Multilingualism and the Tea Tribe of Assam

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Abstract: **Over the past several decades, multilingualism is the most popular topic of any language community of Assam. In the past, people are lived their lives in a limited way for many reasons. However, over several decades, globalization and improvements in communication have allowed people to move effortlessly from one place to another. Advances of technology also play a positive role in learning a new language for language learners. They can access it easily through the internet. A monolingual person converts to a multilingual person due to migration, markets, language acquisition ability, curiosity to acquire knowledge and many other reasons. In addition to these, educational institutions, work places, multilingual societies etc. act as the main influencers as individuals or groups become multilingual. The tea tribe of Assam is also migrated from many other states of India. Like, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal etc. The tea tribe has more than hundred sub-castes and most probably each of these having their own languages. Tea tribe of Assam has a linguistic diversity society.**

Keywords: **Multilingualism, Assam, Tea Tribe, Ethnicity.**

INTRODUCTION:

In the twentieth century, a new genre of Sociolinguistics was added to the discussion of linguistics. Sociolinguistics is the study of language on the basis of a society. Sociolinguistics studies the history of a language or language group as well as analyzes its social status. Multilingualism is also discussed within this Sociolinguistics.

Multilingualism is a much-discussed topic nowadays. Multilingualism is determined by the way a person uses language. In the general sense's multilingualism is the ability of an individual person or by a group of persons to use two or more languages. A person is defined as multilingual by the use of languages other than the first language. Similarly, multilingualism is the ability of a group to use more than two languages. A person becomes actively multilingual when they exchange languages using languages other than their first language, formally or informally. Otherwise, a person becomes passively multilingual when he understands languages other than his first language only by reading or listening, not using it himself. A person learns their first language informally. However, they acquire multilingual knowledge both formally and informally. A person acquires multilingualism because of language inquiry or sometimes hereditary. If the language of the mother, father or community is different, the person is more likely to be multilingual. Currently the government language policy also makes the teaching of three languages compulsory. Bilingualism or multilingualism can be divided into two categories Oral and Written based on the individual and the community. Oral Multilingualism can also be divided into two categories based on a person's acquisition pattern Natural and Artificial Multilingualism. Natural Multilingualism is people who use multiple languages of their own free will without being influenced by any pressure. In contrast, Artificial Multilingualism is those individuals who are forced to learn a language through a formal institute or medium under pressure. Bilingualism or multilingualism in individuals or group can be called Social Bilingualism or Multilingualism. When discussing multilingualism in the international, national and state context, the discussion bilingualism takes place. This is because an individual or group can only be multilingual if it is bilingual.

The discussion of multilingualism is very applicable in a state like Assam. Assam is a place to various ethnic groups belonging to four language families. This results in linguistic differences in almost every ethnic group. As a result of linguistic diversity, bilingualism or multilingualism is observed in the context of Assam.

THE TEA TRIBES OF ASSAM:

The history of Assam is a history of migration. All the people living in Assam are migrants. Large numbers of laborers were imported from various parts of India to work as laborers in the tea plantation of Assam. Hundreds of proletarians from different parts and origins of India came to Assam and joined the larger tea tribes. Each of these migrant ethnic groups had different languages, cultural traditions and religious beliefs. The group known as the tea tribes is naturally a mixture of heterogeneous in all respects. Despite these differences, the larger tea tribe is named after their occupation by uniting them for occupational similarities. The story of the creation of a groups or community by adopting a particular occupation is rare in the history of the world.

The larger tea tribe of Assam is made up of many ethnic and ethnic groups. The British colonialists imported various people from present-day Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh to work in the tea plantations of Assam. These imported people were later recognized as "Tea Tribes" by the government of Assam. In Assam the tea tribe is the majority population in the districts of Odalguri, Sonitpur, Bishwanath, Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, Golaghat, Jorhat, Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Kachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj etc. A limited population also lives in the Barak Valley and villages and towns in Dhubri, Bangaigaon, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Baksa, Kamrup (Metro), Kamrup (Rural), Morigaon, Darrang, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Dima Hasao districts of Assam. They have a sophisticated society and culture and a diverse language. There are more than hundred tea tribes of different surnames in Assam. Almost every ethnic group or surnames community has its own ethnic language. Like, Santali's have Santali language, Kurukh's have Kurukh language, Saora's have Saora Language, Munda's have Munda language etc. and all languages differ from one another to a greater or lesser extent.

WHY TEA TRIBE OF ASSAM'S BECOME MULTILINGUAL?
Due to some major causes tea tribe of Assam become multilingual. Some of them are mentioned here in below:

- **Migration:** Migration is one of the major causes to become multilingual in a language community. Because of plantation tea tribe are migrated to Assam. In the past, before migration, these people used their own, state and other languages. They brought at least more than one language with them when they arrived. It is believed that they were bilingual or trilingual before their arrival in Assam. In Assam, unknown migrants from different places had to live together. They have no similar language to communicate each other. Therefore, they faced severe linguistic problems to stay in Assam. Then they had to learn a new language, called Assamese, to meet their basic daily needs through communication. Assamese is the state and also the local language of Assam. Because of the linguistic differences between the immigrants, they invented a language to communicate with them. The language later became used as the lingua franca among them. Due to communication or such type of circumstances, the tea tribe people became multilingual.

- **Education:** Like other aspects of life, education affects in the field of language. An educated person knows two languages more than an illiterate person. Our National Education Policy also introduces three language learning methods and therefore students are become multilingual. Language can be acquired from different language speaking people met in educational institutions such as teachers, classmates and others. This process sometimes occurs knowingly and sometimes unknowingly. Thus, they do not know how to transform from monolingual to multilingual through education.

- **Various Occupation Place:** Work affects every aspect of a person's life. Different places of work make differences in the linguistic aspects of individuals. The workplace of the tea tribe is mainly plantations. However, some people have left the tea plantations and joined the jobs of various companies. Due to the diversity of the workplace, most of the people you meet there are also from different caste or communities. Tea tribe people use their own ethnic language with the same speakers in the work place. Otherwise, they communicate in lingua franca to other ethnic groups belonging to them. It is also noteworthy that the tea tribe uses the state language Assamese, the national language Hindi and in some cases international languages to communicate outside their community.

- **Living in Multilingual Society:** The same tea estate is inhabited by people of different ethnic groups belonging to the tea tribe. As mentioned earlier, almost every one of these people has their own ethnic language. On the other hand, because each language is incomprehensible, one ethnic group does not easily understand the language of another ethnic group. They developed a lingua franca to understand each other's feeling or emotions. For example, due to misunderstanding of each other's language, Santali, Saora, Munda, Kurukh speakers are use lingua franca when communicating with each of them.
  In addition to the tea tribe ethnic groups, various non-tea tribe ethnic groups are also live in the same tea estate. The tea tribe people communicate with them in Assamese, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Hindi etc. Living in a multilingual society, it is natural for them to be multilingual.

- **Markets:** A market is a place where many people gather together at the same time. These crowds play the roles of buyers and sellers. The languages of the buyers and sellers are different. Linguistic transactions are common in the market. Both the buyers and sellers want to acquire each other's language because of focusing on market benefits and own interests. Language can be used to build friendships with anyone. It is easier to transact if the buyer and seller speak the same language.
  The market affects a person's multilingualism both directly and indirectly. There are a high proportion of locals as buyers in the tea garden markets of Assam. There are many sellers from Assamese, Bengali, Bihari, Marwari and Muslim communities besides locals. The language of the people of these communities is influencing the tea tribe people in the market. Therefore, the languages of that community are included in the list of languages spoken by the tea tribe people.

- **Language Acquisition Ability:** Multilingualism refers to the linguistic acquisition ability of an individual or social group. Tea tribe people have their higher language acquisition ability. They sometimes have to use multiple languages in their own homes. However, language use may vary with different people in the household. Therefore, it can be seen that the tea tribes has to use multilingualism from the domestic life to the social level.
  Interest and curiosity play an important role in language learning. People's are not only multilingual by acquiring languages but must also maintain the languages equally. In fact, use keeps anything eternally useful. Everyone has different abilities to acquire language. Tea tribe people are also multilingual due to their high language acquisition capacity.

- **Inter-Caste Marriage:** Linguistic diversity and multilingualism depend on marriage. Inter-caste marriage facilitates the learning of another language. Inter-caste marriage unites people of different languages representing two different societies. Sometimes children suffer the consequences of parental linguistic differences. The majority of women, on the other hand, borrow the both of languages of their father's and husband's household, sometimes completely and sometimes partially.

- **Religion:** The tea tribe community is predominantly Hindu but there are also Christians and some Muslims. The language of Hindu priests, Christian or Islamic cleric greatly influences the linguistic aspects of the tea tribe people. The songs performed in temples, churches or mosques have directly or indirectly influenced the linguistic aspects of the tea tribe people.

- **Globalization and Internet:** As the world has become a village due to globalization, we can learn about different of any place such as social, cultural, linguistic etc. The easiest way to know all this because of mainly through Internet.
  The Internet is the most accessible means of communication today. Anyone from anywhere can learn anything effortlessly. Every day we learn something new through the internet. Similarly, Google can translate into different languages in national and international levels. Google, which is connected to almost all of our electronic devices, allows us to access all aspects of local and international news in any language from the comfort of our homes. Nowadays, people use Google first to retrieve any information.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF MULTILINGUALISM:

Multilingualism has different consequences for different individuals and groups. Some of them are mentioned in given below:

- **Working Place:** Language plays an important role in workplace selection. Using many languages opens up a variety of workplaces. People spend most of a day at work. Good relationships are developed with other people in the workplace. Therefore, it is natural that the language of the workplace affects individuals. The language of the workplace sometimes mixes with other languages spoken by the person. The temporary or permanent nature of this mixture depends on the workplace.
  The linguistic contribution to the success of a business is remarkable. The impact of multilingualism on trade is obvious. Multilingualism has an impact on buyers and sellers in everything from small businesses to large ones.
- **Linguistic field:** Language helps us to communicate with different people. In a multilingual society, language is needed to get along with everyone. Knowledge of each other's language is essential for successful communication between two people from two different language societies. Multilingualism is very useful in this regard and helps in the successful implementation of a communication. In a conversation between monolinguals from different communities, the multilingual becomes the center of attraction rather than other monolinguals. The multilingual is seen acting as a translator for a monolingual person.
- **Political gains:** Multilingualism has a profound impact on politics. A politician meets many different people every day. It is easier to communicate with these people in their own language. The multilingual is more likely to gain widespread attention and vote banks than the monolingual political officer. It is easy to win the hearts of the people by going to different places and delivering speeches in their language. Nowadays, it is often seen that politicians always start in their own language even if they do not fully know the language spoken in the area in order to impress the minds of the general public. Through this conversation, many not happening tasks can be accomplished easily by establishing intimacy.
- **Social Life:** In social life, individuals need more language. Socially, you meet different kinds of people at different times. These individuals can only be made friends through language. In this regard, language can be used as a means of communication to build relationships with people from different communities through humility.

CONCLUSION:

Multilingualism has affected all caste or tribes as well as the tea tribes. There are many discussions on multilingualism in national and international contexts. However, in the context of Assam, the multilingualism of the tea tribe is still not discussed. Therefore, hope that this article is prepared with the intention of bringing this aspect under discussion and discovering new information.

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