

Identity Negotiation in Individuals: A Growing Dilemma among the Marmas in Bangladesh

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Humanities
BRAC University
December 2023

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It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work as a part of completing my bachelor's degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain any material written by a third party or previously published, except where this is appropriately cited through accurate referencing to give credit.
3. The thesis does not contain any part that has been submitted or accepted for any other degree at a university or other institution.
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Approval

This thesis titled “Identity Negotiation in Individuals: A Growing Dilemma among the Marmas in Bangladesh” submitted by Amit Kanti Dhar (Student ID: 19203011) of Fall 2023 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Bachelor of Arts in English on the 25th of December.

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Ethics Statements

I declare that the thesis titled “Identity Negotiation in Individuals: A Growing Dilemma among the Marmas in Bangladesh” is submitted to the Department of English and Humanities at BRAC University in partial fulfillment of the completion of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English. The thesis does not contain any copied or plagiarized parts of any published or unpublished work of other writers. I have properly cited the previously published studies to give the author(s) of the studies credit.

Abstract

Language and identity are inextricably linked to each other. Language is a crucial factor in the formation and fostering of ethnic identity. Marmas are the second largest indigenous group in CHT in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has languages including Bangla, regional dialects, and languages of different ethnic communities. The co-existence of languages places the Marmas in a challenging situation if their language is not mainstream. Despite being the second-largest indigenous community, fewer works have been conducted on the experiences of the Marmas in contemporary Bangladesh. The formation of ethnic identity greatly varies across different communities and within individuals as well. This qualitative study aims to unfold the perspectives and experiences of the Marma on the issue of identity negotiation. Through thematic analysis, the paper discusses how interactions within surrounding and established stereotypes crucially influence the sense of identity among the Marmas in contemporary Bangladesh. The paper pointed out multilayer factors in forming the sense of identity that despite sharing the same ethnic identity, an individual's agency, actions, thoughts, and words also influence the sense of identity while dealing with different people in different contexts. In addition, it shows the Marmas' preferences of language(s) to speak with the other indigenous groups in CHT related to identity negotiation.

Keywords: Language and identity, Marma, Ethnicity, Ethnic identity, Chittagong (Chattogram) Hill Tracts

Dedication

To Anamika Dhar, my elder sister.

Acknowledgment

All glory to God.

I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Dr. Asifa Sultana for her constant support and encouragement to conduct the study – to do something unique. She has been an inspiration for me. Attending her lectures and working under her as an RA inspired me to explore the field of applied linguistics. I am grateful to all the faculties of my department who never hesitate to listen to me when I want to learn something.

I am grateful to my parents who always believe in me. Conversations with my father about language, literature, history, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology always motivate me to explore the outside world and understand the different perspectives of different people. Thanks to my mother as well for supporting me. I remember my late uncle's words "You have to work hard to get what you want."

This study would not be possible unless three persons accompanied me in the fieldwork. They walked with me on the muddy and concreted hilly roads under the sun and rain. They are none other than my sister Anamika Dhar and her friends, Muhyminul Islam and Ukyawon Marma. Thanks for the warm hospitality I received from Ukyawon's family. I would like to thank one of my seniors, Rafsana Amin, and my friend, Sudipta, who kept motivating me throughout the thesis journey.

The love and respect from the Marma community I got are priceless. Long live their language and culture.

Amit Kanti Dhar

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List of Acronyms

CHT	Chittagong (Chattogram) Hill Tract
UN	United Nations
L1	First Language/ Mother Tongue
L2	Second Language

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Language is a primary medium through which human beings communicate. It is also tightly connected to culture and identity. In the case of bilingualism or multilingualism when people choose a language to use in certain contexts may influence how they are perceived by themselves as well as how they are perceived by others. Bangladesh has been known as a monolingual country although, before its independence, it had existed as a multilingual country for centuries under different social and political developments. Nevertheless, considering the phenomena of language use, there can be observed three different scenarios – 1. distribution of varieties of Bangla, 2. distribution of indigenous languages, and 3. trend of using foreign languages in different social settings. Hence, the situation goes beyond monolingualism if we take these three different scenes into account (Faquire, 2010, p. 63). Bangla is the national language of Bangladesh. Apart from that, there are 42 established languages listed including 36 ethnic minority languages and 6 non-ethnic minority languages (The Business Standard, 2022). There are 50 ethnic minority communities in Bangladesh according to the preliminary report of Population and Housing Census 2022. The Marmas are one of the prominent indigenous (ethnic according to the constitution of Bangladesh) groups in Bangladesh. Their language, Marma, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. According to Ethnologue (n.d.), this language is currently institutional (Retrieved August 12, 2023). These ethnic groups are referred to as “indigenous” people according to the UN (Islam, 2012, p. 51). I have used the term “indigenous” in this paper as authors of most of the core studies in the literature I cited stick to the “indigenous” term. Most of the Marmas live in three districts in Chattogram Hill Tract areas including Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachhari. In addition, some of them live in the coastal districts of Pathuakhali and Cox’s Bazar. Marmas living in these coastal districts name them Rakhain and identify them as a separate ethnic group (Ashaduzzaman & Rashel, 2007, p. 143).

On one hand, it is not an uncommon phenomenon observed among indigenous communities to identify themselves as their ethnic identities. They claim themselves as “Bangladeshi” but not “Bangali”. This notion of having a “distinct identity” grounds their cultural and linguistic roots. On the other hand, a growing hesitation in using the Marma language in public (outside their family and community) by the young generation and their lack

of competency in writing skills in Marma leads to a cultural identity dilemma. This paper aims to portray how the language(s) spoken by the Marmas influence their identity perceived by themselves and perceived by others through an internal negotiation influenced by external factors in different contexts. This paper aims to showcase a crucial scene that unfolds the growing identity dilemma among the Marma people.

1.2 Background of the Study

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country on the world map in 1971 through a blood-stream war. Before that, a series of movements took place and the Language Movement in 1952 was one of them. Bangladesh is known worldwide for the Language Movement in which people of today's Bangladesh protested against the then-Pakistani government when Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced "The state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language" (Jabeen et al, 2018, p. 107). However, after independence, Bangla became the national language. In independent Bangladesh, almost everyone speaks Bangla, but some minority ethnic groups have different mother languages other than Bangla. Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh pays due attention to the ethnic minority groups and their cultures and languages (Rahman, 2019, p. 3).

Marma is the second-largest ethnic minority community in Bangladesh and is said to fall under the Proto Mongoloid race (Ashaduzzam & Rashel, 2008, p. 144). Marmas interact with people having different linguistic backgrounds for their day-to-day activities. Alongside CHT, there are (or more than) 14 indigenous communities. Moreover, Marmas living in other parts of Bangladesh speak mainly Bangla to communicate with people speaking other languages. Marmas have their own set of alphabets. Although most Marmas speak the Marma language well, only a few of them know how to write in the Marma language (Channel 24, 2022, February 11, 1:35 – 1:44). Marmas primarily get exposed to the Marma language at home. However, the government has distributed books for nursery schools in five ethnic minority languages and Marma is one of the languages (The Business Standard, 2022). Those who are capable of using the Marma scripts learned it at the local monastery (Channel 24, 2022, February 11). The trend of learning this language at monasteries is seen less than it was practiced before. Nevertheless, the organizers are hopeful to bring about a positive change.

1.3 Problem Statement

Many studies have been conducted about the language and identity accustomed to the community and cultural aspects of indigenous communities. Moreover, many studies have been conducted from a socio-political point of view in CHT. The area is yet to be explored to a greater extent through a linguistic lens with a different interest. Additionally, the number of studies on the Marma community in this field is fewer. Consequently, I have aimed to add information on the Marma community and its language to the existing information through a series of case studies.

1.4 Research questions:

The following research questions have been kept in mind to conduct the study:

1. How do the Marmas identify themselves and how they are identified by others from their point of view while using the Marma and other languages?
2. How has being bilingual or multilingual influenced their sense of identity?
3. Is there any significant change in the intergenerational sense of identity towards the language in use? If yes, how?

1.5 Rationale

The study is aimed to add more information to the existing information in the field of interest. It expects to increase our understanding of the aspects of language use and identity in various ways. In addition, it will portray the Marma people's situation and experience in relation to different sociolinguistic aspects.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Beyond an Incomplete Picture

According to John Lyons (2005), language is a socially maintained and socially functioning institution, therefore, there is ultimately no distinction between linguistics and either sociology or social anthropology (p. 266). Language is a social possession. Many languages achieved the position of national or official language, but many languages co-exist with the national and other languages. Every language shares distinct features which differentiate it from other languages. Language, therefore, acts as an identity of any nationality, ethnicity, or group of people (Chakma, 2014, p. 8). Gal (2007) states a single, universal language was viewed as the gift of heaven, whereas linguistic diversity and the requirement consequent for multilingualism were regarded as divine retribution for human conceit (p. 149).

Bilingualism refers to the coexistence of two linguistic systems within an individual. (Multilingualism, therefore, refers to the coexistence of more than two). Bilingualism and multilingualism develop as a result of substantial language interaction (contacts between persons who speak different languages). There are numerous reasons why speakers of different languages should interact with one another. Some do it voluntarily, while others are compelled by circumstances (Britannica, n.d.; Lyon, 2005). Perfect bilingualism is extremely rare. One language will be dominant and the other language(s) will be subordinate in cases far from bilingualism (Lyons, 2005, p. 282). Although Bangladesh now has been recognized as a monolingual country, the language situation of Bangladesh goes beyond monolingualism if we take three different scenes into account. These are the distribution of regional varieties of Bangla, the trend of foreign language use in different social settings, and the distribution of indigenous languages (Faquire, 2010, p. 63). Faquire draws a language situation beyond monolingualism with a certain degree of multilingualism in which 98.74% of speakers speak Bangla and its dialects (p. 66).

By analyzing the languages of the indigenous people living in Bangladesh, Sikder and Poly (2016) state that approximately 40 languages belong to 4 language families of the world. Most of these languages have unique features, but some languages are so closely related that they can be called sub-linguistic varieties. The authors add that after the work of Sir George

Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson, 1927), there was hardly any such in-depth linguistic identification and comparative discussion. Besides, in the last one hundred years, many changes have occurred in the languages, but no prominent study has been conducted on these languages. However, the International Mother Language Institute has recently commenced conducting a project titled "Ethno-linguistic Survey", which gives us a light of hope (p. 9).

Some ethnic groups in Bangladesh are referred to as "*Upajati*", "*Khudra Jatisotta*", "*Nri-ghosti*", and "tribes". They are also commonly referred to as "*Adivasis*", "tribal", "indigenous peoples" and sometimes even as a "backward section of the society" (Article 23A, Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972; Islam, 2012, p. 51).

The study of identity in sociolinguistics has progressed significantly from the statistical correlation of linguistic and social variables. Researchers now use a broad range of frameworks for interpretation and analysis, drawing from social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and their field. Identity is now the primary focus of inquiry in sociolinguistic studies in contrast to the earliest sociolinguistic studies (Dyer, 2007, p. 108).

2.2 Language and Identity

According to Agar (1994), the idea of "languaculture" emphasizes the inseparable connections between language and culture. Agar says, "Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture" (cited in Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 157).

The term "identity" refers to sameness. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that identity would be most salient when individuals are most similar. Nevertheless, this seemingly simple formulation, in practice, is more complicated. It is difficult for an outside observer to decide when a group of individuals should be "alike" or on what ground such categorizations should be made because there is an infinitude of ways where individuals differ from one another. It is, therefore, essential to pay close attention to how speakers perceive their identities, as demonstrated by the ethnographic interpretation of their pragmatics and metapragmatic actions. When people consider themselves to belong to a group, they are not driven by the established and recognizable similarities but by power and agency (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, pp. 370-371).

There are two approaches to understanding the idea of identity discussed by Kumaravadivelu (2012): a modernist view and a post-modernist view. The modernist view

defines identity by preexistent and static norms and individuals generally are identified with their annexation to nation, race, ethnicity, class, religion, profession, language, and gender. This notion of identity intends to generalize individuals as stable beings based on characteristics imposed on them externally.

In contrast with the previous view, the postmodernist approach to perceiving identity is on the basis of its ongoing nature. This approach views identity as fragmented, not unified; expansive, not bounded and multiple, not singular (pp. 9-10). In addition to that, the initial contributors to the formation of identity are not only historical backgrounds, culture, socioeconomic status, or any other inherited traditions, but also the individual's capability of exercising agency. An individual's words, actions, or thoughts at particular times or moments often are an internal compromise among different discourses and voices. Identity, therefore, is changing and negotiated constantly across time and space (Norton, 2013).

2.3 Identity Discourse

According to Wenger (1998), participation in a community influences not just what individuals do but also forms what individuals do and the way they do. Within the framework of a practice community, Wenger discusses identity by looking at "learning by becoming." Duveen (2001) states that identity is a product of broader social interactions and symbolic realities in addition to practice. Duveen refers to this process as "extended identity" because the "other" identification comes before our self-identification. Abreu and Cline (2003) in their study in multiethnic primary schools in England with school-going children combine the analysis of social representations with the analysis of accounts of how these are reconstructed in individual pupils' experiences. They have explored the following three processes of forming identity. They are: 1. Identifying the other, 2. Being identified 3. Self-identification (p. 17).

On the issue of indigenous groups, Fishman (1991) states that indigenous groups are not as advantaged both educationally and economically as the majority groups because they lack educational institutes and job opportunities. This leads to the marginalization of indigenous groups. They remain poor. Fishman describes this situation by referring to them as "disadvantaged by-product" (p. 59). It unfolds the bitter truth that they are poor by birth and remain poor. Also, Fishman extends the discussion that culture becomes less important in a society when its speakers are less educated and have a fragile economic base. This situation

sometimes brings about a profound change. To get a better life and a better future, they lean towards re-linguification and re-entification. Thus, social dislocation might occur in indigenous groups, if so, this can be a major issue for the community (pp. 58-61). It also creates an inner dilemma in individuals when people consciously adopt ‘re-linguification’ for a better future (see Rahman, 2019). This paper (Rahman, 2019) shows a case study where the parents want their children to be exposed to the majority language but the parents speak their mother tongue with their children. On this note, Bourdieu (1977) acknowledges that family and education are not the initial determinants of linguistic value, rather it is the labor market that creates value. However, when education systems access control over the labor market, then education becomes the primary determinant.

2.4 Language, Identity, and Ethnicity

Language serves as the storehouse for ethnicity, with each ethnic community using its native language as a means of identification and self-expression (Fishman, 1999, p. 354). In the study of language use, individuals are viewed as stable, consistent, and internally uniform creatures whose heads the language system resides in. Language and identity are conceptualized somewhat differently when considering human behavior from a socio-cultural perspective. Here, identity is not viewed as singular, fixed, and intrinsically personal. Instead, it is seen as a socially constructed, reflexive, dynamic byproduct of a person’s lived experiences within the social, historical, and political circumstances (Hall, 2013, pp. 43-44). Initially, it may appear that the correlation between language and ethnic group affiliation is one of the more evident connections between language and culture. Nevertheless, linguistic borders are permeable, negotiated constructs that are often defined more by sociopolitical and ideological considerations than by structural linguistic parameters, much like sociocultural borders (Wolfram, 2007, p. 78).

According to Wolfram (2007), ideology, identity, and sociopolitical power are some key factors to shape a language's position in society. It is not easy to separate ethnicity from other social factors such as socioeconomic status, historical background, and geography. Invariably, ethnicity is linked to an intricate set of sociocultural relationships, processes, and identities, and it interacts with a wide array of other historical, social, and sociopsychological elements. The definition of ethnic group can be described by some parameters as Wolfram has addressed. They are:

1. origins that precede or are external to the state; 2. group membership that is involuntary; 3. ancestral tradition rooted in a shared sense of peoplehood; 4. distinctive value orientations and behavioral patterns; 5. influence of the group on the lives of its members; and 6. group membership influenced by how members define themselves and how they are defined by others (National Council of Social Studies, Task Force on Ethnic Studies 1976). Though these criteria seem expansive, they still cannot ensure clearly defined ethnic categorization. In most cases, self-selection is as significant as any other criteria, thus leading Giles (1979) to reduce the definition of an ethnic group to ‘those who perceive themselves to belong to the same ethnic category’ (77).

Indigenous people living in Bangladesh have been struggling to have their identity recognized by the State (Chakma & Maitrot, 2016). There is a clear disagreement between the Bangladesh government and indigenous leaders on the issue of identity. The Bangladesh government has preferred to use terms such as “tribal” and “tribe”, meaning “*Upajati*” in Bengali, and has announced that there are no indigenous people, meaning “*Adivasi*” in Bengali (Roy, 2009, as cited in Chakma & Maitrot, 2016).

Lyons (2005) argues that based on established stereotypes, members of a certain social group may react to certain accents and dialects either positively or negatively, and even make judgments without knowing about the speaker (p. 25). This is, however, applicable to language as well. The attitude of the Bengalis towards the indigenous people is based on culturally inherited stereotypes of the indigenous people as “jungly” or primitive people. As they do not speak Bangla properly, their cultures which are not similar to that of the majority are seen as inferior (Islam, 2012, p. 52).

2.5 Marma Overview

In account of the latest report, the Population and Housing Census 2022, Marma is the second-largest ethnic group in Bangladesh with a percentage of 13.59 among the ethnic minority groups. The total population of Marmas currently living in Bangladesh is 224, 261 (p. 33). There are multiple possible meanings of the word “Marma”. In one explanation, the word derives from

the Burmese word “Myanma”, meaning “Burmese Nationals” and is pronounced as “Marma” by CHT residents (Ashaduzzaman & Rashel, 2008; Marma, 2020). In another explanation, “Marma” originates from the Burmese word “Mraima”, meaning “Be Strong” (Marma, 2020). Some other scholars who believe that Marams’ original residence was China think that the word “Marma” came from the Chinese word “Meing”, which means “Human” (Sikder & Poly, 2016, p. 136).

Mongwaiching Marma (2020) adds that previously, Marmas were known as “Moghs” or “Maghs”. Hutchinson in his *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (1906) has written: “The tribe belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The dialect in current use is Maghi, a corruption of Arracanese (Arakanese), which is itself a dialect of Burmese, written in the Burmese characters” (p. 18). Bengalis used to address them as “Mogh” because they associated Portuguese and Dutch pirates to invade Chattogram. Even the term “Mogh” is still used today by Bengalis to refer to Marmas (Marma, 2020, p. 7). Nevertheless, Marmas of Bangladesh, especially educated Marmas, do not like to identify themselves as “Mogh” as the term is defamatory (Ashaduzzam & Rashel, 2008; Marma, 2020; Sikder & Poly, 2016).

There are two opposing ways of presenting the ancestry of the Marma of the CHT. The Bohmang account indicates that the Marma are the descendants of the Talain people of Pegu while the other sources state that the Arakanese people are the ancestors of the Marmas of CHT (Marma, 2020, p. 8). Before the Burmese conquest of Arakan, Arakan was an independent kingdom and on some historians' notes, Marmas are the descendants of the Arakanese who controlled Chittagong in the 16th and 17th centuries. In contrast to the previous discussion, some argue that they (Marams) are the Arakanese emigrants who fled to East Bengal in 1784 during the British regime (Htin, 2015, p. 135). The popular belief among Marma is that Marmas originally came from Arakan from the 16th century through the 18th century. On account of the Burmese history, two-thirds of the population migrated to CHT from Arakan during the Burmese conquest of Arakan (Marma, 2020, p. 8). On this note, Htin (2015) concludes that the old community that had settled in CHT for a long time and the newly arrived Arakanese community in Bengal around 1794 formed two distinct communities in modern-day Bangladesh. The author notes:

The unwillingness of the old community to associate themselves with Arakan (Rakhine), the creation of the Bohmong history supporting the “Talaing” ancestry, the popularization of the Bohmongs’ claim in local, Bengali and Western writings and the legalization of the term “Marma” by the Bangladesh government strengthened the ‘de-Arakanization’ of the Marmas. However, ethnographic and linguistic studies show that the Marmas of CHT are of Arakanese descent (148).

Marma is a spoken form of the old Burmese language and has its own set of alphabets called Mraimaja (Sikder & Poly, 2016; Marma, 2020). Since ancient times, mantras, verses for the worship of Gods and Goddesses, and talismans were written through these alphabets. In addition to that, from a long time ago, religious and royal books and documentation were also written using the Marma alphabet. *Manugyi Dhammasait*, and *Samudaha* are notable among these. Even a few decades ago, in the court of Bohmang kings, in offices in the hill regions, the Marma language was in use (Sikder & Poly, 2016). The characters are Burmese (Hutchinson, 1906; Marma, 2020). Nevertheless, some scholars have found the Marma characters’ corporal similarities with the Chinese ideogram and the characters derived from Monkhem scripts. Some other scholars argue that the source of this script is Brahmi script. To support this claim, Linguist Wu Aung Saw noted the northern Brahmi script used in the inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka has changed its form 6 times over time and has now carried the form of Marma Script (Chakma et al., 2010 as cited in Sikder & Poly, 2016). Among indigenous people in Bandarban, Marma is used as a lingua Franca. Some people of Boam, Pangkhua, Khumi, Mru, and Tripura use Marma as their L2 (Sikder & Poly, 2016). Some Marmas who are not exposed to standard Bangla much, use Chatgaya (Dialect of greater Chattogram) as a lingua franca (Rahman, 2019). Also, the people who live in urban areas or nearby speak a corrupt version of Chatgaya (Marma, 2020).

The term “culture” denotes all the notions and assumptions about the nature of people and things that individuals learn when they become members of certain social groups (Yule, 2010, p. 276). This identity of Marma ethnicity through the phrase “Marma Lomyo” lies in the concept of Marma culture as embodied in their language, tradition, religion, and other cultural components (Marma, 2020).

2.6 Present Situation: A Goal Yet to be Accomplished

Acharya and Kshatriya (2016) note the universal nature of language as a “vehicle of communication” has turned this a local symbol of ethnic identity because of the “deep-rooted” users’ perceived “cultural essence” in it (p. 209). The authors argued that through a broad system of institutionally supported education along with Santal forums, and conferences held locally, nationally, and internationally, Santali as a language gained growth and sustainability in contemporary India (pp. 210- 214).

The present situation of Marma is far away from their golden history and the future is in a complicated calculation. Unfortunately, even though almost all Marmas can speak Marma, very few of them know how to write using their own set of alphabets. An adult Marma frustratedly confessed, “I myself don’t know a single alphabet of my language, my son’s situation is even worse” (Channel 24, 2022, February 11, 0:51). Two other community members point out the same reason behind the paradigm shift – due to overexposure of Bangla from the very beginning of education life, the main focus has shifted to learning Bangla (1:15, 1:25).

This is not an uncommon phenomenon. In a case study by Rahman (2019) in his study about language shift and maintenance on Marma state U Sa Ching, a 29-year-old NGO worker, wanted his children to learn Bangla at an early age. It is because he was demotivated to continue his studies as he could not understand instructions in Bangla when he was a student. It eventually led to a collapse of his study. Although Ching was from Thanchi, he shifted to a Bengali-majority place for his children. He succeeded. His son was fluent in Bangla from an early age although the child’s L1 was Marma. Ching and his wife speak Marma with their son so that their son gets connected to the root (pp. 25-26). This scenario shows that, on one hand, Ching wants to be a part of the common herd to reduce obstacles for a better life and on the other hand, a voice from within keeps saying to get connected to his roots.

Although the government has already taken steps to include the mother tongue as an independent subject for six communities including Marma, the initiative has yet to meet its desired goal. There is supposed to be a teacher from the respective community who is proficient in the mother tongue, but the community members state there is no such teacher in most schools. Consequently, the initiative is still confined to pen and paper (Channel 24, 2022, April 1). When

the speakers become less proficient in their mother tongue, the use of the language becomes less, and language loss occurs. In an extreme situation, it leads to language death (Homles, 2001).

The existing literature, particularly on the Marma ethnic group and language, focuses more on shared culture and tradition as a whole, which Yule defines as "socially acquired knowledge". However, it can be justified, though, the main goal, considering the current phenomena, is survival from extinction, and reviving the culture and language. Nevertheless, as Kumaravadivelu's (2012) and Norton's (2013) views of identity from a postmodernist point of view, identity as expansive, multiple, and diverse is yet to be explored to a greater extent. The paper aims to explore the notion of identity in this regard with people of different age groups and professions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To conduct the study, the following steps have been followed.

3.1 Research Design

I adopted a qualitative method to conduct this study. Qualitative data collection consists of long periods of gathering information directly involving people and recording in-detail personal perspectives from individuals (Creswell, 2015, p. 209). The target community of the study is the Marmas. Therefore, it focused on the Marma language and the culture accompanied by its users to portray the picture of this study. The qualitative approach allowed me to extract the full picture of the situation through their perspectives and experiences.

3.2 Participants

I interviewed participants individually and in groups. I interviewed both middle-aged people and young adult people from the Marma community. In addition, there were two focus groups: 1. a focus group consisting of middle-aged participants, and 2. a focus group consisting of young adult (university-going) and young (school-going and college-going) participants. Besides, I interviewed Marmas in different professions individually. I interviewed both male and female members from the Marma community. The list of the participants has been attached below with their demographic details.

Focus Group 1

Participants' Code Names Formulation: From left to right, A stands for adult; the following two alphabets stand for their names and their age.

Name	Gender	Age	Profession
A-MM-58	Male	58	Primary School Teacher
A-CHM-56	Male	56	School Office Assistant
A-PUM-59	Male	59	Merchant

Focus Group 2

Participants' Code Names Formulation: From left to right, Y stands for Young; S for School; U for University; the following two alphabets stand for their names and their age.

Name	Gender	Age	Educational Level
YS-YM-17	Male	17	Class 10
YS-KM-16	Male	16	Class 9
YS-KM-17	Male	17	Class 9
YU-AM-25	Male	25	University level
YU-SM-23	Male	23	University level

Individual interviewees

Participants' Code Names Formulation: FA stands for female adult and their initials and their age. The rest code names are formulated following the techniques mentioned above.

Name	Gender	Age	Profession
FA-OCM-50	Female	50	Housewife
FA-NCM-29	Female	29	Primary School Teacher
YU-SM-23	Male	23	University Student
A-MMK-71	Male	71	Village Representative & Social Worker
YU-UKM-27	Male	27	University Student
YU-UM-24	Male	24	University Student
YC-UCM-20	Male	20	College Student

3.3 Settings

The setting for this study was naturalistic. In addition, the setting of the study was semi-formal. I visited their homes in person to take the interviews. Initially, I started conversations with them casually for ice-breaking. I also talked about my study and discussed the objectives of my study. I took the adult focus group interview in a tea stall while having tea with them. I roamed around the grounds and hills with some of the young participants to make them feel free. I took their interviews on the grounds and at their homes as well. The interviews were spontaneous and conversational. The interviews allowed them to express their opinions and perspectives spontaneously. It facilitated the provision of more lively and relevant data.

3.4 Data Collecting Instruments

To follow a qualitative method, I developed interview questions (See Appendix). However, the interview questions were semi-structured. By adopting this method, some follow-up questions appeared during the discussion which made the interview more meaningful. The interview questions were categorized into themes related to the study. For instance, the interview questions fell under themes like language and identity, language and intergenerational identity, language use and cultural identity, and language and community. The interviews were recorded on mobile with the participants' consent. Additionally, I took hand-notes while taking the interviews. I set interview questions in themes. I included some interview questions here.

Sample interview questions:

- Do you feel the Marma language influences your sense of belonging to the Marma community in your place?
- In which language do you feel more comfortable expressing yourself in general?
- Have you ever perceived yourself as included or excluded among people based on the language(s) you use?
- Have you ever faced any stereotypes? How do you tackle those situations? What was your response?

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Since the study had a specific target audience aiming to disclose the experience and perspective of the target community, I adopted the qualitative method to conduct the study. The medium of communication was face-to-face interviews with the participants. The type of interview was semi-structured because I emphasized “open-endedness” to extract the pieces of information. The interviews had a conversational tone. We conversed in the Bangla language. I listened to my participants to understand their points of view and the phenomena. I translated the interviews into English. I analyzed the data after all the sets of data had been collected. I explained all the phenomena through a “thick description” process in the later chapters.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

First of all, I explained to every participant what the research was about and its purposes. In addition, I provided them with a summary of my study in Bangla with the consent form. Before recording, I took their permission to record the whole interview. To maintain the participants’ privacy, I have kept anonymity. I have not disclosed the original names of the participants. I have formed code names for each participant. To achieve trustworthiness, I adopted strategies such as peer debriefing, member-checking, and interview corroboration. Extensive quotes by the interviewees have been added to achieve the credibility of the paper.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

Thematic analysis is one of the qualitative analytic methods that explore themes or patterns concerning different ontological and epistemological positions. Themes capture something significant about the data in relation to the research questions and it elaborates some level of patterned response within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77, 82).

4.1 Identity Negotiation among Marmas in Different Surroundings

The previous studies on Marma and its language and culture put more emphasis, considering the whole Marma community as a single entity that shares a common culture, on a broad range of discussions varying from its origin to its current situation. Those studies define the Marma identity with Marmas' annexation to the nation, ethnicity, race, language, and other cultural elements that are externally imposed on them. In other words, Marmas inherit those as being stakeholders of the Marma community and thus a Marma identity in them is formed. However, this notion of identity generalizes individuals as static beings. However, what I have found is that similar to the post-modernist approach to understanding identity – identity is not only formed based on the cultural element that individuals inherit externally but also based on individuals' ability to practice agency (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Norton, 2013). Now a factor may arise that what factor(s) makes differences in forming individual identity.

When I was interviewing young participants, I found similar responses from participants who stayed in Rangamati (more specifically, Marma majority places) and studied institutions near their residences but got different responses from those who stayed in regions where Marmas are absent. The young focus group consisted of three school-going students: YS-YM-17, YS-KM-16, YS-KM-17, one university-going student, YU-AM-25, who stayed in their village (Marma majority) and their educational institutions are nearby, and one university-going student (YU-SM-23) who lived outside CHT. In addition, I interviewed two other university students, YU-UKM-27 and YU-UM-24, and a college student, YC-UCM-20.

What I found is that surroundings play a crucial role – one of the factors for which the Marmas have to negotiate their sense of identity across time and place. Here, three processes of forming an identity as Abreu and Cline (2003) discuss are a key to depicting the phenomenon. The three processes are: Identifying the other, 2. Being identified 3. Self-identification. From the

surroundings, individuals' sense of identity is formed but also negotiated. A university student, YU-SM-23, who lives in Khulna (Bengali majority place) shared that while being in CHT he does not feel the same as he feels at his current place. On one hand, he hesitates to speak Marma to his family members over the phone, on the other hand, he hesitates to speak Bangla to his family members as he is habituated to speaking Marma to his family members. Here, this hesitation triggers his sense of identity as he is not comfortable speaking either way. Nevertheless, this hesitation is not always constant. They become hesitant when they are triggered by the attitude of people toward them in their surroundings and when they keep monitoring people's attitudes toward them in their heads.

YU-SM-23: As my friends and roommates are familiar with my ethnic identity and language, I do not bother speaking my language in front of them. his hesitation mostly triggers me when I am in public.

Interviewer: Do you feel excluded or included due to your language or ethnic identity in your friend group?

YU-SM-23: I have not faced any particular situation. But I have heard that people become isolated as people have different attitudes towards us.

Interviewer: What type of attitude? Is it related to language?

YU-SM-23: We are physically different. But to me, it bothers me more when people stare at me while speaking Marma. I had also lived in Rangamati Sadar when I was in school. That was a Chakma-majority village. I know a little Chakma too. But when I'd speak Marma, I felt like I was not a part of the common herd.

Here, individuals' surroundings may have one dominant language (considering the language of the majority of people), it may be Bangla or other ethnic languages. Which language is important is not only important but how Marmas are identifying the other and being identified are important. These factors are affected by their experiences of the surroundings they are/were in. YU-UM-24, another university-going student (interviewed individually), once lived in a Chakma majority place (in Rangamati) during his school life. When I asked him if he ever felt excluded or included because of his language and ethnic identity and how it affected his

sense of identity. YU-UM-24 shared how language became a tool to be recognized as the other. He responded:

“Not everyone can differentiate who is Chakma and Marma based on our physical appearance. When we speak, the ethnicity borderline appears between us. It was a Chakma-majority village in Rangamati where I used to live. I can also speak and understand Chakma. But when I would speak my language (Marma), sometimes I felt I was being excluded. But my acquainted mates and seniors would speak Bangla and So did I, and they were nice to me.”

However, three school-going students, YS-YM-17, YS-KM-16, YS-KM-17, and a university-going student YU-AM-25 from the focus group whose educational institutions near their residence had different responses. Two things were common among them: 1. They live in a Marma-majority village 2. Their institutions are nearby and institutions have pupils from different ethnic communities. Usually, different villages consist of different ethnic communities although some villages consist of multiple ethnic groups too. Schools, therefore, have students having different ethnic identities. Although they meet different people having different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, it seems normal to them. They speak Marma among themselves, and their Tongchongya friends speak their language. Bangla acts as a lingua franca among them.

Here, from the focus group, YU-SM-23's perceptions of identifying the other and being identified are not as same as the perceptions of three school-going students and one university-going student. Although YS-YM-17, YS-KM-16, YS-KM-17 and YU-AM-25 do not always consciously identify who belongs to which ethnic group, a belief seems to be established that they are identified clearly. The thing is that, unlike YU-SM-23, they perceive that they are identified as Marma in their institutions where different ethnic communities such as Tripura and Tongchongya and also Bengali study. At the same time, they identify the other as such. On the other hand, YU-SM-23 and YU-UM-24, have (/had) experiences of living in such places where Marmas are not widely seen, in that case, they perceive that they are not identified clearly, and even if identified as Marma, they feel like they are not part of the common herd when they use Marma. Such places may have a dominant language such as Bangla or Chakma. In the studies of indigenous groups' language in Bangladesh, it is observed that the use of indigenous language is reduced due to Bengali exposure (Chakma, 2014; Marma, 2020; Rahman, 2019). I do not

disagree with this claim. However, when it comes to identity, individuals' capability to exercise agency to face their surroundings is more important than which language is the dominant language in that surrounding.

Although in a Bangla-majority place, they may hesitate more to use the Marma language because of the established stereotypes. The attitude of the Bangla-speaking people towards the indigenous people is based on the established stereotypes of their (indigenous groups) culture being inferior (Islam, 2012, p. 52). There are also stereotypes about their physical appearances. Marmas are considered to be the descendants of the Proto-mongoloid race. They tend to have small eyes, a sub-nose and yellow complexion, and other Mongolian characteristics (Ashaduzzaman & Rashel, 2008). A university-going student shared an incident describing how he tackled stereotypical responses. YU-UKM-27, a university student (post-graduation), was entering a *tong* while speaking in Marma over the phone in Chattogram town. Seeing him a group of adolescent boys said indicating him "Look a Chinese is coming." YU-UKM-27 amenably responded: "Isn't it good a Chinese man speaking Bangla to you?" When I asked him what their counter-response was. YU-UKM-27 replied:

They didn't respond. They just smiled and so did I. Look, we share physical characteristics that are similar to the Proto-Mongoloid race unlike you and those boys as well. I know who I am. I'm a Marma. As we are not a mainstream community, meaning, people do not know much about us. They might react to us that might be unpleasant to us sometimes. Many Marmas might hesitate to speak in Marma over the phone in public. But to be honest I do not. Because I don't feel comfortable speaking other languages other than Marma to the people with whom I'm habituated to speaking in Marma.

The quote just mentioned above also supports the previous claim I discuss that hesitation is not always constant for all the time and in all individuals who share the same culture. An individual's actions, thoughts, and words – overall his/her ability to exercise agency also play a vital role in the formation, maintenance and negotiation of the sense of identity. Moreover, the use of Marma among Marmas also influences how they are perceived by themselves. A-MM-56 shared that for festivals or different purposes, he needs to phone different Marma people he knows a little. When he starts the conversation with proper greetings and speaks Marma in a

way the Buddhist monk use to preach, the people on the other side over the phone show respect and treat A-MM-56 as a monk-like person. Nevertheless, A-MM-56 confessed that he sometimes hesitates to speak in Marma when he is in a public place.

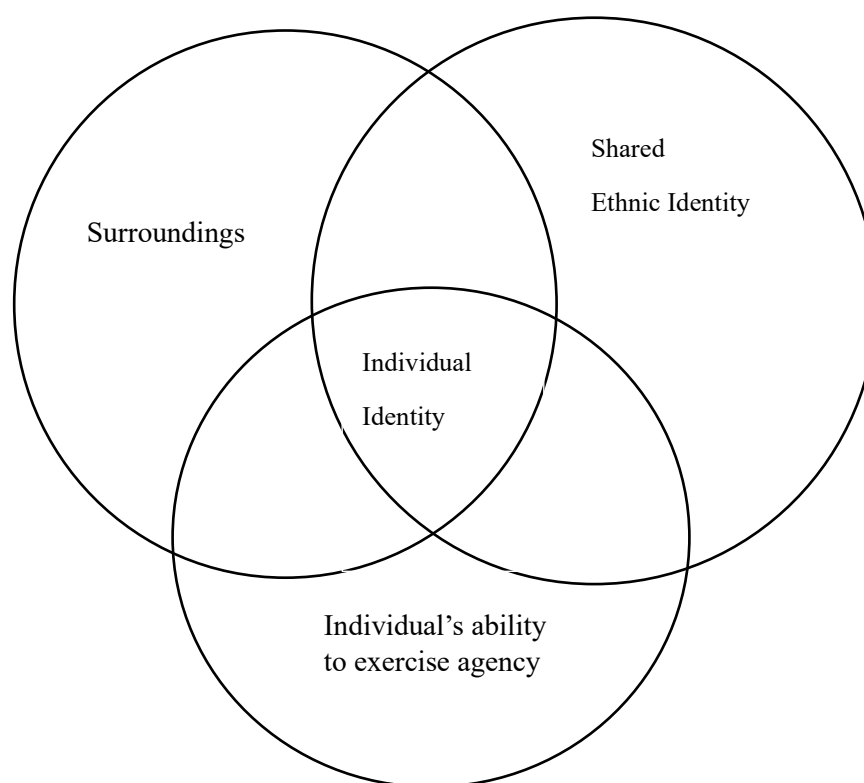


Figure 1: Factors that contribute to the formation of individual identity

The participants mentioned above carry the same ethnic identity and share the same cultural elements of the Marma community. A crucial discourse of identity thus comes where identity can be viewed as fragmented, not unified; expansive, not bounded, and multiple, not singular. The primary factors in the construction of identity are not only historical backgrounds, culture, socioeconomic status, or any other inherited cultural elements, but also the individual's capability of exercising agency. Identity, therefore, is changing and negotiated constantly across time and space (Kumaravadivelu 2012; Norton, 2013). Although they share the same ethnic identity, an individual sense of identity is influenced by the surroundings s/he deals with. Being a part of the same community, the perception of identity may vary from person to person to an

extent because individuals encounter different circumstances. Their actions, words, and thoughts – overall an individual’s ability to exercise agency also contributes to the formation of their ethnic identity. The interrelation between these external factors (effects of surroundings) and internal factors (an individual’s ability to exercise agency) influences individuals’ sense of identity despite belonging to the same community (See Figure 1).

4.2 Responses to Stereotypes

Marmas are said to be the descendants of the Proto-Mongolian race and carry physical characteristics of that race (Ethnologoue, n.d.; Ashaduzzaman & Rashel, 2007). Therefore, a yellow complexion, small eyes, a snub nose, a wide face, and an epicanthic fold that covers the inner corner of the eyes are common physical characteristics among Marmas (Ashaduzzaman & Rashel, 2007). Some other indigenous communities in the CHT also share such physical characteristics in which the Chakmas are prominent among them. Again, among the indigenous communities, the Chakmas are the mainstream and most-populated indigenous community. It is not an uncommon phenomenon when people, especially Bengalis, unintentionally or intentionally identify the other indigenous group as Chakma. This is not a new phenomenon. Htin (2015) quoted Captain Lewin, an administrator in British India, who identified some Marmas who fled to CHT during the Burmese occupation.

“Lewin states that the tribes of Arakan such as “Domcan Chukma, and Kiecopa Lies, Marring” ran away to the hills of Bengal when Arakan was attacked by the Burmese. They were identified by him as the Chakma and the Murung tribes of CHT (p.144).”

When I interviewed them if they had such experiences when they were assumed to be a Chakma. Almost all the participants who traveled to different parts of Bangladesh have faced this question. A-CHM-56 shared an incident taking place in Hajari Lane (a place in Chattogram town) in response.

Stranger: Are you a Chakma?

A-CHM-56: Are you a Chakma?

Stranger: No, I am a Monipuri

A-CHM-56: I am a Marma.

A-MKM-71 acknowledged that physical appearances and food habits are similar to some extent, but our language and culture are different. He added that the population, contribution to the community by their ancestors even before the independence of Bangladesh, and engagement in public and administrative platforms through education put them ahead of other indigenous communities. A-MKM-71 frustratedly expressed that families should be more responsible for their children. In this discourse, participants' collective responses express two confessions. They do not take it positively when they get misrecognized; nevertheless, they accept that this is not phenomenal. Current adult generations are now aware of the importance of formal education which could improve their livelihood and the communities as well.

4.3 Interaction among Different Ethnic Communities

Usually, in the CHT, each community lives in a village, or a village may consist of two or more indigenous communities. For various day-to-day activities, people from different indigenous communities interact with one another. The area I explored to conduct this study was a Marma-majority village. In addition, I met several people who live/lived in places where Marmas do not have settlements. People from some other indigenous communities such as Mru, and Tripura use Marma as L2 (Sikder & Poly, 2016). However, I roamed around villages nearby where different indigenous communities dwell. Tripura and Tongchongya are the neighboring communities of the Marma village. When 3-4 Marma people accompanied me when I was roaming around. I observed the medium of communication among different indigenous groups. People spoke Bangla, a corrupted version of Chatgaya (A mixture of Chatgaya and Bangla) and to a lesser extent Marma. Since I do not know the Marma language, I verified from a companion that they were speaking in the neighboring areas.

From the observation, I had a series of conversations with my interviewees. The adult interviewees in the focus group stated that their union is a Marma-majority area. Consequently, this place has a Marma influence to an extent. A-PUM-59, a merchant, added: "People in the local market sometimes use Marma for mutual convenience." Nevertheless, only a handful of people from the other indigenous groups know Marma. This oral competency is a byproduct of linguistic exposure rather than learning Marma as their second language. Bangla is mostly used

among these three indigenous communities. Besides, sometimes Chatgaya is used although it is not the traditional Chatgaya that is used in the greater Chattogram.

Following the discourse, I asked interviewees if they knew other indigenous groups' languages. Three participants, YU-UM-24, YU-SM-23, and YC-UCM-20 responded that they understand the Chakma language and communicate in Chakma, A-CHM-56, understands and knows some common words and phrases in Chakma as they lived in Chakma-majority places for some years. It was a common response from them that they preferred to use Bangla as the medium of communication during their stay in those places. They sometimes would use the Chakma language in the local market to a lesser extent as the other indigenous groups speak the Marma language in our area. YU-SM-23 described: "I could be a part of the common herd if I speak Chakma but I preferred Bangla as we, Marma, and Chakma, both can communicate in Bangla." On this note, YU-UKM-27 responded: "I have a Chakma friend. But both of us use Bangla. Because we mutually believe it is best to use the common linguistic resource we have, to be expressive." Here, Bangla is not only used as a lingua franca but also Bangla is used to show subtly that they have a separate ethnic identity. Bangla is being used to understand human expression and self-actualization. Interestingly, the participants showed concern about the overall overexposure to Bangla but if we consider the co-existence of the languages of different ethnic groups, Bangla is used to draw the boundary line between different ethnic identities. It can be said that language hegemony of the used Bangla is established following its necessity in schools, offices, and various administrative purposes and it extends to communicating with other communities without making a compromise.

4.4 Sense of Guilt

When I met YU-UKM-27, he showed me a diary from when he used to learn Mraimaja (Marma Scripts) in 2002. Unfortunately, he did not continue learning. He now rarely recognizes the alphabet. YU-UKM-27 added

"I believe if I could master our Marma language, probably, my sense of identity and attachment to Marma would probably be stronger. One thing I can say is that learning other languages is not bad, rather it is a plus point. But not knowing or forgetting your language is a sin."

A-CHM-56 used to go to the Buddhist monastery (Kyong) after school time. Although he also did not complete the lessons, can read in Marma a little bit. A-MM-58, a primary school teacher, is proficient in the Marma language. Nevertheless, he frustratedly confessed: “It does not matter that I know it well; what matters is that many don’t know a little.” YU-SM-23 (university student) regrets not mastering the Marma language. YU-SM-23 shared: “The most depressing part for me is that I am not able to exercise literature in my language because I don’t know how to write in Marma.” Ngugi WA Thiong’o says language conveys culture, and culture carries, certainly through orature and literature, a complete set of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (Mahin, 2018).

While some of the participants (YU-UKM-27, YU-SM-23, and A-CHM-56) quoted above expressed a sense of guilt or, can say, frustration either for their lacking linguistic proficiency in their mother tongue, all the school-going students from the focus group and one college-going (YC-UCM-20) and one university-going student (YU-UM-24) expressed they are comfortable with Bangla in terms of thinking, expressing emotions and broader use of the language. It indicates a phenomenon of re-linguification. It may eventually lead to a shrunken identity. On the other hand, YU-UKM-27, YU-SM-23, and A-CHM-56’s situation depicts a dilemma of self-actualization and worldview. For a better life, parents are now more concerned about their children’s academic performances. Consequently, the linguistic value of Bangla in academics overshadows the necessity of practicing their Marma language. This seems to be inversely proportional among the young participants. Language shapes how we view the world and how we see ourselves in the world. A thin line can be drawn between the sense of guilt and linguistic incompetence. These two facets between the thin line, however, radiate two contradictory sides: a deep-rooted perturbation for the language and a shrunken identity.

4.5 Mogh and Marma Discourse

Marmas were known as “Moghs” or “Maghs” (Marma, 2020). Marmas of Bangladesh, especially educated Marmas, do not like to identify themselves as “Mogh” as the term is defamatory (Ashaduzzam & Rashel, 2008; Marma, 2020; Sikder & Poly, 2016). This term “Mogh” is also seen in the recorded literature in British India. Hutchinson in his *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (1906) has written:

“The tribe belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. The dialect in current use is Maghi, a corruption of Arracanese, which is itself a dialect of Burmese, written in the Burmese characters” (p. 18).

To an extent, it is said to be right that Marmas have different views on this issue. Adults did not seem comfortable discussing this issue. A-MKM-71 politely ignored the questions. Nevertheless, he just said: “My father and forefathers were Mogh, but some years after independence, we got our documents with the “Marma” term. Since we are identified as Marma, therefore, I have no problem with it.” On the other hand, university students, YU-UKM-27 and YU-SM-23 said they are more comfortable with being identified as Marma. When I discussed the different views I got earlier with them individually, they referred to the association of the term “Marma” on account of recorded history. YU-SM-23 added that the terms “Mogh” for male and “Moghini” are not completely out of use. Name of a player in the National Women's Football team, for example, he referred to. Most educated and young Marmas might not bother about this discourse and are comfortable with the term “Marma”. Nevertheless, some still have an emotional attachment to the term “Mogh” despite knowing or unknowing the negative connotation.

4.6 Responses on introducing Marma at the Primary level

For generations, Buddhist monks have been playing a crucial role in the upkeep of the traditional educational system in the Marma society. Buddhist monasteries provide the learners with both formal and spiritual guidance. From an early age, Marma children learn language and religious customs from their religious teacher in the temple. This is the reason why the literacy rate among Marmas is very high due to the existence of Buddhist temples and religious teachers in every village and locality. However, it is still inadequate. (Marma, 2020, p. 45). This is, indeed, a huge contribution to the Marma community. Nevertheless, this has two layers of discourse as pointed out by one of the interviewees, A-MM-58. On one hand, it produces torchbearers who will carry the religious and traditional customs and rituals because the Marma language is in use for those traditional customs and rituals. On the other hand, if it is confined to only limited use for these purposes, the future is going to be tough for them.

Nowadays, the opportunity of learning the language is not available in every temple. When I asked if they are familiar with any organization particularly working on fostering the

Marma language. Interviewees responded that they were aware of the existence of such organizations but could not give any particular information. It is because such organizations are more active in Bandarban than in their area. This is why the participants of the adult Marma focus group and other adult interviewees want institutional support from the government. For six communities—including Marma—the government has already started implementing measures to make mother tongue study an independent topic (The Business Standard, 2022; Channel 24, 2022). All the interviewees and local Marmas appreciated this approach. Some of them, however, have some suggestions regarding such initiatives. I talked to a female primary school teacher, FA-NCM-29, who teaches the newly added Marma lesson in primary school up to class 3. She stated that she lacks writing skills in Marma. Consequently, the teaching and learning practice is confined to oral implications only. On this note, A-MM-58 stated that the selected teachers got training on the Marma language teaching for 15 days, which is insufficient. Still, Marma people hope that if this initiative undergoes a better structure, it will be more sustainable. It is because school plays a vital role in establishing a more sustainable attitude towards teaching and learning their language. Bourdieu (1977) concedes that education and family are not drivers of linguistic value, and that value is determined by the market. To the extent that educational systems govern labor-market access, it becomes a significant determinant. A-MM-58 believes that schools can play a vital role in establishing a more sustainable attitude toward teaching and learning their language. He added that as language is a social possession, the broader it will be in practice, the more sustainable it will be.

A-MKM-71, an older interviewee, who is proficient in the Marma language, stated to strengthen the sense of identity among Marmas, exposure to Marma literature and culture to a greater extent is a must and it will be possible if the Marmas families cater to the Marma language and patronize mastering the language. He added: “Our children must learn Bangla as it is our country’s demand but at the same, our children have to learn Marma as it is our community’s demand.” To create linguistic value for a language, the family’s and community’s role is not negligible. For example, regional, national, and international Santal forums, associations, and conferences immensely contributed to the growth and mainstreaming of the Santali language. Art, literature, and music in Santal create natural interest among Santal and other communities as well (Acharya & Khastriya, 2016).

4.7 Limitation

I have conducted this research work following a concrete framework with utmost dedication and sincerity. A member from the Marma community had been an assistant and was present with me throughout the fieldwork and the study as well. Nevertheless, although I interviewed two adult female members, there were no young female interviewees. It might be more explanatory if a Marma would directly conduct the research or I could spend a long period with the community. It is because a community member has access to people for a long time and can understand the circumstances more profoundly.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

When the topic of language and identity appears concerning an indigenous community. The common focus is based on individuals as a whole who share the same ethnicity, language, and culture. I cannot deny the significance of the study which unifies individuals under the same umbrella as their language and culture at a risk of extinction. Nevertheless, this paper sought the perspective of identity from a micro level. As the initial goal of the paper was to contribute information to the existing literature on the Marma language, the paper extracted the inner voice of individuals being a Marma. In this era of globalization, most Marmas are exposed to other languages and cultures more for various reasons including educational, professional, and overall survival purposes. Still, there is a voice from within among them of having an ethnic identity “Marma”. Here comes the argument that an individual’s response, action, and words to such circumstances are different. There are two levels of factors that influence their sense of identity. Surrounding – it can be considered the external factor but this factor influences an individual’s own set of thoughts, words, and actions. An individual’s agency can be considered an internal factor. Here, Marmas may face more or less similar kinds of surroundings. For example, living in a place where Marmas are the majority group or Marmas are second/third/ majority group (can be said minority group as well) or a place where Marmas are rarely seen. The participants’ data I included showed many participants such more or less similar experiences. However, an individual’s response to his/her experience within the surroundings is different. It is because an individual’s ability to exercise agency varies even though they share the same ethnic identity, and face similar types of experiences. The internal negotiation about their sense of identity is based on their ongoing nature beside their identity as Marma, which they inherited culturally. Surroundings trigger their sense of identity when they become consciously observant of how “the other” identifies them. However, this is not a one-way phenomenon. On one hand, surroundings influence their perception of how they are identified and their responses to the surroundings through an internal negotiation show how they want themselves to be identified. Nevertheless, it is not like surroundings always trigger them first, rather their own perception also shapes how the other might identify them – from their previous experiences, established stereotypes, and personal beliefs. Their actions and responses reveal how strong or tangling their

sense of identity is as Marma. How they identify as the other and how they think that they are identified by the other thus influence their sense of identity as Marma. Moreover, the participants' responses disclose another significant scenario which can be called adaptability. Their adaptability to go with the flow to support their livelihood, professional, and educational lives is much needed. Consequently, they seem to be less interested in learning their language in written form. When an individual at one point in time perceives that he or she should have focused on his language to master it, it forms a sense of guilt. Therefore, this situation may also subtly lead to an issue of identical crisis despite having a strong sense of identity as Marma. Moreover, almost all the Marmas speak the Marma language with their family members in CHT. The practice of using the language is highly limited to oral communication. Almost all the Marmas I interviewed, including the two who were able to use the Marma scripts, thought that their written form is usually tough to master. The perception has been another obstacle for the Marmas to master their language.

“Identity is negotiated across time and space” (Norton, 2013). The participants speak Marma among themselves, and Bangla to people having other linguistics backgrounds. Despite knowing the language of another indigenous group, they prefer to speak Bangla. Even though they admit that the overexposure of Bangla to the community is one of the main reasons for the marginalization of their language, Bangla is usually preferred for interaction among different indigenous groups in CHT. It might be for mutual convenience. Besides, in such circumstances, Marmas do not usually prefer to speak the other indigenous groups' languages. Here, in this case, the difference between “Us” and “They” becomes salient in terms of the language use. This discourse can be discussed through the linguistic value of the language(s). Marmas speak Marma because it is their mother tongue, therefore, an emotional connection is common here. However, learning Bangla has been mandatory for schooling, and so is for entering the job market. Hence, subtle consent in using Bangla was established, but not for other indigenous groups' languages.

In a nutshell, Marmas have been carrying the cultural values for generations in which the language resides. Unfortunately, the use of language among Marmas has been limited to oral communication, which leads to language loss slowly. Due to the lack of proficiency in the Marma language, most of the young generation is far away from the Marma literature, history, and cultural activities. In addition, a sense of guilt among the Marmas, especially educated

Marmas for not mastering the language. All of these phenomena tangle their sense of identity as Marma. The interaction in different contexts triggers the perception of how they are being identified by others further complicating their sense of identity.

5.2 Recommendations

1. To accomplish the goal of teaching and learning in the mother tongue, there is a necessity for continuing the trend of teaching the Marma language in the monasteries. Meanwhile, the government initiatives to teach the Marma language up to class three should be expanded. It should have a formal evaluation process annually as some monasteries adopt such strategies. The formal teaching and learning process for the Marma language can play a vital role. It can create a positive attitude and value towards learning the language. Most importantly, teachers must be well-trained first, especially in writing. Only “Marma ethnicity” is not sufficient for the teachers. Language teachers should be selected who have writing competency. It is because only a short training session is not sufficient for teachers to master writing competency or the understand the teaching-learning process.
2. I am in favor of the trend of learning the language in the monasteries too. It is because they will not only learn the language but also the cultural values, history, and traditions, which is necessary to get rid of the identical crisis. Therefore, formal schooling and attending classes in monasteries should go side by side. Community members must be enthusiastic about this. Otherwise, the initiatives both by the government and the local organization will go in vain.
3. To foster enthusiasm for participation in learning the language, cultural engagement should be fostered. Marma culture is tightly linked to their language. Art and literature in their language and culture will not only create enthusiasm but will also act as the documentation of their legacy.
4. Unfortunately, established stereotypes are one of the main reasons for the identical crisis they usually face. A majority of people of Bangladesh are not aware of the rich linguistic and cultural diversity Bangladesh has. It is because of the lack of exposure and representation of different Ethnic communities including the Marmas in textbooks and media.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Language Use

- Which language(s) do you use in your day-to-day activities outside and inside your home?
- How many language(s) do you know? How proficient are you in each language?
- How often do you speak Marma?
- Do you speak Marma in the same manner your parents do?
- Do you think Marma is hard to learn or not? Why and why not?

Language and Cultural Identity

- Do you feel a tight relationship between your language and your culture?
- Is your mother tongue in use in your cultural and religious activities?
- If you are not able to participate in cultural or religious activities due to a lack of proficiency in your language, how do you feel?
- Did you ever face any obstacles related to your language and identity?

Language and Interaction

- In which language do you feel more comfortable expressing yourself in general?
- Which language do you use with people within your community?
- Which language do you use with people without your community?
- Do you feel any difference in both contexts we discussed previously?
- Do you think there is any hierarchy among the languages in your village?
- Have you lived for a long time where there is another dominant language other than Bangla?
- Have you been able to communicate in the language of that place? If yes, how often have you used that language?
- What is your stance on using the other ethnic language you can speak?

The use of language in public

- Do you hesitate to speak your mother tongue in a public place?
- Do you hesitate to speak your mother tongue over the phone in public?
- Suppose you receive a call from your family member who speaks Marma to you. Do you tend to shift from Marma to Bangla or any dominant language of the place you are in?

Language, Identity, and Ethnicity

- Would you like to share what you know about your community's history?
- Do you feel the Marma language influences your sense of belonging to the Marma community in your place?
- Do you feel the Marma language influences your sense of belonging to the Marma community in places where Marmas are absent?
- Do you feel a sense of pride while using Marma within your community and people who understand the Marma language?
- How proficient are you in Marma? What are your perceptions about your proficiency in Marma?
- Have you ever gone through literature and scripts in the Marma language?
- Have you ever felt included or excluded on the basis of language(s) you use?
- What are the consequences of these experiences?
- In which language do you think it is easier to express certain emotions?
- Do you observe any generational gaps in communication in Marma?

Regarding stereotypes

- Have you ever faced any stereotypes? How do you tackle those situations? What was your response?
- Have you ever misrecognized as any other ethnic community? If so, how do you feel if you are misrecognized as any other ethnic community?

Media Representation

- Do you think that the media properly showcases the linguistic diversity in Bangladesh?
- Have you observed any misrepresentation regarding your language or culture?

Language and Education

- What language have you first learned formally?
- Have you faced any obstacles or advantages?
- Have you attended classes in monasteries to learn Marma?
- What is your stance on the new initiatives by the government to include the Marma language learning up to class three?