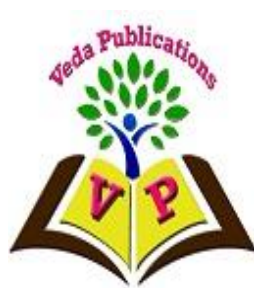**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SHERPA, AN ENDANGERED LANGUAGE OF NORTH EAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to discuss the nature and extent of language endangerment with special reference to Sherpa an indigenous Tribal community settled mainly in the Nepal, Bhutan and India. The present study discusses mainly about the Sherpas of India which are mainly settled in South and West District of Sikkim. . According to the Census of India 2001, the total speaker of Sherpa in Sikkim is 13,922. However, *Denzong Sherpa Association* claims that the population of Sherpa is more than 65,000 out of which more than 32,000 people speak their Mother Tongue in their native environment particularly in the home domain. Linguistically, Robert Shafer has divided Tibeto-Burman into four main groups: Bodic, Baric, Burmic and Karenic. According to Shafer, Sherpa belongs to the Central Unit of the Bodish Section within the Bodic Sub-division of Sino-Tibetan. The closest linguistics relatives of Sherpa are: Garhwal, Spiti, Dru, Lhoskad, Kagate etc. According to the UNESCO report (2003), Sherpa is one of the endangered Language of Sikkim. The paper aims to look into the language endangerment of Sherpa and the causes that leads to language endangerment. The attitude of the native speakers towards the language will also be assessed and the suggestions to save the language from the further endangerment will also be given.

Keywords: *Sherpa, Status of language, Attitude, Endangerment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

An endangered language is a language that is at a risk or fear of extinct or falling out of use. If the language dies then gradually the identity of the community will also die. According to UNESCO report 2021, 40% of the estimated 7,000 approximate languages around the world are endangered, out of which most of them are indigenous languages. The phenomenon leading towards the extinction or loss of a language is known as language endangerment. The primary drivers of indigenous language loss involves different factors i.e. social, economic, and political subjugation of Indigenous peoples, including centuries of social exclusion and poverty, genocide, forced displacement, policies of assimilation etc.

2. Sherpa: An Introduction

The Sherpas are one of the indigenous tribes of Sikkim having a distinct ethnic identity. The Sherpa language belongs to the Central Unit of the Bodish Section within the Bodic Sub-division of Sino-Tibetan. Sherpas are found in all four districts of Sikkim namely East, West, South and North of Sikkim. However, Sherpa population is higher in the West and South Districts than the North and the East Districts. According to the Census of India 2001, the total speaker of Sherpa in Sikkim is 13,922. However, *Denzong Sherpa Association* claims that the population of Sherpa is more than 65,000 out of which more than 32,000 people speak their Mother Tongue in their native environment particularly in the home domain. Their language is significantly dominated by the Nepali, which is the official Language of Sikkim State. Sherpa people speak other native languages like Lepcha, Limbu, Tamang, Rai, Mangari too. Due to inter-communal marriage,

maintenance of the Sherpa Language and culture is in danger and leads to the Language endangerment. The Association people make some positive efforts to revitalise the Sherpa Language by arranging informal social and cultural meetings with the native speakers with the support of the State Government.

3. FACTORS RESPONSIBILITY FOR LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

Below we explain the six major factors identified: 1) Intergenerational Language Transmission; 2) Absolute Number of Speakers; 3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population; 4) Trends in Existing Language Domains; 5) Response to New Domains and Media; and 6) Materials for Language Education and Literacy. Note that none of these factors should be used alone. A language that is ranked highly according to one criterion may deserve immediate and urgent attention due to other factors.

3.1. Intergenerational Language Transmission.

The most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next (Fishman 1991). Endangerment can be ranked on a continuum from stability to extinction. Even "safe" (below), however, does not guarantee language vitality, because at any time speakers may cease to pass on their language to the next generation. Six degrees of endangerment may be distinguished with regards to Intergenerational Language Transmission:

Safe (5): The language is spoken by *all generations.* There is no sign of linguistic threat from any other language, and the intergenerational transmission of the language seems uninterrupted.

Stable yet threatened (5-): The language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission, yet multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant language(s) has usurped certain important communication contexts. Note that multilingualism alone is not necessarily a threat to languages.

Unsafe (4): Most but not all children or families of a particular community speak their language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains (such as at home where children interact with their parents and grandparents).

Definitively endangered (3): The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home. The youngest speakers are thus of the parental generation*.* At this stage, parents may still speak their language to their children, but their children do not typically respond in the language.

Severely endangered (2): The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations*;* while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children.

Critically endangered (1): The youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation, and the language is not used for everyday interactions. These older people often remember only part of the language but do not use it, since there may not be anyone to speak with.

Extinct (0): There is no one who can speak or remember the language.

Table 1: Degree of Endangerment

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
safe	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
unsafe	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
definitively endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
critically endangered	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
extinct	0	There exists no speaker.

3.2.   Absolute Number of Speakers

It is impossible to provide a valid interpretation of absolute numbers, but a small speech community is always at risk. A small population is much more vulnerable to decimation (e.g. by disease, warfare, or natural disaster) than a larger one. A small language group may also merge with a neighboring group, losing its own language and culture.

3.3. Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population

The number of speakers in relation to the total population of a group is a significant indicator of language vitality, where "group" may refer to the

ethnic, religious, regional, or national group with which the speaker community identifies. The following scale can be used to appraise degrees of endangerment.

Table 2: Proportion of speakers within the total reference population

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Proportion of Speakers Within the Total Reference Population
safe	5	All speak the language.
unsafe	4	Nearly all speak the language.
definitively endangered	3	A majority speak the language.
severely endangered	2	A minority speak the language.
critically endangered	1	Very few speak the language.
extinct	0	None speak the language.

3.4. Trends in Existing Language Domains

Where, with whom, and the range of topics for which a language is used directly affects whether or not it will be transmitted to the next generation. **Universal use (5):** The language of the ethnolinguistic group is the language of interaction, identity, thinking, creativity, and entertainment, and is actively used in all discourse domains for all purposes.

Multilingual parity (4): One or more dominant languages, rather than the language of the ethnolinguistic group, is/are the primary language(s) in most official domains: government, public offices, and educational institutions. The language in question, however, may well continue to be integral to a number of public domains, especially in traditional religious institutions, local stores, and those places where members of the community socialize. The coexistence of the dominant and non-dominant languages results in speakers' using each language for a different function (**diglossia**)**,** whereby the non-dominant language is used in informal and home contexts and the dominant language is used in official and public contexts. Speakers may consider the dominant language to be the language of social and economic opportunity. However, older members of the community may continue to use only their own minority language. Note that multilingualism, common throughout the world, does not necessarily lead to language loss.

Dwindling domains (3): The non-dominant language loses ground and, at home, parents begin to use the dominant language in their everyday interactions with their children, and children become semi-speakers of their own language (receptive bilinguals). Parents and older members of the community tend to be productively bilingual in the dominant and indigenous languages: they understand and speak both. Bilingual children may exist in families where the indigenous language is actively used.

Limited or formal domains (2): The non-dominant language is used only in highly formal domains, as especially in ritual and administration. The language may also still be used at the community centre, at festivals, and at ceremonial occasions where these older members of the community have a chance to meet. The limited domain may also include homes where grandparents and other older extended family members reside, and other traditional gathering places of the elderly. Many people can understand the language but cannot speak it. **Highly limited domain (1)**: The non-dominant language is used in very restricted domains at special

VEDA'S
JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)
An International Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal
Impact Factor (SJIF) 4.092   http://www.joell.in

Vol.8 Issue 4
(Oct.-Dec.)
2021

occasions, usually by very few individuals in a community, e.g. ritual leaders on ceremonial occasions. Some other individuals may remember at least some of the language (**rememberers**). **Extinct (0)**: The language is not spoken at any place at any time.

Table 3: Domains and Functions

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Domains and Functions
universal use	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions
multilingual parity	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
dwindling domains	3	The language is in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
limited or formal domains	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions
highly limited domains	1	The language is used only in a very restricted domains and for a very few functions
extinct	0	The language is not used in any domain and for any function.

Note that multilingualism is a fact of life in most areas of the world. Speakers do not have to be monolingual for their language to be vital. It is crucial that the indigenous language serve a meaningful function in culturally important domains.

3.5. Response to New Domains and Media

New areas for language use may emerge as community living conditions change. While some language communities do succeed in expanding their own language into the new domain, most do not. Schools, new work environments, new media, including broadcast media and the Internet, usually serve only to expand the scope and power of the dominant language at the expense of endangered languages. Although no existing domains of the endangered language may be lost, the use of the dominant language in the new domain has mesmerizing power, as with television. If the communities do not meet the challenges of modernity with their language, it becomes increasingly irrelevant and stigmatized.

Table 4: Response to new domains and media

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	New Domains and Media Accepted by the Endangered Language
dynamic	5	The language is used in all new domains.
robust/active	4	The language is used in most new domains.
receptive	3	The language is used in many domains.
coping	2	The language is used in some new domains.
minimal	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
inactive	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

The type and use of these new domains will vary according to the local context. One example of the possible use of this criterion is: an endangered language enjoys one new domain, broadcast media, including radio and television, but only for a half-hour a week. Though the availability of these media gives the language a potentially high ranking, the extreme time limitation results in limited exposure to the language, which thus would rank only a 2 or 3. Inevitably, there will be different levels of achievement in different media. In education,

assigning criteria can be based on two dimensions: up to what level, and how broadly across the curriculum, the endangered language is used. An endangered language which is the medium of instruction for all courses and at all levels will rank much higher than an endangered language that is taught only one hour per week.

All new domains, be they in employment, education, or the media, must be considered together when assessing an endangered language community's response.

3.6. Materials for Language Education and Literacy

Education in the language is essential for language vitality. There are language communities that maintain strong oral traditions, and some do not wish their language to be written. In other communities, literacy in their language is a source of pride. In general, however, literacy is directly linked with social and economic development. Needed are books and materials on all topics for various ages and language abilities.

Table 5: Materials for Language Education and Literacy

Grade	Accessibility of Written Materials
5	There is an established orthography, literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.
2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.
1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.
0	No orthography available to the community.

3.6.1. Language Attitudes and Policies

The maintenance, promotion, or abandonment of non-dominant languages may be dictated by the dominant linguistic culture, be it regional or national. The linguistic ideology of a state may inspire linguistic minorities to mobilize their populations toward the maintenance of their languages, or may force them to abandon them. These linguistic attitudes can be a powerful force both for promotion and loss of their languages. Members of the dominant culture shape the ideological environment, propagating a value system in which their own language is seen as a positive asset, and believed to be a unifying symbol for the region or state. When several larger linguistic communities compete for the same political or social space, they may each have their own conflicting linguistic attitudes. This leads to the general perception that multiple languages cause divisiveness and are a threat to national unity. The fostering of a single dominant language is one attempt to deal with this real or merely perceived threat. In doing so, the governing body may legislate the use of language. Accordingly, the policies may discourage or even prohibit the use of other languages. National policy, including the lack of overt policy, has in any case a direct impact on the language attitude of the community itself.

3.6.2. Language Attitudes and Policies: Dominant and Non-dominant Language Communities

A country's government may have an explicit language use policy for its multiple languages. At one extreme, one language may be designated as the sole official language of the country, while all others are condemned. At the other extreme, all languages of a nation may receive equal official status. Equal legal status, however, does not guarantee language maintenance and long-term vitality of a language.

3.7. Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use

Governments and institutions have explicit policies and/or implicit attitudes toward the dominant and subordinate languages.

Equal support (5)*:* All of a country's languages are valued as assets. All languages are protected by law, and the government encourages the maintenance of all languages by implementing explicit policies.

Differentiated support (4)*:* Non-dominant languages are explicitly protected by the government, but there are clear differences in the contexts in which the dominant/official language(s) and non-dominant (protected) language(s) are used*.* The government encourages ethnolinguistic groups to maintain and use their languages, most often in private domains (as the home language), rather than in public domains (e.g. in schools). Some of the domains of non-dominant language use enjoy high prestige (e.g. at ceremonial occasions).

Passive assimilation (3)*:* The dominant group is indifferent as to whether or not minority languages are spoken, as long as the dominant group's language is the language of interaction. Though this is not an explicit language policy, the dominant group's language is the de facto official language. Most domains of non-dominant language use do not enjoy high prestige.

Active assimilation (2)*:* The government encourages minority groups to abandon their own languages by providing education for the minority group members in the dominant language. Speaking and/or writing in non-dominant languages is not encouraged.

Forced assimilation (1): The government has an explicit language policy declaring the dominant group's language to be the only official national language, while the languages of subordinate groups are neither recognized nor supported.

Prohibition (0): Minority languages are prohibited from use in any domain. Languages may be tolerated in private domains.

Table 6: Government Attitudes toward Language

Degree of Support	Grade	Official Attitudes toward Language
equal support	5	All languages are protected.
differentiated support	4	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of the private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
passive assimilation	3	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.

active assimilation	2	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.
forced assimilation	1	The dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.
prohibition	0	Minority languages are prohibited.

3	*Many* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
2	*Some* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
1	Only *a few* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
0	*No one* cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

3.8. Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language

Members of a speech community are not usually neutral towards their own language. They may see it as essential to their community and identity and promote it; they may use it without promoting it; they may be ashamed of it and, therefore, not promote it; or they may see it as a nuisance and actively avoid using it. When members' attitudes towards their language are very positive, the language may be seen as a key symbol of group identity. Just as people value family traditions, festivals and community events, members of the community may see their language as a cultural core value, vital to their community and ethnic identity. If members view their language as hindrance to economic mobility and integration into mainstream society, they may develop negative attitudes toward their language.

Table 7: Community Members' Attitudes toward Language

Grade	Community Members' Attitudes toward Language
5	*All* members value their language and wish to see it promoted.
4	*Most* members support language maintenance.

3.8.1. Language Attitudes and Policies: Interaction and Social Effects

Attitudes towards the language, be they positive, indifferent, or negative, interact with governmental policy and societal pressures to result in increased or decreased language use in different domains. In many cases, community members abandon their language because they believe they have no alternative, or because they do not have enough knowledge about the long-term consequences of the "choices" they make. People in such a situation have often been presented with an either-or choice ("either you cling to your mother-tongue and identity but don't get a job," or "you leave your language and have better chances in life"). Actually, maintaining and using both languages will allow even better chances in life. When languages have an unequal power relationship, members of the subordinate group usually speak both their native language and the dominant language. Speakers may gradually come to use only

the dominant language. On the other hand, the subordinate group may resist linguistic domination and mobilize its members to revitalize or fortify their language. Strategies for such linguistic activism must be tailored to the particular sociolinguistic situation, which generally is one of three types:

a. Language Revival: re-introducing a language that has been in limited use for some time, such as Hebrew after the creation of the state of Israel, or Gaelic in Ireland;

b. Language Fortification: increasing the presence of the non-dominant language to counterbalance a perceived linguistic threat of a dominant language, such as Welsh;

c. Language Maintenance: supporting the stable use, in speaking and in writing (where orthographies exist), of the non-dominant language in a region or state with both multilingualism and a dominant language (lingua franca), such as Maori in New Zealand. For language vitality, speakers ideally not only strongly value their language, but they also know in which social domains their language is to be supported. A positive attitude is critical for the long-term stability of a language.

3.8.2. Urgency for Documentation

As guided for assessing the urgency of documenting a language, the types and quality of existing language materials must be identified. This constitutes the factors in the assessment of language endangerment.

3.9. Amount and Quality of Documentation

As a guide for assessing the urgency for documenting a language, the type and quality of existing language materials must be identified. Of central importance are written texts, including transcribed, translated, and annotated audiovisual recordings of natural speech. Such information importantly helps members of the language community formulate specific tasks, and enables linguists to design research projects together with members of the language community.

Table 8: Language Documentation

Nature of Documentation	Grade	Language Documentation
superlative	5	There are comprehensive grammars and dictionaries, extensive texts; constant flow of language materials. Abundant annotated high quality audio and video recordings exist.
good	4	There are one good grammar and a number of adequate grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and occasionally updated everyday media; adequate annotated high-quality audio and video recordings.
fair	3	There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient amount of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.
fragmentary	2	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists, and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality, with or without any annotation.

		Only a few grammatical sketches, short word lists, and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are of unusable quality, or are completely un-annotated.
inadequate	1	
undocumented	0	No material exists.

4. Assessment of the degree of language endangerment of Sherpa

Based on the factors discussed above regarding responsibility for Language Endangerment, this section tries to discuss the nature and degree of language endangerment in Sherpa.

4.1. Intergenerational Language Transmission

It is important to mention that the Sherpas are mainly migrated from Nepal and Bhutan, therefor in Sikkim the population is less in comparison to other two countries.

In the case of Sherpa most children or families of the community speak this language as their firs language but this is becoming restricted to specific social domains such as the home where children interact only with their parents and grandparents. Sherpa are mostly multilingual in their native language, the neighboring languages and the dominant language of the state and country. In the case of inter marriages, particularly in the case of educated and working parents, children are often found giving up their mother tongue and shifting to Nepali, Hindi of even English. In the case of Sherpas working and settled in cities intergenerational transmission is even more less. It is considered as a matter of prestige if their children speaks Hindi or English or other dominant language from a very early

age. Therefore, the language can be said to be unsafe and gradually moving towards definitely endangered.

4.2. Absolute Number of Speakers

The number of Sherpa speakers according to the census of 1991 2002 and 2011 of Sikkim is given in the table bellow

Table 9: Absolute Number of Speakers

Year	1991	2001	2011
Sherpa	23630	13922	16012

Considering the total number of speakers, Sherpa is severely endangered language.

4.3. Proportion of Speakers with the total Population

Sherpas are scattered in different geographical regions of Sikkim. The Sherpa lives in hilly villages bounded by Tamang, Gurung, Lepcha, Rai, Bhutia and Nepali speaking Communities. And thus Sherpa becomes the linguistically minority language whereas Nepali becomes the dominant language. As a result the present generation has adopted dominant language and they are gradually shifting to Nepali Language and Culture. Therefore, this language can be categorized as critically endangered taking the proportion of speakers within the total population in Sikkim.

4.4. Shifting in Domains of Language use

As mentioned earlier, there is a gradual shift from the mother tongue to other neighboring dominant languages. English plays a very crucial role in this regard. Fluency in English and other dominant languages is regarded as prestigious and a younger generation prefers to speak in public even if they

know their own mother tongue. Besides English Nepali and Hindi also plays a vital role as those who peruse their formal education in Hindi and Nepali medium schools prefer using Tibetan, Hindi and Nepali. As a result, Sherpa are slowly losing their language because they have started speaking Nepali, Tibetan, Bhutia, Hindi and English inter and intra communication across different generations in everyday interaction. Hence most of the Sherpa community people are multilinguals. Therefore, we can say that the use of language in different domains is decreasing rapidly.

4.5. Response to New Domain and Media

The language finds place in the public domains such as school and colleges but it is not found to be used as the official language of the State. Therefore, the response of the language to new domains and media is minimal and is somehow managing in some digital media Facebook, YouTube, Instagram etc.

4.6. Materials for Language Education and Literacy

As Sherpa has its own script 'Sambuta' therefore, they use 'Sambuta' script for writings. Sherpa language is also used in formal educations from the primary level to till higher secondary level. Therefore, the language is used as a medium of instruction and it also finds importance in the curriculum.

4.7. Government and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies

As mentioned earlier, Sherpa is not an official language in the states of Sikkim. In Sikkim, where it is mainly spoken, Nepal is the sole dominant group's language and is defacto the official language.

Therefore, the other non-dominant languages don't enjoy any high prestige. In a secular country like India the Constitution safe guards and protects all minority languages. However in practice, the reality is very different and minority languages are often neglected and allow to perish. Thus we can say that in regard to official attitudes towards the language, Sherpa can be said to be protected primarily as the language of the private domain and gets differentiated support. Therefore, the language needs serious attention in this regard.

4.8. Communication Members Attitudes Towards Their Own Language

The community member's attitude towards Sherpa cab be considered as a positive in spite of many external factors. This can be seen from the fact that there are many philanthropic organizations and literary bodies trying to develop, improve and preserve the language. Language is still seen as a mark of distinct identity in a state where there are many ethnic linguistic group. Many independent scholar of the community are also taking necessary steps for writing and publishing different books in Sherpa language. At present, the younger generations are also taking active role in social media for promoting and preserving the Language.

4.9. Type of Quality Documentation

There is very limited literature available in the language in the form of religious and cultural books. There are also magazines and journals trying to spread language use and thus helping in preservation and revitalization of the language. Thus we can say, with regard to the type and quality of documentation, the language is in adequate and still needs a lot of support.

Based on the above discussion, the degree of language endangerment in Sherpa may be summed up in the following table.

Table 10: Degree of language endangerment

	Grade	Assessment
Intergeneration language transmission	4	Unsafe
Absolute number of speakers		
Proportion of Speakers with the total Population	4	Severely Endangered
Shifting in Domains of Language use	2	Limited or formal domains
Response to New Domain and Media	1	The language is used only in a few new domains
Materials for Language Education and Literacy	4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
Government and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies	3	The dominant language is de facto the official language. The non-dominant languages don't enjoy
		high prestige.
Communication Members Attitudes Towards Their Own Language	6	Most members support language maintenance.
Type of Quality Documentation	2	There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists, and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality, with or without any annotation.

5. Factors responsible for Endangerment of Sherpa

The factors responsible for language endangerment vary from language to language in certain socio-linguistic settings.

The following factors are responsible for the endangerment of Sherpa language.

1.   Languages are threatened by external forces such as economic, political, religion, cultural or educational subjugation, or by internal forces such as a community's negative attitude towards its own language. At present, for Sherpa, the increasing migration, intermarriage, and rapid urbanization

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often bring along the loss of traditional ways of life and a strong pressure to speak a dominant language, which is perceived to be necessary for full civic participation and economic advancement.

The rich indigenous culture of Sherpa is gradually disappearing due to globalization, modernization, westernization andurbanization.

2. The older people in rural areas use all the lexical items related to culture, food habits, flora-fauna including medical plants, games, house hold materials etc. However, in the urban areas, they do not use any Sherpa lexical items rather they use Nepali language, leading to further language endangerment.

3. There is no Sherpa medium educational institution for learning or imparting mother tongue education. Therefore, students go to English and Nepali medium schools further leading to language shift and language endangerment.

4. Borrowing is a very common phenomenon among the educated and younger generation. Here, the state dominant language and English languages can be considered as the main killerof the indigenous languages.

6. Use of folk songs, dances and proverbs are almost extinct among the urban area Sherpa, but in Hills area they are still practicing and preserving their own cultural rituals.

8. OBSERVATIONS

Sherpa is one of the endangered languages of North East India, as intergenerational transmission is declining due to pressure from the dominant languages. In the rural area, Sherpas are multilinguals as they are fluent in their mother tongue, the neighboring language (Tibetan) and the state dominant language, (Nepali). They used the three languages in different domains. However, in the urban areas, they generally speak Nepali in all the domains. Due to this reason, there is shifting of language due to the dominant state language.

There is very few mother tongue education and so in urban areas, there is no scope for learning the language. Therefore, it is very important to implement mother tongue education in the formal educational institutions especially in Sherpa dominated areas.

There is an urgent need to improve and develop the status of the language and for which proper planning and documentation is very important for the survival of the language.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. If language dies, the culture and identity of the people also dies. Therefore, it is very important to safeguard the endangered languages and the older generation must pass the language to the younger generation.

2. Practices of own cultural rituals is very important for preservation of the culture and language. Therefore, the community members must continue to practice and preserve the rich cultural and religious heritage.

3. Awareness program about the importance of language and cultural preservation must be organized.

4. Learner's books, dictionaries, grammar books and literary books related to language and culture in Sherpa must be written and published for enriching the literature.

5.   Documentation of language, folk songs, folk dances, folk music, cultural rituals etc. are important and it must be available to the younger generation for learning.

6.   Workshops related to cultural activities like folk songs, dances etc. can be conducted in different Sherpa villages.

7.   The state educational curriculum should give importance to Mother tongue education for protection and preservation of minority and endangered languages like Sherpa.

8.   Native speakers also have a major role to play in the maintenance and preservation of the language. They should preserve their language by using it in different domains.

9.   Native linguists and language experts can help in the preparation of primers, dictionaries and grammars in the language.

10. Modern technology like online digital archiving can be used for documenting and archiving the language and culture. This can later be used for teaching and learning purposes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that language endangerment is increasing due to globalization, modernization and many other factors. This is particularly true of languages with less number of speakers, like Sherpa, where shifting to the dominant neighboring language is a very common phenomenon. A language is in danger when the native speakers no longer pass their language to the future generation. If the elder generation do not takeimportant measures now, one day all the present endangered languages will also die.

Therefore, proper steps should be taken and awareness programs must be conducted regarding all these issues. Keeping this in mind, the present paper attempted to discuss various issues with regard to language endangerment and suggested measures for safeguarding the language and culture of the Sherpas of Northeast India.

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