

## Challenges and opportunities of Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Assam

Dr. JHUMPA DEY, Lecturer, DIET, KAMRUP, ASSAM

### Abstract

Mishing, is the language of the second largest cultural community in Assam after the Bodos and is taught as a language subject in the 3rd and 4th standards in 230 schools in the districts of Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur on the upper bank and Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Golaghat on the lower bank of the Brahmaputra River of Assam. This article briefly discusses the opportunities and challenges of teaching Mishng as a language subject in schools and introducing it as a medium of instruction.

Keywords: **Language policy and planning, multilingual school education, Mishng language, minority community, Assam ,society**

### Introduction

Every society undergoes a change in social, economic, cultural, linguistic, and political matters. And these changes are predictable. However, the causes and consequences of such social changes may differ from society to society, and the causes may both be inner and external. The present Mishng society has witnessed a series of socio-historical changes traced reverse to the pre-Sankardeva period. Thus, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Mishngs migrated from their original homeland in the Dafla hills of Arunachal Pradesh to the swampy riverine areas of the alluvial landmass in search of food, and a safe and stable habitat and

### Area of Study

The minds and thought processes of people all over the world are changing speedily due to the powerful wave of globalization. Lifestyles of people are also changing globally. This also affects the Assamese language. With the passage of time, the speaking style of the Assamese people is also shifting which results in a strange mixed language, which cannot be classified as either correct Assamese, or correct English, or correct Hindi. This research paper includes some important topics related to the problems faced by the Assamese language, such as Assamese people boycotting Assamese medium in schools, increased use of English and Hindi, problems caused by out of control immigration, excessive use of English and Hindi words in electronic media advertisements, problems caused by social media, lack of awareness among the middle class Assamese people, challenges brought in by globalization and its opportunities and challenges.

## Challenges of Implementing Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education in Assam

### (01) Diversity of problems of the Assamese language

- It becomes clear that some Assamese people are not very patriotic about their mother tongue, and fail to take a stand for the language. Hindi and English are gradually intense the language. Also, the abandon of some middle class Assamese people towards their own language is posing threats to the existence of the same. The foreign immigrants have also caused harm to the language by not fully adapting to it. If we carefully observe the advertisements on electronic media, we will notice a certain mixture of Assamese, English, Hindi and Bangla being used for these adverts. Apart from these, globalization has twisted the world into a global village and gradually people from all around the globe are adapting to parallel types of culture, language, and food habits. This is affecting the uniqueness and genuineness of native languages spoken in small regions in every part of the world, including Assam.
- Boycotting the Assamese Medium and high proportion of English, Hindi and Bangla: One of the most major problems of the Assamese language is that most middle and upper class Assamese people are neglecting the Assamese medium and preferring English medium schools over Assamese medium schools, regarding the education of their children. People tend to have an belief that one can fulfill one's dreams and ambitions only through the English medium. With the advent of the 21st century, due to globalization and predominance of the English language, people began to get more attracted to the English medium schools because Assamese/ other native languages do not seem to be the ideal medium for education, principally the government schools, which is not true.
- Presently most Assamese people are of the opinion that a man is only as educated as his fluency in English. This way of thinking is harmful to the Assamese language. **English is a language; it is not a standard to measure one's level of knowledge.** Learning a foreign language is considerable, if one also knows how to respect their mother tongue. We should always be careful not to ruin the beauty of our mother tongue by mixing it with Hindi and English. The Assamese language is mostly facing challenges because of people's lack of interest towards their own language, feeble condition of the Assamese medium, lack of scientific and technical methods in Assamese medium schools etc. This problem has to be resolved as soon as possible or it will endanger the Assamese language. Similarly, the predominance of languages like Hindi, Bangla etc. is shrinking the reach of the Assamese language. It is okay to borrow words from other languages for daily use but too much use of words of foreign origin is not ideal, especially if similar words are already existent in the Assamese language. Assamese people are basically job-seekers. Therefore, Assamese are more inclined towards getting a degree and acquiring a job, and since good education is provided by private institutions, they give more importance to learning English. This opinion of the people is also a catalyst in

endangering the Assamese language. Currently it is not possible to fully free ourselves of the affects of other languages such as English, Hindi and Bangla. These languages have become an integral part of our day to day life.

- On one hand, these languages have contributed to the richness of our language and on the other hand, they are posing various threats to the very existence of our language. There are many English words used frequently by Assamese speaking people, both educated and non-educated. Some of these words are even used in writing.
- Some of them are mentioned below:
  - a) Education related: school, college, desk-bench, pen, copy, arts, and science.
  - b) Health related: operation, accident, nurse, prescription.
  - c) Clothing related: cap, shirt, skirt, jacket etc.
  - d) Sports related: table tennis, football, cricket, badminton etc.
  - e) Fine arts and literature related: theatre, tragedy, comedy, novel, sonnet etc.
  - f) Jewellery: earring, necklace, bracelet. Words borrowed from Bangla are 'rosogolla', 'sandesh', 'batasha', 'gonda', 'kuri', 'kori', 'sorbohara', 'bastuhara' etc. Words borrowed from Hindi are 'sona', 'loha', 'ulta-palta', 'khorsa', 'gaata', 'saavdhan', 'loksabha', 'doordarshan' etc.
- It can be derived from the above discussion that Assamese is greatly influenced by English, Hindi and Bangla. We should be careful as to accepting only the necessary words; otherwise these languages will start affecting our own language.
- Due to this nature of English, it has been termed as "killer language". This is the biggest problem of the Assamese language in the current scenario.

## (02) Negative thinking by the Assamese Middle Class

- The biggest challenge of the Assamese mother tongue language is the negligence of middle class Assamese people. Whether it is business or higher education, the middle class has always been prioritizing the English language in every phase. Some people do not even hold the minimum level of respect for the Assamese language. Most middle class people prefer English medium schools for the education of their children, but only a few are able to teach their children the value of their mother tongue. Apart from this, even the name plates or signboards of schools, colleges and universities are mostly written in English. These signboards should be written in both English and Assamese. Nowadays most students are able to speak Assamese, although not perfectly, but many of them do not know how to properly read or write Assamese.
- Modern day students speak in a language that is, in reality, neither proper Assamese nor proper English. **For example: "Tomar dress tu iman pretty lagise" (your dress is looking so pretty).** These types of sentences in a mixed language are harming the Assamese language every day.

### (03) Negative impacts of Electronic Media on the Assamese Language

- The different types of electronic media platforms are also affecting the Assamese language in different ways. Although electronic media and print media have largely contributed towards the growth of the language but they are not free of flaws. Due to the negligence of people working in the media, the sentence structure in many Assamese news reports, whether in newspapers or news channels, are found to be wrong. Especially electronic media has mixed a lot of Hindi, English and Bangla words with Assamese. News headlines can be seen as –
- "Brahmaputrat dui satrar xalil xamadhi" (Two Students Drown in Brahmaputra".
- Here, the sentence is incomplete without a verb according to the rules of Assamese grammar. This style of news reporting has been borrowed from Bangla news channels.
- English words are often used in the TV advertisements such - "Amul Taaza Xodaye Fresh" (Amul Taaza Always Fresh) or "Daator xurokhyat jidore toothpaste, liveror xurakhyat Livsav" (the way toothpaste protects our teeth, similarly Livsav protects our liver).
- An Assamese tagline having Hindi word is- "Aahe aahe kesharar dum" (the power of saffron in every bite). Here, the word "dum" is borrowed from Hindi.
- We can also see the prevalence of English words in news headlines such as - "Saboloi napahoribo xaat bojar prime time." (Do not forget to watch Prime Time at 7), "Opoja matir poroxere prothom tu satellite channel" (the first ever satellite channel with the touch of our motherland).
- We get to hear appearance such as "Ajir Midday Masala R.J Pahir xoite" (today's Midday Masala with RJ Pahi), "Hello everybody super hit 93.5 Red FM-ot moi RJ Pahi. Of course Red FM-ot soli thake eti story. Apuni jodi lucky winner amar xoite bohobo paribo" (Hello everybody I am RJ Pahi in super hit 93.5 Red FM. Of course we tell you stories on Red FM.
- If you are our lucky winner you can take the hot seat with us), etc. These types of sentences are harmful for the Assamese language. Even Assamese newspapers print headlines such as "ketiaba target hoi bisarok" (sometimes judges are the target).
- Private TV channels, FM radio, mobile phones, newspapers etc. use this mixed language. Therefore, the social media platforms should take the lead in reviving the Assamese language and controlling the damage caused by electronic and print media.

### (04) Challenges Faced by the Assamese Language because of Migration

- Some of the threats being faced by the Assamese language are posed by the relentless migration to the state. Migration is the movement of people from one place to another during a given time period. Immigration is a natural process. Excessive immigration causes unemployment, communal violence and also damages the structure of the native language. Immigration brings about certain changes regarding the culture, religion, societal behavior, language etc.

- People primarily migrate to Assam from two neighbouring countries- Nepal and Bangladesh. Too much migration from Bangladesh is causing problems to the native languages of Assam. It is obvious that immigrants carry their own language, culture, religion etc. with them wherever they go. They change the demographic structure of Assam and concurrently keep speaking their own language, thus reducing the number of people speaking Assamese.
- Due to the laziness of the native people of Assam, migration is taking place every day to this land because certain jobs are not suitable for Assamese people. This is a huge danger to both the demography of Assam and its language.

### (05) Negative influence of Globalization on the Assamese language

- Globalization is a huge factor in the changing situation of the Assamese language. Globalization facilitates the concept of "one language, one culture, and free commerce". Globalization has harmed the native languages and cultures to a great extent. It is challenging the very existence of different languages. Globalization is slowly engulfing the words of native languages. Assamese words such as "Aamoi (female friend of parents), Tawoi (male friend of parents), Xokhi (friend), and Mita (friend)" are hardly used anymore by Assamese people. **The world is now using a universal language that can be called "global English"**. Some people in Assam are now starting to talk in a mixed language which is causing troubles in maintaining the uniqueness of the Assamese language. Number of people speaking Assamese is decreasing and the social media are also ruining the prettiness of the language.
- Recently, a trend of writing in Assamese alphabet has been started online in the social media platforms, which is beneficial for the language, but various mistakes also occur in such online posts and status updates.
- Globalization has included many words in the Assamese language, such as
  - a) Borrowed words- mummy, daddy, papa, brother, sister etc.
  - b) Phrases borrowed from the Hindi language- "fokatiya kotha nokobi" (do not say baseless things), "bakwas bandha kar" (stop blabbering), "zindagi barbad kori dim" (I will destroy your life), etc.
  - c) Sentences without preposition- "tumi amar ghor ahiba" (come our home), "tumi school jaba" (you will go school), "Sombare amar ghor ahibi" (come our home on Monday).
  - d) Mixed language- "if you don't mind, one minute eifale ahoksun" (if you don't mind, come here for a minute), "next mahot tair wedding" (her wedding is in next month).
  - e) Change of adverbs due to the impact of Hindi. For example, "jur-se" (-se being a Hindi adverb) instead of "jur-koi" (-koi being an Assamese adverb) meaning "loudly".
- Therefore, Assamese themselves have to come forward to fight these challenges and secure the future of this beautiful language. Only then will these problems subside and Assamese will keep shining as a language in the pages of world

history. Presently a inclination to not feel attached to their own mother tongue can be seen among the Assamese people. A new mixed language has been created because of the lack of respect of people towards the Assamese language. An scheme should be taken to re-write all the name plates of different roads and streets of Assam in Assamese. We should only borrow words from other languages when there is no appropriate word in Assamese. Unnecessary use of words from different languages in Assamese can destroy the beauty of the language.

### **Opportunities of Implementing Mother Tongue- Based Multilingual Education in Assam**

- Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday said the country's northeast, where people speak in at least 180 different languages, epitomise diversity, and Assam, being the entry to the region, will be made a "laboratory" for mother tongue-based education. Heaping admire on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Pradhan said it has amplified the importance of imparting lessons in the native language, especially at the primary level.
- "The NEP is a unifying factor in stimulating Indian knowledge systems, regional languages, art and culture. It is focused on developing desired learning competencies right from the pre-primary level, equipping students with 21st century information and skills and preparing our youth to become global citizens," the minister said after inaugurating a two-day North-East Education Conclave here. Pradhan further said that the Centre is striving to ensure parity in educational opportunities across the country, and to that end, a roadmap for creating 'Special Education Zones' is being prepared.
- Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday announced that five colleges in Assam will be given the status of university in the next two years.
- When it comes to implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it is easy to introduce the policy in states like Uttar Pradesh and Delhi whereas it is a challenge in the North-Eastern states as there are as many as 180 languages in these states, the Assam CM said.
- The central government plays a huge role in the implementation of NEP 2020 in North-Eastern region and the special vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the North East will immensely help us to activate NEP 2020 in a shorter time .
- Speaking at the NE Education Conclave Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday said that there are plans to make the state of Assam a "laboratory" for a unique "caste, tribe, and language-based education system".
- The Union Education minister said that all the northeastern states together inculcate as many as 180 languages – which makes Assam, a key state in the region ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), prime ground for implementing new educational measures.

The minister further that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has made the NEP a big instrument in the 21st-century transformative society,”

- The two days North East Education Conclave 2021 organised by Sankardev Educational Research Foundation along with the Education Department, Assam was attended by education ministers of all eight NE states and top officials.
- This all address was denoted a high opportunities to Assamis languages.

### Conclusion

The LFL structure is designed to be adapted to common multilingual contexts of India’s linguistically pluralistic scenario. The framework has been particularly developed to fit into both urban and rural educational contexts properly. It mainly encourages languaging through language to attain the preferred cognitive development. It aims to develop a pedagogy in the early years of learning rooted in multilingualism. Linguistic realities of India’s rural and tribal areas are much more compound and intertwined due to various factors, including language shift, speakers’ attitudes, and even cultural absorption. Therefore, to address all these aspects inside the classroom with a vision to develop children’s cognitive skills and mental abilities, the policy (to exploit its best potentialities) needs to understand the real challenges faced by every stakeholder in this context. However, a systematic involvement of literate speakers of minority languages, language, and cultural activists, grammarians, and lexicographers may result in the growth of effective content, translation services as well as IT literacy among community members.

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