

Factors of Language Shift from Chakma to Bengali: A Study on the Chakma-speaking people

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**This paper is dedicated to my parents for their valuable
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Abstract

Language shift has become a common phenomenon in the countries where there is more than one speech community. In such countries the dominant language gradually engulfs the minor languages. As Bangladesh comprises different indigenous communities who have different speech varieties, language shift has been taking place. This study focuses on the Chakma-speaking people and explores the factors of their language shift from Chakma to Bengali. At the same time, this study investigates the influence of age of the Chakma people on the psychology involved in speaking Bengali. In order to investigate the related issues a survey was conducted. Data was collected from 30 Chakma-speaking participants living in Dhaka. The paper concludes with some possible steps which can preserve the Chakma language as well as the Chakma culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Mother tongue is the language in which we all feel comfortable to express our thoughts and feelings. It is an integral part of any culture, as it is spoken by the ancestors of any speech community and represents their identity. However, there are many speech communities around the world, which are shifting from their mother tongue to another language. This shift occurs when a small speech community mixes with a large one. Besides, there are other various factors which play significant role in language shift, such as, social factors, geography, economy, politics, religion, education and so on.

Bengali is the official language of Bangladesh. The Bengali people are fluent in standard Bengali; some of them are also fluent in Bengali dialects. However, the indigenous people of Bangladesh who live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) speak in their respective mother tongues; that is to say, they speak in their different indigenous languages. Among the different indigenous communities, the Chakma community is the largest. The mother tongue of this community is Chakma and this language has its own distinct alphabet. Nevertheless, due to many reasons they are gradually shifting from Chakma to Bengali.

This thesis will investigate the factors of language shift from Chakma to Bengali. Among the different indigenous communities the researcher focused only on the Chakma community as it is the largest, educated and more developed community in comparison with the other indigenous communities. In order to explore the factors of language shift, the researcher worked on the Chakma people who live in the city. From their participation, the researcher also tried to find out what is happening in the CHT regarding language.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Language Shift

In a multilingual society, the dominance of the majority language sometimes erodes the minority language. This situation regarding language is commonly known as language shift. According to Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, “a change from the use of one language to the use of another language” is called language shift (1985). That is to say, language shift mainly deals with the change of using one language to another in daily life.

Language shift has become common phenomenon where a country has migrants from other countries and has tribal, indigenous or minority people of different languages living with the majority people of that country. Three authors used metaphors in clarifying the process of language shift. They said an individual’s knowledge of language can be regarded as his/her language capital, and he/she has to trade on with that capital in the linguistic market. However, if the knowledge of a language does not sell well in the market then it will lose its market shares and consequently, it will lead to language shift (Fakuada, Gambo and Bashir, 2003, p.296).

Besides there are some other issues and theories related to language shift, such as, bilingualism, multilingualism, language change and variations.

2.2 Bilingualism:

Bilingualism generally means being able to use two languages. According to Longman dictionary, “Bilingualism is the use of two languages either by an individual or a group of speakers such as inhabitants of a particular region or a nation” (2008, p. 54). So, it basically refers to the persons who can speak two different languages. Linguists Robert Anderson Hall states that “Bilingualism means at least some knowledge and control of grammar and structure of the second language” (1952, p. 65). That is to say, if a person has at least some control over the skills of a second language he is regarded as a bilingual person.

2.3 Multilingualism:

David Crystal says that “Multilingualism is a term used in sociolinguistics to refer to a speech community which makes use of two languages” (2003, p.305). That means multilingualism refers to countries which have more than one language either used by individuals or by groups.

2.4 Theories related to language shift:

2.4.1 Martha’s Vineyard:

The famous linguist William Labov did a research on phonological or sound variation in a place named Martha’s Vineyard. It is an island situated in Massachusetts coast. Labov investigated the changes in sound variation in this island and tried to find the reason. He interviewed many people in the island and found variants in (ay) and (aw) diphthongs. The people used to pronounce these diphthongs in a more central way. An important fact is that, in this island the summer visitors crowd during the season of summer. Consequently, it is found that, the older people specially the fisherman tend to do this tendency in order to distinguish their identity from the summer visitors. Moreover, the tendency of using centralized diphthongs is seen mostly in the people between 30 & 40 years of age. Authors Pope, Meyerhoff and Ladd said that,

“Labov suggested that differences between speakers of different ages could be seen as synchronic evidence for the processes of language change that had hitherto been observed only as historical processes” (2007, p. 615).

That is to say, language change is a historical process which occurs because of variation of speakers along with variation of ages.

2.4.2 The Wave Theory:

The change of language spreads rapidly. Author Janet Holmes talks about wave theory which deals with language change. She said, “Any particular change typically spreads simultaneously in different directions, though not necessarily at the same rate in all directions. Social factors such as age, status, gender, and region affect the rates of change and the directions in which the waves roll more swiftly” (2001, p.200). By this statement, the author means linguistic change does not spread equally in all communities. Social factors influence the spread of change. In particular speech community different sets of waves (the linguistic changes) intersect. A single change of language in age group, region or social group may spread into another group along with it.

2.5 Theories related to culture:

2.5.1 Theory of Acculturation

Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath discussed about the theory of acculturation in their book *Cultural Anthropology: The Humane Challenge*. According to them, acculturation is a broader term of cultural change, when a culture or society mixes more closely with a strong, big and powerful society. Besides some ‘element of force’ influences the change of culture directly or indirectly. Factors related to this point are such as, the extent of differences between the two cultures and the frequency of contact between these two cultures. Moreover, it is important to observe which culture is dominant and which culture is not (Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath, 2013, p. 355). Therefore, ‘Acculturation’ is a process where two cultures come in contact with each other, influencing languages and customs. In a broader way, when people of two different cultures live a country, there remains a possibility of assimilation. That is to say, the large culture may incorporate its values, customs, language etc to the minority culture.

2.5.2 Theory of Adaptation

Adaptation refers to the gradual process of adjusting of organisms to a certain condition. This ability to adopt with the new environment is known as the theory of adaptation. Cultural adaptation means adjusting the existing culture by adopting ideas, technologies and activities

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from another culture, that will help that culture to survive in a certain environment (Nanda, Serena, 1987, p. 45)

2.6 Language Shift in Different Countries around the World

Different countries have migrants and non-migrant citizen who shift their language to the majority language. “Compared with the situation in many nations, a staggering number of immigrants and their descendents in the United States have given up their ancestral languages and shifted to a new mother-tongue. Nearly two-thirds of the 35 million immigrants between 1840 and 1924 were native speakers of some other tongue” (Lieberson, Curry, 1971, p.125).

The authors further state there are two main demographic events which play vital roles in mother- tongue shift. Firstly, how non-English speaking immigrants learn English. It depends on, whether they learn English as a first language or a second. Secondly, how bilingual parents pass on English to their next generation. That means, whether parents teach English as a mother tongue or a second language. According to the authors, bilingualism is connected with the issue of native language shift. If conscious bilingual parents maintain the native language in socializing the offspring, then bilingualism does not create language shift. On the other hand, bilingual parents who teach only English in socializing the offspring, then it creates language shift. Besides there are more issues which are related with language shift, such as the “degree of mother- tongue diversity within the foreign born population, diversity within the immigrant population of the United States helped to generate mother-tongue shift, communication advantages with ethnic compatriots also suggests that any decline in the numbers of new immigrants settling in the United States would tend to raise the rate of mother-tongue shift among the earlier settlers. (Lieberson, Curry, 1971, p.135).

Different kind of language shift situation is seen in Adamawa state of Northern Nigeria. A lingua franca named Hausa has been used by almost all the ethnic groups. However, among the ethnic groups the Fulani people use the language ‘Fulfulde’, and it is seen that other ethnic groups are learning that language and some groups have shifted their mother tongue to Fulfulde.

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According to Fakuada, Gambo and Bashir, the study of the maintenance of a minority language requires investigating the rewards or the motivation given by the society of majority to minority members to shift to the majority language. In this case of Adamawa state, the non-fulani people are shifting their language to Fulfulde for getting religious, economic and political favor and benefits. The Fulani people used to go to villages to sell commercial goods, and they only spoke in Fulfulde. And the Arabic scholars also spoke only in Fulfulde. So the converted non-fulani Muslim people had no choice but to learn Fulfulde for religious favor. (Fakuada, Gambo and Bashir, 2003, p.296)

The tribal people of Northern Arapaho, who live in eastern plains of Colorado and Wyoming of United States, are shifting from their mother tongue Arapaho to English. Author Jeffrey Anderson states that “The approach here is primarily "ethnolinguistic," since it is grounded in indigenous perspectives for further understanding the interrelationship of culture, language, and history in the process of shift from Arapaho to English.” He further states, “Today, the Northern Arapaho, like many other American Indian peoples, are facing the loss of their indigenous language within two generations. Because of increases in population, in which younger generations predominate, elders are also decreasing even more rapidly as a percentage of the overall population. As a result, fewer and fewer social domains involve Arapaho speech. With the declining proportion of speakers in the population, there is a decreasing availability of older teachers of linguistic and cultural knowledge for younger people” (Anderson, 1998, p.43).

Similar reason of age in language shift but different language scenario is seen in Manukau City, which is situated in the south of Auckland and is regarded New Zealand's largest city. This city is rich in cultures & languages as it has four different communities living in it having different native languages. These Manukau Pasifika communities are Samoan, Cook Islands, Tongan, and Niuean. Four authors named Taumoefolau, Starks, Davis and Bell investigated the language shift of these communities. They found out that the older people of the communities claim that they can speak fluently in their native language, while the younger people are attracted to the dominant language English and they tend to speak in English. Therefore language shift has already taken place as the number of older people is very few in comparison to the rising population of the younger people. The younger speakers are

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monolingual in English. They are learning only English in the schools and it is proved that they can hardly speak in formal or informal native language. That is to say, there is a loss in formal and informal style of using the native language for the youth and they cannot recall vocabularies. Though the elder try to maintain the native language at home, the younger tend to reply in English. (Taumoefolau, Starks, Davis and Bell, 2002, p. 18)

Shift towards the majority language also happens due to rigid nationalism. Author Tsitsipis investigated the language shift of the Arvanitika speakers to Greek. Arvanitika is a variety of Tosk Albanian and Arvanitika speakers are the decedents of Albania, presently living in Greece. They first settled in the mountains of Greece, where they were isolated from the urban areas. As a result, this isolation ensured the preservation of their native language for a long time. Later they settled in the semi-urban areas. However, situation gradually changed after the World War II, as Greece was facing modernization and industrialization resulting Arvanitika communities to shift in the urban area. The author said “Prevailing conditions at the time of Greece's independence from Ottoman rule led to the adoption of a rigid nationalistic position expressed in the "one language, one nation". Thus the new national rule caused Arvanitika to shift their language from Arvanitika to Greek, as there was no “potential for tolerance of the minority languages” (Tsitsipis, 1988, p. 62).

2.7 Language Shift in perspective of Bangladesh:

2.7.1 General overview of minority people and the CHT:

The CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) of Bangladesh is situated in the country's international border with Myanmar and India. The whole region can be subdivided into three districts. These are Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari. These are the hilly areas where the indigenous people live with minor number of non-tribal people from the land. Among the ethnic groups, the largest group is the Chakma. These people are locally known as ‘pahari’ or hill people. They are completely different from the people of plain lands. Their differences are clearly seen in terms of their physical appearance, language, religion and culture. However, they have many similarities with the ethnic groups of northeastern India and Myanmar. Most of the hill people are the followers of Buddhism (Adnan, 2008, p.28).

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The CHT includes a total area of 5,093 sq. miles, which is almost ten percent of the total area of Bangladesh. In 1991, its population was approximately .974 million and in this the Hill people constituted 0.5 million and the Bengalis .47 million. There are thirteen ethnic groups and they are of Sino-Tibetan descent belonging to the Mongolian groups (Mohsin, 2002, p.11).

2.6.2 Political Background (1760-1996)

British colonialism and the hill people (1760-1947)

In 1760, during the British colonialism there was a British policy regarding CHT. This policy was taken for some political purposes. First of all it was a sort of protection for the British to get political, economic and military advantage and secondly, it will keep the hill people separated from the Bengalis. Though it helped the hill people to get rid of economic exploitation of Bengalis, later it became a problem for them, as they were not ready to take part in the political system.

The chiefs of the hill people used to tribute cotton to the East India Company. However, communication between the hill people and the company was conducted by the Bengali Commission agents of the Company. As a result, the movements of Bengalis in the hill increased day by day and it created a superior-inferior environment. The Company increased the revenue gradually, which ultimately led to a war in 1777. This war was against the Company as well as the Bengali exploiters and it was declared by Rono Khan, who was the deputy of the chief. In 1787 the Chakma chief Jan Bakhsh Khan surrendered and ended the war, as the economy of the hill people was almost paralyzed. After that, several conditions were accepted by both of the parties. Consequently, the British agreed to give the hill people their autonomy at the same time, restricting the migration of the Bengalis into the hills. In 1860, the CHT was made into a separate district. However, the British were not satisfied. Somehow, they managed to take control over CHT by giving the local chiefs some powers. During that time, many Bengalis migrated in CHT and took lands for agricultural purpose. Besides, Bengali money-lenders were exploiting the hill people. In the year 1900 the CHT Manual amended to stop this exploitation.

The State of Pakistan and the Hill people, 1947-1971

After the division of two nations, the political system took a new turn. There were conflicts between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. The language movement of 1952 gave the Bengalis an inspiration to fight for their rights. However, in this crucial time of nationalism the hill people were separated from the overall politics. They were neither identified by the East Pakistan nor by the West Pakistan. However, this separation made them aware of politics and somehow it spread the importance of literacy. Eleven high schools and one college were built in Rangamati, between 1951 to 1970. In addition, in 1957-1966 three associations were made to protest against political and economic oppression. These were Pahari Chatra Shomity, CHT Welfare Association and the Rangamati Communist Party (Mohsin, 2002, p. 25-47).

Another issue which created a great conflict during that time is the establishment of Kaptai hydro-electric dam. Author M.Q. Zaman states about this political issue of conflict in his article. He states that before the liberation war, in the year of 1960 the Kaptai hydro- electric dam was built. The establishment of the dam caused great hazard for the Hill people of CHT, especially for the Chakmas. More than 1,00,000 people that is to say, 90 % of the Chakmas lost their home and were displaced. In addition, 8000 Bengali settlers and 1000 Mogh hillmen were also affected. At that time, the then East Pakistan Government took rehabilitation programme. Though the government had a budget of US \$ 51, it spent only US \$ 26 of this purpose, which helped only a few indigenous groups. Besides, the Bengali settlers got special attention of the administration rather than the indigenous (Zaman, 1982, p. 75).

Politics of Bengali Nationalism and the CHT, 1971-1996:

During the liberation war, the Mogh Raja Mong Prue Chai Chowdhury joined the liberation force. However, the Chakma Raja Tri Dev Roy was in support of Pakistan army. As a result, when Bangladesh liberated, the anger of the Bengalis, especially the anger of the Mukti Bahini fell on the Hill people. Moreover, for getting constitutional safeguards in the new nation building process, Manobendra Narayan Larma presented some demands, which were rejected by Sheikh Mujib then and there. On the other hand, Sheikh Mujib approached the Hill people to take the identity of Bengali, but it was refused. The political situation took a new turn after Mujib's assassination in 1975. Major- General Zia ur Rahman emerged following the military

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intervention in Bangladesh. Religion and nationalistic communalism spread in the new construction of nationhood; however, the people of the CHT got no space in the new construction. As a matter of fact, military operations took place in the CHT at that time. In order to pacify the PCJSSS (Parbatta Chottogram Jono Shanga Shamiti), a Tribal Convention was formed in 1977. Till 1978, four sessions were held between the government and the PCJSS. However, it was interrupted due to the assassination of Zia in 1981. After this, H.M. Ershad assumed power and during his regime he tried to make the state an Islamic oriented state. In 1987, he tried to make negotiations with the PCJSS, but the attempt was failed. After Ershad's regime, BNP came into power in 1991; however, the CHT issue was not solved. In 1996, Awami League government came into power and tried to make negotiation with the PCJSS, but the problem is still unsettled.

2.7.3 Educational system in the CHT:

Different types of educational institutions are situated in the CHT. These are Government, non-Government and other religious missionary educational institutions (Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts, 2009, p.117).

According to Kamal, 44% of the indigenous students enroll in government primary schools, 24% enroll in NGO Schools, 21% enroll in missionary schools, 5% in satellite schools and 2% in primary schools. However, many obstacles have created an uncomfortable educational environment in the CHT. Such as, uncomfortable educational environment, text books in Bengali language ; unfeasible location of schools, lack of education in mother tongue, uncertainty in social, economical and political sectors and so on (Education and Language Needs of the Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, p. 24).

In the matter of classroom situation in the CHT author Greenhill said, as both the teachers and students are from two different communities, their language, mentality, physical features and thoughts are different from each other (Greenhill, 2009, p.16). The educational system in the CHT is such that indigenous students cannot cope up with the environment as majority of the teachers are Bengali. The indigenous students cannot communicate properly. Besides, there are no similarities between their appearance, thoughts and most importantly their mother tongues.

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However, Kamal, Sikder and Nasreen found out that most of the indigenous parents want their children to know Bengali. Though they want their children to read and write in their mother tongue in the school, they are also conscious about educating their children in Bengali. Knowing Bengali will help their children to cope up with the majority people. They also prioritize the importance of learning English (p.9). However, the indigenous children are already facing problem learning mother tongue and Bengali at the same time. So, learning another language becomes difficult for them (Kamal, Sikder and Nasreen, 2004a, p. 26)

Chapter 3

Research Design

3.1 Objective: - To investigate the factors behind the native Chakma speakers' language shift from Chakma to Bengali

3.2 Research questions:

1. What is the comparative percentage of Bengali-speaking and Chakma-speaking people among the Chakma residents of Dhaka?
2. What are the factors that compel them to be exposed in Bengali language and culture?
3. How is the educational system in CHT responsible for language shift?
4. How do the economy, religion and politics play significant role?
5. How are the cultural changes taking place following the language shift?
6. How is the geographical location responsible in this regard?
7. What are the possible motivating factors that encourage them to speak in Bengali?
8. Do different age groups have different mentality toward the mainstream language?

3.3. Significance of the Research:

This research will let everyone know about how the Chakma community is gradually shifting their language towards the mainstream language Bengali. Besides, the community of majority will know how the Chakma community feels about using a language which is not their mother tongue. In addition, this research will try to find out the incidents happening in the CHT that stimulate language shift. Moreover, it will let everyone know what the indigenous people want from the government in order to preserve their culture and language.

3.4. Methodology:

3.4.1. The Instrument:

The researcher made a questionnaire consisting of 16 close ended questions, 3 open ended question and 1 partially close and partially open ended question. The survey was conducted in three different age groups.

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- i) Survey for the teenagers, age: 15-19 (College students)
- ii) Survey for the young adults, age: 20-29 (University Students)
- iii) Survey for the middle aged people, age: 30-40 (Professionals)

3.4.2. Participants:

The participants of this research were 30 educated indigenous people who live in Dhaka and all of them belong to the Chakma community.

3.4.3. Procedure:

The researcher had distributed 10 questionnaires to the indigenous students of a reputed college in Dhaka, 10 questionnaires to the indigenous students of a private university in Dhaka and the rest 10 were distributed to the indigenous people who are engaged in doing jobs in Dhaka.

3.4.4. Method of Analysis:

Microsoft Excel was used to organize the raw data. It was used to make tables and graphs and calculating percentages. Later, the tables and graphs were set in the 'Findings and Analysis' chapter.

3.4.5 Limitation:

This research is only done on the teenagers, young adults and middle aged participants of Chakma community living in Dhaka. However, the researcher was supposed to take survey from the older people who live in the CHT, which became very difficult due to the present political turmoil happening in the country. Besides, due to the volatile responses of the teenagers, the total percentages were affected. Moreover, though the researcher expected to get more participants for the survey, she got only 30 participants.

Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

4.1 Findings of the close ended questions:

4.1.1 Table 1: Responses of the participants to all the close ended questions

Questions	Responses	15-19	14-13	15-15	Total	Percentage
Q.1	Chakma	8	0	3	11	37%
	Bengali	2	10	7	19	63%
Q.2	Chakma	7	0	0	7	23%
	Bengali	3	10	10	23	77%
Q.3	Yes	8	10	10	28	93%
	No	2	0	0	3	7%
Q.4	Yes	1	6	8	15	50%
	No	9	4	2	15	50%
Q.5	Yes	8	10	10	28	93%
	No	2	0	0	2	7%
Q.6	Yes	7	9	10	26	87%
	No	3	1	0	4	13%
Q.7	Yes	10	10	9	29	97%
	No	0	0	1	1	3%
Q.8	Yes	10	10	9	29	100%
	No	0	0	0	0	0%
Q.9	Yes	8	10	10	28	93%
	No	2	0	0	2	7%
Q.10	Yes	4	9	10	23	77%
	No	6	1	0	7	23%
Q.11	Yes	3	8	10	21	70%
	No	7	2	0	9	30%
Q.12	Yes	6	9	10	25	83%

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	No	4	1	0	5	17%
Q.13	Chakma	0	0	0	0	0%
	Bengali	10	10	10	10	100%
Q.14	Yes	9	7	10	26	87%
	No	1	3	0	4	13%
Q.15	Yes	8	8	10	26	87%
	No	2	2	0	4	13%
Q.16	Yes	8	9	8	25	83%
	No	2	1	2	5	17%
Q.17	Yes	6	5	6	17	57%
	No	4	5	4	13	43%

4.1.2 Table 2: Language that is spoken mostly in daily life (Responses of question-1)

Participants	Response	Number	Percentage	Total Percentage
College Students	Chakma	8	80%	37%
University Students		0	0%	
Professionals		3	30%	
College Students	Bengali	2	20%	63%
University Students		10	100%	
Professionals		7	70%	

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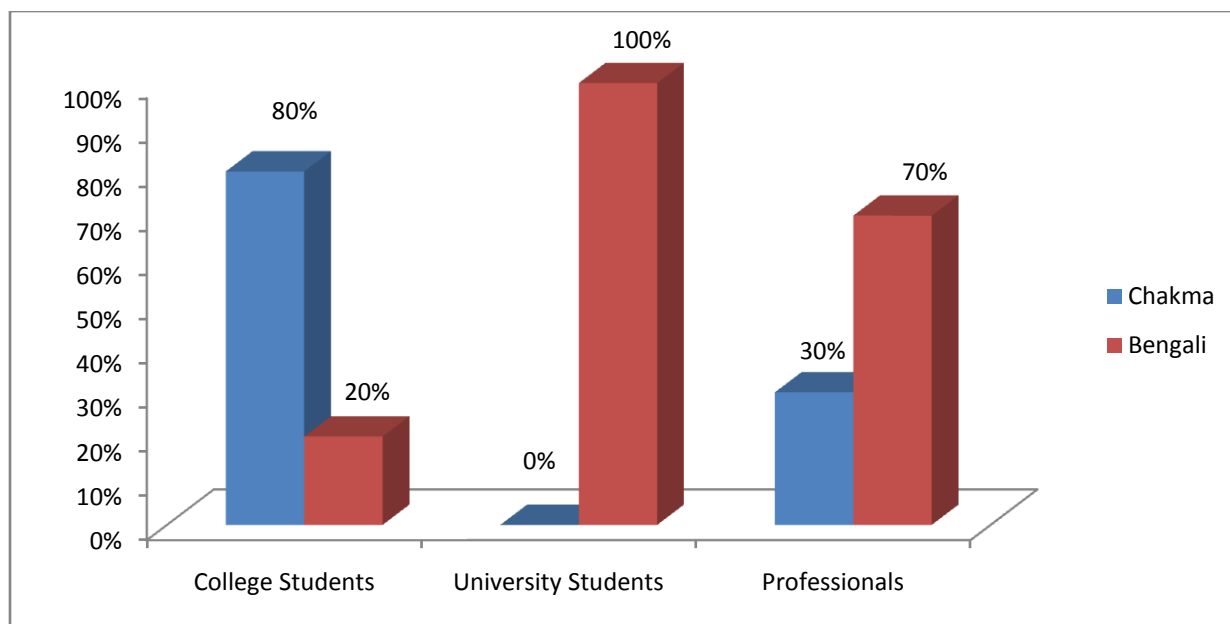


Figure 1: Language that is spoken mostly in daily life

The participants were asked whether they speak Chakma or Bengali in their daily life. In Table- 2 and Figure-1, we can see the responses of the participants to this question. **63%** of the participants replied that they speak in Bengali most of the time, and the rest **37%** replied they speak in Chakma in their daily life. Among the participants, **80%** of the college students (age 15-19) speak in Chakma in their daily life, **100%** of the university students speak in Bengali and **70%** of the professionals speak in Bengali in their daily life. That is to say, majority of the indigenous people use Bengali in their day to day life. This indicates the certainty of language shift to Bengali from Chakma.

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4.1.3 Table 2: Fluency in Language (Question-2)

Participants	Response	Number	Percentage	Total Percentage
College Students	Chakma	7	70%	23%
University Students		0	0%	
Professionals		0	0%	
College Students	Bengali	3	30%	77%
University Students		10	100%	
Professionals		10	100%	

Table 3: Fluency Language

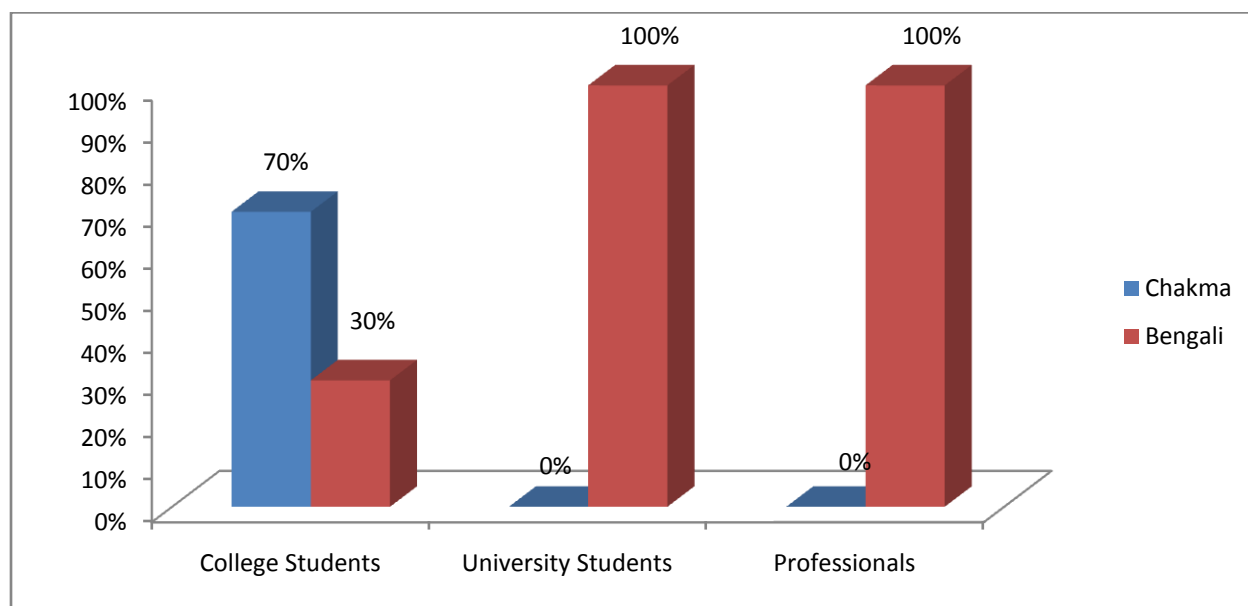


Figure 2: Fluency in language

In Table -3 and Figure -2, we can see the responses of the participants to the question in which language they are more expert/fluent. **23%** responded to Chakma, and **77%** responded to Bengali. **70%** of the college students said that they are fluent in Chakma both in terms of

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speaking and writing. **100%** of the university students said they are fluent in Bengali and **100%** of the professionals said they are fluent in Bengali. This shows the direct indication of language shift. Although they have their own mother tongue, most of the people are expert and fluent in Bengali which is a second language for them.

4.1.4 Table 4: Code Switching to Bengali (question-4)

Participants	Response	Number	Percentage	Total Percentage
College Students	Yes	1	10%	50%
University Students		6	60%	
Professionals		8	80%	
College Students	No	9	90%	50%
University Students		4	40%	
Professionals		2	20%	

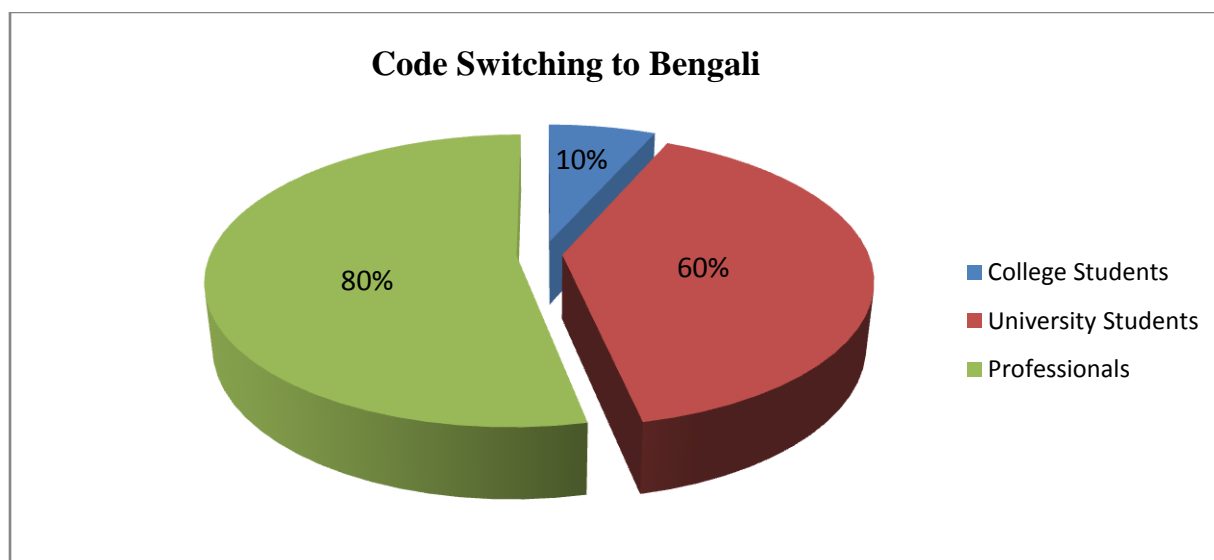


Figure 3: Code Switching to Bengali

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The participants were asked if they face the problem of switching to Bengali, while speaking in Chakma. **50%** of the total participants said ‘yes’ and **50%** said ‘no’ to this questions. Among the participants **10%** of the college students, **60%** of the university students and **80%** of the professionals do switch to Bengali, while speaking in Chakma. On the other hand, **90%** of the college students said they do not face this problem of code switching. So, it can be assumed that not all of the indigenous people face the problem of switching in Bengali. However, there are people who face it while speaking in Chakma. This code switching occurs only because they are more exposed to Bengali language.

4.1. 5 Table 5: Feel comfortable speaking in Bengali (question-16)

Participants	Response	Number	Percentage	Total Percentage
College Students	Yes	8	80%	83%
University Students		9	90%	
Professionals		8	80%	
College Students	No	2	20%	17%
University Students		1	10%	
Professionals		2	20%	

Factors of Language Shift from Chakma to Bengali

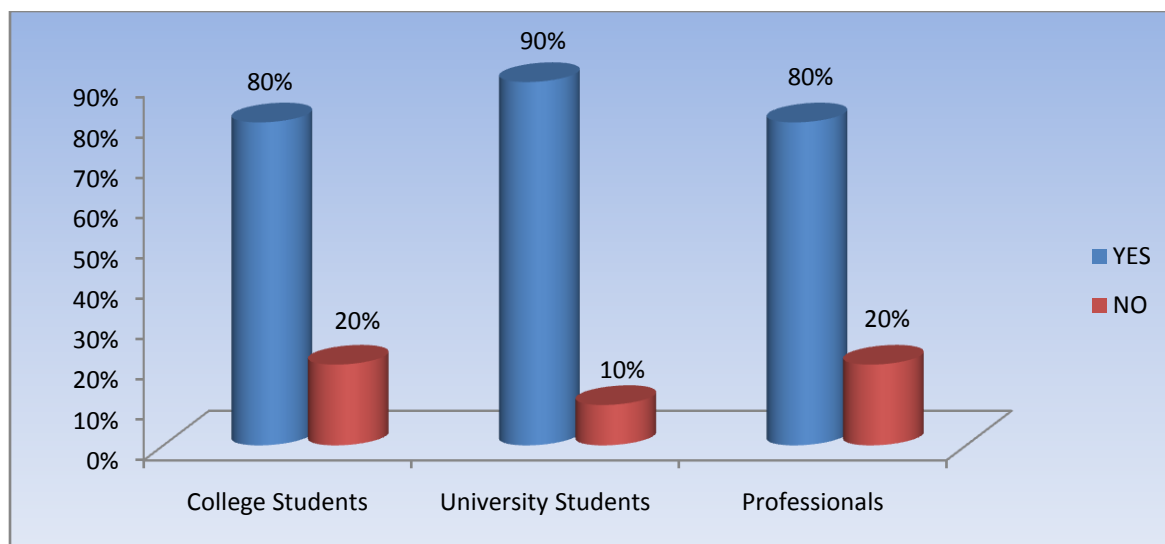


Figure 4: Feel comfortable in speaking Bengali

Table-5 and Figure-4 shows that **83%** of the total participants feel comfortable in expressing themselves using Bengali. **80%** of the college students said they feel comfortable speaking in Bengali while **20%** of them said they do not. **90%** of the university students and **80%** of the professionals said they do not feel uncomfortable speaking Bengali. That means majority of the indigenous people do not feel uncomfortable in using a language which is not their mother tongue. That clearly indicates the certainty of language shift. On the other hand, the rest **17%** of the total said that they do not feel comfortable using Bengali. However, they have to speak in Bengali for the purpose of education and socialization.

4.1.6 Analysis of the rest close ended questions:

Among the 17 close ended questions asked to the participants 4 questions is analyzed above with the help of tables and graphs. Now the rest close ended questions are analyzed below.

Question 3

Do you think educating your children in Bengali is important, so that they can cope up with the majority people?

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From Table-1 we can see that, 93% of the participants answered affirmatively to this question. And 7% answered negatively. This indicates majority of the indigenous parents want their children to know Bengali, as it will help their children to cope up with the education system as well as with the mainstream Bengali-speaking people. As 93% answered 'yes' to this question, that gives us the idea that most of the parents educate or teach their children in Bengali. If they use Bengali with their children, it is definite that gradually there will be shift towards Bengali.

Question 5

In order to get Government jobs or private jobs a person must have fluency in Bengali. So, do you feel the necessity of having good fluency in Bengali?

Table-1 shows that, in this question 93% of total the participants answered 'yes'. And 7% said 'no'. This shows that the indigenous people are conscious of having fluency in Bengali, as it is the key to get a good job. They have no other choice but to have a good command in Bengali.

Question 6

For economical survival, if you are engaged in doing business or any kind of economical activities, anyhow you will have to deal with Bengalis. Do you feel the necessity of knowing Bengali for economical survival purpose?

Among the participants 87% answered affirmatively, and the rest 13% answered negatively. That means, due to economical purpose, the Chakma people use Bengali and majority of them feel the necessity of speaking in Bengali in this regard.

Question 7

Due to geographical and other barriers, the quality of primary schools and colleges in the CHT are not up to the mark. That's why conscious parents send their children to the cities to get better education. Do you have any educational experience in the CHT?

97% participant said that they have educational experience in CHT and only 3% participant said that they do not have any educational experience in the CHT. However, in both

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of the cases of getting education, that is to say whether they get education in the CHT or outside the CHT they were exposed to Bengali language and culture.

Question 8

In recent data, it is seen that most of the primary schools in the CHT use 'Bengali' as a medium of communication in the class. Did you face the same experience? (Answer if you have any educational experience in the CHT)

This question is asked for those 97% participants, who have educational experience in the CHT. And 100%, that is to say, all of them answered 'yes' to this question. That means, the medium of giving instruction in the schools and colleges is Bengali and everyone face it. As a result, the indigenous children learn Bengali more effectively and promptly and obviously language shift will take place.

Question 9

Both in the CHT and outside, the educational system follows national curriculum. As the text books reflect the Bengali way of living, indigenous children can not relate their life to the topics of the books. So, indigenous children are more exposed to Bengali culture along with the language rather than their own. Do you agree?

93% of the participants said 'yes' to this question. They all agreed to the fact that indigenous children are accustomed to read text books that reflects Bengali ways of living, as a result, there will be a certain complexity among the children. They cannot relate their culture and language with their education.

Question 10

It is seen that the distinct culture of yours is being affected by Bengali culture. For example; food habits, social gatherings, and wedding customs are influenced by Bengali culture. Do you think that speaking Bengali somehow influenced you to adopt Bengali culture as well?

77% participants answered affirmatively to this question and the rest 23% answered negatively. That is to say, 77% of the participants believe their culture is getting influenced by Bengali culture. Language itself reflects the cultural identity of every community. When the

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people of a different culture speak in a particular language that is different from mother tongue, it will certainly made influence in that culture. Besides if there is intimacy between the two communities, the culture of majority will definitely influence the culture of minority. As a result, their distinct culture will go through certain changes.

Question 11

The conversion to Christianity in CHT is increasing day by day. The converted indigenous people read the Bible in Bengali. Besides, most of the priests are Bengalis. So, in order to know the religion, the hill people do not have any other choice but to know Bengali. Do you agree?

70% participants agreed to the fact that religion also plays a role in using Bengali language. Though all the indigenous are not Christian, the rate of conversion in CHT is increasing.

Question 12

The geographical location is a problem in the CHT for which there is lack of good educational institutions. There is no university in the CHT, which causes students to migrate to cities in order to get higher education. Do you think that the geographical location of the CHT is a barrier here?

Among the participants, 83% agreed to this question. In case of language shift, geography always plays an important role. In the case of the CHT, geographical location is a barrier, as it hinders in establishing institutions and communication.

Question 13

There are many Bengali settlers who live in the CHT. In which language do they communicate with you?

100% of the participants answered 'Bengali' to this question. The population of Bengali settlers is less than the local indigenous people. However, they do not learn Chakma to communicate with them. They use Bengali as a medium of communication.

Question 14

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As the number of Bengali settlers is increasing day by day, do you think it is affecting your language as well as culture?

87%, that is to say majority of the participants think that their language and culture is being affected by the Bengali settlers. These Bengalis are involved in different occupations. Some of them are teachers, priests, NGO workers, business man etc. Consequently majority of them are spreading the Bengali culture and language among the indigenous people.

Question 15

If we see the political background, we see the indigenous people are exploited by Bengalis from the British period. In the liberation war, due to many reasons the then Chakma raja Tri Dev Roy supported Pakistan, for which the Bengalis became more aggressive towards them. Do you think these political incidents still have some negative influence in the relationship between your people and Bengalis?

This was a political question asked for checking whether politics still have some influence in the relation between the two communities. And 87%, that is to say the majority of the participants think political issues have certain negative influences in their relation with Bengalis.

Question 17

The government is giving some privileges to the indigenous people. Such as, the facility of 'quota' both in education and government jobs. In a way, it can be regarded as 'motivation' for adopting Bengali language and culture. Do you agree? If no please justify your answer.

57% of the participants think that the 'quota' system is a kind of motivation for them to speak in Bengali. Whenever, there is language shift towards a mainstream language, it is seen that the community of majority gives some privileges to the community of minority as a motivation. The purpose of asking this question was trying to find out whether the privileges given to the indigenous people really act as 'motivation'. However, 43% participants do not think it as motivation.

4.2 Analysis of the open ended questions:

Question 17

In question 17 those 46% participants who didn't agree that 'quota' acts as a motivation, were asked for justification for their answer. 1 participant said that as the educational facilities are poor in the CHT; it is their right to get this kind of facility like 'quota' from the government. Another participant said that even it is true that 'quota' system encourages them for higher education but higher education may not always be in Bengali. So, he does not think it is affecting their language and culture. Though these participants didn't agree to the fact that 'quota' is a motivation for them, they said it encourages them in higher studies, which ultimately help them in getting good government jobs as well as private jobs.

Question 18

What steps should be taken by the government to preserve Chakma language and culture? Please list them down.

In this question almost all the participants who answered gave the same suggestions to preserve their language. These steps includes,

- ensuring primary education in Chakma language
- making education compulsory in Chakma language up to class 5
- primary texts should be written in Chakma alphabets
- establishing more schools and colleges in the CHT
- recruiting more Chakma teachers in the schools and colleges, especially in the primary level
- giving instruction in the primary level in Chakma
- including chapters reflecting their life and culture in the national curriculum books
- making an institution by the government to preserve indigenous language and culture

Question 19

The CHT does not have facilities that developed cities have. Some indigenous girls come to cities to do jobs in beauty parlors; some people come to get good jobs; and some others come to

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have a good standard of living. There are no shopping malls, good restaurants, amusement parks etc. and there are no good private organizations to work for. Do you think geographical barrier is the only reason for this? If not, please justify your answer.

In this question most of the participants said there are other reasons beside geographical barrier which hinders development in the CHT. Almost all the participants who answered said that there are political reasons as well. 1 participant said that they are deprived economically, socially and politically, for which the CHT lags behind in terms of development. Another participant said that, lack of interest of the governments to develop the CHT is also a factor. Moreover, another participant said that the influential or powerful people of the CHT could take some steps for development; however, there is lack of confidence to come ahead.

Question 20

What is your view regarding using Bengali in your day to day life?

This was a general question asked to check how the Chakma people feel speaking in Bengali, that is to say speaking in a language which is not their mother tongue. Some participants answered positively towards using Bengali, and some answered very straight forward regarding their usage of Bengali. Those who answered positively, they said they can communicate effectively with their friends and with other people. As they use this language daily, their fluency is improved, which also help them in getting good jobs. Besides, this fluency in Bengali helps them to express their feelings more clearly to their Bengali friends. Moreover, one participant said that, as he/she now lives in Dhaka, she prefers to speak Bengali more and more to achieve the standard accent. On the other hand, some participants said that, in Dhaka they do not get enough chance to speak their own language; as a result they are worried about the gradual language death. Some other participants made some straight forward answers. They said that, they speak and use Bengali only to communicate with the mainstream people and for educational purpose.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Language shift generally occurs at the places where the speakers are bilingual. In this research, among the total Chakma participants 63% of them said that they use Bengali in their daily life and 77% of them said that they are fluent in Bengali. These clearly indicate that the Chakma people are bilingual and Bengali is their second language, as Hall says, “Bilingualism means at least some knowledge and control of grammar and structure of the second language” (1952, p. 65). Now the researcher will discuss the other factors related with language shift, which will help to conclude whether the bilingual Chakma people are really shifting their language to Bengali or not.

Education is one of the most significant areas of research regarding language shift. From the findings we can see that, 97% of the participants have educational experience in the CHT. This experience includes getting education from schools and colleges where the medium of interaction is Bengali, and 100% of the participants faced it. On the issue of language shift of the migrants, Lieberson and Timothy says, “Another factor which is important in language shift is the usage of language with parents and usage of language in school” (1971, p. 134). From the survey we get a clear idea that, the indigenous students get education in Bengali from the primary level. Majority of the teacher who are involved in teaching in the CHT are Bengali. As a result, it is very certain that there will be a tendency among them to shift to the language in which they are getting education from the primary level. Besides, usage of language with parents is another important factor. Kamal, Sikder and Nasreen found out that most of the indigenous parents want their children to know Bengali (2004a, p. 26). In this research, it is also seen that, the indigenous parents want their children to be educated in Bengali, as it will ensure their children’s future. 93% of the participants emphasized on the importance of educating their children in Bengali. As the parents are conscious about educating their children in Bengali, they will definitely encourage their children to learn Bengali.

Besides education, religion, economy and politics are other important concerns which stimulates language shift. Though Buddhism is followed by the majority of the Chakma people, it is seen that the rate of conversion to Christianity is increasing rapidly. Ali and Nurullah state

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“The Christian mission, taking the opportunity of people’s poverty and distress, is evangelizing them through financial assistance and other means. The rapidly increasing number of conversion to Christianity among the tribal population is alarming” (2008, p. 87). To know the new converted religion the indigenous people read the Bengali translated Bible. In addition, the priests in the CHT who give them (indigenous people) knowledge about religion use Bengali as, most of them (priests) are Bengali. A question was asked to the participants, if they agree about the fact that, this increasing rate of Christianity leaves the indigenous people no choice but to use Bengali. And most of the participants, that is to say 70% of them agreed. Alongside religion, economy also plays a significant role in this issue. In a question of reliance on using Bengali for economical purpose, 93% of the participants agreed and 87% agreed for the necessity of using Bengali for socio-economical purpose. Fakuada, Gambo and Bashir researched the reasons behind language shift of a particular community and they found out that the community of minority uses the mainstream language for getting religious, economical and political favor from the majority community (2003, p.296). Here in this context of the CHT we can see that the indigenous people use the mainstream language for getting religious and economical favor. However, we are not sure about whether they speak in Bengali for getting any political favor or not. From the British period to the present time the relationship between Bengali with the indigenous people is not so pleasant. A question was asked if the political incidents still have negative effect in their relation with the Bengali. And 87% of the participants said ‘yes’. Besides in the open ended question asking for reasons behind the lack of development in the CHT, most of the participants said there is political reason, as they think government is intentionally ignoring the development of the CHT.

Cultural changes and adaptation of a community of minority in touch of a mainstream culture generally occurs following language shift. The language Bengali itself is an essential element of Bengali culture. Speaking in Bengali somehow influences the indigenous people to adopt the Bengali culture. As educational system introduces the Bengali culture and language to the indigenous children, they are exposed to it since childhood. Consequently, 93% of the participants agreed that indigenous children are more exposed to Bengali language as well as culture rather than their own. It can be said that, a cultural change is taking place, which is known as acculturation. As Haviland, Prins, McBride and Walrath discussed about the theory of acculturation they explained “Acculturation is a process when a culture or society mixes more

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closely with a strong, big and powerful society which influences the languages, customs and culture” (2013, p. 355). Therefore, the indigenous people, especially the Chakma people are going through the process of acculturation as they are in a close contact with the Bengalis and they are exposed to Bengali in the area of education, economics, and religion and so on. Moreover, the indigenous people, especially the Chakma people are also going through the process of cultural adaptation. Nanda and Serena explained that cultural adaptation means adjusting the existing culture by adopting ideas, technologies and activities from another culture, that will help that culture to survive in a certain environment (1987, p. 45). As the traditions and customs of the Chakma people are changing by the affect of Bengali culture, a question was asked regarding their cultural adaptation. They were asked whether speaking in Bengali somehow influenced them to adopt the Bengali culture. In response to this question, 77% of the participants said ‘yes’. It is seen that they are adopting some Bengali cultural features and changing their distinct food habits, wedding customs and traditions. Besides, there is concrete reason behind this process of cultural acculturation and adaptation of the Chakma people. There are many Bengali settlers who live in the CHT and their population in the CHT is increasing day by day. 100% of the participants ensured that, the Bengali settlers communicate with them in Bengali and 87% of the participants think that the increasing number of Bengali settlers is affecting their language and culture. Certainly, the Chakma people are changing their culture and adjusting it according to the social environment around them.

The researcher has tried to find out whether there is any geographical factor related with this language shift, as most of the studies of language shift reflect it. It has been found that, in the context of the CHT, geography plays an indirect role in language shift. 83% of the participants think that geography is a barrier. As the CHT comprises with hilly areas, the communication, transportation, educational systems and facilities are not up to the mark. Moreover, it is one of the concrete reasons for which the CHT is lagging behind in terms of development. As a result, most of the Chakma people are migrating to cities to get a good standard of life as well as education. This ultimately, causes them to be exposed with the Bengali language and culture.

Whenever a community of minority shifts their language, there remain some motivational factors which encourage them to speak in the mainstream language. According to three authors, Fakuada, Gambo and Bashir, “The study of the maintenance of a minority language requires

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investigating the rewards or the motivation given by the society of majority to minority members to shift to the majority language” (2003, p.296). A question was asked to the participants in this regard, if they think the ‘quota’ system in education and government jobs acts as a motivation for them to speak in Bengali. Consequently, 57% of the participants agreed, and the remaining 43% who did not agree gave their valuable justifications. They explained that the ‘quota’ system encourages them for higher studies which helps them to get good jobs. Therefore, the justifications circumlocutory reflect the possibility of ‘quota’ as a motivational factor for which they are encouraged to speak in Bengali.

As mentioned earlier, this research is done on participants from three age groups. Age has always been an important factor in the researches of language shift around the world. In the research of language shift of Manukau Pasifika four authors said, “The older people of the communities claim that they can speak fluently in their native language, while the younger people are attracted to the dominant culture and they tend to speak in the mainstream language” (Taumoefolau, Starks, Davis and Bell, 2002, p. 18). Younger people tend to shift to the dominant culture more enthusiastically, and it is a common scenario in almost all the researches done regarding language shift. However, in this research this view regarding language shift and age is rather different. It is seen that, the teenagers tend to speak more in Chakma and they claim they are more expert and fluent in Chakma rather than Bengali, whereas young adults and the people of middle age tend to speak and are more fluent in Bengali. Besides, in most of the questions the negative responses came from the teenagers. There are some possible reasons behind this kind of negative responses from the teenagers. Firstly, these teenage participants were college students. As all of them said they have educational experience in the CHT, it is possible that they have just came from CHT to Dhaka for getting better educational facilities. As a result, they are not as intimate or experienced with the Bengalis as the university students and professionals are. Secondly, as they are not mature enough, they may feel a little bit insecure to answer the questions properly. And thirdly, another possibility of such negative responses is that there could be hatred towards the mainstream language in them. Due to political reasons the relationship between the Chakma people and the Bengalis are not so smooth and such feelings of hatred towards the mainstream language can possibly come. On the other hand, it is seen that the young adults (university students) and the people of middle age (professionals) showed great enthusiasm towards Bengali. 100% of the university students and professionals said they are

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more fluent and expert in Bengali as they use this language more in their daily life. Besides, 60% of the university students and 80% of the professionals said that they switch to Bengali while they are speaking in Chakma. Moreover, participants were asked a question about their feelings about using the mainstream language. And most of the young adults and professionals said that they feel great to have fluency over this language and to be able to communicate with their Bengali friends and colleagues effectively.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Thus, it can be concluded that the Chakma community is gradually shifting their language from Chakma to Bengali. Talking about language shift, three authors said that the knowledge of language of a speech community can be regarded as his linguistic capital. However, if the community cannot utilize the capital in the linguistic market, then it loses its market shares and it leads to language shift (Fakuda, Gambo and Bashir, 2003, p.296). Consequently, the Chakma community is facing the same as they cannot trade with their linguistic capital in the Bengali-oriented linguistic market. Thus it will gradually lead their language and culture to a marginal situation. In order to preserve their language and culture they suggested some policies, which need the help and support of the government. For instance, ensuring primary education in Chakma language along with Chakma text books will certainly serve the purpose of preserving language and culture. By following this step, the Chakma children will learn their mother tongue better and will know their culture better. Nevertheless, the government can make some positive effort in this regard by following the aforementioned steps for preserving indigenous languages and cultures.

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Appendix

Age:

1. In your daily life which language do you speak mostly?
 - a. Chakma/ other ethnic languages
 - b. Bengali
2. In which language are you more expert/ fluent both in terms of speaking and writing?
 - a. Chakma/ other ethnic languages
 - b. Bengali
3. Do you think educating your children in Bengali is important so that they can cope up with the majority people?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Do you face the problem of switching to Bengali, while you are speaking Chakma?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. In order to get government jobs or private jobs, a person must have fluency in Bengali. So, do you feel the necessity of having good fluency in Bengali?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. For economical survival, if you are engaged in doing business or any kind of economical activities, you will have to deal with Bengalis. Do you feel the necessity of knowing Bengali for the purpose of economical survival?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Due to geographical and other barriers, the quality of primary schools and colleges in CHT are not up to the mark. That's why conscious parents send their children to the cities to get better education. Do you have any educational experience in the CHT?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. In recent data, it is seen that most of the primary schools in the CHT use 'Bengali' as a medium of communication in the class. Did you face the same experience? Answer if you have any educational experience in the CHT.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Both in the CHT and outside, the educational system follows national curriculum. As the text books reflect the Bengali way of living, indigenous children can not relate their life to the topics of the books. So, indigenous children are more exposed to Bengali culture along with the language rather than their own. Do you agree?
 - a. Yes

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- b. No
10. It is seen that the distinct culture of yours is being affected by Bengali culture. For example; food habits, social gatherings, and wedding customs are influenced by Bengali culture. Do you think that speaking Bengali somehow influenced you to adopt Bengali culture as well?
- a. Yes
b. No
11. The conversion to Christianity in CHT is increasing day by day. The converted indigenous people read the Bible in Bengali. Besides, most of the priests are Bengalis. So, in order to know the religion, the hill people do not have any other choice but to know Bengali. Do you agree?
- a. Yes
b. No
12. The geographical location is a problem in the CHT for which there is lack of good educational institutions. There is no university in the CHT, which causes students to migrate to cities in order to get higher education. Do you think that the geographical location of the CHT is a barrier here?
- a. Yes
b. No
13. There are many Bengali settlers who live in the CHT. In which language do they communicate with you?
- A. Chakma/ other ethnic languages
B. Bengali
14. As the number of Bengali settlers is increasing day by day, do you think it is affecting your language as well as culture?
- a. Yes
b. No
15. If we see the political background, we see the indigenous people are exploited by Bengalis from the British period. In the liberation war, due to many reasons the then Chakma raja Tri Dev Roy supported Pakistan, for which the Bengalis became more aggressive towards them. Do you think these political incidents still have some negative influence in the relationship between your people and Bengalis?
- a. Yes
b. No
16. Naturally we all feel comfortable in expressing our thoughts in our mother tongue. Though the mother tongues of the indigenous people are numerous and different, most of them can speak fluently in Bengali. Do you feel comfortable expressing yourself using Bengali?
- a. Yes
b. No

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17. The government is giving some privileges to the indigenous people. Such as the facility of 'quota' both in education and government jobs. In a way, it can be regarded as 'motivation' for adopting Bengali language and culture. Do you agree? If no please justify your answer.
- Yes
 - No
- -----

18. What steps should be taken by the government to preserve the indigenous language and culture? Please list them down.

19. The CHT does not have facilities that developed cities have. Some indigenous girls come to cities to do jobs in beauty parlors; some people come to get good jobs; and some others come to have a good standard of living. There are no shopping malls, good restaurants, amusement parks etc. and there are no good private organizations to work for. Do you think geographical barrier is the only reason for this? If not, please justify your answer.

20. What is your view regarding using Bengali in your day to day life?