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Language Shift among the Tribal Languages of India A Case Study in Bihar

Richa, Ph.D.

Introduction

The issues of language shift, maintenance and death have been consistently agitating the minds of linguists, sociologists, geneticists and anthropologists for the last fifty years. Linguists, along with other scientists, believe that languages are necessary for human evolution. Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (2000) consider languages as part of total ecosystem and term the diversity as 'biolinguistic diversity'.

Languages are repositories of history, languages express identity, languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge and of course, languages are interesting in themselves (David Crystal, 2000). The linguistic diversity is really a benchmark of cultural diversity. If we lose language, we lose knowledge of that language and culture.

In reality, "every language is a living museum, a monument to every culture it has been vehicle to" (Daniel Nettle & Suzanne Romaine, 2000:14). Dorian (1999) regards the loss

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of an ethnic language far less easily recoverable than other identity markers and its cultural content is never fully recoverable.

Equilibrium State of the Languages of the World

The languages of the world have been in linguistic equilibrium for years but in the last five hundred years, waves of biological and economic importance have changed the scenario to a great extent.

Moreover, the pressure has been felt most by the languages having less status in the society, either socio-economic or political. In the 20th century, a few communities have unprecedented power which costs others loss of their culture as well as loss of their language.

Along the margins of the metropolitan economies, we see the process of sucking in of the peripheral economy and its language as well as the process of pushing off. The peripheral (minority) communities have no choice; they change or lose, they change and lose. According to Daniel Nettle, language shift occurs when there is a decrease in choice brought about by the exercise of undemocratic power.

Some Languages are More at Risk

The languages at greatest risk are the minority languages. Though language shift is a universal phenomenon, we have to take several factors into account as we deal with minority languages. Rubenstein (1957:283) believes that language shifts are normally gradual and not abrupt. A high degree of shift may occur in the areas of high cultural mobility and social instability. Sometimes, there can be cultural continuity despite language shift (Dauenhauer, 1998).

Language Shift

Language shift can result out of coercion or choice. Here, the socio-economic and political factors play a major role. Shift never occurs because of an increase in choices but in a decrease of available choices. Language shift is faster in urban areas than in rural as the insularity and rigidity of rural life reduce the acceptability of change (Fishman, 1976:315). Fasold (1984) has considered societal bilingualism as a prerequisite for language shift. It is the outcome of the dynamics of language contact. The contact-induced changes can lead to linguistic homogeneity on one hand and language attrition on the other.

So, language shift, a universal phenomenon, may occur either voluntarily or it can be forced. It can be either natural or non-natural. Natural shift is a process of historical change; non-natural shift takes place as different linguistic groups interact with each other.

The Goal of This Paper

In the present paper, we shall see the language shift among tribal languages of India [A case study: Bihar (undivided)] and how does it point to language retention and potential language loss.

Tribal Languages

Concept –

There is no linguistic definition of tribal languages in India. Linguists have to take tribal languages as languages spoken by the tribals as listed in the Article 342 in the Constitution of India. So, we can say that the concept of tribe is an administrative, judicial and political one.

Jawaharlal Nehru, during the inaugural address at the Tribal Affairs Conference held on Dec.4, 1959 in New Delhi, stated:

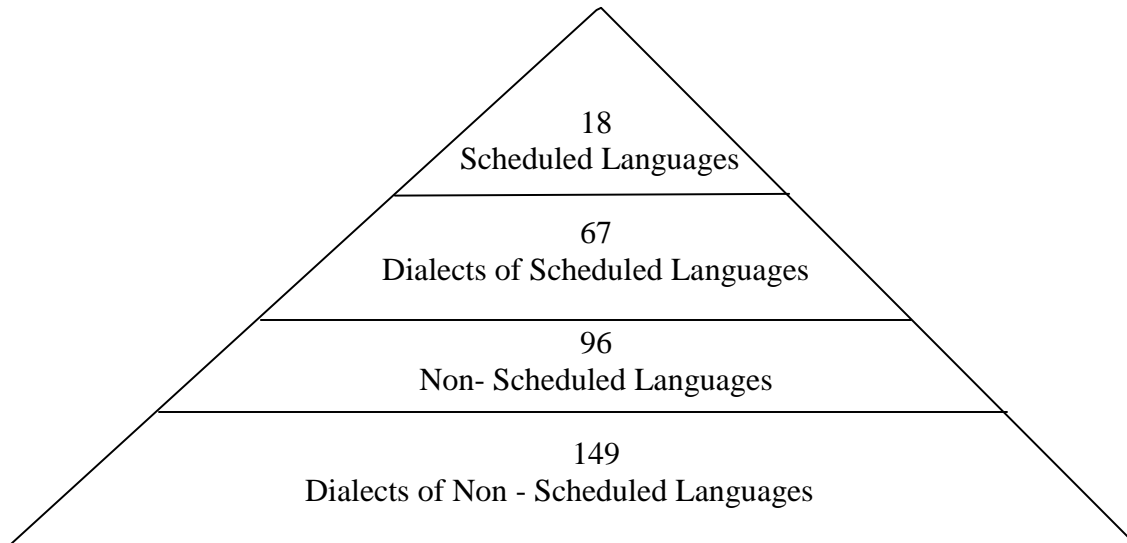
But I am sure that to think of the tribals and non-tribals as people qualitatively different is wrong. Take the description in our Constitution of the Scheduled Castes. As you know, it is rather arbitrary. Government, after consideration, decides whether a caste is a Scheduled caste or not. It is not possible to draw a hard and fast line. That is why, we aim ultimately at removal of all these appellations, descriptions and names which ideologically and physically separate the people as the Depressed Classes, the Harijans, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and so on.

Distribution –

Tribes in India do not form a neat homogenous socio-cultural category. The Scheduled Tribes (as per Article 342 of the Constitution of India) constitute 623 varied communities but not even half of them speak any tribal mother tongue.

The Constitution of India recognizes only eighteen languages under VIII Schedule, Articles 343-351, out of the total 114 (18 scheduled and 96 non-scheduled) reported in the census.

The important thing to be noted here is that the languages not listed in the VIII Schedule are no less populous. Some of the non-scheduled languages are spoken by more than a million people as researchers have found out. Linguist Anvita Abbi has given a hierarchical status of Indian languages and dialects.



Out of 96 non-scheduled languages, 92 are tribal.

We can see that the tribal languages constitute almost 96% of the total non-scheduled languages and around 81% of the total languages of India listed in the census.

Geographical distribution -

We can divide the tribal languages' areas into four major parts:

- (i) Northeast of India – Most of the area is constituted of tribals. Language maintenance is the highest (between 88% to 100%). Most of the languages are not mutually intelligible. This area represents three major language families, Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan and Austro-Asiatic.
- (ii) Central India and other areas – The central India is represented by Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The tribal languages of the Dravidian family and that

of the Munda family are spoken here. The other region has Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages spoken here.

- (iii) Andaman and Nicobar Islands – There we can find Little Andamanese group speaking Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese and the Great Andamanese group speaking ten different tribal languages. Languages of the Nicobar Islands are called Nicobarese and belong to the Austro-Asiatic family of the non-Munda branch.
- (iv) Jharkhand – The area is inhabited by the tribals of Munda language family and of the Dravidian family along with the scheduled language speakers. The area of the tribal populations actually spreads wider than the Jharkhand which came into existence politically in the year 2001. It spreads across four adjacent states, i.e., Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Ram Dayal Munda, the noted Jharkhand movement propagator and linguist, points out:
- (v) “Culturally this is the only area in the entire country where three major cultural streams - Aryan, Dravidian and Austro-Asian, represented through various languages- have converged to create a cultural synthesis of its own kind.”(1989)

Post-Independence Contexts and Language Shift

The tribals or the *adivasis* have lived on this soil for thousands of years. Though they have been interacting with the non-tribals on the periphery of their homelands, the process of interaction has acquired a new dimension in India after Independence with the introduction of adult franchise and several community development programs.

Industrialization and modernization (including exploitation of mineral resources) are other reasons for language shift among the tribal populations. The degree of shift depends on the degree of exposure to external influences. For example, tribes of Northeast India have 88%-100% language maintenance due to limited interaction with outsiders. Central Indian Tribes and tribes of Jharkhand show greater degree of exposure to outsiders. The tribes of western and southern India have extreme external pressure. According to an estimate by Raza & Ahmed (1990) a little less than half of India's tribal populations have already lost their linguistic identity adopting regional languages.

The Dynamics of Language Contact in Jharkhand

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The dominant languages are the Scheduled Languages of the Indo-Aryan family and the dominated ones are those of the Munda and the Dravidian families. It has resulted in bi-/multilingual society, as a result of which minority communities are on higher level on the 'scale of bilingual proficiency' than the majority communities are.

Though the official figure gives average bilingual intensity around 47%, the urban Jharkhand area has nearly 85% bilingual intensity. The figure being much higher than the national figure of bilingualism which was 97% in 1961 (after 1961 no data was collected for bilingualism) (Abbi, 1997: 134).

Various mother tongues are in an intense language contact situation. Though none of the tribal languages of this area has reached a situation where it is in extreme danger of losing grounds, linguists have warned of the danger signs for language attrition in the loss basic vocabulary as well as change in the word order.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to look at the possible language shifts occurring among the tribal people and the causes of the shift. The present paper looks at the four major tribes of Jharkhand [the census taken up for consideration here is of 1981-1991 when Bihar (undivided) existed]. The confusion should not arise when 'Bihar' and 'Jharkhand' are mentioned as it has been made clear.

Methodology

Four of the largest tribes were identified in Bihar (undivided): the Ho, the Oraon, the Munda and the Santhals. The total population of each tribe by selected mother tongue is taken for consideration as the sample. The languages taken for consideration are: Bengali, English, Hindi, Ho, Oraon, Munda, Mundari, Oriya, and Santhali.

The data were used from the 1981 census. Thereafter, the actual population change on a total, rural and urban basis was worked out as

$$\frac{\text{Total number of tribal speakers of mother tongue}}{\text{Total number of people in that tribe}} \times 100$$

To see the disaggregated level of change, a rural to rural and urban to urban change was worked out as a percentage. This was done as

$$\frac{\text{Total number of rural mother tongue speakers of language}}{\text{Total number of rural tribal population in that tribe}} \times 100$$

To look at the change in percentage, the 1981 figures were subtracted from 1991 figures.

Language Shift in the Ho Tribe

Traditionally the Ho tribe occupies some areas near the Ranchi district of South Bihar (undivided). This language is a part of the Munda languages.

In 1981, the total Ho population in Bihar was 536,523 out of which the total rural population was 500,147 and the total urban population amounted 36,376. In 1991, 631,541 people state Ho their tribe. The rural population stating this was 584,376 and the urban population was 47165.

The change in the total population is positive as we can observe an increase of 95,018 people in the Ho tribe. As far as the mother tongue is concerned, there has been a negative decline in the rural Bengali mother tongue speaking Ho and a positive change in the urban Bengali mother tongue speaking Ho.

There has been a positive change of English mother tongue speakers though the rural value has declined. In the case of Hindi, there has been a huge positive increase in people recording it their mother tongue both in the rural as well as in the urban areas. Similarly, in the case of Ho language there is an increase in people recording it as their mother tongue both in rural and urban areas. But, in the case of Oraon language, there is a decline.

There has also been an increase in the case of two associated languages of Munda and Mundari in all the levels - totals, rural and urban.

In the case of Oriya mother tongue speakers, there is a decline in the total and rural population but an increase in the urban population.

As in Munda and Mundari, there has been an overall increase in the Santhal speaking people of the Ho tribe.

Percentage Change in Total, Rural and Urban Mother Tongue of the Ho Population

In Bengali, there has been an overall slight positive change. Associated with it is the general decline in rural and urban spread of the language.

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The English mother tongue also has a very slight positive change of 0.00097% as total change. However, both the rural and urban figures indicate a negative change.

Hindi sees a positive change of 1.74% in total change and 0.85% in rural change and 1.13% as urban change. Therefore, we see more urban change here.

As seen in the actual population figures, the number of speakers of Oraon as mother tongue has declined in an all round figure.

The percentage of Munda speakers has registered more than 0.5% increase in the case of total and rural population but has declined in the case of urban population.

Similarly, Mundari speaking Ho people have registered increases in total and rural areas but have declined in the urban areas.

For Oriya speakers, there is an overall increase but the rural and urban figures have a slight decrease and increase respectively.

Santhali has gained in the total and rural segments but has lost in the urban segments. The percentage change is highly illustrative since it becomes visible where the change is actually happening.

Rural to Rural and Urban to Urban Change in the Mother Tongue Spoken by the Ho People

On a more disaggregated level, we see that Bengali as a mother tongue has declined in the rural sector but has increased in the urban areas. The same is the case with English as mother tongue.

Hindi has gained overall with a positive change in the urban areas.

Ho as mother tongue seems to have declined in both rural and urban sectors. Similar is the case with Oraon.

Munda and Mundari have registered positive change. Oriya spoken by the Ho people has declined in the rural areas but has declined in the urban segments.

Santhali has gained in both rural and urban areas.

Analysis

As we have observed above, we find as an overall picture that speakers of Hindi have increased among all sections. Therefore, there has been a shift in the mother tongue scenario of the Ho towards Hindi as more people are registering Hindi as their mother tongue.

Another significant shift, though small, has been seen in the case of the Santhali, Munda and Mundari languages.

For other languages, there has been a general decline, including Ho, where, though the actual number has increased, the percentage of the Ho speaking Ho has declined.

Yet, the urban areas have consistently shown positive (though minute) change in the case of Bengali and Oriya which are also dominant regional languages.

The total change certainly points to the following two directions:

1. Toward a non-tribal dominant language.

This may be caused by economic reasons to gain more and more opportunities and may also reveal a kind of social mobility. The people want to gain legitimacy for themselves by declaring themselves as mother tongue speakers of Hindi, it being the language of the majority in Bihar.

2. Toward a larger tribal language group (e.g. Munda, Mundari and Santhali)

The reason for this move can be political. During that specific period the struggle for a separate Jharkhand state was going on. The larger tribal groups are the majority in South Bihar (undivided). They were not given a separate state in 1956 due to their inability to prove their linguistic dominance over the region. So, it looked like that the tribals would not want to lose the chance again. The shift here is surely for social and political gain.

One important point to be made is that there emerges a shift towards an Indo-Aryan language. Within the tribal languages, the shift is towards the dominant group of the family. Oraon has seen a negative change all around (Oraon is a Dravidian language). So, even amongst the tribals, the subconscious move towards their own group is manifested. To the Ho people, even the Oraon is on another level; its hegemony over the space is not as powerful as that of the Munda and the Santhal.

Language Shift in the Oraon Tribe

The Oraon tribe inhabits the areas contiguous to Orissa. Mostly, they are in Singhbhum and Gumla districts of Bihar.

The total population of the Oraon tribe has increased by 166,642, since it was 104,8065 in 1981 and became 12,14,707 in 1991.

Here, Bengali mother tongue speakers have increased in total and rural segments but declined in the urban segment.

Some small difference can be seen in the case of English, with a positive increase in total, rural and urban sector.

Similarly, Hindi has gained in the registration of mother tongue in all the segments (though in the rural sector the increase has been more than that of the increase in the urban sector).

Ho gains in the total, lost out in the rural sector and high gain in the urban sector.

The total number of people declaring Oraon as their mother tongue has declined drastically over all the segments.

The Munda mother tongue speakers of the Oraon tribe exhibit a positive change and they have gained in all the sectors.

Surprisingly for Mundari, there is an all round negative change.

The Oriya language has gained overall but it shows a negative change in the rural sector and a positive change in the urban sector.

Santhali mother tongue speakers exhibit a positive change all round.

Percentage Change in the Rural, Urban and Total Mother Tongue Speakers of Oraon

On the percentage basis, Bengali as mother tongue amongst the Oraon tribe shows a decline in the total tally and the rural tally also but a positive change in the urban tally.

English shows an overall gain though it is too slight to be considered change in the percentage.

Hindi gains with major positive changes in all the sectors but more gain can be seen in the rural area.

Ho exhibits an overall slight positive total change, slight rural negative change and a little more urban positive change.

Oraon exhibits major negative change all over.

Munda shows positive change, though meager, in all the sectors.

Mundari shows negative changes in all the sectors but more so in the rural than in the urban.

Oriya can be seen gaining slightly in the overall tally but shows negative change in the rural sector and positive in the urban segment.

Rural to Rural and Urban to Urban Change in the Mother Tongue Speakers of Oraon Tribe:

In this micro-level of disaggregation, Bengali shows negative change in both the segments.

English exhibits a slight 0.008% positive change in both the segments.

Hindi shows major positive change but almost double in the urban segment than that of the rural.

Ho shows divergent trends, negative in the rural sector and positive in the urban sector.

Oraon exhibits large negative changes in the rural sector and medium negative changes in the urban sector.

Munda shows positive change in both the sectors.

Mundari exhibits negative change in both the sectors but it is more in the urban than in the rural sector.

Oriya shows a negative change in the rural sector and a positive change in the urban sector.

Santhali exhibits steady positive gain in both the sectors.

Inference

There is a definite language shift towards Hindi in the Oraon tribe as more Oraon tribals are giving Hindi as their mother tongue. Once again this points to the fact that the state lies in a Hindi speaking region.

English has also exhibited a slight but definite positive change in all the sectors consistently. The rudiment of a shift to English is there but only the next census figures can say if it really is changing. The process has just begun.

Munda shows consistent positive changes in all sectors as does Santhali.

Distinctly, more of the Oraon tribe is speaking less of the Oraon language. This shows a steady decline. This is very important since it implies that the importance of the Oraon language is declining for the Oraon tribe itself.

Analysis of the Change Registered

The dominant legitimate position of Hindi is upheld. There is, thus, a definite language shift towards it. The state language has begun the process of assimilation of the non-scheduled minority languages effectively. The major cause for this is to gain legitimacy for one's mother tongue so that one is at par with the most dominant language in the society. This can be said to be a form of desire to make up in the social ladder - social vertical mobility.

This is also for economic reasons. If they know Hindi, they will have better employment opportunities. On the other hand, there are less chances of being cheated easily if you speak the same language as the people holding dominant position.

Moreover, the medium of instruction in educational institutes in most cases is Hindi or English. The beginning of a shift towards English has already been made.

The importance of Oriya and Bengali in the dominant positions in urban places still lingers on. Thus, even though they have declined in the total and rural sectors, the urban sector still gives a positive trend.

There is also a definite shift towards Munda and Santhali languages. This clearly is revealed amongst the tribal groups. These two are the dominant groups and there is the desire to be counted as one of the majority people and to avail the benefits arising from such a situation. There may also be political motivation, since they were not shifting towards Mundari. All the leaders of the tribal protest movements come from these two groups. Here the Oraons perceive themselves weaker so they are abandoning their original language and shifting towards the dominant tribal groups. This is where the ethnic or racial differences play their part. In fact, they are not even shifting towards a language in their minds but towards a social and political pressure. So, they are willing to submerge their own identity in the larger linguistic identity.

Language Shift in the Munda Tribe

The Munda tribe first migrated to Chotanagpur under the patriarch Birsa Munda according to their legend. In fact, the name Chotanagpur itself is from one of their patriarchs' name Chutia Hadam. Thus it is claimed that their continuity can be constructed. They are numerically the second largest tribal group in the state.

Actual Population Change

The actual change in population between 1981 and 1991 is positive, amounting to 75,321. Keeping in mind that the Mundas have two languages - Munda and Mundari, the changes have to be evaluated.

Bengali speakers have decreased overall. People registering English as their mother tongue have gained very slightly and a negative change in the rural segment along with a positive change in the urban segment.

Hindi as usual shows a significant positive change in all the three sectors.

Ho also shows positive changes in all the sectors.

Oraon shows a negative change all over.

Munda as mother tongue exhibits significant positive gain in all the three sectors.

Conversely, Mundari shows a sign of almost decaying since it shows major negative changes in all the sectors.

Oriya also shows negative changes all over.

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Santhali shows significant and steady positive change all round.

Percentage Change in the Total, Rural and Urban Mother Tongue Speakers of the Munda Tribe

Bengali exhibits a steady decline in its usage as mother tongue, though the percentage change for the urban sector is quite low as compared to the rural segment.

English shows up a major decline amongst the Munda tribe.

Hindi has a positive total gain but when the break ups are seen, the rural sector provides a slight negative change. The urban sector here shows a slight positive change.

Ho exhibits an overall positive change.

Oraon exhibits an overall negative change while Munda shows large positive gains in the total segment (the rural segment also shows an overwhelming positive change), but the urban segment exhibits very slight positive change.

Mundari shows an overall large negative change but urban figures show a negligible change.

Oriya shows steady negative change all over.

Santhali also shows a steady positive percentage change.

Rural to Rural and Urban to Urban Percentage Change in the Mother Tongue Speakers in the Munda Tribe

Here, Bengali shows negative percentage changes.

English exhibits negative changes for rural sector and positive changes for the urban.

Hindi shows positive changes for both but the urban segment shows a massive gain of 7.03%

Ho shows positive slight percentage change.

Oraon shows negative changes for both rural and urban sectors.

Munda shows positive change in the rural segment and negative changes in the urban segment.

Mundari shows negative changes for both the sectors.

Oriya also shows negative changes for both the sectors but the magnitude is much less.

Santhali shows a steady positive change in both the sectors.

The Inference

Only two languages, Hindi and Santhali, exhibit a steady positive change in all the segments.

Munda shows massive gains but in the urban to urban sector, it shows a decline.

Mundari has a distinct fall in values.

Ho shows steady positive changes.

The language shift, therefore, can be said to be in the direction of Hindi for the scheduled languages. Both Bengali and Oriya have lost their importance for the Munda tribe. Even English displays a negative change in the rural sector. There is also a shift towards Santhali and Munda is holding its own.

Analysis of the Change

As before, there is a definite change or shift of language towards Hindi. Also, this is even more pronounced since the other tongue of the Munda tribe is Mundari which shows a drastic fall. It simply shows the dominant position of Hindi in the state and how dialects or sublanguages are dying out. This is mainly because people perceive these as the third tier of languages whereas Munda grows strong. But the urban segment has shown signs of negative change here also.

Only Santhali has gained or exhibited signs of steady positive percentage change. It, therefore, doesn't necessarily mean a shift towards Santhali but that it is holding its position. In definitional terms, yes, there is a shift.

The other scheduled languages, Bengali and Oriya have lost their dominance.

The Jharkhand political cause is behind the movement towards Santhali and Ho. If more people speak a tribal language, more support for the cause of a separate Jharkhand state will be there.

Increase in the use of Hindi is motivated for reasons of assimilation into the mainstream Bihari society. People show a preference for language shift towards Hindi.

The economic reasons, as always, are there. So, English has not declined in importance for the urban Munda. This may also be a result of *Hinduisation* of tribes whereby the Christian tribals are converted back into the Hindu fold. But this seems to be a very far-fetched reason. Access to education is another facet of the language shift towards Hindi and Santhali. Santhali has a written script. Therefore, if the demands for the inclusion of tribal languages into the VIII schedule are met, then Santhali will probably be one of the first ones to do so. So, the people who list Santhali as their mother tongue will gain.

Lastly, as it is becoming visible, there is a dominance of Hindi and the slow transition of the tribal people towards it. This, in some literature, has been termed as 'cultural genocide' in a slow and sustained manner.

Language Shift in the Santhal Tribe

The Santhal tribe is the largest tribal group in Bihar. As their legend says they settled in the present areas of Santhal Paraganas in Bihar after prolonged wandering. Their language identity is quite strong since they have a written script.

Actual Population Change amongst the Santhal Tribe

The population in 1981 was 2,060,729 and in 1991 it became 3,378,760, the increase being 1,318,031.

In the case of Bengali mother tongue speaking Santhals, there has been an overall decrease, but the urban sector has gained.

English as mother tongue shows overall increase in all the sectors.

Hindi as mother tongue shows large overall increases.

Ho also exhibits overall increases in all its sectors.

Oraon shows negative change in case of total and rural segments and positive in the case of urban sector.

Munda shows overall increase in all its segments though the magnitude is low.

Mundari also shows positive change in all its segments.

Oriya also shows positive change overall.

Santhali exhibits massive gains all round.

Percentage Change in the Mother Tongue Speakers amongst the Santhal Tribe

Bengali exhibits an all over negative percent change.

English does show positive percent change but it is minimal.

Hindi exhibits a positive percentage change in total and rural but negative change percent in total and but negative change in percent in the urban sector.

Ho shows an all over positive change in percent.

Oraon shows an all over negative change in percent.

Munda exhibits an overall positive change in percent.

Mundari, similarly, shows an overall positive change.

Oriya displays a negative change in its total and rural segments and a positive change in percent in urban sector.

Santhali displays a negative change percent in its total and urban sectors and a positive change in percent in the rural sector.

Rural to Rural and Urban to Urban Change in the Mother Tongue being Spoken by the Santhal Tribe

Here, Bengali shows a negative change in percent in both the sectors.

English exhibits a positive, though a very slight change in percent, and a negative urban change.

Hindi shows a positive change in the rural segment and negative change in the urban segment.

Similarly, Ho shows a positive and a negative change in the rural and urban segment.

Oraon exhibits negative change in both the sectors.

Munda shows positive change in the rural sector and negative change in the urban sector. Mundari follows suit, as does Oriya.

The Inference

There is no apparent shift occurring in the Santhal tribe. If there is any shift, it is towards Hindi. As before, Bengali and Oriya have lost their dominant positions.

Analysis of the Change

This society isn't exhibiting any major directions of change. In that case, it can be called a 'stable zone'. The changes are very small and the people are in constant contact with other cultures.

If there is any shift, it is in the rural areas towards Hindi and in the urban areas, it is away from both Hindi and Santhali. This tribe is now sort of undecided as to what to do on the language frontier. The urban Santhalis are undecided. This is also the tribe which has perhaps the most interstate spread- West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.

Noticeably, it is the urban section that is showing the negative change. The trend is towards English. Another fact is that most people of this tribe retain either their original Saora religion or are Hindus. Therefore, they have no obvious compulsion to engage in language shift. They are secure in their identity.

Conclusion

This study of selected mother tongues spoken by four major tribes in Bihar (undivided) to find out whether there is any language shift or not, shows the stability of tribes themselves. This is so because they are secure in themselves.

M. Ishtiaq (1999:146) states that the language shift among the tribes in India is mostly towards the regional languages. Besides, they have also adopted the languages of other

tribal groups. We, too, have observed this in the present study. His study of the typology of language shift and maintenance among the selected tribes of India revealed that the areas of very high degree of language shift are associated with a low grade of maintenance of all these tribal groups.

The high degree of language shift may indicate the degree of cultural assimilation into the majority linguistic groups as one way of preserving cultural identity is to maintain their traditional languages. The mix of language consciousness and ethnicity has led to tribal unrest. As Imtiaz Hasnain (1997) points out, the signs of growth or decline in the use of mother tongue not only indicate vacillation but marks nexus between language and identity. There does exist an underlying relationship between language and identity.

Another factor that determines the sociolinguistic status of these tribal languages is the process of urbanization and industrialization. There is an inverse correlation between levels of industrialization or urbanization, and the maintenance of tribal language as mother tongues (Abbi, 1997:135). By speaking Hindi, they feel superior to other fellow tribals who cannot speak it. As we observed, a low percentage of urban tribals is monolingual in their traditional languages.

Ethno linguistic minority status induces a negative attitude towards language loyalty. A gradual adoption of a non-tribal language as mother tongue presents a classic case of language shift. Theoretically, these symptoms are considered diagnostic of potential language death (Abbi, 1997:135).

The speakers of these tribal languages tend towards adopting one or more non-tribal regional languages when they find their mother tongues not much of functional use. However, as M. Ishtiaq (1999:149) points out, changing linguistic identity in a multilingual society like India sometimes do not represent a real index of shift in language. Rather, it is a change in people's perception that compels them to declare their mother tongue differently in different periods. Language has often been a victim of politics and is used as an effective tool for achieving political goals.

In India, we see language and politics interacting with each other to push economic, social and other issues into the background and transcend the caste and religious boundaries (O'Barr and O'Barr, 1976).

The census data (the basis of this study is census reports) also cannot be taken as absolute and conclusive for the purpose of the analysis and especially for policy programmes. The data from census must be verified through extensive fieldwork before reaching any

concrete conclusion. The study has to be conducted for each tribe on its own as we have several socio-economic and regional variations within the tribal group itself.

Though the languages studied here are not in danger, we need not think that the situation should be left as it is. Article 350A of the Constitution of India has provided the right to education in the mother tongue at the primary stage for linguistic minority groups but, in reality, the majority privileged groups always want to impose the dominant language/s, and this results in detribalization except the Santhals to give up their tribal traits. (Sridhar, 1996)

As Ekka (1979) remarks, the political status and functional value of the majority language in the states have exerted enormous socio-psychological pressure on the tribal communities to be proficient in the majority language to gain occupational mobility and educational advancement.

As Verma (2003:16) points out, we also have to admit that ‘the institutional hierarchisation’ and discrimination, the economic disadvantages and the satellite and cable cultural neo-colonization via English at home is beginning to weaken Pandit’s (1972) characterization of the Indian sociolinguistic scene as one where multilingualism was the norm, monolingualism an exception.

The choice of a language other than the mother tongue for initial and academic literacy is also likely to have a long term disempowering and disabling influence on the minority mother tongues. According to Pattanayak (1981), languages other than the Scheduled languages have been certainly disabled and as the demand for ‘universal literacy’ goes up, most of the spoken languages face extinction. As we all know, language and communities are inseparable and, in the past, we have seen language death and community death as victims of colonial and neo-colonial policies.

Therefore, it is the role and responsibility of the linguist in the Indian context to work for the tribal languages and to preserve this cultural heritage. Tribal people should be taken into the mainstream but their culture and language should not be destroyed because of this. They are part of the national heritage and they should not be allowed to submit to the pressure of assimilation within the dominant culture, under the compulsions of joining the mainstream so that they are left with no choice - they change or lose.

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