

Linguistic Barriers and Socioeconomic Mobility: The Impact of Language on the Bihari Community in Geneva Camp

By

Rezuana Tabassum
23163004

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Master of Arts in English

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Declaration

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23163004

Approval

The thesis/project titled “Language Aspirations and Educational Challenges: English Learning among Urdu-Speaking Secondary Level Students in Geneva Camp” submitted by

1. Rezuana Tabassum (23163004)

Of Spring, 2025 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English on [Date-of-Defense].

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:

(Member)

Md. Al Amin, PhD

Associate Professor, English and Humanities

BRAC University

Departmental Head:

(Chair)

Firdous Azim, PhD

Professor, English and Humanities

BRAC University

Ethics Statement

Before the study, participants were informed about the entire process and consented. The participants' confidentiality was carefully maintained throughout the research.

Abstract

The Bihari community of Bangladesh is a marginalized Urdu-speaking minority that faces challenges in social integration and economic opportunities. Languages are crucial for this deprived community in Geneva Camp to avail socio economic advantages. This thesis examines language's socio-economic impact on the Bihari community in Geneva Camp. It explores the implications of Urdu, Bangla, and English languages in their education, employment, and social mobility by assessing in what ways language acts as a barrier and, at the same time, how this enables access to economic resources and public services. Additionally, it seeks to find how linguistic identity, integration challenges, and generational language shifts shape their struggles and opportunities because all these are interrelated. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview to find the answers to this qualitative case study. Group discussions were conducted to collect adequate data. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from students, parents, and the CEO of the Council of Minorities. The findings reveal the choices of languages for economic and social survival, discrimination in Bangladeshi society, linguistic identity and integration, and generational language shift and tendency to code-switching. The findings of this research are crucial for policymakers. They provide recommendations to improve language learning policies for minority communities, thereby contributing to their social inclusion and empowerment.

Keywords: Bihari community language use, impact of language, language choice in Camp, language shift.

Dedication

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Al Amin, for allowing me to conduct this study on a unique community.

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Acknowledgment

First, I am thankful to Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala for his unfailing love and constant guidance. I praise the Almighty and greet the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Also, I am grateful to Afsan Chowdhury Sir for facilitating access to the study subjects. I am forever in debt to my parents for their unconditional love, sacrifice, and support, for which I am grateful.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

The Bihari community of the Geneva camp is a poor Urdu-speaking minority that faces marginalization and challenges to social engagement and economic opportunities. Languages are essential for the poor community in Geneva Camp to receive socioeconomic benefits. This paper examines the socioeconomic impact of language on Geneva Camp's Bihari community. It looks at their language choice and how Urdu, Bangla, and English languages affect education, employment, and social mobility by analyzing the way language may act as a barrier while simultaneously providing access to economic resources and public services. Furthermore, this study describes linguistic identity, integration challenges, and generational language shifts that affect their struggles and opportunities since all of these are intertwined.

1.2 Who are Biharis?

The term 'Bihari' differs among Bangladesh, India, and other parts of the world. 'Biharis' were Urdu-speaking Indian refugees who came to east Pakistan mainly from Bihar. However, many people came from other parts of India as well by thinking this was Pakistan, where Urdu-speaking people live. People from other parts of India who might not speak Urdu also started to live with them. Therefore, all of them are collectively called Bihari. Now, in Bangladesh, 'Bihari' does not only refer to the people from Bihar, India; instead, it has a different connotation. It is neither geographical nor a linguistic term, though it resembles that due to its historical roots, migration, and language. In reality, now 'Bihari' has become a socio-economic term that refers to Urdu-speaking lower-class people who live in the camp. It is crucial to recognize that the people of Bangladesh will not deliberately call middle-class or

upper-class Bihari dwellers ‘Bihari.’ Instead, will say in astonishment and high intonation, ‘He is a Bihari!’ because those middle or upper-class Biharis have a house, education, and a stable economy. When we hear Bihari, we think of people who are poor, dirty, uneducated, speak Urdu, associated with criminal activities, and somebody we do not like due to historical influence and politics. Also, in India, it is the same attitude because they are considered low and uneducated people who live in one of the poorest parts of the country. Therefore, the discrimination of the term Bihari is located in their socio-economic condition as well.

In our country, Bengalis can be defined through their Bangla language; however, there are no ethnic indicators to describe Bihari in Bangladesh if they start to speak Bangla. They can be people who migrated from Bihar in India or stay in the camp, and as long as they belong to that segment of our society, they will continue to be known as Bihari.

1.3 Migration History and Settlement

The Biharis are initially from the Indian state of Bihar. They were moved to East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) during and after the partition of India in 1947 (Whitaker, 1982). The insecurity felt by Urdu-speaking Muslims in India and acts of communal violence proved to be catalysts for the flight. The situation got worse in 1971 during the Bangladesh Liberation War when Biharis were targeted for violence by Bengali nationalists as the Biharis were thought to be collaborators with the Pakistani military (though many of them did collaborate). As a result, due to the collaborators, other Biharis were severely affected, with many people being slaughtered or forced to flee (He, 1982; Rahaman et al., 2020). The post-independence scenario showed that Biharis fell into a vulnerable position due to acts of violence, prejudice, and disregard from the new Bangladeshi government and society.

Even though before the civil war in 1971, the Biharis made significant contributions to various professions, the Bengali community frequently despised and saw them as outsiders

and felt hostility (Rahaman et al., 2020). They were more hated and opposed as a result of the Pakistani government's indulgence of them as well as Bihari's siding with the Pakistanis during the liberation war. This case was also valid when the Awami League came to power, and Bengali nationalism gained a grip in 1971 (Siddiqi, 2013). Though Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made early attempts to promote peace, the Biharis remained neglected and often were collectively blamed for the atrocities committed during the war (Whitaker, 1982). Even after the war, Biharis continued to face hostility and lack of protection, which left them vulnerable and struggling to survive in an environment full of animosity.

Similarly, after Bangladesh's independence, they were not accepted in Pakistan or India following the departure of the Pakistani military and civilians (Siddiqi, 2013; Sohel et al., 2023). As a result, they took shelter in camps meant to serve as temporary shelters; however, as they were refused entirely by India and Pakistan, these camps evolved into permanent communities (Susan, 2023).

1.4 The Geneva Camp: A Community in Transition

The Bihari community, which lives in different camps throughout the country, is among the poorest in Bangladesh. They are facing limited access to education, healthcare and landlessness that was allocated for them (Elahee, 2013). Hundreds of family members live in poverty and lack basic fundamental rights as Bangladeshi (especially those who were born here after partition). Six to ten people live in a single room with damp and cracked walls, unhygienic sanitation, inadequate water supply, and cramped passageways. This scenario is replicated in every other 'camp' of the country. Various estimates show that there are 300,000 to 450,000 Biharis who are living in their secluded camps across Bangladesh, and Dhaka is the living place of more than half of them (*How Are the Biharis of Mirpur?*, 2019).

Among 116 camps, the Geneva Camp is Bangladesh's largest settlement of the Bihari community (Sohel et al., 2023). It is home to approximately 50,000 Bihari residents and is characterised by overcrowding and inadequate living conditions, which reflect socio-economic issues (Bhuiyan, 2024; Rashid, 2020). Families share a latrine with about ninety others in the camp (Akter et al., 2022). Many children in these camps lack access to formal education. As a result, dropout rates are high, and literacy levels are low there (Afroze, 2022). The environment within the camp is unhygienic. Life in the camp is beyond imagination.

1.5 Educational Landscape of Geneva Camp

The educational landscape of Geneva Camp is not adequately equipped with learning facilities. The overpopulation affected their access to education and other essential services. Fewer schools in the camp are run not by the government but by NGOs or other local organizations. One of the school's names is Al-Falah. This school is densely populated with fewer resources and opportunities than outside the camp. Due to language and historical identity, they are isolated and discriminated which has caused financial difficulties for them and impacted on availing education. Attending primary school seems affordable for many, but secondary or higher education is a great challenge for them. Though it was in the past, recent situations can be different. Most of them go to government schools after completing primary level or from the very start.

1.6 Social Integration Challenges

In Bangladesh, Biharis suffered from significant social integration challenges between 1977 and 1981, particularly since 1971. Their identity as "Stranded Pakistanis" complicated their acceptance into Bangladeshi society (Whitaker, 1982). However, it was Pakistanis who did not accept them and left the poor population behind. Repatriation efforts to Pakistan have been slow (Whitaker, 1982). This has led to militant leadership groups advocating for their

rights and repatriation and proposed solutions, such as mixed housing and workforce reintegration, which did not work as well.

Along with their limited legal and economic rights, the Biharis were stigmatized and excluded from society (Dasgupta, 2023). They experience social and political alienation which restricts their access to employment and basic services. Economic disadvantage is a major concern because many people work in low-wage manual labour while others manage small companies or services (Akter et al., 2022). Isolation within the camp and limited mobility increase their poverty and marginalization (Dasgupta, 2023). Intergenerational transmission of poverty, problems, institutional prejudice, and violence among local populations created a challenge for them to integrate into Bangladeshi society. They have been denied citizenship rights since the independence of Bangladesh. This further marginalised and limited their access to resources (Sattar, 2012). However, in 2008, Bangladesh's High Court recognized Bihari refugees' right to citizenship. Their names would be added to the voter list as citizens. By doing this, Biharis, who were a stateless Urdu-speaking linguistic minority living in refugee camps scattered throughout the country, gained citizenship rights 37 years after the 1971 war (Hussain & Khan, 2024). They were no longer considered refugees as per the law and got their rights through the community's efforts.

1.7 What is language to Them?

Language is one of the mediums of exclusion and inclusion in a society. It shapes citizens' identity, rights, and social mobility. For Biharis, language is the most significant part of their history and marginalization. Urdu is their heritage, Bangla is a way of integration, and English is responsible for their upward mobility. Language determines their future opportunities related to education, jobs, and social integration. It is merely not a source of communication to them; language is the most significant factor in developing their lifestyle.

1.8 Statement of the problem

The Bihari community in Geneva Camp suffers from socioeconomic issues, many of which are closely linked to language. Language is connected to their identity, which affects their socioeconomic mobility. Most have limited competence in Bangla, Bangladesh's primary national language. This limits their access to school, employment, and essential government services. On the other hand, Urdu is the community's mother tongue, and its use in Bangladeshi society decreases their social and economic survival. Furthermore, another prominent language of this globalized world is English, a language of higher education and global employment. Among the Bihari community of Bangladesh, the English language is rarely used. It is inaccessible due to a lot of obstacles.

This language marginalisation facilitates a cycle of poverty, exclusion, and hindrance to upward mobility. Moreover, generational language shifts cause conflicts between cultural preservation and societal integration, altering communities' identities and prospects. Governments' productive measures can include linguistic and socioeconomic inclusion.

Thus, this study seeks to explore how language serves as a barrier and a tool to access benefits and the challenges of doing so by shedding light on its impact on a community's difficulties and opportunities.

1.9 Purpose of the Study

This paper examines language's socio-economic impact on the Bihari community in Geneva Camp. It explores the impact of Urdu, Bangla, and English languages in their education, employment, and social mobility by assessing in what ways language acts as a barrier and, at the same time, how this enables access to economic resources and public services. Also, it focuses on how linguistic identity, integration challenges, and generational language shifts shape their struggles and opportunities because all these are interrelated.

2.0 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are given below:

1. How do socioeconomic conditions affect linguistic choices among the Bihari community in Geneva Camp?
2. What challenges do members of the Bihari community face due to language?

2.1 Limitations of the Study

The study has a few limitations. The sample size was limited to a specific location, which may impact the finding's generalizability. External factors such as personal responsibility and unforeseen events limited the time allocated for this research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses relevant literature related to the socio-economic impact of language choice in ethnoreligious minorities. It is divided mainly into two broad sections: one discusses relevant literature within South Asia, and another discusses literature done in the Bangladeshi context. I have selected research papers published between 2019 and 2024. All the studies are Journal articles. These sections are developed by considering this study's research questions.

2.2 South Asian Context: languages' Socioeconomic impact on the minority

Discrimination and preferences regarding the choice of dominant, local, and international languages prevail among South Asian countries like India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Nepal.

In India, the necessity of social and economic mobility increases the desire for English education (Mathew, 2022). The domination and preference for the English language are associated with higher status and upper-class norms (Kumar, 2021). It opens the door to better educational and employment opportunities (Highet & Del Percio, 2021). Their minority communities, like Banjara Tribal youth, face linguistic and cultural barriers in education, as their mother tongue is different from the mainstream people (Chandras, 2023). Despite potential benefits, English remains the language of a privileged segment of society (Minz & Doreswamy, 2023).

Even though Nepal is dedicated to its mother tongue, English in schools proves to be more powerful (Mouni, 2023; Sah, 2022). This practice mainly benefits the elite class and

marginalises ethnic minorities, such as the Madhesi community. This group face educational disadvantages due to the lack of instruction in their mother tongue. Proficiency in the dominant language, Nepali and English, is a prerequisite for better job opportunities, especially in urban and professional settings. This limits access to higher-paying jobs and contributes to socioeconomic differences by creating a barrier for speakers of minority languages. Moreover, the emphasis on English and the dominant language, Nepali, has led to the loss of local languages, which are crucial for traditional and cultural identity (Devkota & Hanemann, 2023). This bilingual practice, code-switching between Nepali and English language, is prominent in urban settings and reflects a negotiation of identity and an adaptation to global influences (Bullock, 2022). According to Poudel et al. (2022), socioeconomic stratification in Nepal reinforces the preferences for English and Nepali languages above other local languages.

In Sri Lanka, economic factors drive language choice to maximise economic benefits. However, the country's language policy does not ensure equal opportunities for all language users (Jayawickrama & Nawarathna, 2024). According to Rajapakse (2023), the Burgher community's use of English is often not valued due to racism, which affects their socioeconomic mobility. If they recognize the importance of the Sri Lankan English language, then it can also help to enhance their opportunity.

Moreover, in the Maldives, adolescents prefer English over Dhivehi as it is associated with progress and prestige. The shift towards broader societal attitudes prioritises global language (Mohamed, 2023). Mouboua and Atobatele (2024) found that people of Maldives' language choice influences social integration, and English serves as a bridge in diverse job environments, enhancing social and economic mobility.

2.3 Bangladeshi Context: languages' Socioeconomic impact on minority

Ethnic minority

Minority communities like Chakma face socio-mobility issues due to limited proficiency in Bangla and English languages (Visser & Gerharz, 2016). The Chakma community often faces pressure to assimilate into the dominant Bangla culture, leading to the adoption of the Bangla language. This assimilation is seen as a strategy for survival and socioeconomic advancement in a predominantly Bengali society. According to Chowdhury (2024), the Chakma community's socioeconomic status is affected by discrimination and poverty, which are exacerbated by their linguistic barriers and minority status. The absence of Indigenous languages in the formal education system restricts students' academic development and pushes them towards marginalisation.

Similar to the Chakma community, the situation in the Garo community is also the same. Haque (2024) highlighted in his paper that language choice significantly impacts socioeconomic mobility, including employability and access to global job markets.

Bihari Community

The Bihari community has been living in Bangladesh since 1947. Due to its distinct language, it could not assimilate into Bengali-speaking society (Rahaman et al., 2020). Language attitudes within the first generation of this community strongly show a preference for Urdu over Bangla, Bangladesh's host language. This preference depicts the importance of intergenerational transmission of language which encourages language shift (Dilshad & Ahmed, 2024). According to Haque & Khatun (2023), proficiency in the Bangla language significantly impacts their socioeconomic mobility. Islam and Ahmed (2023) said that adolescents in Bangladesh experience identity distress as they are proficient in dual linguistic and cultural affiliations. Even then, their cultural identity is often in conflict, which leads to challenges in social integration.

However, Haque and Khatun (2023) also stated that many Biharis prioritize learning Bangla over Urdu by recognizing its significance for employment opportunities and integration into society. The majority of Bihari people say that Bangla can lead to better employment prospects and Urdu is less useful outside their camps (Haque & Khatun, 2023). Their conscious choice of the Bangla language and improvement of their proficiency in English help them better integrate into the broader society by reducing social discrimination (Khan et al., 2023).

Moreover, the cultural and linguistic differences between Biharis and the Bengali, contribute to a sense of otherness, which is reinforced by societal attitudes (Singh, 2023). This linguistic barrier contributes to their social exclusion and reinforces their distinct cultural identity. Upper-class Bihari individuals often assimilate more easily into Bengali society, but poorer camp dwellers wanted to conceal their Bihari identity outside of the camp. In reality, they hold a dual identity of being Bihari at home and Bengali outside of the camp, which reflects the complexities of their socio-cultural existence (Rahman et al., 2023).

2.4 Research gap

In Bangladesh, several studies on the Urdu-speaking community are predominantly focused on topics related to historical context, migration, legal status, citizenship issues, statelessness, living conditions, socioeconomic marginalisation, identity cultural integration, discrimination, social exclusion, human rights issues, and healthcare (Arif, 2018; Dasgupta, 2023; Fattah, 2020; Rahaman et al., 2020; Rashid, 2020; Siddiqi, 2013; Sohel et al., 2023). There are few studies that discuss various aspects of educational challenges and opportunities in this community (Akter et al., 2022; Macdonald, 2022; Prodip et al., 2020).

However, there is one journal article titled “Acculturation Level and Cultural Adaptive Strategies of Camp-Dwelling Biharis in Bangladesh”, which discusses how they are

trying to assimilate into society and economy by applying integration strategies (Haque & Khatun, 2023). Though it says that Biharis learned the Bangla language for integration into society or job purposes, the main focus is not the language. It does not specifically mention language's effect on social class and generation. The author does not mention how they are deprived of the opportunity and face problems due to language and change it according to their needs, depending on the situation.

Thus, there is a significant gap in the research on exploring how language serves as a barrier and a tool to access opportunities and mitigate socioeconomic challenges. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap and open the door to future research possibilities. If done in a broader segment, then it is possible to develop a curriculum for teaching different languages according to their needs, which will be solely dedicated to the learners of this community.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3 Introduction

This chapter covers the study's methodology, including research design, the process of selecting participants, data collection, analysis procedures, ethical consideration and other crucial sections necessary for this research.

3.1 Research Design

This research is conducted using a qualitative case study design. There are a few reasons for choosing this method. First of all, this method is conducted when a problem needs to be explored, for example, how do socioeconomic conditions affect linguistic choices among the Bihari community in Geneva Camp? And what challenges do members of the Bihari community face due to language?”. Moreover, this method is appropriate for extracting elusive data by enabling in-depth research of a specific group of people or a population within their real-life contexts, such as Bihari students' and community members' perspectives and experiences. Therefore, all these reasons combined make qualitative case research an appropriate method for this study.

Moreover, for this research, I have chosen the social constructivist theory as it emphasises the role of social interactions, cultural context, and shared meanings in shaping individuals' understanding and knowledge and allows personal interpretation of observation towards a particular object or thing (Saleem et al., 2021). My research seeks to explore “How do socioeconomic conditions affect linguistic choices among the Bihari community in Geneva Camp? (RQ1) and What challenges do members of the Bihari community face due to language? (RQ2)

The philosophical assumptions of this study are drawn from Creswell's (2007) table of "Philosophical Assumptions with Implications for Practice" (p.17) and it is given below:

Table 3.1 The Philosophical Assumptions of the Study

Research Paradigm	Philosophical assumptions				
	Ontological	Epistemological	Axiological	Rhetorical	Methodological
Social Constructivism	The subjective view of participants	Relay on the quotes of participants as evidence Approach of the researcher to spend time with the participants.	The researcher's values and biases are present along with the participants' interpretations	First-person point of view has been used to adopt a narrative style of qualitative research	Qualitative Multiple case study approach Semi-structured interview Thematic analysis

According to Creswell (2007), an ontological assumption refers to the reality that is not objective or independent of human perception and interpretation. Instead, it is subjective. In the case of this research, the participants' unique circumstances involved their social life, culture, and economy in the Geneva Camp. The experiences of each participant with languages are acknowledged as context-dependent and personal rather than a generalized experience of all Urdu-speaking people in the world.

Next, the epistemological perspective suggests that individuals actively construct knowledge through their interpretations and interactions with the world (Mersin, 2012). In this research, I actively established relationships and engaged myself with participants through interviews to co-create knowledge. In my study, interviews with students, parents, and the Chief Executive Officer allowed me to discover these socially constructed realities.

Moreover, axiological assumption helps define a researcher's positionality in the study and accept that the data analysis may reveal his or her values or biases. Later in this chapter (See section 3.3), I explained my positionality as a researcher who tried to minimize the impact of any personal bias or value when interpreting the findings. Then, the qualitative study's rhetorical premise inspired me to adopt a narrative writing style with a storytelling manner and a personal tone of voice.

Finally, the methodology is focused on qualitative research methods. As reality is complex and subjective, I have conducted an in-depth exploration and understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. The research approach involves semi-structured interviews, verbatim transcription, and thematic analysis to uncover the multiple interpretations.

3.2 Setting

The study is conducted in a metropolitan area of Bangladesh named Dhaka, the country's capital where a marginalized community lives. The selection of this site was based on accessibility, as it is highly challenging for people to get access if he does not belong to that particular community. These settings provide an extensive and relevant background for analyzing the experiences and perspectives of the participants in the actual environment, as the study is centred socioeconomic linguistics of the Urdu-speaking minority group in Bangladesh.

3.3 Researcher's Role

Since I am a student of ELT and Applied linguistics, considering language's influence on socioeconomic conditions among Biharis in the Geneva Camp, I have become interested in finding the reasons behind language choice and challenges regarding using specific language. As it is connected to a better future for marginalized communities, therefore, the stakeholders are optimistic and encouraged. Thus, I chose “Linguistic Barriers and Socioeconomic Mobility: The Impact of Language on the Bihari Community in Geneva Camp” as my topic for this research and was responsible for conducting interviews and analyzing data.

In this study, the pronoun "I" was used throughout to narrate and describe the findings. The "I" may appear to be projecting personal ideas. As a result, the "I" of the study reflects my attempt to explore how language serves as a barrier and a tool to access and the challenges of doing so. Even throughout the interview session, I did not impose my opinions on the participants, and in order to avoid bias towards my data, I completed inter-rater reliability to ensure authenticity.

3.4 Selecting Participants

For this research, the purposive sampling technique is regarded as useful for collecting adequate data from limited resources. According to Robinson (2014), purposive sampling is the conscious selection of participants based on their capacity to explain a particular concept or theme. It is a non-probability sampling technique that allows the researcher to choose the participants based on their own free will and voluntary interest to engage in this study, as well as select volunteers with relevant experience who can provide accurate information (Taherdoost, 2016).

I wanted to learn how language serves as a barrier and a tool for access in society and the economic realm. Therefore, I purposefully chose ten students, three community members and one expert by following the purposive sampling technique to get the required data. I have considered a list of criteria for selecting participants. It is as follows,

- a) Students must be studying in secondary level school
- b) Community member of Geneva Camp who knows Bangla English and Urdu
- c) Students, community members, and the chief executive officer of the Council of Minorities must have ancestors who lived in the camp.
- d) Students, parents and the Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Minority must express their willingness to participate in the study.

I chose secondary-level students because after passing SSC, they can do part-time jobs where they will need to navigate through three languages.

3.5 Participant Profile

The fourteen participants' profiles are shown in the table below. There are six female and four male secondary-level students, three parents, and a Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Minorities. The profiles include information about their names, genders, and occupations, age, school and generation status. I believe that the participants' responses helped me understand their status, as it might affect their interview responses, and made it easier to complete the writing work.

No	Pseudo Name	Gender	Occupation	Age	School	Generation	Language (s)

1	Khaled	Male	Chief Executive Officer of Council of Minorities	46	Govt.	3 rd	Urdu, Bangla, English
2	Fahim	Male	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
3	Ikram	Male	Student	16	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
4	Sabik	Male	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
5	Mahi	Male	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
6	Ruqu	Female	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
7	Ekra	Female	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
8	Saba	Female	Student	16	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
9	Tori	Female	Student	16	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
10	Roji	Female	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
11	Sneha	Female	Student	15	Govt.	4 th	Urdu, Bangla, English
12	Fatema	Female	Service holder	28	Govt.	3 rd	Urdu, Bangla, English
13	Khaidja	Female	Service holder	30	Govt.	3 rd	Urdu, Bangla, English
14	Pappu	Male	Service holder	45	Govt.	3 rd	Urdu, Bangla, English

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

I collected data through semi-structured interviews of two participants using Zoom platform, mused features like Audio recording application to record their statement.

3.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews have been applied as a research technique to get required data and as a tool for me to gain a deep understanding of the inner views of participants. I selected this interview process because they typically proceed in a conversational style that gives participants the freedom to raise any issues that are significant to them. As a researcher and interviewer, I arranged a list of pre-generated questions to prevent myself from making biased questions. Hence, semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand more about the experience of participants.

3.6.2 Designing the Interview Protocol

For this study, I have adopted Yeong et al. (2018) processes of Fine-Tuning Interview Protocol which is a more flexible model of Castillo Montoya's (2016) Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR) framework. This framework follows four steps:

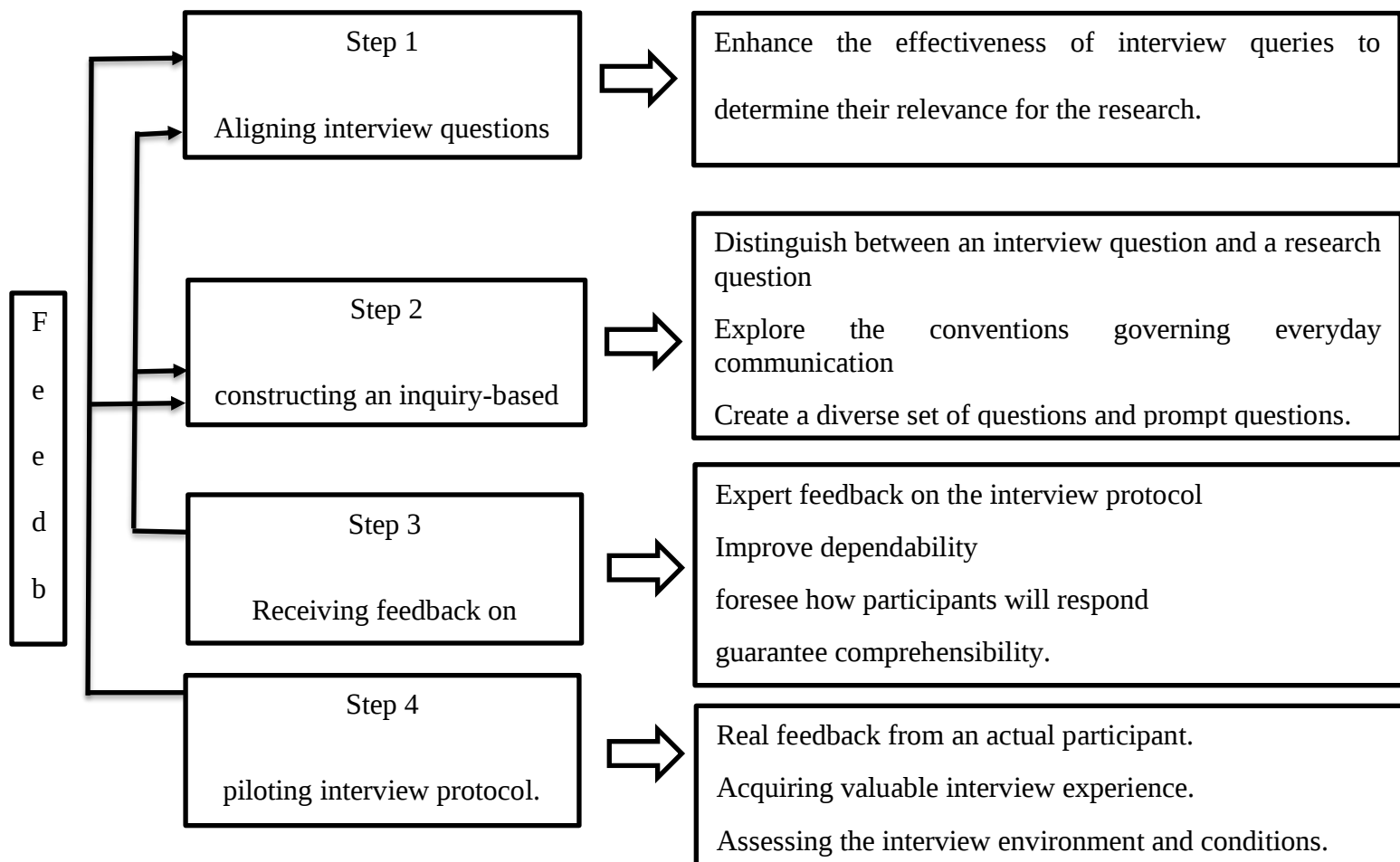


Figure 3.2. Processes of Fine-Tuning Interview Protocol (as cited in Yeong et al., 2018, p.2701)

Following the first step, I prepared necessary interview questions based on my RQs (Appendix A). Then participants provided information in response to these interview questions that addresses the research problems.

Next, in the second step, I developed interview questions (IQs) that were written differently from the research questions (RQs) and arranged them chronologically to follow the natural flow of social conversation by adding a variety of questions. I have also prepared prompt questions to make the interview conversational.

Again, to gather accurate data for the third phase, I obtained feedback on the interview protocol from an expert by closely examining the questions. This is because I, as the researcher, can determine the participants' level of comprehension by asking relevant questions based on comments on the interview protocol. I contacted an associate professor at BRAC University's Department of English and Humanities to get his opinion on the interview questions. He is an experienced applied linguistics and ELT course instructor. I changed the interview questions based on his suggestions.

The FTIP's last phase extends expert feedback toward piloting. These stages assisted me in finalizing the interview questions by checking that they flowed naturally. This helped the interview technique employed in this study become credible and reliable.

3.6.3 Piloting the Interviews

After reviewing the feedback and changing questions, I also pilot-tested the IQs with a fellow coursemate who had also taken a similar course to ensure comprehensibility.

3.6.4 Conducting the Interviews

Multiple technologies were used while interviewing participants. Initially, the Zoom platform was utilized to conduct interview sessions with the Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Minorities and a parent (Khaled). The other two parents were interviewed over a phone call. As for students, I arranged two sessions with the help of two paralegals. I took their interviews in a physical setting to make these sessions effective and interactive. After finalising the time and date, two sessions were arranged for the actual interview. I have used the Android smartphone's call recorder feature to capture their statements as much as possible. Interviews were conducted in the Bangla language. It was more or less like a group discussion because I divided them into two groups and generated questions.

3.6.5 Issues of Conducting Interviews in Geneva Camp

While interviewing the participants, the main hurdle I faced was obtaining responses from them. As they belong to a unique community, they are afraid to speak or shy to express their perspective in front of someone outside of their community. It might be related to the mistreatment they received from people of other communities due to their ancestors' history. In the first session, it was hard for me to make them talk and answer interview questions. Therefore, I had to arrange a second session with the same students, and in that session, they finally answered the interview questions as they already knew me and someone who looked like them, as I also wore a 'Hijab.'

Besides, getting access was not easy. Not everyone gets access to their community, and they do not trust people outside their community. I got access only because one of my teachers, who worked closely with them for many years, introduced me as a safe researcher.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

Speech analysis is the study of spoken and written language, examining its underlying meaning, power, inequality, and bias.

3.7.1 Data Analysis Framework for the Interviews

For thematic analysis, I adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step data analysis framework to analyse my interview data (as cited in Labra et al., 2020). The following flowchart shows the data analysis framework:

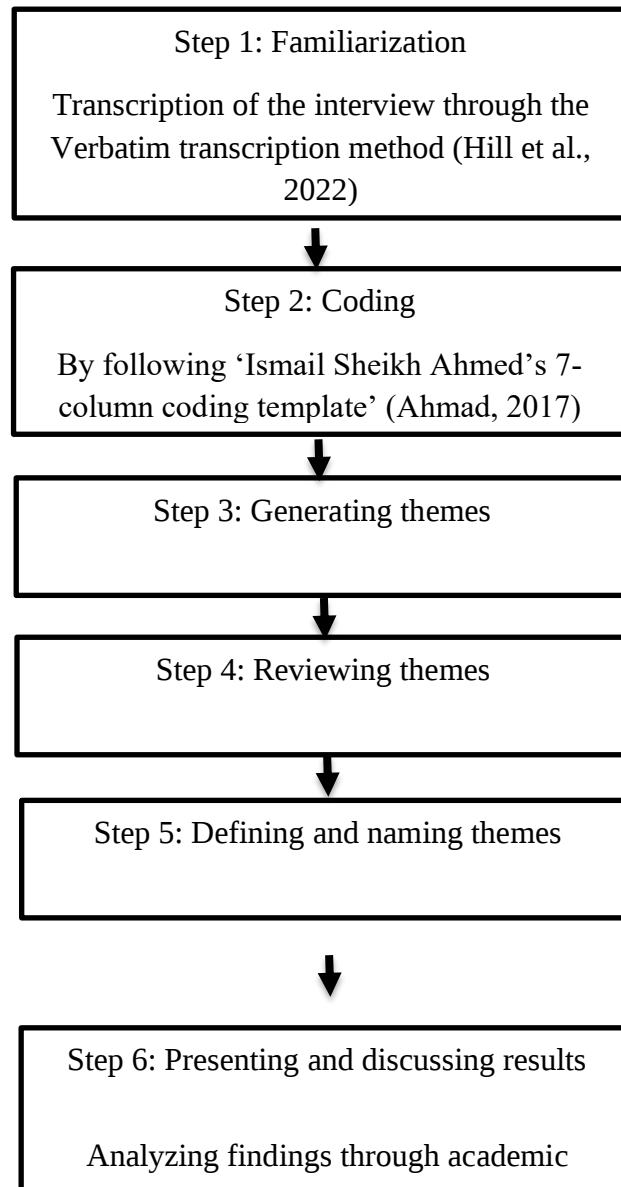


Figure 3.3: Data Analysis Framework (Braun and Clarke's six steps)

In this figure, a brief idea is given for each step. The first step is familiarization, so, to get familiar with data, I listened to the audio recordings and read the interview transcripts word for word to finish the first step. Here, transcription of the interviews was done through the Verbatim transcription method (Hill et al., 2022). Next, step 2 involves highlighting essential codes. The codes are generated by following ‘Ismail Sheikh Ahmed’s 7-column coding template’ (Ahmad, 2017) In step 3, I have generated themes from the codes found in the previous step. After that, all those generated themes are reviewed in step 4 to ensure whether they are correct. Then, in the 5th step, all those finalised themes were renamed and defined according to the relevance of the study. In the final step, I have analysed and written the findings and discussion section of this study (see Chapter 4).

3.7.2 Analysing Interview Data

To analyse the interview data of this study, I have done qualitative thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) data analysis framework (Figure 3.3) (as cited in Labra et al., 2020). All the processes have been described in the previous section of data analysis. Even so, in short, in the beginning, I used the verbatim transcription method (Hill et al., 2022) for transcribing interviews, then used ‘Ismail Sheikh Ahmed’s 7-column coding template (Ahmad, 2017) to code and find important information. Finally, I generated themes for discussion.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

The ethical considerations were considered before initiating the data collection procedures. The consent was verbally taken from the participants before the interview sessions were recorded. I promised the participants to protect their privacy and did that by giving each participant a pseudonym and excluding any confidential information. Also, while

using secondary resources in my research, I carefully gave credit to all by following APA 7th citation.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative research likewise uses particular measures to address study quality. The assessment of quality, or more commonly, trustworthiness, is done differently in qualitative research. The research findings' reliability, validity and credibility are essential parts of any research. Therefore, to make research reliable, it must be transferable. It means that equivalent results may be obtained using the same procedures in a different setting. Therefore, the method used for Bihari students of the Geneva camp can be applied to other Bihari camps to get equivalent results.

Credibility is the primary determinant of whether or not qualitative research can be trusted. In research, it is crucial to guarantee that study findings are reliable and independent of bias or personal opinions. Furthermore, credibility is tied to the topic of the study, and confidence in the methods used to gather and analyse research data is upheld to control the research focus. I have employed member checking and a written record with a detailed description of the study analysis to guarantee the study's reliability before coding the participant's interviews to look for patterns.

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Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the interview findings thematically and elaborates on participants' statements. Later, an overall discussion of each sub-theme with relevant resources is given to ensure clarity and avoid redundancy. These are integrated to provide a cohesive understanding of each idea. This chapter has four broader themes: economic survival, discrimination, identity and integration, generational language shift, and code-switching. There are multiple sub-themes under these themes.

4.2 Economic Survival and Language Choice

Language for Low and High-Grade Jobs:

The first and foremost component of doing any job efficiently is communication. It requires a language with which customers are well acquainted. It is crucial to choose the language based on the demands of the situation and the customers. People who are marginalised and unprivileged, the majority of them do low-level jobs. These low-grade workers belong to the lower class and mainly deal with local people who predominantly understand the dominant language, Bangla. In the Bihari community, language plays a crucial role in their economic survival and integration into society. Khaled said, “In the camp, there are no middle-class people. All are lower class”, which means they do low-grade jobs and mainly deal with people who at least can communicate in Bangla. Therefore, they chose Bangla to speak.” Khaled explained by saying, “If you think about Biharis who are rickshaw pullers when they go outside, they use the Bangla language instead of Bihari to talk to their passengers. People of other occupations also speak Bangla when they are outside of the camp. It's solely due to their earning purpose.”

Even within the community, Bangla and English differ among people of different occupations. Those in low-income jobs use the Bangla language instead of Urdu because Bangla is a necessity rather than a choice. Because of this, Khaled said he wants all the camp people “to learn it because they can get economic benefits as it’s a dominating language in this country.” Thus, these findings suggest that their economic needs primarily drive this linguistic shift because the Bangla language increases job opportunities among all classes of people in Bangladesh.

However, educated people of the Bihari community who want to get better jobs prefer English more, as this lingua franca is preferred by all medium to higher-level offices. Though this phenomenon is not only limited to Biharis, it is the same among everyone around the country. Even then, the thing that makes them stand out is their desire. Despite being marginalised and economically deprived, they are opting for a third foreign language. All the respondents stated that, even though they know Bangla for doing a job, they think English is equally or more important. Fahim stated the reason and said, “Most offices ask to talk in English during the interview. If we do not know English, we can’t perform better in the interview session and will not get better jobs. Job is important as it will change our lifestyle and struggles in the camp.” Similarly, another participant, Sabik, associated English with perceiving people’s capabilities who are minor and marginalised. He explained, “If we speak in English, then the interviewer will think we have experience and can perform better. They will think we are educated.” In addition, Ikram pointed out a better-paying aspect of the English language. He said, “English is necessary to get better pay, as people prefer that.” As they are a deprived group of people, a beacon of hope holds immense significance in their lives.

Moreover, data revealed that in the camp, many female students are trying to earn money by providing tuition to other younger students within the camp or to the mainstream;

therefore, learning Bangla is a must. They need to teach their students mainly in Bangla, and as for English subjects, they need to know the English language. They work as a home tutor to help their parents financially, for pocket money, to release their burden or to provide educational support. Ruqu shared, “English is necessary because it is demanding, and parents pay more for it than other subjects. If I can learn English better, I can earn more money than other Bangla subjects and support my family through tuition. Though now, whatever I earn, it goes for my pocket money as I cannot ask money from my parents for small things... because they do not have enough money.”

Moreover, Pappu, one of the successful people in the camp, explained that they “are proficient in Bangla because it has brought” them “jobs and food.” As a result, they forget their mother tongue consciously or unconsciously in the process of surviving and learning a second language as well as a third language. Khaled explained their reasons for conscious forgetting by saying,

“Bihari people are deliberately forgetting the Urdu language, which is economic. For example, just like when children want to find a job, they do not want to use the camp address; rather, they want to use the address outside of the camp of their relatives. They fear the employer won’t give him the job if he finds out the candidate is a Bihari. This applies to both big and smaller jobs. Similarly, they are discarding Urdu or the Bihari language for their livelihood so that no one finds their true identity.”

These findings suggest that their choice of languages is associated with economic prosperity, which eventually leads them towards a better lifestyle. Also, mastering English for employment empowers these individuals, inspiring them to strive for better opportunities and a more fulfilling lifestyle.

Education and Language Learning

Education is not easy for the people of the Geneva camp. It comes with obstacles, sacrifice and hardship. As Bangla is the dominant language in Bangladesh, the government and most private schools use it for communication or as a medium of instruction. One of the participants, Fahim, said that they went “to the camp school until the primary level and moved to government ones because camp schools failed to provide adequate support for learning.” This scenario is still applicable to the Geneva camp. Therefore, students belonging to non-Bangla-speaking communities must learn the Bangla language to attend government schools. All the participants acknowledge that even now, many “Bihari children who can afford education go to government schools from the very beginning”. Hence, learning Bangla is a must for them. A secondary student, Anika, explained that they “need to speak in Bangla during the class as everyone speaks in that language.” they “cannot speak in Hindi.” They have “learned Bangla and are now teaching younger siblings Bangla language so that they can receive education without any hassles or discrimination.” Therefore, the Bangla language is necessary for them to get an education in schools, and they willingly choose it over Urdu. However, it does not mean that they are learning Bangla only to attend government schools; even in camp schools, they need to speak in Bangla because teachers prepare students for the outside world and teach the Bangla language.

Participants additionally pointed out that although government educational institutions are far better than camp schools, they still lack in terms of teaching the English language. The Urdu-speaking community avoids private schools as they are expensive, though their English classes are much better than those in government schools. In addition, unlike private educational institutions, government ones do not have much scope to provide quality English education due to a lack of resources.

On the other hand, another participant, Mahi, explained why English is necessary; he stated, “Also, if we want to pursue higher study, then English is necessary. So, we must learn

English because it opens the door for communication and higher studies inside or outside the country.” As an unprivileged, minor and marginalised community, it is impressive to think that they are trying to learn a third language when they lack other fundamental rights.

Additionally, as a member of the Urdu-speaking community, Khaled expressed his thoughts on multilingualism and the barriers to achieving it. He said, “Multilingualism is excellent, but it is impossible due to the lack of teachers who can speak and write Urdu!” He added, “At our time, camp schools had Urdu subjects, for which we learned to read and write Urdu, but that is not the case now. There is no subject, so they cannot read or write, but due to social demand, camp schools now have a Bangla subject.”

This data shows that due to societal demand and enthusiasm for education, they are embracing Bangla and English more than their mother tongue, Urdu.

Gender Differences in Motivation to Learn English

The findings pointed out fascinating insights. One of those is the urge to learn a language. Within this minority community, the desire to learn English belongs only to educated people who know the value of education. Sabik stated that “if they do not study, then they won’t know the value of English.”

During the first session of the interview, I found that female students are more prone to complete education than male students. Males tend to drop out early or are not interested in learning. Fahim stated the reasons by saying, “Boys tend to drop out after primary level due to poor economic condition of the family and join their father’s occupation to help economically, which girls don’t have to.”

On top of that, the motivation for learning English differs between the two genders. Students' answers varied based on gender; the boys wanted to go on tour, but the girls wanted to support themselves and their families economically, so they wanted to be proficient in

English. Therefore, this data clearly states that girls' motivation to learn English is more family-oriented. However, boys are self-centred. At least, till now, their thinking process varies. This thinking about oneself can be the influence of their society or community. Girls tend to stay more at home and thus more connected to their family members, along with societal expectations, but boys are forced to support family without even asking. This might have led to these variations.

Nevertheless, it is surprising that despite their marginalised status, their female education is still higher. Sabik pointed out a reason behind it and said, “Boys are more easily distracted from education in their environment than girls, let alone studying English”. However, Khadija mentioned, “Girls are more emotional, and many see their mothers struggle; they want to upgrade their lives by earning money and think English will help them.” Therefore, this motivated them to study English more than boys.

The findings of this section clearly show that motivation and desire to learn a language vary depending on gender. Girls are driven by emotion and family, while boys are driven by self-interest.

Poor Living and Economic Environment: Barriers to Learning English

The camp is an overcrowded, shabby place filled with economic crisis. With many distractions, it's hard for them to concentrate on learning English. Mahi added, “Even if we think we can learn English if we do it this way, we ultimately do nothing. Camp does not have the proper environment to study.” They all agreed that they might have gone far by now if the camp had a proper environment and exposure.

Due to poor economic conditions, unprivileged students of the Urdu-speaking community of Geneva Camp are incredibly suffering financially. Most students' only option is to learn English in school as they cannot afford private tuition. For instance, Mahi

explained, “I learn English at home. I do not go to any coaching center as I don’t have money. My mother brings an English newspaper daily, and I learn English there.”

Despite having poor economic conditions, poor environment and other barriers, they are trying their best to learn the English language to upgrade their position in society

4.3 Discrimination and Fear of judgement in Bengali Society

Bullying and Social Stigma Due to Identity

Urdu-speaking people of the Geneva camp suffered the worst of mockery, stigma and bullying due to their identity, which is shaped by their language. Bihari families mainly communicate in Urdu at home. If they speak Urdu outside the camp, they are labelled as “Bihari” or “Mawra” and will be treated with prejudice. Their language and identity are the reason they get stigmatised and ill-treated. Therefore, they teach their siblings and children Bangla rather than Urdu. Anika shared, “We encourage our little brothers and sisters to talk in Bangla. Whenever people hear us talking in Urdu, they are like, look, there are Bihari and Mawra.” Though they migrated decades ago, due to their history and their ancestor's deeds, they are still being labelled with various terms. Moreover, Anika also stated a situation where her classmates heard them talking in Urdu and said, “If our classmates hear that we speak in Hindi, then they will not talk to us in school or even won't give any answer. They will ask whether we live in the camp and think we are not a good human.”

In this statement, a noticeable fact is that she says they speak in Hindi instead of Urdu. Even in front of me, they wanted to conceal the fact that they were talking in Urdu. The reason for saying they speak ‘Hindi’ can be that in Bangladesh, people watch Hindi movies and listen to songs more than Urdu. Urdu is similar to Hindi, so if they say they are speaking Hindi, then people may have a positive attitude towards them.

Moreover, Khadija, a parent from the community, disclosed the reason for not teaching their children Urdu and disassociating with the title Bihari; she said, “People don’t want to teach their children Urdu. Those who were with us at the beginning to help this community also want to remove the tag of Bihari from their lives. Does not want to associate themselves with this community because speaking Urdu will make them fall under a minority group, and people will think they are from the camp even if they are not because many people live outside of the camp as well. They do not want their children to be discriminated.”

Thus, the findings indicate that to live an unstressed, unstigmatised, and comfortable life, Urdu-speaking minorities are trying their best to leave their real identity behind and gradually adopt the language and culture of their host country, Bangladesh.

School Segregation, Psychological Impact, and Hesitation to Participate

The Biharis language shapes their identity significantly. Many of them get bullied due to their identity and people through negative remarks. This bullying leads to differentiation among people. This situation of segregation has become so striking that it started to show in educational institutions where discrimination is least expected. Sneha, one of the students, shared that classmates would say look, they are from the camp. She further informed me that if they arrived late for five to ten minutes for class, teachers would point out and say they did it because they were Biharis. The teacher would highlight their identity and make it an issue. This sort of behaviour is traumatising for them when they are trying to demolish their source of Identity. In addition, Ruqu shared situations of school segregation in agony and said,

“Teachers would make us sit separately from other students in the same class because we are Bihari. On one side, all the Bihari students will sit; on the other, all the students who are not like us will sit. I felt like crying when they first did that.”

Also, according to her, teachers criticise them for not being proficient in Bangla and insult them by saying why they even go to school. As a result, this makes them feel hesitant to ask their queries in class. According to Ikram, “I feel shy asking questions in class because they will think I am not good and look at us differently.”

By this ‘us’, they psychologically think of themselves as different individuals than people outside the camp. Hence, the findings brought attention to the fact that asking questions means showing weakness and fear of mocking. So, they want to learn Bangla and not Urdu. They are even happy to learn English to live a respectful life without the segregation that they face from the early years of their life.

Avoiding Urdu to Prevent Marginalisation

Due to past and present experiences, most of the families from the camp think before teaching their children the Urdu language because it will only bring disaster in their lives. Therefore, Khadija, a parent and paralegal, said that now, camp people avoid speaking Urdu as much as possible for fear of being marginalised. Fatema shared her trauma by saying, “We don’t want our children to learn Urdu because we don’t want people to ignore our siblings or children or look at them neglectingly. We do not want them to face the discrimination we had to endure.”

Moreover, Khaled said, “As this is a completely Bangla-dominated society. So, if I do not talk to my children in Bangla to teach them, then they will end up like us and suffer in the long run. People will make them fall into a different cluster.” He added, “Still, if a house owner hears a Bihari wants to rent his house, then they won't allow it. Stigma and xenophobia are still there. That’s why they choose language according to their needs.”

These statements highlighted that the tendency to avoid Urdu and not let children learn this language is due to trauma, experience, fear of disaster, marginalisation and stigma. People from outside of the camp are solely responsible for it.

Class-based Language shift

The use of Urdu has significantly declined among the Bihari community. However, it depends on the economic and educated class. According to Fahim, “Urdu is reducing in the camp. Those who are illiterate or elderly only talk in the Urdu language.” This statement elicited that older people do not have the age or purpose to learn a language; therefore, only the educated class and the young ones are the primary segments of the community where language shift is noticeable. Also, it is evident from previous sections that young people from the Geneva camp, such as students and children, are rejecting Urdu and accepting Bangla, which causes a language shift.

However, interview data further revealed that the death of the Bangladeshi variation of Urdu in Geneva is impossible because many people talk in it although they cannot read or write Urdu. Fahim explained, “Death of the Urdu language is impossible because many camp residents do not attend school. Talking in Bangla is hard for them. Also, they don’t go out like us. So, it will live as a verbal language.” Therefore, it will take decades for the language shift to occur among the elderly camp dwellers because they do not feel the urge to get integrated or included in society.

On the other hand, Integration is critical for survival, especially for lower-class people who interact with Bengali society for livelihood. Knowing Bangla is a must for work purposes. Pappu expressed the reality by saying, “If you think about Biharis who are rickshaw pullers when they go outside, they will use the Bangla language instead of Bihari to talk.” As for the English language, the findings suggest that it is needed for literate people.

Fahim said that the urge to learn English only belongs to educated people who know the value of education.

Thus, the findings pointed out that the Bangla language is necessary for lower-class people who communicate more with Bangla-speaking customers or passengers on a daily basis. English prevails among the less to higher-educated people of the camp as it adds tremendous value to their occupation and lifestyle.

Influence of Past Experience

Past experiences also influence the choice of language. People from the Bihari community have a traumatic past, full of discrimination and deprivation, which is still going on. As a result, the first thing that they want to change is their language because it reveals their identity more easily. Pappu shared his childhood trauma and said,

“I remember an incident from my childhood. Once, my friend and I went outside on a local bus after the war ended. We were talking in Urdu, and suddenly, people shouted, saying that we could not use Urdu while speaking to each other. We told them that we are Bihari, but they still insisted that we could use it at home but not outside as Bangladesh has become independent, and their language is Bangla.”

Similarly, Fatema shared her experience,

“The younger Generation is not fluent in Urdu. We speak to them in the Bangla language. We faced discrimination at school. If people hear Urdu, they will think low of us. We even face issues in getting admitted to school due to our identity. As my child and I were born and brought up in Bangladesh, I believe we need to know Bangla, which is our national language. So, they need to learn it accurately. Sometimes, they answer in Bangla.”

Due to discrimination in every aspect and watching this happen age after age, the new generation does not want the camp to exist. Sneha said, “It will be better if the camp does not exist. If the camp is not there, there won't be any Bihari. It will be hard to distinguish who is Bihari and who is not. No one will speak Urdu but Bangla. No one will label us as Biharis, and we won't suffer.”

Therefore, the language shift or choice of language also depends on past experiences. As a result of those painful experiences, Biharis are embracing the Bangla language and occasionally English as well.

4.4 Linguistic Identity and Integration

Urdu as a marker of Otherness

Urdu has a negative connotation with the history of Bangladesh. The use of Urdu is restricted mainly to the home to ensure that they learn the Bengali language fluently. From the interview data, I found that Urdu is seen as the language of others who do not belong to this country. This is evident from all the adverse events that happened to the Urdu-speaking community of the Bihari camp. One of the students, Fahim, shared that they talk in Hindi or Urdu at home, but with his little sister, he talks in Bangla because she only knows Bangla. Another notable finding is that they believe that speaking Urdu will not be fruitful as they live in Bangladesh. Thus, speaking in Bangla is the most logical thing to do to become a part of the state. She explained, “Apu, it does not work if everyone speaks in Urdu. We live in Bangladesh, so we must speak Bangla and teach our younger siblings the Bangla language. Otherwise, we won't be a part of this country, and people will think we don't belong here.”

As previously mentioned, Anika shared incidents of avoidance from her classmates due to their identity. Another participant, Tori, said that Bengali students would criticise and look at them with disgust as if they were aliens. The finding also revealed that they are afraid

of being labelled as Bihari or Mawra outside of the camp. The young children and residents are scared that people will see them as ‘others’ rather than included. Khaled shared an incident of how, after many years, people still show hostile attitudes towards the Urdu language and its people. He stated,

“I just saw a piece of recent news stating that the Betar Urdu service will restart in Bangladesh, which was open four or five years ago. When this news circulated in the media, many people used bad remarks for the Urdu language, hated Biharis, and condemned the idea.”

Moreover, participants said they do not want to be a part of this community, and those who were with them previously are now leaving to dissociate themselves from the camp identity. The only reason is that this Urdu language separates them from ‘others’ in our Bengali society. It gives them a cursed identity, which is a barrier to their social inclusion and leading a normal lifestyle. Therefore, they want to get rid of it as it brings them all the hardships that they have been enduring for many years.

English: A Tool for Prestige and Inclusion

From these findings, it is noticeable that the English language has a high prestige value. This thought even belongs to the other community, which is not marginalised. They even associate prestige with the English language. Hence, as the Urdu-speaking community is marginalised and deprived of respect, stigmatised, and labelled, it is justifiable as well as remarkable for them to think English will increase their value and prestige in society by making them strong, and people will accept them. To them, it is a source of prestige. Anika explained, "As Biharies, people think low of us. If we can talk to people in English, we can mix with people from high society. They will value us."

The English language also plays a significant role in shaping the cultural identity of the Urdu-speaking community. It is another source of their inclusion in society. Khaled commented on this inclusion fact and said, “Just like the Bangla language is necessary for this community, English is equally important for inclusion. Learning English will help them to be included both locally and globally.” They consider English as another valuable tool that can uplift their marginalised status.

All of these factors motivate them to learn the English language. The findings further reveal that despite being an underprivileged marginalised minority, they also associate themselves with the progressive world. They also listen to English songs, and even though they know they cannot comprehend those meanings, they try their best to learn them and fit into society. All of their strategies are to get accepted in society, live with honour like other people in the country and get the upper hand in economic aspects.

Self-identification as Bangali and Assimilation Struggle

Since the children of the Bihari camp were born and raised in Bangladesh, they are born Bangladeshi. Yet they struggle to feel and show themselves as one of us. Findings noted that they think they are ‘Bangali’; however, it will not be possible as they have Bihari ancestry. They have not had an easy time assimilating into Bengali society, which is why they are deliberately saying that they are ‘Bangali’. Anika said, “Even though we are Bihari, as citizens of Bangladesh, we think of ourselves as ‘Bangali’ because we born here.” This data also indicates that they do not have an idea of what ‘Bangali’ and Bangladeshi refer to.

The Bihari community used to be more unique and deeply bonded with its language and culture. However, Pappu said, “Mixing dialect or language is severe now compared to childhood.” This is creating a distance between them and their culture. As Khaled worked to

integrate into Bengali society completely, he shared his efforts towards assimilation by saying,

“90 % of the time, I use Bangla in my daily life. I am trying to integrate into this Bengali society, so I cannot let other languages create a complicated situation like the political situation in 1952.” He is referring to the Urdu language.

Khadija emphasised the necessity of speaking Bangla for social acceptance by saying, “The mother tongue we use is not applicable in Bengali society. It is growing with the trend, as this is a completely Bangla-dominated society. So, if I do not talk to them in Bangla and teach them, then they will end up like us and suffer in the long run. People will make them fall into a different cluster. If I want to stay in Bangladeshi society, I have to submerge myself into this society and be one of them.”

Camps play a significant role in shaping identity. Sabik said, “It would be better if camp did not exist anymore.” This means that they will benefit from extinction as it will be hard to distinguish who is Bihari and who is not.

Moreover, Khaled explains how socio-mobility affects identity perception. He said, “Those who were middle class and could uplift themselves from that level are trying to think differently and discard their identity.” Younger generations are actively identifying as Bengali because, from what they have observed, it's ideal to choose the Bangla language. This also causes a linguistic shift, which is a part of assimilation. Fahim said, “We are not confident in speaking Urdu.” Further, Khaled explained, “They don't want to accept Urdu identity, and that's why they are calling themselves Bengali but do not understate the notion that they cannot be 'Bangali' just by being born in Bangladesh.”

Drawing from these findings, it is evident that they have struggled for generations to assimilate into Bangla society due to their language and identity, which has caused social and

economic exclusion. Therefore, they think that stating themselves as Bangali will make things smoother for them. To avoid reality and suffering, they self-identify as Bangali.

Influence of COVID-19

COVID-19 played a significant role in these marginalised people's lives. The interview revealed that they were the ones who suffered to a great extent due to poverty. They are mainly low-income people who had to sit at home due to the lockdown. Insights from the interview revealed that they were already in despair, and on top of that, the lockdown made things worse. Not being able to run small shops or do low-income work threatened their survival. Only those who worked through online platforms had at least two meals a day. According to Anika, “The situation during Corona made us realise that we should learn English to help us earn money. During Corona, we understood the importance of earning as everything shut down.” Mahi shared, “We were not eager to learn English before Covid. However, due to COVID, as we stay at home and for entertainment, we need to watch movies, so we develop a liking for the English language.”

These findings emphasised the value of the English language in social and economic aspects. Participants understood that English can open opportunities to earn money during critical times; therefore, proficiency is necessary.

4.5 Generational Language Shift and Code-Switching

This table shows the generational language shift. However, when they start learning second and third languages, the status of language as primary and secondary differs considering inside and outside of the camp.

Table 1.1: Generational Language Shift

Language	Key Ideas	1 st Generation	2 nd Generation	3 rd Generation	4 th Generation
Urdu /Urdu	Communication	Primary language of communication	Primary language of communication	Primary language of communication, only inside the Camp	Primary language of communication in the camp. Only Speak in Urdu. (Mostly uneducated people)
	Language Skills	Speak, understand, read, and write	Speak, understand, read, and write	Primarily used in spoken form. A few can read and write.	Only used in spoken form. No one can read or write.
	Influence of other language	No	No	Urdu is much in utterance. English words can be seen in the utterance.	Bangla and English can be seen in the utterance.
Bangla	Communication	I did not know Bangla	Second language of communication	Second language of communication in the camp	Second language of communication, only inside the camp
	Language skill	Spoken (rarely)	Learned to speak Bangla but was not fluent.	Speak, read and write Bangla Fluently.	Speak, read and write Bangla Fluently.

			Rarely could read and write in Bangla.		
	Influence of other language	No	Urdu can be seen in the utterance.	Urdu and English can be seen in the utterance.	English and Urdu words can be seen more in the utterance.
English	Communication	Did not know English	Only educated people know	Third language of communication	Third language of communication
	Language skill	No	Rarely	Educated ones understand, read, write and speak English.	Educated ones understand, read, write and speak English.

Older Generation and the Use of Urdu

The findings show that Urdu was the first generation's primary spoken and written language. Other languages did not affect Urdu at that time. Their Urdu was pure as Urdu was their mother tongue. Also, Fahim and other participants confirmed that their older generation can write and read in Urdu, which later generations lack significantly. However, those from the Urdu-speaking states of India would speak Urdu; otherwise, the majority would talk in Hindi. Bangla was not the dominant language at that time.

Middle generation

The second to fourth generation who were born and raised in the camp, experienced a shift in language use due to not being taught to read or write Urdu. All the students said they

could only speak Urdu but could not read or write. As a result, their proficiency in Urdu remained limited to verbal communication.

One of the parents, Fatema, stated, “We do not teach them Urdu. We teach them Bangla.” Similarly, Khadija said, “I talk to my daughter, who is 4 years old, I completely talk in Bangla. With son, mostly Bangla.” Another younger participant, Ikram, said, “We talk in Urdu inside the camp. People see us differently when we talk in Urdu. So, we are teaching our siblings Bangla. Thus, they cannot talk in Urdu.” Therefore, Bangla gradually became the dominant language outside the camp. Many are learning to speak it fluently. Even though they do not want Urdu to be spoken, acquiring Urdu is inevitable as they live there. Ruqu said, “Children eventually learn to speak Urdu as they live in the camp.”

Khaled, a third-generation Urdu speaker, said, “My friends and I love to talk in Urdu.” However, the fourth generation does not want that. Mahi shared, “If it disappears, then it's good.” Now, when children try to speak Bangla, Urdu comes out of their mouths instead. So, if they stop speaking Urdu, they can talk to Bangla Fluently.” Ikram said, “We don't want to learn Urdu as we don't need it outside.” Again, Mahi added, “Urdu is rarely spoken among educated people. Those who are illiterate or elderly only talk in the Urdu language. Also, as for English, though Bangla is their second language and English is their third language, in the outside world, Bangla works as their first and English as their second language because they pretend not to know Urdu (their mother tongue).

Over time, the younger generations of Geneva Camp have lost the ability to read and write in Urdu. Their language has also changed to Urdu and then eventually to Bangla, but now it is a mixed language.

Code-switching

Code-switching is a common occurrence among people who know more than one language. This idea has become common among the young generation of the camp as people mix Bangla, Urdu, and English in conversation. Khadija said, “New generation mixed languages. For example, on the way home, my son would say, Ma ekhon mone hoy **barish** hobe! he won't say ‘bristy’ for rain, but rather barish. He would include English and Urdu in a Bangla sentence.” Ruqu explained, “We mixed Bangla with Urdu, e.g. **tumi** kaha giye tho! Out of habit. Sometimes, we also include English words.” Fahim explained, “There are many things that are hard for people to understand, so in that case, we use the Bangla language to make them understand.” They switch codes not only in verbal communication but also in text or via messenger. They are doing this in daily conversation.

The findings depict that they are comfortable using mixed language. One possible reason is that they are always treated as outsiders, and using languages other than Urdu makes them feel included in a society where every other Bengali student switches codes and mixes multiple languages. It makes them feel equal to other ‘Bangali’ people in this country. They think they are as capable as one of us.

4.6 Overall Discussion

The findings highlight the importance of socioeconomic factors in influencing the language preferences of Biharis of Geneva Camp in Bangladesh. Language is a tool for social mobility and economic survival. The linear progression or language transition is

Urdu → Bangla ↔ English

Individuals who aim for higher-paying positions understand the value of English fluency. On the other hand, low-income people prioritise acquiring the Bangla language for everyday communication and employment opportunities as it is the dominant language in Bangladesh. According to Dilshad and Ahmed (2024), economic hardships lead to a reliance

on the dominant Bengali language for better integration into the job market, despite a preference for Urdu. For a similar reason, the perceived value of the English language is also increasing gradually.

Again, findings revealed that the motivational differences between the Genders further illustrate how socioeconomic obligations influence language acquisition. Female members focus on English to provide for their families as they realise the importance of English in gaining better prospects. In addition, the effects of COVID-19 further emphasized its necessity. Gender-based motivational differences are evident in South Punjab, where females show a stronger inclination towards English learning due to its perceived economic benefits (Imran, 2020). Their linguistic growth is hampered by other structural obstacles like economic constraints, a lack of Urdu education and an unsupportive learning atmosphere. These are notwithstanding their motivation. Therefore, the results suggest that language learning is essential to this community's socioeconomic challenges and mobility since it is linked in a complicated way to economic goals, social identity, and structural injustices.

Moreover, Bihari families of Geneva Camp prefer Bangla over Urdu or Hindi out of fear of prejudice due to their linguistic history. The idea that speaking Urdu identifies them as outsiders is reinforced by social stigma and bullying. Islam & Ahmed (2023) mentioned that Bihari people face significant social stigma due to their Urdu language, which is often associated with outsider status in Bangladesh. This stigma is reinforced through bullying in both public and educational settings, leading to reduced self-esteem and participation in class. Stigmatizing and mocking occur in both public and educational settings. This restricts their possibilities and hinders their assimilation into society at large.

Not only that, Bihari people are further alienated by school segregation and teacher bias. Teachers, who are supposed to be the protectors, are becoming the reason for their fear of

getting mocked due to their identity. Rashid & Hà (2024) explained that teachers often fail to support these students, which reflects broader socioeconomic discrimination in educational choices. All of this lowers their self-esteem and discourages them from participating in class. However, some teachers and individuals support students to ease hardships; even then, the societal pressure and perceived notions remain the same. Gong (2024) stated a similar case of Dalits, a marginalised group, face significant discrimination and social exclusion, impacting their access to education and employment. Societal pressures compel them to adopt the dominating language for survival, while educated individuals may prioritise English, reflecting socioeconomic disparities.

Bangladesh's government schools mainly use Bangla language to teach in class. Therefore, to change their fate through education, Biharis learn Bangla even though topics are more comprehensible if taught in their mother tongue (Nishanthi, 2020). The economic class also matters because, in the community, those from lower socioeconomic classes are more likely to use Bangla for employment, whereas educated people prioritise English after learning Bangla.

Moreover, past experiences of xenophobia and exclusion also shape these changes in language preferences. Even stereotyping is still there and all these are shaping the opinions of the younger generation. Therefore, many of them think that the only way to avoid marginalisation is to erase the verbal and physical symbols of their ethnicity, which eventually includes their mother tongue Urdu. Capstick's (2021) research indicates that migrant families often counter discrimination through their everyday multilingualism, which suggests erasing ethnic symbols that include their mother tongue.

Furthermore, people who use Urdu have a history of social marginalization. As seen by the negative connotations associated with names like "Bihari" and "Mawra," they fear their

rejection into Bengali society if their identity of belonging to different ethnicity is discovered through language. Many Biharis, especially new generations, choose to speak Bangla along with English words to obtain social recognition and mobility. Particularly, English is seen as a prestige marker and a means of upward mobility after Bangla. It enables underprivileged populations to gain access to opportunity and social respect. Despite getting the privilege of citizenship, the Biharis still face challenges that influence their language choices, which often make them prioritise languages other than Urdu for social acceptance (Du, 2024; Haider, 2018).

Despite these initiatives, the fight for integration persists. Newer Bangladeshi-born generations frequently distance themselves from their Bihari heritage by identifying themselves as 'Bangali'. They seem not to understand that they can't change their ancestral identity, but it is also noticeable that they are deliberately rejecting their real identity and portraying themselves as Bangali.

Moving forward the necessity of English for social development and survival became increasingly noticeable due to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. It indicated the desperation for economic stability. Rashid et al. (2024) said that the stigma and discrimination faced by COVID-19 survivors also played a role in shaping social dynamics because these experiences have influenced individuals' decisions to align more closely with the dominant Bengali identity to avoid marginalisation.

Next, the generational language shift in Geneva Camp serves as a reminder of the complex relationships between internal and environmental influences that shape language use. Urdu, spoken mainly and written by the older generation, remained pure and unaffected by other influences. Similarly, Dilshad & Ahmed (2024) stated that the first generation shows a more positive attitude towards Urdu, but later on, they recognise the necessity of using Bangla in daily interactions. Initially, in the camp, the dominant language shifted to Urdu because there

were not only Urdu-speaking Biharis but also Urdu-speaking Indians. Then, the language shifted to Bangla because the successive generations grew up in the camp and Bangla-dominated society without being taught to read or write in Urdu. Although they continue to speak a combination of Urdu and Hindi within the camp, the younger generations are becoming more proficient in Bangla. Thus, Bangla has taken over as the primary language outside of the camp. Islam & Ahmed, (2023) stated that many Bihari adolescents show a preference for the host culture, which leads to increased competence in Bangla over Urdu. In addition, to its now the English language is also getting preference among the educated young generation due to globalisation.

As a result, code-switching between Urdu, Bangla and English has grown frequently due to multilingualism. This reflects a larger trend of linguistic adaptation. Though I found that Biharis children switch from Urdu to Bangla more however, Hossain (2014) said that Biharis who are young, born and raised in Bangladesh, are more fluent in Bangla and often switch to Urdu, indicating a reverse pattern of code-switching driven by familial ties and cultural identity. Moreover, they tend to switch languages while chatting through Messenger. Ferdous et al. (2023) said that this digital code-switching could impact the spirit of the mother tongue, as frequent switching and mixing may lead to a dilution of linguistic purity and cultural identity.

Also, English and Bangla play prominent roles in the larger social context, even though few people study English. As language acts as a means of communication both inside and beyond the community and a marker of identity, this linguistic evolution depicts the conflicts between the demands of assimilation and cultural preservation. Nevertheless, it is required for their survival due to the dominance of this mono-linguistic country. As they choose a language based on their circumstances, to do so in the first place, they need to be motivated to learn that language, and Urdu-speaking minorities are learning enthusiastically. Their socioeconomic condition motivating them to learn languages and become proficient.

Thus, the overall discussion reveals that the first-generation preferred Urdu, but gradually, due to social and economic survival, later generations shifted towards Bangla and now emphasise the English language.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Languages communicative value is the root of everything. In this paper, I have explored the impact of languages on the socioeconomic survival of Urdu-speaking people in the Geneva Camp of Dhaka, Bangladesh. The research participants were ten students, three community members, and one authority working for the betterment of this minor community. They were selected by using a purposive sampling technique from the Geneva camp of Dhaka. I have carried out semi-structured interviews in groups to collect the data. After collecting the data, the study findings are analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Hence, it is presented in themes and sub-themes. Collecting data was difficult as it is not easy for any researcher to access that community without prior working experience with them. It is due to a lack of trust, fear of getting harmed, and past mistreatment which were done to them by people outside of their community.

The study reveals four broader themes related to economic survival, discrimination, identity and integration, generational language shift, and code-switching. Under these themes, there are multiple sub-themes. For example, sub-themes under economic survival discussed low and high-income workers' language, the educational aspect of language learning, gender differences in motivation to learn English, and barriers to learning English. Next, under the theme of discrimination, the sub-themes discussed bullying and social stigma due to identity, school segregation, avoiding Urdu to prevent marginalisation, class-based language shift and the influence of experience. The third theme discusses linguistic identity and integration, under which the subthemes are markers of otherness, a tool for prestige and inclusion, self-identification as Bengali, the assimilation struggle, and the influence of COVID-19. The last theme explained the generational language shift and the transition to different generations.

Therefore, this research concludes that, due to their socioeconomic condition, Biharis choose to use different languages (Urdu→Bangla↔English) to access society and economic opportunities, which is remarkable for a community with a controversial past history.

5.1 Recommendations

Two recommendations can be derived from the above discussion. The recommendations are given below:

1. NGOs or UN organisations should develop projects and provide funding to teach camp citizens all four skills of languages required for social mobility and economic advantages.
2. If everyone in the camp deliberately avoids speaking the Urdu language to communicate, the language may become extinct. Therefore, just like efforts are being made to preserve other ethnic languages, efforts should also be made to preserve this Bangladeshi Urdu dialect.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions

1. What languages do you primarily use at home, school, and work?
2. How do socioeconomic conditions influence your ability to learn Bangla and English?
3. What challenges have you or your community faced due to language barriers?
4. Do you think learning Bangla and English improves job opportunities for the Bihari community? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever faced discrimination because of the language you speak? Can you share an example?
6. How does language affect access to education, government services, or legal rights for Bihari individuals?
7. What efforts (government or NGO-led) exist to support language learning in Geneva Camp? Are they effective?
8. Do you think younger generations are more motivated to learn Bangla and English compared to older generations? Why?
9. What impact does language have on the cultural identity of the Bihari community?
10. What changes or initiatives do you think are needed to improve language access and social integration for Biharis?