Chapter 10
Language Shift and Maintenance in Uttarakhand, a Hilly State of India

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ABSTRACT

Several lesser known and tribal languages of India are rapidly choosing to shift to local and official languages in educational, social, and even personal domains. This preference of the 'other' language is aided by social, political, and economic factors that often devise the 'other' as dominant. This chapter looks at the extent of language shift with respect to two communities living in the state of Uttarakhand in India and speaking respectively named endangered languages, Jad and Raji, in the light of these factors. The authors examine how language contact that is causal in language shift is changing their linguistic make up. In the Jad community, Hindi and Garhwali are the major dominating languages, and their presence can be seen in all the domains (100% in education, 35% in religious activities, and even 25% at home). In the Raji community, the usurping languages are Kumaoni and Hindi, and their presence in education is 100%, in religious activities is 45%, and 35% at the home front.

INTRODUCTION

Language Shift

When languages come into close contact, they do not remain unaffected; and often the politically, socially and economically 'dominant' language impinges upon the 'weaker' one. The processes of urbanization and modern industrialization further act as agents for the diffusion of particular

languages at the expense of the others. During this diffusion, the functions of the language are reduced, the domains of its use dwindle, its forms are changed and gradually, its speakers become less and less proficient in it. Gradually, speakers of one language stop using their first language and replace it with a socially dominant one (Clyne, 2003). This is called language shift. It begins with a single domain of life and finally takes over all of them (Pandharipande, 1996) and leads to language death when no speakers are left (Dorian, 1980). Various linguists over time have defined and classified different types of language shift, e.g. Tandefelt (1992) differentiated four types of language shift—partial, total, macro-level and micro-level. Similarly, Clyne (2003) talks about two types of language shift— intra-generational and inter-generational shift. However, whatever their classifications may be, there is a general consensus that the most frequent and influential factors in language shift are shifting demography or number of speakers, their language attitude, and the community's socio-economic and political condition. Researchers have also looked at the following in order to correctly describe a language's linguistic situation: (a) the functional motivations for and social correlates of language shift, (b) language shift as language change, (c) psychological dimensions of language shift and (d) the impact of education and language policy on language shift. In these relevant studies language shift is viewed as a replacement of a functionally deficient code by a more efficient code. Clyne (2003) explains the emergence of language shift as a product of pre-migration and post-migration experiences mediated through culture. Fishman (1991) however believed that language shift does not always occur as a result of migration and Holmes (Holmes & Wilson, 2017) voiced that certain political, economic and social changes can also cause language shift in a non-migrant community.

The processes that lead to language death do not essentially differ from any other type of linguistic change, but they differ in the speed with which they cause structural changes to occur in an existing language (Schmidt, 1985). Similar but slightly different processes are those of language attrition and obsolescence. Attrition is a generic term used to refer to loss or gradual decline of linguistic elements from the structure of a language. It covers all non-temporary regression in language processing and production, covering a continuum from mild access problem, i.e. word finding, to complete loss of language in both individual and societal levels (Hamers, Blanc, & Blanc, 2000). Obsolescence on the other hand occurs when a population shifts from one language to another (Hoeingswald, 1960). There can be intra-generational attrition, which indicates partial loss of some linguistic aspects, and inter-generational attrition that marks language obsolescence, shift and finally death of the first language.

All these terms can be bracketed to mean gradual language change that leads to loss and eventual death. All of them indicate a social phenomenon triggered by the social needs of a community. In most cases extinction is due to the supplanting of an old language by a new one that has greater social and political prestige. The factors responsible for language shift, death, attrition and language obsolescence are numerous, such as: urbanization, literacy, occupation, industrialization, migration, acculturation, loss of traditional belief and mode of thinking, religious conversion and a sense of inferiority accompanying the use of a 'low prestige' language variety.

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