

Sociolinguistic Study of Begusarai Maithili

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Abstract

This paper makes a sociolinguistic study of the language variation in Begusarai Maithili and tries to investigate its sociolinguistic base. It also attempts to establish a correlation between language variation and the cast system in Begusarai district. The collaborators are the native speakers of Begusarai Maithili which is one of the varieties of Maithili spoken in Begusarai district. The overall outcome of the study suggests the occurrence of a strong sociolinguistic relation between the language variation in Begusarai Maithili and the caste system. The research site is Begusarai district which is one of the districts of Bihar in North India.

Keywords: Language variation, Maithili, Begusarai Maithili, Angika and Begusarai district.

1. Introduction

We all experience some relationship between language and society in our daily life. One does not need to be a linguist to feel this relationship. Indian culture is highly influenced by the western world. This influence can be easily seen in Indian languages too. Both language and society go together. The branch of Linguistics that studies all the aspects of the relationship between language and society is called Sociolinguistics. It is the study of language in relation to society. It is an interdisciplinary area covering Linguistics and Sociology. It also involves Ethnology, Anthropology and other related areas. It studies the correlations between linguistic variables and social variables in scientific manner. Man is a social animal and lives in a society. He uses language in relation to his society or the society in which communication is being made. We are in the habit of putting our social, cultural and religious feelings into the language we use. A language without the social and cultural load is tasteless and communication through it is always unsatisfactory.

The sociolinguistic study of a language (or a dialect) is needed for many reasons. It investigates the relation between linguistic variables and social variables at different levels. This unique relationship is studied deeply by the sociolinguists to form different linguistic as well as sociolinguistic laws. The studies done by Labov, Gumperz, Bloom, etc. are the ideal examples of such kind of study. It involves

not only Linguistics and Sociology but Psychology, Ethnology and Anthropology. This paper attempts to take Begusarai Maithili for such kind of study.

Begusarai is one of the districts of Bihar in North India. It lies on the northern bank of the river Ganga. It is located at latitudes 25.15N & 25.45N and longitudes 85.45E & 86.36E. It was established in 1870 as a subdivision of Munger district and was given the status of a district in 1972. This district is the birthplace of the famous Hindi poet Rashtrakavi Ramdhari Singh Dinkar. The places of visit are Jai Mangla temple, Nauo Lakha temple, Kabar Lake, etc.

Maithili language belongs to Indo-Aryan language family which is known globally for its sweetness. This feature of Maithili has always attracted the world towards itself. It is spoken in India (Bihar, Jharkhand and parts of West Bengal) and Nepal (Southeastern plains called *Tarai* region). It is one of the major languages of India as it occupies its place in the VIIIth schedule of the Indian constitution. The addition of Maithili in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution has given it a special look. The Standard Maithili is spoken in Madhubani and Darbhanga districts of Bihar (India) and parts of Nepal. It is mostly written in Devanagri script. The most famous literary figure of this language was the poet Vidyapati.

This paper is significant from many angles. It has not only high linguistic value but sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic values too. There are many languages / dialects (Angika, Bazika, Khari Boli, Magahi, Bhojpuri) spoken in and around Begusarai district which have deep socio-cultural background. Such a multilingual setting provides a wide scope for the sociolinguistic study of this area. This study in some aspects follows William Labov's work (2006): *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*.

The review of related literatures suggests that the sociolinguistic study of this particular dialect has not been done seriously in the past. The works done by Grierson (1903 / 1968): *Linguistic Survey of India*, and Singh (1976): *Begusarai ki Boli: Bhasa Shastriya Adhyan* provide good understanding of this dialect but needs additions in number of ways. This study attempts to investigate the variations in Begusarai Maithili and its sociolinguistic base. It also tries to explore the existence of different dialects within Begusarai district and its sociolinguistic relation with Begusarai Maithili. This study will further improve the consciousness of the speakers of this speech community towards their mother tongue. Being a native speaker of this dialect, it gives the author great pleasure to work on it.

2. Significance of This Study

- 1) This study is significant as the sociolinguistic study of this particular dialect (Begusarai Maithili) has not been done in past in a systematic manner.
- 2) The caste system is psychologically deeply rooted in this area which is given more importance than religion. It seems to be one of the major causes of variation in Begusarai Maithili.
- 3) There are many dialects / languages (Angika, Bazika, Khari Boli, Magahi, Bhojpuri) spoken in and around the district which have deep socio-cultural and geographical background. This multilingual environment provides a wide scope for the sociolinguistic study of this area.
- 4) This study will energise the consciousness of the speakers of this area towards their language(s) as the speakers of this speech community seem generally not much conscious towards their language. Most of them don't know the name of the language / dialect they speak!

3. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To investigate the linguistic variations in Begusarai Maithili and its sociolinguistic base.
- 2) To explore the use / existence of different dialects within Begusarai district and its sociolinguistic relation with the caste system of this region.
- 3) To study the influence of the other dialects / languages spoken in and around Begusarai district (Angika, Bazika, Khari Boli, Magahi, Bhojpuri) on Begusarai Maithili.

4. The Begusarai District

Begusarai is one of the thirty eight districts of Bihar in North India which lies on the northern bank of river Ganga. It is at the distance of 126 KM from the state capital Patna (Bihar). It is located at latitudes 25.15N & 25.45N and longitudes 85.45E & 86.36E. It was established in 1870 as a subdivision of Munger district and it was given the status of a district in 1972. It is the birthplace of the famous Hindi poet Rashtrakavi Ramdhari Singh Dinkar. It is one of the industrial towns of India having Indian Oil Corporation (IOC, Barauni), Sudha Dairy, Thermal Power Station etc. The places of visit are Jai Mangla temple, Nauo Lakha temple, Kabar Lake, etc. The majority populations are the Hindus and the Muslims but people of most of the major religions and cultures live here. People of more than 32 castes live here which can be broadly divided in to Upper Caste and Lower Caste which are called 'Forward'

and ‘Backward’ respectively in local terms. Some of these castes are *Brahman, Bhumihaar, Yadav, Maali, Teli, Mushar, Kanu, Paswan, Lohaar, Dome* etc. The languages spoken are Hindi, Angika, Maithili and Urdu.

Language / Dialect	District / Area
Maithili	Madhubani, Darbhanga, Saharsa and Tarai of Nepal
Angika	Bhagalpur, Khagaria and Samastipur
Bajjika	Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Samastipur, Hanjipur, Shivhar and Sitamarhi
Maghi	Patna, Luckhisarai and Sheikhpura
Khar Boli (Hindi)	For Formal Purpose: The Official Language of the Govt. of Bihar and also the Govt. of India

Table 1: Language / Dialect Spoken in and around the Begusarai District (Bihar)

The boundaries of Begusarai district are: East - Khagaria and Munger districts of Bihar, West - Patna district of Bihar, North - Samastipur and Saharsa districts of Bihar and in South - Shekhpura and Luckeesarai districts of Bihar.



Figure 1: The Research Site - Begusarai District (Bihar) India (Source: www.mapsofindia.com)



Figure 2: Nauo Lakha Temple, Begusarai (Bihar) India (Source: Internet)

5. Maithili: Mithila, Maithili and Mithilakshar

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‘Mithila’ was an independent state in ancient India which has high importance in Hindu mythology as it is the birth place of the Goddess Sita (wife of God Ram). It is the name of that part of Bihar which is located at the north of Ganga and lies to the east of Bhojpur district of Bihar.

‘Maithili’ is derived from the word ‘Mithila’. This name was given by Colebrook (a British scholar) to this language. ‘Maithili’ is also one of the names of the Goddess Sita. It is spoken by the 21 million peoples, covering the area of 28,000 square kilometres of North Bihar and the parts of Nepal. It is spoken in Madhubani, Darbhanga, Bhagalpur, Purnea, Munger, Begusarai and Samistipur districts of Bihar (India) and *tarai* of Nepal. The Standard Maithili is spoken in Madhubani and Darbhanga districts of North Bihar. The period of Maithili is divided as Old Maithili (AD 1000 - AD 1300), Middle Maithili (AD1300 - AD 1800) and Modern Maithili (AD 1800 onwards).

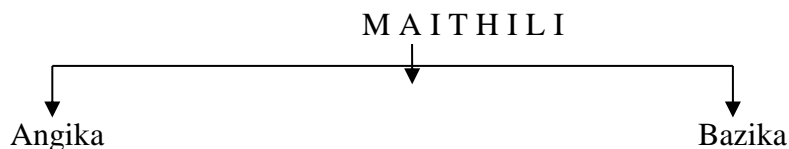
6. Linguistic Boundaries of Maithili

- East - Bengali
- West - Bhojpuri
- North - Nepali
- South - Magahi



Figure 3: Begusarai District and the other Districts of Bihar, India (Source: www.mapsofindia.com)

Grierson (1903, 1968) has specified six dialects of Maithili in Linguistic Survey of India as Standard Maithili, Southern Standard Maithili, Western Maithili, Eastern Maithili, Chikachiki and Jolha Boli. But today, the two major dialects of Maithili which are spoken at wide level are Angika and Bazika. In Samistipur district of Bihar, both the dialects are spoken. Maithili is now one of the major languages of India. It has its place in the VIIIth schedule of the Indian constitution.



Maithili was traditionally written in Tirhuta (Mithilakshar) and Kaithi script but these scripts are now no longer in use. It is now written in Devanagri script.

7. Begusarai Maithili

Begusarai Maithili is the variety of Maithili which is spoken in Begusarai district. It is one of the most popular dialects of Bihar which is spoken in this district and also in the neighbouring areas but it is understood not only in Bihar but also in East UP, some parts of West Bengal and even in Nepal. It is unique in itself due to many reasons.

The native speakers report that this variety of Maithili has linguistic features of not only Maithili but Khari Boli, Angika, Magahi and even Nepali. It's this feature makes it much interesting for not only the linguistic study but sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and studies in the other related areas. Grierson (1903, 1968): 'Linguistic Survey of India' and Singh (1976): 'Begusarai ki Boli: Bhasa Shastriya Adhyan' have done significant work on this dialect. These works provide well experience to the researchers for the further study in this area.

- 1) Dr. G. A. Grierson (1903, 1968): Linguistic Survey of India (Volume - 5, Part - 2)
- 2) Dr. Abdesch Kumar Singh (1976): Begusarai ki Boli: Bhasa Shastriya Adhyan

Grierson (1903, 1968) has used 'Bihari Language' as a cover term for all the dialects spoken in Munger district of Bihar. This includes Southern Standard Maithili, Chikachiki and Magahi. He has divided this district into three parts as Northern Munger, Southern Munger and the rest portion of the district on the basis of the dialects spoken in these areas. He classified the language of Begusarai as 'Southern Standard Maithili' which was the part of North Munger. He classified the language of Jamui

as 'Chikachiki' which was the part of Southern Munger. He classified the rest portion of the district as Magahi speaker. Singh (1976) has also done the comprehensive work on the variety of Maithili spoken in Begusarai dialect. He has made the linguistic study of this dialect during his Ph.D. research work. He has explained all about his research work in his book 'Begusarai ki Boli: Bhasa Shastriya Adhyan' (1976). The author has called this dialect as '*Begusarai ki Boli*' in this book. Singh (1976) has differentiated this dialect with Standard Maithili, Angika, Khari Boli and Magahi at different linguistic levels.

Begusarai Maithili is spoken as the mother tongue (L1) at wide level by its native speakers but people generally shift to Hindi (Khari Boli) while writing. This is not true with Standard Maithili which is written at wide level in Devanagri script. This is one of the differences between Standard Maithili and Begusarai Maithili. There is very few literature in Begusarai Maithili but Standard Maithili is rich in literary work.

8. Singh (1976): Linguistic Features of Begusarai Maithili

- The number of Vowels in Begusarai Maithili - 17
- The number of Monothongs in Begusarai Maithili - 15
- The number of Diphthongs in Begusarai Maithili - 02
- The number of Consonants in Begusarai Maithili - 30

Variation at the level of the caste system is one of the important characteristics of this dialect. It can be noticed if we compare the dialects spoken by the people of different castes, especially between the upper castes and the lower castes. This socio-cultural connection provides an ideal platform for the sociolinguistic study of this dialect. The caste system is psychologically deeply rooted in this area. It is given more importance than religion. People are more concerned of one's caste than religion. Thus the cause of variation can be examined and analysed by studying the caste system of this area. Both are strongly related to each other. Such relation has much significance in the sociolinguistic research. The relationship between socio-cultural variation and language variation looks strong and unique in this area.

9. Methodology

The hypothesis of the study: The caste system is one of the prominent factors for language variation in Begusarai Maithili.

Out of the different sociolinguistic methodologies, the researcher adopted the method used by Blom & Gumperz (1972) and Milroy & Gal for the data collection. They chosen to live and mix with the community to which the data is to be collected. Being a native speaker of Begusarai Maithili, it was easy for the researcher to mix with this speech community which enabled the collection of natural and spontaneous data.

Data collection was done through the ‘participant observation’ *ie*, simply being present while the interaction is taking place in the community. As the researcher was able to mix with the Begusarai Maithili speech community, this gave the freedom to observe and record both formal as well as spontaneous data. Being a member of this speech community, it would not need to spend too much time in getting to know the cultural background of the participants. Thus, knowing the language and culture of the speech community to which data is to be collected has much advantage.

10. Literature Review

1. William Labov (2006): *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*

Labov’s hypothesis: The pronunciation of /r/ by the New York City speakers varies according to the social class that they belong to.

Labov (2006) went to the three New York City department stores which were distinguished according to the social class groups. He asked the shop assistants working in these stores, the location of the departments that he knew to be located on the fourth floor eliciting the use of /r/ which he required. He was fully aware that the interview method would elicit ‘careful speech’. So he developed the technique to elicit casual or spontaneous speech. He did this by paying attention to those interactions that occurred outside the interview, such as greetings, interruptions and if a third person was spoken to. He also believed that introducing certain emotional topics would elicit spontaneous speech, such as childhood events or hypothetically dangerous situations.

2. Dr. G. A. Grierson (1903, 1968): *Linguistic Survey of India* (Volume - 5, Part - 2)

Dr. George A. Grierson was a British officer in India during the British rule who took much interest in Indian languages. His survey was based on 1891 census of India. He listed 179 languages and 544 dialects in his classical work ‘Linguistic Survey of India’ (1903, 1968). He paid special attention on Maithili language in his survey. He was so close to Madhubani (a district in North Bihar) that a market is still called ‘Grierson Bazaar’ in Madhubani. He specified six dialects of Maithili which are as follows:

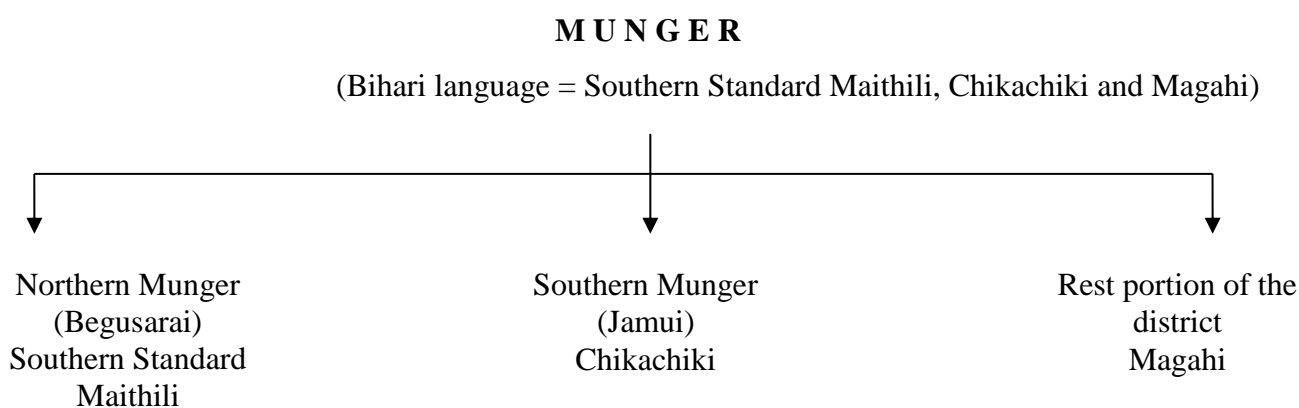
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Standard Maithili, Southern Standard Maithili, Western Maithili, Eastern Maithili, Chikachiki and Jolha Boli.

Grierson used 'Bihari Language' as a cover term for all the dialects spoken in Munger district (a district in Bihar). This includes Southern Standard Maithili, Chikachiki and Magahi. He divided the district into three parts as Northern Munger, Southern Munger and the rest portion of the district on the basis of the dialects spoken in these areas. He classified the language spoken in Begusarai as Southern Standard Maithili which was the part of North Munger. He classified the language of Jamui (a district in Bihar) as Chikachiki which was the part of Southern Munger. He classified the rest portion of the district as Magahi speaker.



3. Dr. Abdes K Kumar Singh (1976): *Begusarai ki Boli: Bhasa Shastriya Adhyan*

Singh (1976) has done comprehensive work on the dialect spoken in Begusarai district. He has made the linguistic study of this dialect as a part of his Ph.D. research work and explained all about his research in his book 'Begusarai ki Boli: Bhasa Shastriya Adhyan' (1976). He has called this particular dialect as '*Begusarai ki Boli*' in this book.

The methodology adopted by Singh (1976) for the data collection:

He prepared a list of the basic sentences used in day to day communication and translated these basic sentences into local dialects after visiting the different areas of the district. This translation was done on the basis of the variety of language spoken by the local people (native speakers) of each area of the district. This collected data was further categorised area wise.

He used this collected data as the base for the linguistic analysis of this dialect. He further made the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic study of this dialect using this collected data. He has also differentiated this particular dialect with Maithili (standard form), Angika, Khari Boli and

Magahi at the different linguistic levels in a very systematic manner. This book also provides the detail introduction of Begusarai district.

11. Conclusion

Begusarai Maithili contains the linguistic features of not only Maithili but Angika, Khari Boli and even Magahi and Nepali. These linguistic features have deep geographical as well as socio-cultural background. But the most important thing that attracts the attention of the researchers specially the sociolinguists is the 'caste system' of this area. The caste system is psychologically deeply rooted in this area. It is given more importance than religion. People are more concerned of one's caste than religion. Thus the cause of variation can be analysed by studying the caste system of this area. This study is on the way of Labov's (2006) work: The social stratification of English in New York City. It supports the Labov's notion that variation is always systematic. This study shows that socio-cultural structure and social factors are strongly responsible for language variation. Such sociolinguistic environment provides an excellent opportunity for this kind of study. The findings of this study support the hypothesis that caste system is one of the prominent factors for language variation in Begusarai Maithili. Though there are other factors also which are responsible for variation in this dialect.

This study has high linguistic as well as sociolinguistic value. It follows the Labov's (2006) study and strengthens his claim. This paper also tries to clear the ambiguity among its speakers regarding the status of this dialect. But the most important thing, it will improve the consciousness of the speakers of this speech community towards their mother tongue.

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