

# IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY, AND LANGUAGE SHIFT:

## *A sociolinguistic study of Magahi Immigrants*

Saloni Priya<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Centre For Linguistic SLL & CS, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

### ABSTRACT

*The present study investigates the Ideological and attitudinal changes in Magahi language community towards their mother tongue. The research observes the language shift in the Magahi immigrants living in New Delhi. The factors that are affecting the language maintenance in the Magahi community are all the Socio-political and Socio-economic reasons. The community considers their language of lower prestige and hence shifting toward Hindi rapidly without considering the language maintenance. The community hides their language identity and considers themselves as Hindi speakers.*

**KEYWORD:** *Language Shift, Language Maintenance, Mother Tongue, Speech community, Ideology, Identity, Language Domains*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language shift refers to a situation where a speech community shifts towards a language which they consider more prestigious or needful instead of their native language. Language shift could occur out of choice or out of need. Crystal says that “Language shift is the conventional term for gradual or sudden move from use of one language to another either by an individual or by a group” (Crystal, 2000). The question is what are the factors that causes language shift in a community or in any individual? Well, there are could be several reasons behind it but the most important that are actually affecting the Language Maintenance in any community are economic, socio-political, demographic factors or sometimes it could be attitudinal or value changes in the community.

#### 1.1 Magahi as a Language

The Magahi Language community belongs to Indo-Aryan language family and spoken in to the southern and western parts of Bihar. The language is also known as Magadhi and believed to be the language spoken by the Buddha, and the language of the ancient kingdom of Magadha. Grierson(1967) in his, “The Linguistic Survey of India” volume-V, and part-II gave a detailed account of Magahi. The development of the Magadhi language into its current form is unknown. However, language scholars have come to a definite conclusion that Magadhi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bengali, Assamese and Oriya originated from Magadhi-Prakrit/Arch-Magadhi during the 8th to 11th centuries AD. These different dialects differentiated themselves and took their own course of growth and development. But it is not certain when exactly it took place. It was probably such an unidentified period during which modern Indian languages begin to take modern shape.

The number of Magadhi speakers is difficult to indicate; in the urban Magahi region, most educated speakers of the language name Hindi as their mother tongue because this is what they use in formal contexts and believe it to be the appropriate response because of unawareness. The uneducated and the rural population of the region return Hindi as the generic name for their language. On the basis of the census of 1881, Grierson (1903)

mentioned the total number of Magahi speakers to be 6,504,817. In 1951 Sampatti Aryani estimated the number of Magahi speakers is approximately 9,900,000 but surprisingly in 1971 the no. of speakers she has mentioned is 6,638,000(Aryani,2000:82,83)and in 1961 the census report says the number of Magahi speakers was reduced and became 3,792,447. We can clearly see the deterioration in the speakers of Magahi and the reason for this discrepancy could be the fact that Magahi speakers don't want themselves to be called as Magahi speakers. As Verma has mentioned that the speakers of these language, particularly the educated and urbanized ones likes to name their language of schooling as their mother tongue. So, obviously the number of speakers has not really gone down but has simply been swallowed up by the census figures for Hindi speakers and this could be some sociolinguistic factors and attitudes of speakers involved in it (Verma,1985:3).The number of speakers on the basis of latest census report available in 2001 is 13,978,565 and in 2011 is approximately 20,700,000 which also includes the Khortha speakers .

## 2. EVIDENCE

Delhi being the centre of India and a metropolitan city which is geographically very much near to Bihar, has become the place where most of the Biharis come in search of Job and Work whether they are from middle class or lower middle class. Due to the lower employment rate in Bihar, the people have to migrate from their native place in search of work; especially the lower class or the lower middle class people can easily get the work in a metro city. In case of upper middle class and the upper class people migration depends on their situation; sometime they come to get settled in a metro city and sometime they come to work in a metro city by their own choice. We have an evidence to support the above statements which shows the different migration rates in Bihar, but here we are going to focus only on the Magahi speakers taking the examples of the some regions which are to Magahi Speaking areas; just to support the fact that the migration rate of Magahi speakers is also growing rapidly.

“In Gaya migration is highest in the blocks of Atree, Parahia, Kochas, Tekari, Imamganj, Barachattee and Dumaria. Gaya has the largest SC population in Bihar More than 50% of the landless or functionally landless SC and OBC households have one or more migrants. Of these 80% are unskilled and poorly educated, in the age group of 17-35 years. Migration began on a large scale in the early 1990s when local employment in agriculture.”

“Migration in Nalanda increased sharply after 1995 (reason not specified)<sup>15</sup>. In Nalanda the land is owned mainly by the upper castes: Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput and Kayasth. Migration is especially high among the SC castes (Ravidas, Paswan, Pasi, Dhanuk, Dom, Rajak and Musahar). These castes are landless, near landless or marginal farmers who work as laborers.”

“In Muzzaffarpur up to 70% of households in blocks suffering floods and water logging (Gayghat, Katra, Aurai, Sakara, Gochaha, Kanti, Marwan) have migrants. Runi and Gai Ghat blocks) have also been mentioned as high migration areas. About 80% of the population of these blocks is either landless or near landless. About 50% of migration is short duration (4-6 months) while the rest is long term.”

The above given data has been taken from a survey report “The role of migration and remittances in promoting livelihoods in Bihar” by- Priya Deshingkar, Sushil Kumar, Harendra Kumar Chaubey and Dhananjay Kumar(2006) . The data from the survey report has been mentioned to show the Migration pattern in the regions which are highly populated by native Magahi speakers. There are many regions which are highly populated with the Magahi speakers like Nawada, Jahanabad, Nalanda etc.; which are getting deserted and they usually shift towards the metropolitan cities and Delhi is the nearest Metro city from Bihar; therefore most of the population is getting migrated to Delhi Only.

## 3. AIM OF THE STUDY

- i) To find out the differences in ideologies in the immigrants of this speech community who are living in Delhi.
- ii) Looking in to the reasons behind the changing ideologies.
- iii) The impact of these changes in language shift and language maintenance.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The participants who have been living in Delhi for at least more than two years were given the questionnaire consisting of questions pertaining to their language usage and attitude. The sample size for this work is 60 and participants were asked about the linguistic code that they preferred to use consciously or unconsciously in different linguistic markets, i.e. social settings.

- 1) Aimed at the Magahi immigrants from Bihar rural and urban areas.
- 2) The field survey is done on the basis of social class groups.
  - a) upper middle class
  - b) middle class
  - c) lower middle class
- 3) Each social group is divided into three age groups.
  - i) 6 - 24 years
  - ii) 25-45 years
  - iii) 45 onwards

##### 3.1 Questionnaire:

- 1) Name:
- 2) age:
- 3) Gender:
- 4) Village or district :
- 5) Mother tongue:
- 6) Year of migration:
- 7) Occupation:
- 8) Edu. Qualification:
- 9) Languages that you speak and understand:
- 10) Did you face any problem to adopt the language which you speak now or did you face any problem in code switching mode, when you came here from your native place?
- 11) What language do you speak at home?
- 12) What language do you speak at market?
- 13) What language do you speak with your friends?
- 14) What Language do you speak with your relatives?
- 15) Would you like to interact in Magahi language in front of your family friends?
- 16) Did you use to speak Hindi or English at your native before migrating?
- 17) What language do you speak now whenever you go back to your native place?
- 18) What language do you speak at public places when you are with you family or relatives?
- 19) Would you like to speak in your native language with the strangers who are of your own speech community?
- 20) Do your kids speak you native language?  
Yes or No and Why?
- 21) Do you agree that your children should learn or speak native language?
- 22) What other regional language would you like speak if not your native language?
- 23) What do you thing about the idea of Magahi is getting offered as a language course in the schools and colleges.

#### 5. OBSERVATIONS

The very first observation that could be made from this work is that the variations in the ideologies of the Magahi immigrants differ not only on the basis of different age groups but also on the basis of social class stratification. Silverstein(1985) defines linguistic ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use.” The 98 percent of the informants don't speak Magahi at their home and only 2 to 5 percent of them are habitual of speaking Magahi at home but only with their spouse which includes just the third age group (45 onwards). The only reason which they gave for not speaking Magahi anymore after coming to Delhi is that ‘ Magahi comes under the non-standard category of language

compared to Hindi; therefore they have turned into habitual Hindi speakers'. We know that the notion of a 'standard' language in a speech community is related to the prestige of the languages spoken in the community. In general, greater prestige tends to be attached to the notion of the standard language, since it can function in higher domains, and has a written form.

The informants made another point that "since Magahi is a non-scheduled language in the constitution and generally unrecognized by the people, therefore they don't prefer to speak it at home, so that their children can only learn to speak the prestigious languages like Hindi and English. Prestige actually refers to the level of respect accorded to a language or dialect as compared to that of other languages or dialects in a speech community. The concept of prestige in sociolinguistics is closely related to that of prestige or class within a society. Generally, there is positive prestige associated with the language or dialect of the upper class, and negative prestige with the language or dialect of the lower class. This phenomenon is not so far from Magahi speech community of Delhi. 99% of the participants of the Upper middle class and the 90 percent of middle class are not willing to speak in their own mother tongue or native language even when they are at their native place or when they are communicating with their relatives; the reason is that they believe that they should not speak this language anymore because it's the sign of being a villager and moron. But the total percentage of the lower class people and 10percent of middle class people like to communicate in their own mother tongue because they feel comfortable in speaking their own language but only when they are at their native place.

The reasons of this generalized phenomenon of this language of prestige could be that "different languages and dialects are accorded prestige based upon factors which include rich literature, highly modernized language, considerable international recognition, or the prestige of its speakers. Having many of these attributes will likely mean the language is viewed as of high prestige; likewise, a language or dialect with few or none of these attributes will be considered to be of low prestige, like Magahi is being considered by its speakers.

The most interesting point that is made by the first age group (10-25yrs )of informants is that " they would rather like to learn or speak Punjabi , Bengali or Haryanvi instead of learning their own mother tongue; because these languages are popular and interesting and also because these are spoken by their friends .

### **5.1 Impact of these changing ideologies on Language shift and Language maintenance**

Language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between change and stability in everyday language usage, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations speaking different language are in contact with each other. That languages (or language variation) sometime replace each other, among some speakers, particularly in certain types or domains of language behavior, under some conditions of intergroup contact, has long aroused curiosity and comment (Fishman, 1964). The observation shows that the changes in language behavior of the Magahi immigrants lead to Language shift and low maintenance in the community.

When the lower class people migrated from their native place who are barely educated; found difficulties in code switching (Magahi to Hindi), therefore they kept using the kind of diglossia i.e. mixture of standard Hindi and Magahi which becomes very much similar to Eastern Hindi. Due to the social pressure and the choice of their linguistic market, these lower class people are obliged to shift towards the second language. Though, they speak Magahi at their native places, but at one point of time the possibility is apparent, of Magahi being in endanger zone because only 55% of the participants who are immigrants are speaking their mother language. In case of middle class and upper middle class, since they are soundly educated people and surrounded by the High class educated society therefore they are obliged to speak only standard languages like Hindi and English. So, here we can see that how this Magahi speech community is shifting towards the other languages and the community is unaware of the idea of saving the language because of their changing ideologies.

If we are talking about the problem of language shift situation then we have to know about the process of Language Maintenance. Basically, language maintenance is the degree to which an individual or groups continues to use their languages, particularly in bilingual or multilingual domains or among immigrant group on the other hand language shift is the process by which a new language is acquired by new community usually resulting with the loss of the community's first language. Language maintenance sometime depends on how frequently and consistently the parents are using their first language. If language is not being maintained, there can be several repercussions. One is language death; speaker become bilingual, younger speakers become dominant in another language, and the language become endangered, the speakers and the community does not die, of course but they just become a subset

of speakers of another language. The end result is language shift for the population, and if the language isn't spoken elsewhere, it dies. But in the case of Magahi, though the native speakers are still speaking the language in Bihar, therefore it is still safe from the death zone but no doubt it is a vulnerable language. The maintenance of Magahi now partially depends on the migration rate of the Magahi speaker from Bihar. As Pandharipande(2002) that 'switching to the standard variety has never been perceived by the speakers of native or minority language, as a threat to their sub culture identity; in fact they believed that they can preserve their cultural identity through their traditional rituals, dress patterns and food habits and their unique values. Thus, shift to the dominant language is viewed by the speakers as a strategy to participate or succeed in the dominant culture'. The situation of Magahi is one of the very good example of this phenomenon in which most of the speakers and especially all literate speaker of this language (which also includes the immigrants of different areas) also speak Khari boli (standard Hindi), which is why Hindi is rapidly displacing the regional languages in all domains of communication.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS

The Persian community which migrated in India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. has lost its language but has meticulously maintained its cultural identity. Thus the attitude of the speech community towards cultural assimilation plays an important role in determining the degree of shift. There does not seem to be an invariable correlation between maintenance of culture and maintenance of language (Pandharipande, 1992). The above evidence given by Pandharipande shows that language maintenance is as much important as cultural maintenance of a community to get rescued from language shift and language endangerment. Therefore, the situation of Magahi community, the speakers actually need to take action or spread the awareness to save the language. The following ways can help them to maintain Magahi as minority language.

- 1) A language can be maintained and preserved, when it's highly valued as an important symbol of ethnic identity for the minority group.
- 2) If families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently, their interaction will help to maintain the language.
- 3) For immigrant individuals from this minority group, the degree and frequency of contact with the homeland can contribute to language maintenance.
- 4) Ensuring that the minority group language is used at formal settings such as schools or worship places will increase language maintenance.
- 5) An extended normal family in which parents, children and grandchildren live together should use the same minority language to maintain it.
- 6) Institutional support from domains such as education, law, administration, religion and the media can make a difference between the success and failure of maintaining a minority group language.

Hence, the situation in which the Magahi language can be maintained only where this speech community continues to use their language in the face of a host of conditions that might foster a shift to another language like Hindi or English.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Depending on this small survey of Magahi immigrants as a speech community which is done only in Delhi region, it is quite difficult to draw any strong conclusion for Magahi speakers as a whole in terms of Identity, Ideology and language Shift. But the above observations made from the present work are giving some idea of the situation of this Magahi as a minority language. We can see that there are cases of multilingualism and language shift among the speakers of first and second age group people and some of the third age group (45 onwards) as well; due to socio-economic reasons. The degree of language shift is becoming high in terms of the way Hindi is increasingly used by the Magahi immigrants across domains. The analysis shows the sign of Magahi could become an endangered language over the period. The responses from the informants were rarely positive about their Native language because Magahi is a Non standard Language into their perspective. Therefore, they need to be made aware of the fact that every language is important in the society and this language is in dire need to be maintained to save the language.

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