistic proficiency and raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of Nyishi as a fully functional language.
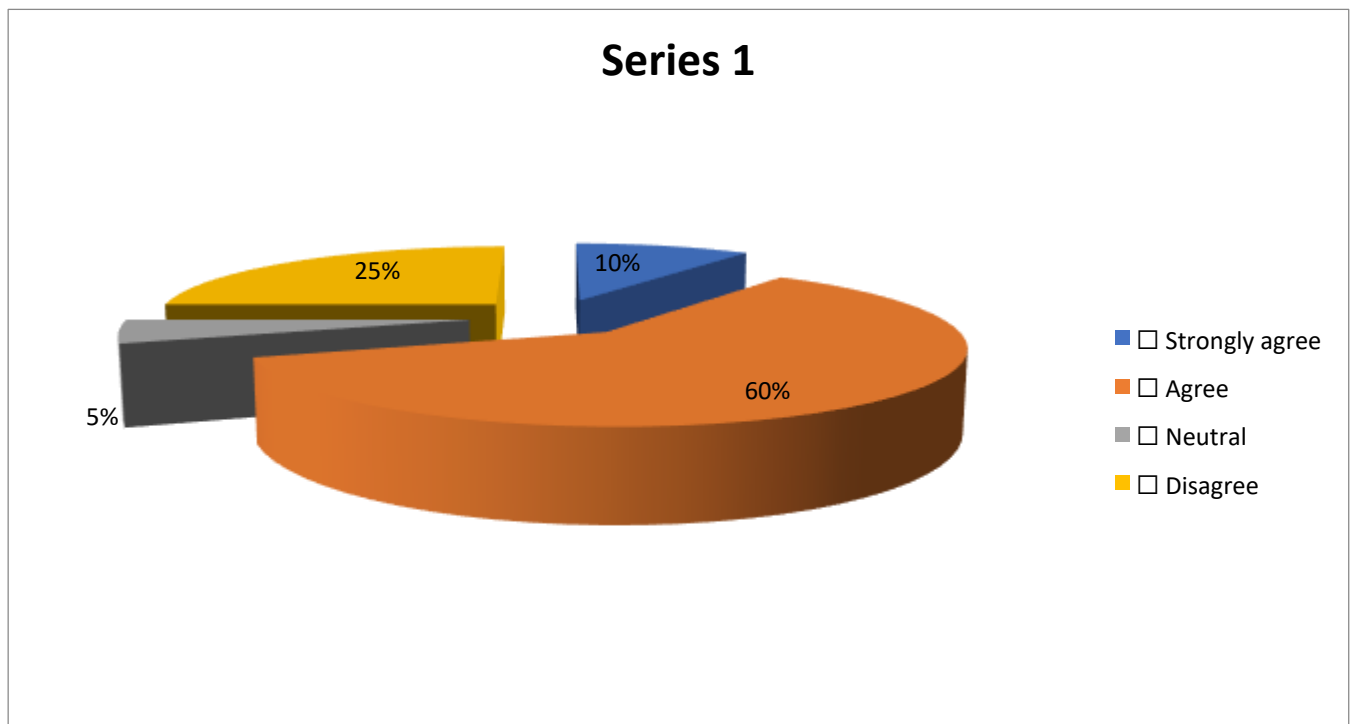
Graph 6: Increase in the Use of English Over the Last Decade

Series 1

- 10%
- 60%
- 5%
- 25%

Legend:
- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree

Figure 6 Field survey

This graph reflects respondents' collective perception of the expanding presence of English in daily life over the past decade. The widespread agreement on increased English usage highlights the rapid pace of linguistic change in Palin. Factors such as expanded education, increased access to digital media, and greater interaction with administrative institutions have contributed to this trend. The growing dominance of English is not limited to formal domains but extends into social and domestic spaces. This graph reinforces the idea that language shift is a continuous and evolving process shaped by broader socio-economic transformations.
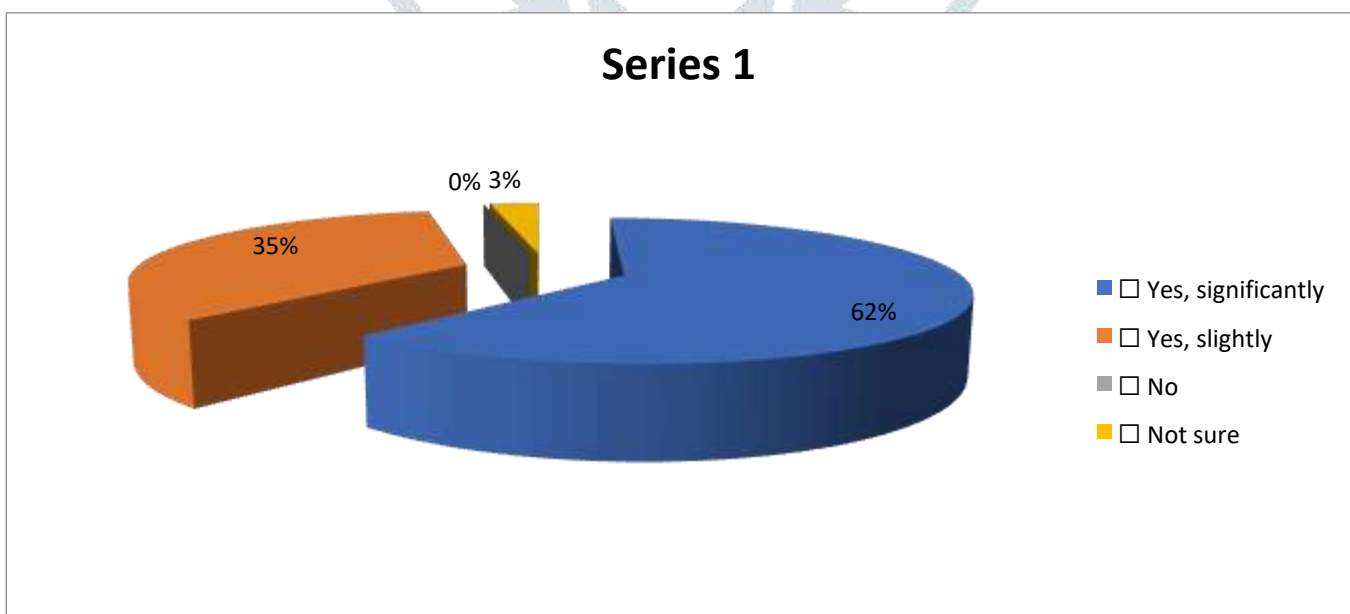
Graph 7: Reduction in Everyday Use of Nyishi Due to English

Series 1

- 0% 3%
- 35%
- 62%

Legend:
- ☐ Yes, significantly
- ☐ Yes, slightly
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Figure 7 Field survey

This graph directly links the rise of English with the declining everyday use of Nyishi. Respondents largely acknowledge that increased English usage has reduced opportunities to use Nyishi in daily communication. This perception indicates strong community awareness of language shift rather than passive or unnoticed

change. Despite recognising the decline, many speakers continue to prioritise English for practical reasons, illustrating the complex tension between cultural attachment and socio-economic aspiration. The graph highlights how language shift often occurs gradually through everyday choices rather than explicit rejection of the mother tongue..

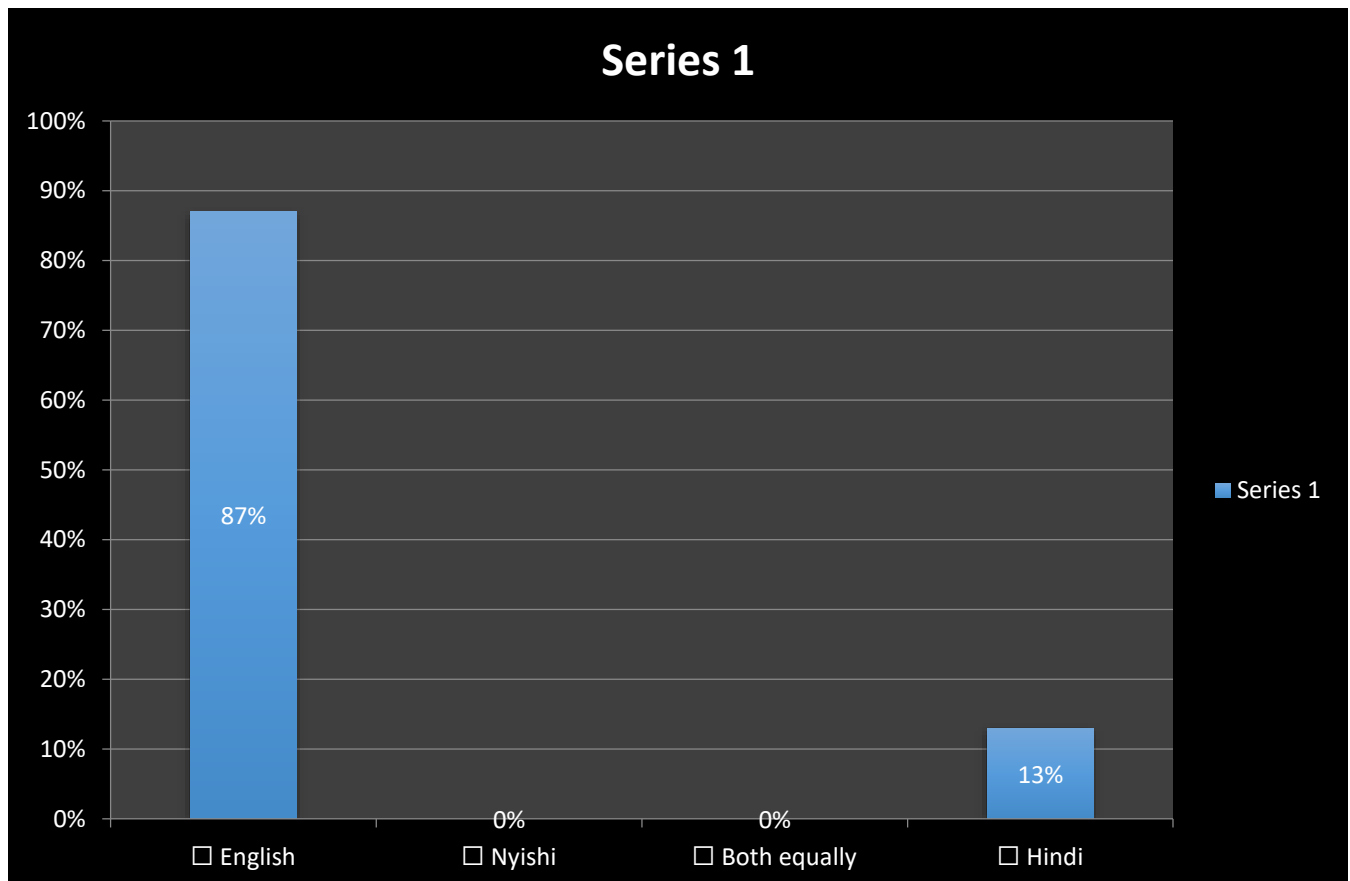**Graph 8: Language Parents Encourage for Children's Success**

Series 1

This graph sheds light on parental attitudes toward language and future opportunities. A strong preference for encouraging English reflects the belief that English proficiency is essential for educational achievement and employment. While this attitude is shaped by structural realities, it often results in reduced emphasis on Nyishi within the household. Parents' language choices play a crucial role in shaping children's linguistic identities and competencies. The graph illustrates how aspirations for social mobility can unintentionally contribute to the weakening of indigenous languages.

Graph 9: Pride in Using Nyishi in Public Spaces

Series 1

- 7% (Always)
- 7% (Sometimes)
- 78%
- 8%

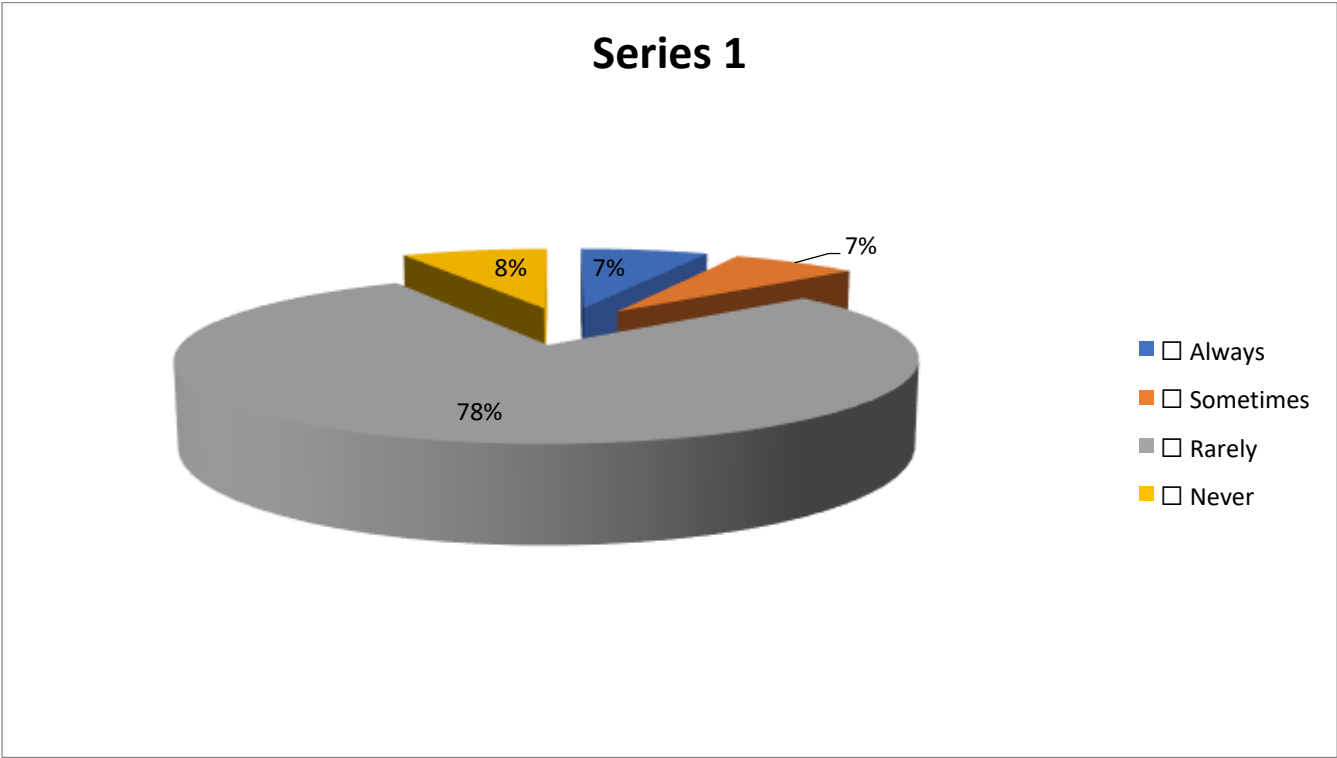Legend:
- ☐ Always
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Figure 9 Field survey

This graph examines emotional and attitudinal dimensions of language use. Feelings of pride or hesitation in using Nyishi in public reflect the perceived social status of the language. Reduced confidence in public usage suggests the internalisation of linguistic hierarchies, where English is viewed as more appropriate for public interaction. Such attitudes discourage visible use of Nyishi and further restrict its functional domains. The graph highlights the psychological aspect of language shift, where language decline is reinforced by changing perceptions of prestige and acceptability.

Graph 10: Observed Changes in Nyishi Due to English Influence

Data	Percentage
☐ **Reduced everyday use of Nyishi, especially among children and youth**	21%
☐ **Limited use of Nyishi in public and formal spaces**	11%
☐ **Declining fluency and confidence in speaking Nyishi**	20%
☐ **Preference for English in education and peer communication**	23%
☐ **Increased mixing of English words with Nyishi in daily speech**	25%

Figure 10 Field Survey

This graph captures the cumulative linguistic changes observed by respondents as a result of sustained contact between Nyishi and English. The data reflects multiple overlapping processes, including increased code-mixing, reduced everyday use, declining fluency, and a growing preference for English in both educational and social contexts. These changes indicate that the Nyishi language is undergoing a gradual but systematic transformation rather than sudden displacement. Code-mixing, in particular, emerges as a dominant feature of contemporary Nyishi speech, especially among younger speakers. While such mixing may initially appear as a natural outcome of bilingual competence, its increasing frequency suggests reliance on English lexical items to express modern concepts, administrative terms, and academic ideas. Beyond vocabulary changes, the graph also points toward deeper structural and functional shifts. Reduced fluency and hesitation in speaking Nyishi indicate diminishing linguistic confidence, which often leads speakers to default to English even when Nyishi would otherwise be appropriate. This phenomenon reflects the internalisation of linguistic hierarchies, where English is perceived as more precise, prestigious, or socially acceptable. Furthermore, the declining use of Nyishi in public and formal domains limits opportunities for the language to evolve and adapt to contemporary communicative needs. Collectively, these observed changes highlight a critical stage in the language shift process, where Nyishi remains present but increasingly constrained in scope and function, raising concerns about its long-term vitality if current trends persist.

Graph 11: Suggested Measures for Preserving the Nyishi Language

Data	Percentage
☐ **Encourage speaking Nyishi at home**	47%
☐ **Use Nyishi in local media and digital platforms**	9%
☐ **Promote Nyishi in cultural and community events**	13%
☐ **Teach Nyishi alongside English in schools**	31%

Figure 11 Field Survey

This graph presents respondents' perspectives on strategies for preserving the Nyishi language, offering insight into community-driven solutions to linguistic decline. The strong emphasis on encouraging the use of Nyishi at home reflects widespread recognition that language preservation begins within the family. Regular use of Nyishi in domestic interactions ensures early exposure, natural acquisition, and emotional attachment to the language, all of which are essential for sustaining intergenerational transmission. Respondents view the home as a culturally secure space where Nyishi can be used without social pressure or institutional constraints. Equally significant is the support for teaching Nyishi alongside English in schools, which indicates a preference for balanced bilingual education rather than resistance to English. Such an approach allows learners to acquire functional competence in English while maintaining fluency and literacy in their mother tongue. The inclusion of Nyishi in educational settings would also enhance its prestige and legitimacy, countering perceptions of inferiority. Suggestions related to cultural events and digital platforms further demonstrate adaptability to contemporary modes of communication. Using Nyishi in festivals, storytelling, social media, and local media can increase its visibility and relevance among youth. Together, these proposed measures reflect a pragmatic and culturally grounded vision of language preservation that seeks coexistence with English rather than linguistic isolation.

Discussion

The findings of the study reveal a clear pattern of language shift among the Nyishi-speaking community of Palin, Kra Daadi district, driven primarily by the expanding influence of English across multiple social domains. English has emerged as the dominant language in education, institutional settings, and increasingly in peer communication, shaping both linguistic practices and attitudes. The reduced everyday use of Nyishi in domestic and social spaces has weakened intergenerational transmission, resulting in declining fluency and confidence among younger speakers. The prevalence of code-mixing further reflects an unequal language contact situation where Nyishi increasingly depends on English for expressing modern and formal concepts. The study also highlights the role of parental aspirations and institutional structures in accelerating language shift. Parents' preference for English as a means to ensure educational and economic success has unintentionally limited children's exposure to Nyishi. At the same time, the marginal use of Nyishi in public and formal domains reinforces its lower prestige, discouraging speakers from using it openly. However, the findings also demonstrate strong community awareness of linguistic decline. Respondents recognise the cultural value of Nyishi and express concern over its reduced usage, indicating that language shift is occurring alongside consciousness of loss rather than through indifference. This duality underscores the complexity of linguistic change in indigenous contexts, where cultural attachment coexists with pragmatic adaptation. Overall, the findings suggest that the future of Nyishi depends on addressing domain-specific imbalances and strengthening spaces where the language can function meaningfully.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the increasing influence of foreign languages, particularly English, has significantly reshaped the linguistic landscape of the Nyishi community in Palin, Kra Daadi district. English has become central to education, employment, and public life, contributing to reduced everyday use of Nyishi, declining fluency among younger generations, and increased code-mixing. While English plays a crucial role in providing access to modern opportunities, its dominance has restricted the functional domains of Nyishi, pushing it largely into informal and cultural spaces. At the same time, the research reveals a strong sense of linguistic awareness and responsibility within the community. Respondents recognise the importance of preserving the Nyishi language and emphasise the role of families, bilingual education, and cultural practices in sustaining linguistic heritage. These findings indicate that language decline is not inevitable but can be addressed through conscious and collective efforts. The study highlights the need for a balanced multilingual approach that integrates English without marginalising indigenous languages. Encouraging Nyishi use at home, incorporating it into educational settings, and enhancing its visibility in public and digital spaces can strengthen its vitality. Ultimately, preserving the Nyishi language is not only a matter of linguistic survival but also of safeguarding cultural identity, indigenous knowledge, and community cohesion in an era of rapid social change.

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(Useful for indigenous language loss and preservation frameworks applicable to Arunachal Pradesh)