

Chinali: A Case of Language Endangerment in India

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Abstract

In India at least 197 languages are surviving at various levels of endangerment. Chinali is one such language, predominantly spoken as mother tongue by not more than 700 speakers in Himachal Pradesh. This language is surviving a moribund stage of endangerment which implies that its transmission to younger generations has completely stopped. This paper aims at describing various causes and reasons of its endangerment and will suggest some measures and methods by which this language can be preserved and protected.

Key Words: Chinali, Attitude shift, Language Endangerment, Documentation, Vitality.

Introduction

Humans inhabit earth so does the languages and across globe various languages perform and uniquely suffice the need of human communication in one or the other way. On an average, apart from sign languages, there are as many as 885,971 spoken languages (ethnologue: 18th edition, 1996) living along with human population of the world. Classified and grouped under various language families, there is a varied canvas of language diversity round the globe somewhat analogous to the atmosphere of the earth comprising of diverse varieties of gases. The diversity of languages is of immense importance. Though the present study delves not deeply into the nuances of any reason for such significance but describes it in brief.

Languages have important implications for individuals and societies when the questions asking for constituents of knowledge of languages. It can be understood by the fact that each language is itself a manifestation of human creativity which has value independent of its use and also that it is a human accomplishment and end in itself (kymlicka & norman, 2000). Also, language is not simply a tool for communication but is a central and defining feature of identity as all human thoughts are conceptualized through a language and all human values are pronounced and perceived through it. (sengupta, 2009).

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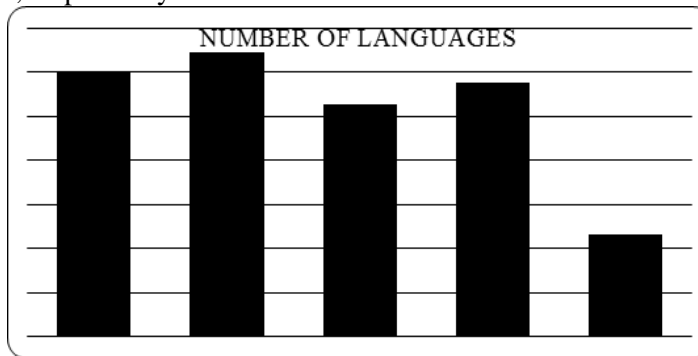
now owing to the essentialities of language diversity, the language endangerment is of great concern to which linguists and language planners are responding keenly with different methods for language revitalization, maintenance, preservation and prevention. On an average there are approximately 2465 languages spread on map of the world that are facing endangerment at various degrees which is shown in the following table (unesco, 2010):

Source: *UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger 1995-2010*

Following is the graphic representation of the above table that displays the

S.No.	DEGREE OF ENDANGERMENT	NUMBER OF LANGUAGES
01.	VULNERABLE	596
02.	DEFINITELY ENDANGERED	646
03.	SEVERELY ENDANGERED	527
04.	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	574
05.	EXTINCT	230

highest number of languages being Definitely Endangered, followed by Vulnerable, Critically Endangered, Severely Endangered and finally the Extinct Categories, respectively.



If a language is at risk of falling out of use due to any reasons then it is termed an endangered language. In india alone at least 197 languages are surviving at various levels of endangerment (unesco, 2010). Chinali is one of the endangered languages in the himachal pradesh state of india. This paper aims to describe the various causes and reasons of its endangerment along with discussion suggesting some measures or methods by which this language will be preserved and protected, at its earliest.

Methodology

This study was carried out as a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India instituted project *Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL)* by the Department of Linguistics at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh under the aegis and patronization of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore. The data was collected as an essential element of Linguistic survey which was conducted in November-December, 2014. A random sampling was carried out to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. Also, a questionnaire was employed upon the informants as a primary tool of data collection besides audio and videography. The collected data was then analyzed for the documentation purposes.

The Chinals: An Overview of the Community

Within a total population 31,564 (Govt. of India, 2011) of Lahul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh reside a small number of 215 people along the banks of river Chinab or the Chandrabhaga whose mother tongue is Chinali and are popularly known as the Chinals of this Himalayan area. Presently most of these are highly educated people; many of them assume administrative offices at the Government of India and the Government of Himachal Pradesh. Some of these denizens follow Buddhism (Mongoloid Budhists) and many have faith in Hinduism (Swanglas). They enjoy rice as their staple food besides wheat and maize.

Of their origin and settlement in Himachal Pradesh, there are two claims. One is that their ancestors have migrated from Gool Gulabgarh, Doda and Kashtwar of Chinab Valley in Jammu and Kashmir. These are the descendants of Aryans. While the other claims their ancestral migration from Rajasthan and are Rajput (Yamba, 2014). The common reason behind these migrations is cited as the state unrest in those times. Across Himachal Pradesh mostly all Chinals are associated with agriculture as their primary occupation.

Chinali: The Language at a Glance

With an obvious SOV word order, classified as a language belonging to Indo-Aryan language family, written in Devanagri script, having a good collection of literature mainly comprising of poetry and folklore and without any prominent dialectal variation(s), Chinali is mother tongue of at the most 625 people who are well settled citizens of India and domiciled in the state of Himachal Pradesh. Chinali can be classified as a class dialect which is totally confined to intra-community communications of a particular community that is also known as Chahns, Dagis or Domba besides Chinals (Sharma, 1991).

Linguistic Demography of Chinals

During the survey and process of data collection for the present study, in November 2014, the number of native speakers was found to be 625 across the state of Himachal Pradesh. Following table reads the respective number of speakers found in each area.

NAME OF THE AREA	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS
Triloknath	40
Tandi	85

Jhalma	90
Keylong	45
Shimla	30
Kullu	240
Manali	50
Dharamshala	45
TOTAL	625

No. of Speakers in different areas of Himachal Pradesh

From the above table, it is clear that the largest number of speakers is in Kullu district of this Himalayan state. The reason behind this is inter-district migration of the speech community to earn their livelihood where they are now permanently settled.

Findings and Observation

1. Language attitude:

As Sallabank (2013: 61) cites Baker (1992:13) laying emphasis upon the observation that the notions of attitudes, ideologies, motives, traits, beliefs, concepts, constructs and opinions are interrelated, adding that in studies, attitudes and motivation are treated synonymously, without discussion of the level of overlap and difference (1992: 14), the present study, on the similar lines found the following percentage of two different attitudes towards Chinali by its native speakers.

a) Negative Attitude: Among the Chinalis of Himachal Pradesh, nearly 75% bear severely a negative attitude towards their mother tongue. This is analyzed as the attitude shift due to two compelling reasons which otherwise create identity crisis among them, thereby a sense of insecurity.

b) Positive attitude: The rest of nearly 25% Chinalis possess a slightly positive attitude towards their language that showcases their affection towards the language for they believe their language being closely related to Sanskrit, which is popular in India as the language of gods, is their asset which they shall lose never.

2. Domains of Language Use

It was observed that, generally, the older generations use the language much than their younger counterparts. The Chinalis have certain restricted domains of use. They use Chinali in few settings like community gatherings, household purposes, work places and other social settings.

a) Across Different Social Settings

The domains of language use include 85% household usage among older generations, about 10% usage in community gatherings like festivals and meetings where the participants are exclusively the Chinalis, 3% at workplaces like farming and 2% usage at other places. The following table briefs it as:

S. No.	Domain of The Language Use	Percentage
01.	Household settings	90

02.	Community gatherings	10
03.	Work places	03
04.	Other social settings	02

Percentage usage of the language in various social domains (Calculated)

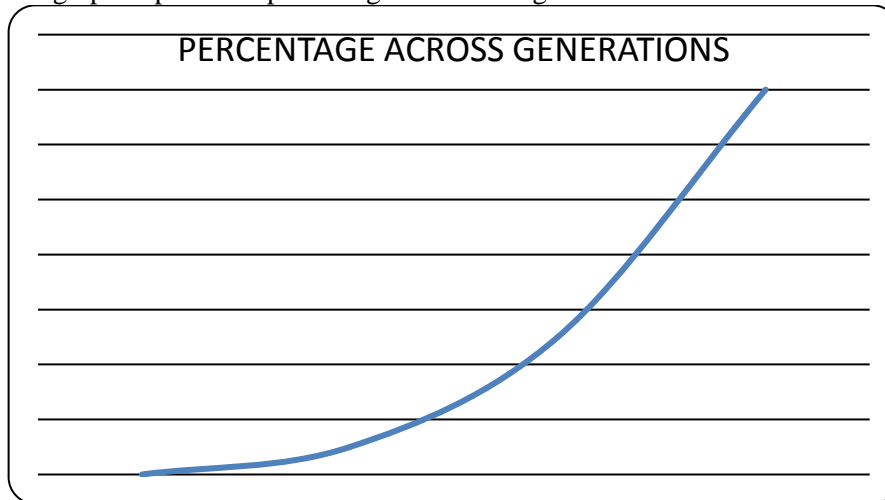
b) Across Generations

As said earlier Chinali is spoken mostly by older or more precisely the oldest generation of the community. However, the following percentage of its usage across generations has been observed:

S. NO.	Generation	Percentage
01	Children (5-15 yrs)	0
02	Adolescents (16-25 yrs)	5
03	Adults (26-35 yrs)	25
04	Old (35yrs &above)	70

Percentage of language use across generations

A line graph depicts this percentage as following:



Percentage of language use across generations

Discussion

Chinali has not been listed in the latest Census of Languages in India, i.e., the Census of 2011. In its *List of Endangered Languages in India*, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also does not enlist the language. However, the last survey report by Ethnologue, pertaining to

Chinali, published in the year 1996 reads the number of its native speakers as 750 inhabiting Himachal Pradesh which has diminished further and is 625 at present. Here it calls for the updating of data by Ethnologue. However, the population of Chinali in Himachal Pradesh has increased following the overall trend in increase in population of India. This demographic increase of Chinali raises queries for the decreasing of Chinali native speakers. This decrease can be explained in the light of above mentioned negative attitude of the Chinali speech community towards their mother tongue.

From interviews of the native speakers of Chinali it was deduced that one of the reasons is that the word *Chinal* (the name of the community) amounts to the meaning of scavenger in Hindi which is realized in Indian societies as a down trodden group of people used to perform the last rites of the dead like burning the corpses etc. and perform odd jobs like cleaning of latrines (Dogra, 2014). Because of this notion for them being Chinal they are always at the receiving end of societal discrimination. In other words, they are treated as Dalits of the rest of India. The next reason for this attitude lies in the pronunciation of the word /tʃɪnal/. If it is pronounced as /tʃɪnal/ then it may mean a 'whore' in Hindi. Thus if it is /tʃɪnal/ then it is disgrace to males and if /tʃɪnal/ then it is against the chastity of their women.

Apart from these, the strong force leading to language shift by shift in attitude is language planning by the government where a language gets enough power to dominate other languages. In Indian context the non-scheduled languages are always pushed to back burner to extinct and die (Sengupta, 2009). In Himachal Pradesh Hindi plays the role of dominating language for its wider usage than any other language present there.

As it is concluded from the data, mentioned above in the tabulated form, the usage of Chinali has now stopped completely in children which means the language is at *moribund* stage of endangerment as per UNESCO's grading of endangered languages. The children are raised with Hindi as their mother tongue. Also, the community shows affinity towards other local languages, popularly known as *Kulvi* and *Lahuli* for inter-community communication purposes. But this affinity that makes them excellent from very good in terms of proficiency is purely the result of a language contact situation and a case of inclusive behavior which the community prefers in order to shun their hapless identity of being Chinal and therefore to be merged with other communities they live with.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The data collected from the various native speakers of Chinali Language have confirmed that the language is critically endangered. So, for its preservation and protection in order to enhance its vitality for promotion of sustenance three agencies viz. the Government, the Linguists or language experts and the community themselves have to set a collective agenda. This can be primarily met with the documentation with an aim to document the language at its superlative degree. Moreover, it can be introduced to curriculum and used as medium of instruction, at least, at primary levels in the form of primers etc. Since, the

language has already a script, the knowledge it contains in any form, can be shaped into books for teaching and learning processes. Also, translations of other academic works into Chinali will be significant. Last but not the least, the Mass Media can provide spaces at different levels to enhance its vitality.

For linguists or language experts, there are various methods for enhancing the vitality of a language. The need is to assess the vitality index of Chinali periodically on a regular basis so that the language may not extinct and die.

A suggestion which I endorse as the will and wish of Chinalis is of changing name of the language from Chinali to any socially respectable name such as Chinabi in order to enhance motivation and reverse the negative attitude.

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