

Research Article

Attitude Towards Bangru Language of Arunachal Pradesh: The Natives' Perspective

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Abstract: This paper investigates the language attitudes among Bangru in Arunachal Pradesh, an ethnically and linguistically diverse state in the north-eastern region of India. Bangru, an unclassified language cluster is spoken mainly in about 15 Bangru villages of Sarli circle in Kurung Kumey district, a northernmost frontier district bordering Tibet (China) in the north-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The total population of Bangru mother-tongue speakers is numbers about 1,023 (39.35%) out of approximately 2,600 persons in the Sarli circle. Although there is no separate Census record on this community, however, according to the data gathered, the Bangru account for about 1.14% of the total population of Kurung Kumey district. A questionnaire was used to collect data on language preference, language parents prefer their children to learn, and reasons for language preference. Results suggest that while a positive attitude played a significant role in learning Hindi and English among some of the groups under investigation, it proved to be of no help in maintaining the ethnic language. Hindi and English were reported as very important for education, economic privileges and social interaction. Ethnic language, on the other hand, was preferred for purely symbolic reasons (symbolizing a group's ethnic identity).

Keywords: Arunachal Pradesh, Bangru Language, Ethnic Language, Kurung Kumey, Language Attitude.

I. Introduction

Language attitudes are the beliefs and values that people have regarding their language. In Fasold's (1984, p. 214) definition, language maintenance or shift can be regarded as "*the choices made by the members of a particular speech community, reflecting their cultural values, [that] add up to shift or maintenance in that community*". Language attitudes, therefore, may help to understand what choices in language behaviour people are more likely to make over a long period, and may help to predict shift or maintenance of a language variety within the speech community.

Language attitude is defined by Richards, Platt, & Weber (1985) as the feeling that speakers of different languages or varieties of a language have towards each other's languages or their own. A negative or positive attitude towards a language may reflect linguistic difficulty or simplicity of learning, degree of importance and social status. Fasold (1987) differentiates language attitude from other attitudes in that language attitude is precisely about language. In studying language attitude, respondents are asked to report if they think a given

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Received on: 20.06.2020, Revised on: 06.10.2020, Accepted on: 21.11.2020

Cite as: Ramya, T. 2020. Attitude Towards Bangru Language of Arunachal Pradesh: The Natives' Perspective, Dera Natung Government College Research Journal, 5, 1-11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56405/dngcrj.2020.05.01.01>

language or variety is 'rich', 'poor', 'important', 'beautiful', 'ugly', 'sweet sounding', 'harsh' and so on. Further, the definition of language attitude is extended to cover how language is dealt with in a variety of domains including language maintenance and planning efforts.

As language constitutes an integral part of society and individuals' identity, people's attitudes towards it must have strong effects on its status within a given community. The study of language attitude by Gardner and Lambert (1972) commonly accepted as systematic attempts in the field of language teaching and learning, propose motivation as a construct made up of specific attitudes to language. The most important of these is group-specific; the attitude learners have towards the members of the cultural group whose language they are learning. In this context, a vernacular speaker's positive attitude towards Hindi and English language and culture, for instance, will help him or her formulate a strong motivation to learn Hindi and English. In such cases, the language learner is thought to have integrative motivation. Other learners may be interested in learning a language just because they want to achieve certain objectives through it. These are believed to have instrumental motivation (ibid). It is this kind of motivation that plays an increasing role in leading vernacular-speaking immigrants to learn the dominant language in the host environment.

According to Adebija (1994), many Africans view their ethnic languages as unsuitable for use in official domains. They believe that these languages lack the capacity for expressing ideas in a variety of domains. As a result, indigenous languages were excluded from all aspects of communication in official settings. The neglect experienced by these languages played a significant role in creating a negative attitude towards them, which may lead to their demise in the future. To counter this situation, language revival strategies and procedures are desperately needed. As most indigenous languages are not written, standardization and graphitization could be of great help. A graphitized language potentially receives the power to recreate, reproduce and advertise itself in a new way. A non-graphitized language, on the other hand, tends to maintain only a local essence and existence (Adebija, 1992). Standardization and graphitization, then, can help develop positive attitudes towards indigenous languages.

The need for a positive attitude towards indigenous languages requires the active involvement of governments in the affected areas. As governments in many parts of the world prefer the existence of a single unifying language, chances for the survival of indigenous languages are limited. Hindi and Anglicisation of education in Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, represents a danger to the state's rich linguistic diversity. This is because the use of Hindi and English as a medium of instruction in schools and universities further enhances the neglect of indigenous languages and consequently creates more negative attitudes toward them. However, the government of Arunachal Pradesh and other community-based organisations may play a very important role in changing people's attitudes towards the state's rich linguistic resources. There is an urgent for the realisation

that all ethnic languages are state languages worthy of respect, promotion, and development. Practical steps aiming at putting this realisation into practice are urgently required to appear.

II. Bangru People and their Language

Bangru is one of the lesser-known indigenous communities and a subtribe of the Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh which may be included in the Upper Assam language group of Tibeto-Burman language family, though no evidence is available on its language affiliation (Ramya, 2015, p. 7 & 8). They have their language, culture, tradition and a distinct lifestyle. The word ‘Bangru’ refers to both the people and the language they speak (Ramya, 2012a). However, there is no available information and evidence to show the accurate sense of the word. It is different from the languages of Nyishi and Puroik. But the three groups have socially and culturally very close affinity among each other. However, it is worth noting that the Bangru language has been largely influenced by Nyishi and as a result changes have occurred in the internal reconstruction of Bangru speech forms.

Due to the intermingling of Nyishi, Bangru and Puroik languages there reflects some affinities in their verbal communication. There is no evidence as to putting the Bangru language into some linguistic diverse groups and sub-groups since no specific study on the linguistic affiliation of the Bangru language is done, so far. They hold different perceptions about their societies, different notions of living and maintaining a livelihood, different sets of ideas akin to their customs and tradition. However, recent work done by Bodt and Lieberherr (2015, p. 66), identified the Bangru as belonging to Tibeto-Burman linguistic family with its closest genetic relatives Miji and Hrusso, spoken further to the southwest in East and West Kameng districts.

The Bangru native speakers comprise 1.14% or 1023 people in the Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Bangru language is known under several appellations such as ‘*Taju-Bangru*’, ‘*Wadu-Bangru*’, ‘*Phujoju*’, ‘*Milliju*’, ‘*Tagangju*’, and ‘*Malloju*’ within the Bangru community. Of these words, ‘*Taju-Bangru*’, ‘*Wadu-Bangru*’, ‘*Phujoju*’, ‘*Milliju*’, ‘*Tagangju*’, and ‘*Malloju*’ stand for ‘Bangru sound’ or ‘Bangru speech’ or ‘Bangru voice’, that is to say, the ‘Bangru Language’ (Ramya, 2019).

The linguistic zone where the Bangru language is used is the northern part of the hilly region of the Kurung Kumey district, mainly comprising the adjacent villages of the Sarli circle (Ramya, 2012b; Devi & Ramya, 2017). Bangrus are found to have a high degree of language loyalty, i.e., 93.72%. Most of the Bangrus wherever they are scattered employ their mother tongue, even outside of the villages and circles viz. Koloriang, Damin, Parsi-Parlo, Sangram, and Nyapin circles of Kurung Kumey district, and other districts such as Lower Subansiri and Papum Pare (Ramya, 2012c).

Bangru or *levai* [ləvæ] as they used to refer themselves is, so far, an unclassified linguistic group in the Kurung Kumey district of Arunachal Pradesh. This is because there is no study (socio-culturally or

linguistically) carried out on this group. The word ‘*Bangru*’ refers to both the people and the language they speak. However, there is no available information and evidence to show the accurate sense of the word. Though Bangru is clubbed within a larger Nyishi constellation, their language is different from the languages of Nyishi and Puroik though they have socially and culturally close affinity among them. This can be supplemented with a statement given by Sun (1993):

What is even more confusing is the practice of some Indian publications to refer to the Bangni, Nishi, Tagin, Hill Miri, Sulung, and Bangru tribes by the socio-culturally motivated blanket term ‘Nishi’ or ‘Nishang’; the languages of the Sulungs and Bangrus do not even belong to the Tani branch” (Sun, 1993, p. 8).

He considered the Bangru to be closely related to *Dhammai* (exonym Miji) and thus belongs to Shafer’s Hrusish group (1955).

III. Objectives of the Study

This paper, in general, investigates language attitudes among Bangru people towards their language. In addition, the paper attempt to see whether language attitude plays a role in the process of language maintenance and shift among the Bangrus and to assess the present strength of Bangru and inform a projection of the future linguistic situation.

IV. Methodology Used

Data Collection

According to Fasold (1984), methods for determining subjects’ attitudes about language can be direct or indirect. A typically direct method requires subjects to state their opinions about a given language in reply to a questionnaire or interview questions that simply ask about their feeling toward a language or another. An indirect method could be one in which the subjects are unaware of the fact that their language attitude is being tested. Given the relatively big number of the target population, the researcher chose the first method. Accordingly, a questionnaire was distributed to the subjects in schools, universities, workplaces, neighbourhoods and houses. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, subjects were asked to list the languages they like best and to identify the reasons behind their choice. Four options were offered: educational, social interaction, religious, and symbolic (symbols for group’s ethnic identity) reasons. In the second part, only older generation respondents were requested to answer questions about the languages they would like their children to learn and to justify their choice (educational, social interaction, religious, and symbolic reasons).

Respondents

The total number of respondents is 162 drawn from various Bangru villages viz. Sarli, Bala, Lee, Lower Lichila, Upper Lichila, Machane, Milli, Molo, Nade, Namju, Palo, Rerung, Sape, Sate, Wabia, and Walu. These villages were selected purposely to form some sort of geographic representation for the Bangru language. The respondents belong to three age groups: adults, youth, and children. The first group of respondents was selected randomly from different Bangru villages and occupational backgrounds (teachers, soldiers, physicians, merchants, farmers, housewives, etc.). Their overall number was 58 and their age ranged above 40 years. It is important to note that this group included subjects from different educational backgrounds ranging from primary to university levels. Most of the educated ones had received their education in Hindi and English. The second group of respondents consists of university and college students, government service employees, soldiers, workers, etc. They were 72 in number representing the different Bangru villages. Their age ranged between 21 to 40 years old. Most of the respondents of the third age group were primary and secondary school-going pupils. They were 32 in number and their age ranged between 10 to 20 years old. The schools in which these subjects were enrolled usually follow the education system in which Hindi and English are used as a medium of instruction as well as a subject.

V. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that 65.43% (106 respondents) of the entire population investigated reported that Hindi and English were their preferable languages. In contrast, only 34.57% of the population claimed that they preferred local Bangru more than other languages. It seems that the predominant role of Hindi and English in the area has decreased positive attitude towards ethnic languages as vernacular-speaking communities use more Hindi and English than their language in most domains of communication.

The table also shows that language preference differs significantly from the first to the third group. For the first group, 29.31% and 24.14% reported that they preferred to speak Hindi and English, respectively. Here, we can see that most of the older generations i.e., 46.55% preferred speaking their ethnic language. The older generation people are, in fact, highly conscious of their own ethnic and cultural identity. They tend to signal their ethnic affiliation by using their ethnic language whenever language choice is available for them in a given context. These results, when compared to the use of language by these people seem to suggest that the extent to which ethnic language is used cannot be taken as evidence for language loyalty among these groups. That is, most minority language communities tend to use the dominant language in the host environment even though they claimed that they preferred to speak their language. The general picture, however, indicates a significant tendency to language shift among vernacular-speaking older generations.

For the second group, the proportion of those preferring to speak Hindi and English increases to 31.94% and 38.89%, respectively. Compared to what happened in the first group, loyalty to the ethnic language

decreases to about 29.17%. If these percentages are correlated to the language used by the second group respondents, a significant tendency to language shift towards Hindi and English can be observed. This suggests that Hindi and English are being highly valued among younger generation members of this lesser-known speech community.

Among the third group, the proportion of ethnic language preference decreases remarkably. About 46.88% and 28.12% of this age group reported that they preferred to speak Hindi and English, respectively. This means that only 25.00% of the third age group respondents were loyal to their ethnic language.

The table also shows that while strong language loyalty among the older generations is consistent, it proved to be remarkably inconsistent among the next two age groups. That is, while a vast majority of the third age group (46.55%) reported that they preferred the ethnic language, only 29.17% of the second age group and 25% of the third age group claimed that they did so. This is simply because members of the two latter age groups are more conscious of the importance of Hindi and English in practical domains such as education, social interaction, and religion (see Table 4: reasons for language preference).

Table 1: Language Considered Most Important to Respondents

Age Group	(Respondents in Numbers)			
	Bangru	Hindi	English	Total
Age Group 1 (40+ Years)	27 (46.55%)	17 (29.31%)	14 (24.14%)	58 (35.80%)
Age Group 2 (21-40 Years)	21 (29.17%)	23 (31.94%)	28 (38.89%)	72 (44.44%)
Age Group 3 (10-20 Years)	8 (25.00%)	15 (46.88%)	9 (28.12%)	32 (19.76%)
Total	56 (34.57%)	55 (33.95%)	51 (31.48%)	162 (100%)

Source: *Fieldwork*.

Parents' Language Preference for Children

In this section, we will investigate the language that Bangru people like their children to learn. Such an analysis will give a clear picture of the future of tribal languages in Arunachal Pradesh. This is because if parents find it necessary for children to learn the native language, they will spare no effort to achieve this goal and consequently chances for ethnic language to survive will be higher. Table 2 give the distribution of language respondents prefer their children to speak.

Table 2: Language Considered Most Important for Children to Learn

Age Group	Respondents			
	Bangru	Hindi	English	Total
Age Group 1 (40+ Years)	34 (58.62%)	15 (25.86%)	9 (15.52%)	58 (44.62%)

Age Group 2 (21-40 Years)	15 (20.83%)	21 (29.17%)	36 (50.00%)	72 (55.38%)
Total	49 (37.69%)	36 (27.69%)	45 (34.62%)	130 (100%)

Source: *Fieldwork.*

Table 2 shows that 27.69% of the first age group and 34.62% of the second age group reported that they liked to see their children speak Hindi and English, respectively. Preference for local vernacular, on the other hand, was found comparatively high among the older generation group with 58.62% and among young generations, it was only 20.83% of the sample. The figures suggest that about 62.31% (81 respondents) of both age groups did not see the learning of vernacular as a top priority for their children.

Old generation parents prefer their children to learn ethnic language because they are very proud of their own ethnic and cultural identity. They tend to identify with their language as an effective mechanism of maintaining their ethnic traditions.

Language Choice Concerning Domains

In this section of our analysis of language attitude, we are going to investigate the reasons behind preferring a certain language by the people under study. Table 3 give the reasons for language preference according to age.

Table 3: Domains Determining Language Choice

Domains	Age Group 1 (40+ Years)			Age Group 2 (21-40 Years)			Group 3 (10-20 Years)		
	Bangru	Hindi	English	Bangru	Hindi	English	Bangru	Hindi	English
Educational	14 (24.14%)	37 (63.79%)	7 (12.07%)	3 (4.17%)	42 (58.33%)	27 (37.50%)	---	19 (59.38%)	13 (40.62%)
Social	43 (74.14%)	15 (25.86%)	---	10 (13.89%)	48 (66.67%)	14 (19.44%)	3 (9.38%)	20 (62.5%)	9 (28.13%)
Religious	58 (100%)	---	---	21 (29.17%)	43 (59.72%)	8 (11.11%)	11 (34.38%)	17 (53.13%)	4 (12.5%)
Symbolic	58 (100%)	---	---	72 (100%)	---	---	32 (100%)	---	---

Source: *Fieldwork.*

Table 3 shows the preference of languages for various purposes attributed to five components: educational, social, economic, religious, and symbolic (symbolizing a group's ethnic identity). It shows that the distribution of the five attitude components towards Bangru vernacular, Hindi, and English differs significantly from the first to the third generation.

For the first generation, Hindi and English were reported by 75.86% for educational reasons and 25.86% for social reasons. Interestingly, none of the first-generation respondents prefers Hindi and English for religious and symbolic reasons. This means that all respondents of the first group prefer Bangru ethnic language in both religious and symbolic domains. Thus, it may conclude that most of the respondents of this age group do not see Hindi and English languages as playing practical roles in their daily life.

A very interesting observation to be made from this stratification is that the proportion of Hindi and English preference increases significantly from the first age group to the second one. Over 58.33% and 37.50% of the second group respondents reported that they preferred Hindi and English, respectively because it was the language of education. Furthermore, 66.67% and 19.44% preferred Hindi and English for social interaction, and 59.72% and 11.11% for religious purposes. This means that most of the respondents of this group viewed Hindi and English as very important instruments for meeting their everyday life needs. Bangru ethnic language, on the other hand, was preferred by 4.17% for educational reasons, 13.89% for social interactions, and 29.17% for religious purposes. This is a clear indication that Hindi and English constitute the prime concern of the second-generation groups' plans and perspectives, which negatively influences the status and maintenance of the ethnic Bangru language. However, using Bangru vernacular for symbolic reasons is agreed to cent per cent by all respondents across age groups.

Reasons for Children Learning Specific Languages

One of the most interesting features of bilingualism among the subjects of this study is the obvious discrepancy between the verbal responses measuring attitude towards local language and the actual linguistic behaviour of the population. That is, while a considerable number of these people reported they preferred using ethnic language in all domains of communication, they used Hindi and English more than ethnic language in most of these domains. This tendency can be also reflected by the languages they prefer for their children to learn. Table 4 give parental attitudes towards the languages they want children to learn.

Table 4: Language Considered Most Important for Children to Learn Concerning Domain

Domains	Age Group 1 (40+ Yrs)			Age Group 2 (21-40 Yrs)		
	Bangru	Hindi	English	Bangru	Hindi	English
Educational	13 (22.41%)	41 (70.69%)	4 (6.90%)	9 (12.50%)	33 (45.83%)	30 (41.67%)
Social	52 (89.66%)	6 (10.34%)	---	35 (48.61%)	28 (38.89%)	9 (12.50%)
Religious	47 (81.03%)	6 (10.34%)	5 (8.63%)	21 (29.17%)	37 (51.39%)	14 (19.44%)
Symbolic	58 (100%)	---	---	72 (100%)	---	---

Source: *Fieldwork.*

Inspection of the above table shows that these figures when compared with mother tongue retention among the young generation, suggest that a significant discrepancy exists between parents' verbal statements regarding ethnic mother tongue preference for their children and the actual language behaviour of the children. Attitudes to the three languages were found to have more than one component. Among the first group of respondents, the first factor, education, was reported by 70.69% in favour of Hindi and 6.90% in favour of English while only 22.41% considers the local Bangru language for educational purposes. The second factor, social interaction, was reported by a massive 89.66% in favour of the Bangru ethnic language while Hindi was

preferred by only 10.34%. None of the old generation respondents favour English for social interaction. The third factor, religious importance, was again reported in huge number by 81.03% in favour of ethnic Bangru language. Symbolic domains, on the other hand, were reported by entire respondents of the first age group in favour of ethnic language.

The figure suggests that while Hindi and English were viewed as very important for educational purposes, the importance of vernacular was found immensely in social, religious, and symbolic domains. Since changing tribal life in Arunachal Pradesh requires extensive use of Hindi and English, parents have to accept the fact that their children have to use the languages in all domains of communication except the home, where the use of ethnic language is encouraged to emphasize the group's identity.

Among the second age group, language preference for children seems to follow almost the same pattern compared to what happened in the first age group. Bangru, Hindi, and English were reported as preferable for educational reasons by 12.50%, 45.83%, and 41.67%, respectively. The second and third factors 'social communication and religious purposes' were ascribed to Bangru by 77.78%, 90.28% to Hindi, and English by about 31.94%, respectively. Again, all the respondents of the second age group also entirely consider Bangru language as symbolic to maintain their ethnic identity. This indicates that while second group parents wished to see their children speaking vernacular for the sake of maintaining the group's cultural and linguistic heritage, they did visualize Hindi and English as very important keys to education, social interaction with other groups, and religious activities, to some extent. As a consequence, parents have to encourage their children to learn the two languages at the expense of the Bangru ethnic language which doesn't have much role to play, especially in the present, modern educational context.

The data also indicate that preference of a language in a given domain differs significantly across the age groups. This can be summed up in a few points.

- i. First, we find a more consistent and repeated favouring of Hindi and English for education across all generations. This is mainly because parents are particularly concerned about securing education for their children. Since Hindi and English are always viewed as key to better job opportunities, it may be logical to assume that it will be the major concern of all generations.
- ii. Second, concerning the social domain, the preference for Bangru ethnic language by the old generation is higher than that among young generations. That is, older people consider that any social interaction within a society should be in their local language.
- iii. Third, the greatest degree of preference of local vernacular for religious purposes is found among the older generations while younger generations found themselves more inclined towards Hindi and English. That is, as people advance in age, they tend to be more religious than they are during their youth.

iv. Fourth, respondents of all the generations favour Bangru language as a symbol of ethnic identity, which indicates that loyalty towards ethnic language is still stronger among the people.

Correlation Between Mother Tongue Maintenance and Language Attitude

In this section, we are going to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between a positive attitude towards a language and its mastery as a mother tongue. To this end, the study has processed data on subjects' verbal responses about the languages they like best and that they speak natively. This procedure will be adopted across the three age groups studied.

The results suggest that the association between respondents of ethnic language as mother tongues and positive attitude towards them among the old generations is particularly significant. This means that ethnic language maintenance and a positive attitude towards them go hand in hand among a vast majority of the vernacular-speaking older generation surveyed. The study also shows that a contradictory relationship was found between positive attitude towards ethnic language and their respondents natively among a considerable portion of the young generation. In other words, a good proportion of young Bangru people, who spoke their ethnic language natively, reported that they preferred to speak Hindi and English. Preference for Hindi and English, in this case, is primarily because Hindi and English are important keys to education, social interaction, and economic success.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has investigated language attitudes among Bangrus in Arunachal Pradesh. More specifically, the paper discussed language preference among the respondents, reasons for language preference, the language parents preferred their children to speak, and the relation between speaking a language natively and attitude towards it. Results suggested that while younger generations preferred Hindi and English, their older counterparts showed more concern for ethnic language. However, both generations agreed that they preferred Hindi and English mostly for educational reasons, and to some extent for social and religious reasons. On the other hand, they favour ethnic language for symbolic issues.

Parental attitudes, on the other, revealed that Bangru people wanted their children to learn Hindi and English for practical reasons (educational, economic, religious, and social) and ethnic language for symbolic ones (maintaining the group's ethnic identity). A general discrepancy between positive attitude towards ethnic languages and their actual maintenance was also found among a vast majority of the speakers surveyed, especially the younger generations.

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