

A Study of Language Change of Migrants with reference to the Bhojpuri Speech Community in Tezpur of Assam

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Abstract

Language is a decisive factor in the life of migrants as it governs their everyday communication. As most of the migrants are workers or businessmen, they need to communicate effectively in the immediate environment, and hence they feel the necessity of adapting the language commonly used for communication. Their adapting effort sometimes drags them in an embarrassing situation thanks to their wrong use of vocabularies and often the tone of their mother tongue. For some, such embarrassment turns out to be deterrent in the process of their adaptation with the new language, whereas many continue to learn the language despite embarrassment which eventually results in their language change. The paper aims to study the language change or adaptation of language of the host land by migrants with reference to the Bhojpuri speech community in Tezpur of Assam, India.

Key words: Language change, Language shift, multilingualism of migrants.

Introduction

Language is a decisive factor in the life of migrants as it governs their everyday communication. As most of the migrants are workers or businessmen, they need to communicate effectively in the immediate environment, and hence they feel the necessity of adapting the language commonly used for communication. Their adapting effort sometimes drags them in an embarrassing situation thanks to their wrong use of vocabularies and often the tone of their mother tongue. For some, such embarrassment turns out to be deterrent in the process of their adaptation with the new language, whereas many continue to learn the language despite embarrassment which eventually results in their language change. The paper aims to study the

language change or adaptation of language of the host land by migrants with reference to the Bhojpuri speech community in Tezpur of Assam, India.

Objectives

- i. To find out the process of language adaptation by the Bhojpuri migrants.
- ii. To find out the process of language change (if any) among the Bhojpuri migrants.
- iii. To find out the multilingual nature of the Bhojpuri migrants.

Methodology

The research is based on the data collection through questionnaire and personal interview of selected informants.

Data Analysis

Regarding language change of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam, the following questions are asked in the questionnaire:

1. Language(s) you can speak
2. Language(s) you can speak and write
3. Which language(s) you can speak at home?
4. Which language(s) do you speak most?
5. Do your parents speak Assamese?
6. Which language(s) do you use with your parents?
7. Which language(s) do you use with your siblings?

Responses

Q. 1 Language(s) you can speak

The languages given in choice are Hindi, Bhojpuri, Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, English and Nepali because these languages are more or less spoken everywhere in Assam. Hindi and Bhojpuri are spoken by all the respondents irrespective of age, education, residence and birth place. Regarding the spoken competence of the target community in the other mentioned

languages, variation in the percentage is found. The responses to question no.1 is presented in Table No.1 given below.

The respondents are divided age-wise in two categories: 30 and 30+. Cent percent respondents of 30 year age use the Assamese language while the 83.3% of 30+ respondents speak it. Similarly, Bengali is spoken by 40% of 30 year and 36.6 % of 30+ respondents, English is spoken by 45% of 30 year and 26.6% of 30+ respondents, and Nepali is spoken by 5% of 30 year and 0% of 30+ respondents. None of the respondents speaks Bodo language.

Table No. 1

| Languages spoken | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above 10 + | urban | rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |
| Hindi | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Bhojpuri | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Assamese | 100% | 83.3% | 84.3% | 100% | 81.4% | 100% | 100% | 42% |
| Bengali | 40% | 36.6% | 31.2% | 55.5% | 40.7% | 43.4% | 55.5% | 0% |
| Bodo | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| English | 45% | 26.6% | 16% | 13% | 48.1% | 21.7% | 41.6% | 21.4% |
| Nepali | 5% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 3.7% | 0% | 2.75 | 0% |

The proficiency in a language differs in terms of the education acquired by the speaker, and, so the respondents of the research are divided in class 10+ and above 10+ categories. 84.3% respondents having education up to 10+ speak Assamese while cent percent of speakers having education above 10+ speak it. In case of the Bengali language it is 31.2% and 55.5% respectively. While English is spoken by 16% of 10+ and 13% of above 10+, Nepali is spoken by 3% and 0% respectively.

A speaker's proficiency in a language depends a lot in his/her social environment. The respondents are divided in to urban and rural to find out whether their surroundings affect their acquisition of the host language. 81.4 % of urban respondents speak Assamese while it is 100% in case of the rural respondents. In case of Bengali it is 55.5% and 40.7% while in English it is 48.1% and 21.7% respectively. Nepali is spoken only by the urban respondent with 3.7%

A migrant's acquisition of the host language is highly determined by whether he is born and brought up in the host society or he is the first-generation migrant born and brought up in his own land. The respondents of this research are also divided into ones who are born in Assam and the ones who are born outside Assam. All the respondents who are born and brought up in Assam speak Assamese while only 42% of those who are born outside Assam speak the Assamese language. Bengali and Nepali are spoken only by the urban respondents with 55.5% and 2.75% respectively. In case of English, the number of the Assam born respondents is 41.6% while it is only 21.45 in case of the respondents born outside Assam.

Q2. Language(s) you can speak and write

The total acquisition of a language is realized when it is both spoken and written by a speaker. For a migrant, the acquisition of the spoken language occurs when he/she starts interaction in the host language for his/her day to day activities. But to acquire written proficiency a lot of dedicated effort is stipulated. For this purpose, a migrant has to deliberately participate in social, literary academic activities of the host language. The following table shows the statistic of the Bhojpuri community in Tezpur regarding their spoken and written proficiency in the language other than theirs own.

Table No. 2

| Languages Spoken and written | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above 10 + | urban | rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Hindi | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| Bhojpuri | 85% | 59.2% | 71.8% | 69.2% | 64.2% | 76.4% | 68.4% | 85.7% |
| Assamese | 90% | 66.6% | 71.8% | 84.6% | 64.2% | 94.1% | 76.3% | 57.1% |
| Bengali | 5% | 15% | 12.5% | 3.1% | 7.1% | 17.6% | 10.5% | 0% |
| Bodo | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| English | 50% | 48.1% | 31.2% | 92.3% | 64.2% | 29.4% | 50% | 28.5% |
| Nepali | 5% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% | 2.8% | 0% | 3.8 | 0% |

The Table No. 2 shows that Hindi is spoken and written by all the respondents irrespective of age, education, residence and birthplace. Bhojpuri is spoken and written by 85% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 59.2 in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 71.8% above 10+ category 69.2%, urban category 64.2%, rural category 76.4%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 68.4% and 85.7% respectively. Assamese is spoken and written by 90% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 66.6% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 71.8%, above 10+ category 84.6%, urban category 64.2%, rural category 94.1%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 76.3% and 57.1% respectively. Bengali is spoken and written by 5% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 15% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 12.5%, above 10+ category 3.1%, urban category 7.1%, rural category 17.6%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 10.5and 0% respectively. English is spoken and written by 50% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 48.1% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 31.2%, above 10+ category 92.3%, urban category 64.2%, rural category 29.4%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 50%and 28.5% respectively. Nepali is spoken and written by 5% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 0% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 3.1%, above 10+ category 0%, urban category 2.8%, rural category 0%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 3.8%and 0% respectively.

Q. 3: Which language(s) you can speak at home?

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:2 February 2017

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In a multilingual and multicultural social environment, we often find a person maintaining a personal and a public language, particularly when one is dwelling in a non-native environment. Since the Bhojpuri speech community is a non-native community in Assam it is pertinent to find out to what extent this community has personally imbibed the language of the host- land. The Table No. 3 presents the data related to the use of language at home by the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam.

The Table No. 3 shows variations in the use of language at home by the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur. Hindi is spoken at home by 100% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 93.3% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 90.6%, above 10+ category 87.5%, urban category 100%, rural category 90%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 100% each. Bhojpuri is spoken at home by 94.1% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 93.1% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 90.6%, above 10+ category 81.2%, urban category 92.5%, rural category 95%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 100% each. Assamese is spoken at home by 58.8% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 60% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 68.7%, above 10+ category 31.2%, urban category 51.8%, rural category 80%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 84.3% and 25% respectively. Bengali is spoken at home by 5.8% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 6.6% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 6.2%, above 10+ category 62%, urban category 0%, rural category 1%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 6.2% and 0% respectively. English and Nepali are spoken by none of the respondents irrespective of age, education, residence and birth place.

Table No. 3

| Languages spoken at home | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|--------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above 10 + | Urban | Rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|------|
| Hindi | 100% | 93.3% | 90.6% | 87.5% | 100% | 90% | 100% | 100% |
| Bhojpuri | 94.1% | 93.1% | 90.6% | 81.2% | 92.5% | 95% | 100% | 100% |
| Assamese | 58.8% | 60% | 68.7% | 31.2% | 51.8% | 80% | 84.3% | 25% |
| Bengali | 5.8% | 6.6% | 6.2% | 6.2% | 0% | 1% | 6.2% | 0% |
| Bodo | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| English | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Nepali | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

Q 4. Which language(s) do you speak most?

A multilingual speaker, irrespective of his/her mother tongue tends to use a specific language most of the time in daily interaction. The most used language by him/her determines his/her linguistic and cultural traits. The following tables present the data related to the most used/spoken language by the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam.

Table No. 4

| Languages most spoken | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above 10 + | Urban | Rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |
| Hindi | 100% | 96.6% | 90.6% | 87.5% | 100% | 90% | 100% | 100% |
| Bhojpuri | 88.2% | 75.3% | 78.1% | 81.2% | 74% | 95% | 84.3% | 91.6% |
| Assamese | 52.9% | 60% | 68.7% | 31.2% | 44.4% | 75% | 78.1% | 25% |
| Bengali | 5.8% | 6.6% | 6.2% | 6.2% | 0% | 1% | 6.2% | 0% |
| Bodo | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| English | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Nepali | 5.8% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% | 2.7% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% |

Table No. 4 reveals that Hindi is spoken at most by 100% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 96.6% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 90.6%, above 10+

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:2 February 2017

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category 87.5%, urban category 100%, rural category 90%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 100% each. Bhojpuri is spoken most by 88.2% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 75.3% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 78.1%, above 10+ category 81.2%, urban category 74%, rural category 95%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 84.3% and 91.6% respectively. Assamese is spoken most by 52.9% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 60% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 68.5%, above 10+ category 31.2%, urban category 44%, rural category 75%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 78.1% and 25% respectively. Bengali is spoken most by 5.8% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 6.6% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 6.2%, above 10+ category 6.2%, urban category 0%, rural category 1%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 6.2% and 0% respectively. None of the respondents speak English most. Nepali is spoken most by 5.8% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below, and 0% in the 30 above, in the 10+ category 63.1%, above 10+ category 0%, urban category 2.7%, rural category 0%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 3.1% and 0% respectively.

Q. 5 Do your parents speak Assamese?

Parents' ability to speak host language assists in a person's acquisition of the host language. It serves as an impetus and encouragement to learn the host language. It is often seen that those migrant parents who speak the language of the host place are able to make their children speak the host language better. It is with this view the present question has been incorporated in the questionnaire as it help in finding the degree of linguistic acculturation of the Bhojpuri speech community of Tezpur in Assam which is presented in the following table:

Table No. 5

| Question | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|----------|--------------|----------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above | Urban | Rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| | below | | | 10 + | | | | |
| Do your Parents speaking Assamese? | 94.1% | 80% | 84.3% | 68.7% | 85.1% | 80% | 90.9% | 66.6% |

The table shows that the parents of most of the respondents speak the Assamese language which is the officially recognized language of the Indian state of Assam, and, hence the host language. It is spoken by 94.1% parents of the respondents in the category 30 and below age, 80% in 30 above category, 84.3% in 10+category, 68.7% in above 10+ category, 85.1% in urban category, 80% in rural category, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam, it is 90.9% 66.6% respectively.

Q. No. 6 Which language(s) do you use with your parents?

Generally, a speaker uses his/her mother tongue when he interacts with his/her parents. But in case of migrant parents and children, it may not be so. If the children use the host language while interacting with parents it shows the speaker's tendency towards total acquisition of the host language. The Table No. 6 given below presents the data concerning the respondents' use of language with their parents.

Table No. 6:

| Languages used with parents | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above 10 + | Urban | Rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |
| Hindi | 100% | 83.3% | 93.7% | 50% | 77.7% | 95% | 90.9% | 83.3% |
| Bhojpuri | 94.3% | 93.3% | 87.5% | 87.5% | 92.5% | 95% | 95% | 95% |
| Assamese | 58.8% | 43.3% | 56.2% | 25% | 40.7% | 55% | 62.5% | 8.3% |
| Bengali | 5.8% | 6.6% | 6.2% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 6.2% | 0% |

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| | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|
| Bodo | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| English | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Nepali | 5.8% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% | 2.7% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% |

Table No. 6 reveals that 100% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below use Hindi with their parents while 83.3% in the 30 above category, in the 10+ category 93.7%, above 10+ category 50%, urban category 77.7%, rural category 95%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 90.9% and 83.3% respectively. Bhojpuri is used with parents by 94.3 % respondents in 30 and below category, 93.35% in Above 30 category, 87.5% in 10+ category, 87.5% in Above 10+ category, 92.5% in Urban category, 95% in Rural category, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and Outside Assam, it is 95% each. Assamese is used with parents by 58.8 % respondents in 30 and below category, 43.3% in Above 30 category, 56.2% in 10+ category, 25% in Above 10+ category, 40.7% in Urban category, 55% in Rural category, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and Outside Assam, it is 62.5% and 8.3% respectively. Bengali is used with parents by 5.8 % respondents in 30 and below category, 6.6% in Above 30 category, 6.2% in 10+ category, 0% in Above 10+ category, 0% in Urban category, 0% in Rural category, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and Outside Assam, it is 6.5% and 0% respectively. None of the respondents use English with their parents, and in case of Nepali 5.8% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below use it with their parents while 0% in the 30 above category, in the 10+ category 3.1%, above 10+ category 0%, urban category 2.7%, rural category 0%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 3.1% and 0% respectively.

Q. 7. Which language(s) do you use with your siblings?

Table No. 7:

| Languages used with siblings | Age | | Education | | Residence | | Place of Birth | |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| | 30 and below | Above 30 | 10 + | Above | Urban | Rural | In Assam | Outside Assam |

| | below | | | 10 + | | | | |
|----------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|
| Hindi | 100% | 90% | 93.7% | 75% | 88.8% | 95% | 100% | 83.3% |
| Bhojpuri | 94.4% | 90% | 90.6% | 75% | 88.8% | 95% | 96.8% | 100% |
| Assamese | 52.9% | 50% | 56.2% | 31.2% | 44.4% | 60% | 71.8% | 8.3% |
| Bengali | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Bodo | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| English | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Nepali | 5.8% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% | 2.7% | 0% | 3.1% | 0% |

Linguistically, a speaker is found to be more interactive with siblings in comparison to any other members in the family as they are informal in their relation and use of language. The Table No. 7 presents the selection language with siblings by the Bhojpuri speakers in Tezpur where they are migrants. The table shows that 100% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below use Hindi with their siblings while 90% in the 30 above category, in the 10+ category 93.7%, above 10+ category 75%, urban category 88.8%, rural category 95%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 100% and 83.3% respectively. 94.4% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below use Bhojpuri with their siblings while 90% in the 30 above category, in the 10+ category 90.6%, above 10+ category 75%, urban category 88.8%, rural category 95%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 96.8% and 100% respectively. 52.9% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below use Assamese with their siblings while 50% in the 30 above category, in the 10+ category 56.2%, above 10+ category 31.2%, urban category 44.4%, rural category 60%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 71.8% and 8.3% respectively. 5.8% of the respondents in the category of 30 and below use Nepali with their siblings while 0% in the 30 above category, in the 10+ category 3.1%, above 10+ category 0%, urban category 2.7%, rural category 0%, and in the category of ones who are born in Assam and outside Assam it is 3.1% and 0% respectively. English and Bengali are used by none of the respondents while interacting with their siblings.

Findings

The Bhojpuri Speech Community of Tezpur, Assam has remarkably gone through the process of linguistic acculturation. The stages of acculturation have been significantly noticed. The elderly respondents or the first generation migrants show devotional adherence to their own language, and a ting of reluctance can be felt in them as regard to the acceptance of the Assamese language as their language of communication. The educated and younger informants are enthusiastic about their ability to speak more languages. They put equal emphasis on their mother tongue, national language and the state language. However, from the personal interaction with a few informants, it has been revealed that Bhojpuri is their personal language whereas Assamese is their public language. Thus, the paper reveals that a migrant undergoes a process of shift from his language to the language of the host land in which he may keep his language, lose his language or arrive at a completely different language of a hotchpotch. This process is highly emotional and psychological as well as tormenting for fear of a humiliating outcome.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:2 February 2017

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