

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE LANGUAGE USAGE IN KHATRA, IN CONNECTION WITH THE COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY (CAT)

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1 Introduction:

“A social network may be seen as a boundless web of ties which reaches out through a whole society, linking people to one another, however remotely” (Milroy 1989). Every speech community consists of a number of social networks, where the individuals of the community are connected to each other in some or the other way, and many a time in multiple ways. “The theory of social network begins with the principle of anchorage, which is a perspective that views an individual being engaged in different social relationships with the various institutions of a speech community”(Hughson T. Ong 2015). Here, the individual, known as Ego, is the anchor of the network. It acts as a mechanism:

- i. for exchanging goods and services
- ii. for imposing obligations
- iii. for conferring corresponding rights to its members

The paper aims to focus on the social networks existing among the people of a village in the Khatra region of Bankura district, West Bengal. A variety of Bangla is the local language of the region. There is also the presence of a tribal population in the area. 10% of the population in the district speaks Santhali. A very rigid caste system is also prevalent in the area, thus making the social networks dense and complex. Therefore, the paper aims to focus on:

- i. the kinds of social networks present in the area
- ii. the impact of the social networks on the languages of the people
- iii. the communicative behaviour of one speech community towards the others: convergence, divergence or maintenance.

There are five villages in Khatra, namely, Dahala, Dhanara, Gorabari, Supur, Baidyanathpur. For this paper, the data has been collected from Baidyanathpur, which has a population of 1706 people.

2 Methodology

- i. Initially, in an informal interview, 5 people belonging to different age groups (both male and female) were asked about the kinds of groups they belong to. Later, it was verified.
- ii. Personal interviews seeking demographic information were taken from informants.
- iii. Two focus group discussions were arranged:

- a) In the first group 2 people (one male and one female) from each of the castes existing in the village were included. A total of 12 people who were Brahmins, Santhals, Bauri, Bagdi, Mudi and Sardar were gathered together for a discussion on the topic 'the problems in farming that they used to face earlier and those that they face now'.
 - b) In the second group 7 elderly women (aged 60 and above) were brought together to share their experiences on marriages of their times and what are the various pancakes /pit^ha/ they make and how.
- iv. Participant observation method was also followed. It was tried to mingle with them in their groups during their conversation, with the recorder on.

4. Various social networks of people found in the area:

- i. Women in this area are involved in various handiworks like making mats with palm leaves or date palm leaves, making puffed rice, hand-fans and other materials made of rattan. They sit together in groups and make them, both for selling and for their own usage. (Age 25-50)
- ii. Women form groups in any house of the neighbourhood and indulge in conversations in their leisure hours. (Age 25-80)
- iii. Women are also involved in self-help groups. (Age 25-50)
- iv. Young boys and girls go to schools (cycling) in groups.

The above-mentioned social networks formed by women are multiplex because in these networks women are connected to each other in different ways. The women in each of the groups are neighbours, kins (because most of the people residing in a neighbourhood are relatives). The young boys and girls going to school together are neighbours, kins and school friends. These networks are dense as well because all the members in the groups know each other through many different ways.

Most men, who are educated, work outside the village or in schools, banks, or as private tutors etc. within the village.

Men belonging to the lower castes go to work in groups for fishing, cutting woods, ploughing in others' fields.

Some of the men (very less in number) gather together to play cards in the afternoons or evenings. They are mostly the unemployed (25-50 average) or aged (above sixty) people.

Men who go to work outside could not give time for the interview. An informal recording of the conversation of the men, who engage in playing cards, was taken. These groups were also both dense and multiplex.

4. The impact of the social networks on the languages of the people:

- i. In the first group discussion where people from various castes participated, everyone used the variety of Bangla which is mostly used in the region. The lower caste groups like Sardar, Bagdi etc. were found to use certain words and/or phrases

of the Bankura dialect during the discussion, which they do not use in their own groups (i.e with members belonging to their own castes) like:

During the discussion	Generally used	Meaning
/balti/	/ʈol/	'bucket'
/pic ^h ɔn/	/pec ^h u/	'behind'
/burɪ ^h te larici/	/malum fiɔɛ nai/	'could not understand'
/sɔman/	/sapʈa/	'plain'
/murqi/	/kukɾua/	'hen'

etc.

This shows that they converge with the upper caste people during conversations and the upper caste people maintain their own language. They neither converge nor diverge.

- ii. In the case of the second group discussion, the elderly women used certain terms among themselves which they do not use with others, and the youngsters do not even understand such terms. Following are the examples:

Used during discussion	Generally Used	Meaning
/ponlati/	/latir c ^h ilia/	'grandson's son'
/pac ^h uɾwa/	/kula/	'an object made of rattan used for removing husk from rice'
/mofur/ , /madli/	/har/	'necklace'
/bolpas makɾi/	/kanɛr dul/	'ear ring'
/mat ^h a banda/	/cul band ^h a/	'to tie hair'

Therefore, the elderly women converged while talking with the younger members of the groups, so that they could be understood by the others.

- iii. In case of the women's groups, the same happened as the first group (FGD), i.e, the women of the lower castes converged with the upper caste women, but the Santhali women used some Santhali terms during their conversations in the groups. The examples are as follows:

Bankura Variant of Bangla	Santhali	Meaning
/talai/	pəʈiə/	'mat made of palm leaves'
/pata/	/pala/	'leaf'
/ɟ ^h uɾi/	/dɔli/	'basket'
/kula/	/ɦaʈa/	'an object made of rattan used for removing husk from rice'
/d̪im/	/bili/	'egg'
/d ^h an/	/ʈonoʔ/	'rice'
/suknɔ/	/ɾɔɦɔɾ/	'dry'

The Santhali women also used Santhali within the group with other Santhali women, when they did not want the other women (speakers of Bankura variety of Bangla) to understand what they said. In such cases, they showed divergence since they wanted to hide something from the others.

- iv. Men (unemployed) were found to use certain taboo words or slangs among themselves while playing cards. But, when (in very few cases) they used such words during their conversation with the upper class men, they were found either not to be responding or cutting the conversation short and leaving. This shows that the upper class men did not want to continue the conversation and therefore showed divergence.
- v. The youngsters (boys and girls) when in school do not use certain words, which they use at home. Given below are the examples:

At home	In school	Meaning
/sid ^h iano/	/ʃigges kɔra/	'to ask'
/dɔr laga/	/b ^h ɔɛ laga/	'to be afraid'
/ʃ ^h ilpi/	/ʃilapi/	'one kind of sweet'
/pip ^h ja'	/pepe/	'papaya'

This shows that they maintain their own language at home and in neighbourhood but show convergence in school.

Conclusion:

Since, from the above data it is observed that the people of Khatra practice maintenance, convergence and divergence with respect to various social groups, therefore, it can be concluded that social networks have a good deal of impact on the language usage in Khatra.

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