

The bilingual condition of Assam and the relevance of its bilingualism

Rahul Kuli*

Abstract

Basically the bilingual situation arises because of language contact. Generally this situation can be seen in the multilingual countries, states or areas. In the North-East region of India specially in Assam there are different language communities who use different kind of languages. In these kinds of diverse linguistic environment, the languages differ from each other completely. Hence they don't have mutual understanding among themselves, because of which Bilingualism has evoked due to their needs of the Assamese Language as second language. Then they feel the necessity of a second language to share their thoughts and views with each other.

Here in this prospect the above topic has been chosen.

Key Word: Bilingual, Bilingualism, Lingua-franca etc.

Introduction

Bilingualism is the part and parcel of our modern society. For the sake of our necessity in a society a person, a state or a country is bound to accept this bilingualism. Bilingualism is an important part of Sociolinguistics. In general term when a group of people habitually uses two languages for their social communication, then that group of people is called bilingual group. When in a certain boundary of a society a particular language fails to fulfill the necessity, or can say when a language that is used by a community is not enough to fulfill the day-to-day necessity, then that society feels the need of an another second language and as a result of that the concept of bilingualism emerge. Bilingualism emerges mainly in two causes, such as personal requirements and social requirements. (Choudhury Mahanta and Borah:2014:43)

There can be many reasons behind being a bilingual person or group of people. Such as intermarriage relation, migration, trade and commerce, religious discussion, travelling and political reason etc. Bilingualism also includes code mixing, code switching, barrowing etc.

Basically the bilingual situation arises because of language contact. Generally this situation can be seen in the multilingual countries, states or areas. When a language got expended in society, than the small language communities use that language to communicate with each other and also for the official and public places use that language. In the North-East region of India specially in Assam there are different language communities who use different kind of languages. In these kinds of diverse linguistic environment, the languages differ from each other completely. Hence they don't have mutual understanding among themselves, because of which they feel the necessity of a second language to share their thoughts and views with each other. Bilingualism has evoked due to their needs of the Assamese Language as second language. So, in this paper the bilingual condition and its necessity has been discussed in the perspective of Assam.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the article have given bellow –

To discuss about the bilingual situation of Assam.

To study about the necessity and importance of bilingualism in Assam.

*Research Scholar, Assamese Department, Dibrugarh University

Methods of Study

The descriptive and analytical methods are used while preparing this article.

Scope of the study

In this article it will be discussed about the bilingual situation of Assam as well as its importance of the state.

For data collection

To prepare this article important data are collected from secondary sources. Such as different books, magazines, research papers, journals etc.

Bilingual situation of Assam

The linguistic field of North-East is very diverse. Different language communities live here together. Apart from the Indo-European language family, there are other languages families reside in Assam. Such as Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian etc. Each language community has their own language and culture which are totally different from each other and there is no mutual understanding among them. Hence the languages are not mutually intelligible, if they are, then it is limited to narrow scope. Though these communities use their own language within their community members but for social works, education, trade and commerce, cultural transaction they feel the need of second language to interact with other language community. Because of this necessity they use the Assamese language as lingua-franca and as a result of that bilingualism emerge. Many ethnic languages of Assam linguistically belong to the greater Tibeto-Burman language family. The Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Mising, Dimasha, Tiwa languages of Assam are offshoot to the Tibeto-Burman of the Sino-Tibetan language family and Khamti, Shyam, Nora, Fakiyal, Aiton, Turung etc are under Thai-Sin or Shyam-Sin of Tibeto-Burman language family. Though these languages emerge from the same language family, these languages are mutually unintelligible. As for example: Bodo, Karbi, Mising, Rabha etc these languages belong to the same language family, but they don't understand other's languages. A spoken language they use their own language, but with Assamese or other speaker they use Assamese language to communicate. Hence these language communities have become bilingual by using the regional Assamese language by their own choice. Above all some language speakers use Assamese also. For example: Samaguriah, Tomar, Bangkul, Bihia, Bebejia etc sub communities of Mising and Tiwa, Sonowal-Kachari and Tai-Ahom of plains use Assamese as mother language.

The bilingualism has evoked among the ethnic tribes of Assam in various causes. Such as:

a) Under developed language community : Each and every tribe of Assam has their own language and culture but they are not rich in written literature and regarding script. To be a developed or rich language must have proper script and written literature, and it must have dictionary and grammar. Tibeto-Burman languages such as Dimasa, Mising, Rabha, Tiwa etc languages don't have their own ancient written literature. But within them they have their oral folk songs, story, ballads etc as their folk culture. Initially these tribes printed out these spoken folk songs or stories in Assamese scripts. Later they used the Devnagri and some used the Roman scripts. Before getting the confirmation of these languages as a medium for education they used Assamese language for educational purpose. Though some of these languages have recognized as a medium for language education, but it is limited within the particular tribe. Hence forth Assamese has become the bilingual because of its use as lingua-franca.

b) Linguistic minority : Another reason for the bilingualism in Assam is linguistic minority. The linguistic communities of Assam have very small number of linguistic population and their language is limited to their own language in most of the time. Thus the people of these tribes become bilingual by acquiring another language for their practical use in social aspect. So, they have to accept the majority language over the minority language, which is basically the Assamese language and it becomes the bilingual as a result of lingua-franca.

c) Island like residence : It can be seen that most of the language communities of Assam reside creating a village within their own community members and they all are surrounded by Assamese language community. As Taraporewala's statement- The Khasi language exists as island between the oceans' of the Tibeto-Burman languages likewise it can be said that the tribal language communities exist as islands in the ocean of Assamese language community. (Konwar: 1997:55) For instances the Bodo language communities are residing in the lower part of Assam such as Kokrajhar, Gowalpara, Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta etc and they are surrounded by

the Assamese community; same for Karbi, Mising etc. The ethnic communities are surrounded by the Assamese people. So, they speak the Assamese language to communicate with the non-tribal languages and thus they become bilingual by using the Assamese language.

d) Trade and commerce and cultural transaction: To adjust with the time every community has to go beyond the commercial boundary. To cross this boundary the first need is language. Though all the communities in Assam have their own language, but regarding trade and cultural transaction they must need a common language, because in society or in country commercial transaction are not possible through all languages. In these cases a respected language fulfills the need of an additional language. So, in Assam apart from their own language to fulfill their social and cultural demand they fell the need of using Assamese language, as a result of that these communities become bilingual by using Assamese language in their day-to-day life.

d) Necessity of education: Another reason for bilingualism in Assam is the necessity of education. As their own languages are underdeveloped and not sufficient for educational purpose, so they start using Assam's Standard language Assamese as a medium for education, hence they become bilingual. (Though recently Bodo language has reached to University level.)

e) Intermarriage relation: An important reason to become lingual of person or community is social compulsion as in intermarriage relationship. Intermarriage relationships always lead to language interpretation between each other. Apart from that two persons the other members of the family are also bound to talk with each other and through which they acquire each other's language and became bilingual. This impact of intermarriage relationship can be seen in other language families also such as Ahom, Bodo, Kachari, Mising, Konch, Kalita, Deori etc. They become bilingual as a result language interpretation among them.

f) Religious discussions: In Assam there are different religious people can be seen. Different communities have their own religions, but in some cases it can be seen that different language communities have a common religion such as in Christian religion. So, where any religious discussion to be held there is a need of lingua-franca and as a result of that Assamese plays that role and those people become bilingual.

Above all there are other reasons for bilingualism in Assam such as political reason, migration, colonization, historical reason, communicational development, Globalization etc.

So, from the above discussion it can be known that the communities of Assam or North-East have their own language and culture. But the mutual understanding among their language, or they are limited to certain boundary. Basically since ancient time these communities are living like an island, and because of linguistic limitations and underdeveloped language communities they remained under this boundary. Therefore due to different social works, commercial transaction, education, political reason they have to communicate in Assamese language and which leads to bilingualism in Assam.

Necessity and Importance of bilingualism in Assam

Wonderful experiences of the life of people, professional needs, universality, constant interaction with different community, and under the situation of their own languages etc, in these situation there is the necessity of bilingualism. With the flow of time the necessity rises (Phukan Patgiri: 2000:87). As language is important in daily needs of human being likewise situation brings the necessity of bilingualism to them. It leads a great influence on the socio-cultural life of people. So for these influences both importance and needs of Bilingualism is required.

Bilingualism is the least characteristics of Assam or North-East India, if it can be seen the importance and need of bilingualism in the North-Eastern region is boundless. It is the part and parcel of Assam or North-East. The lack of mutual understanding brings the need and importance of bilingualism in Assam.

The necessity of bilingualism has not decreased in present time. It is a homeland of different linguistic tribes. On the one hand the languages emerged from the Sanskrit language belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family, on the other hand the Sino-Tibetan languages. There are two branches from Sino-Tibetan language families such as Tibeto-Burman and Tai-Sin. Oka, Daphala, Misimi, Bodo, Naga etc are from Tibeto-Burman language family and Ahom, Khamti, Fakiyal are from Tai-Sin branch. The necessity of knowing at least two languages makes them to use Assamese language as lingua-franca. As a result they become bilingual, and the need and importance of bilingualism become boundless in Assam.

Conclusion

Bilingual situation and the relevance of its bilingualism in Assam: From the above discussion we can reach at certain conclusions, such as:

? The linguistic field of Assam is diverse. So, there can be seen the mutual unintelligibility among different language communities, which brings different problems. To overcome this problem they accept Assamese language as a lingua-franca among them. Therefore as a multilingual state the need and relevance of bilingualism in Assam is indefinite.

? There are many reasons behind the emergence of bilingualism in multilingual Assam. They are: underdeveloped language community, linguistic minority, island like residence, social, religious, trade and commerce, educational reasons etc. As a result of which different language communities of Assam has become bilingual by accepting Assamese as a second language.

Reference

1. Bhatia, Tej K. and William C. Ritchie: The Handbook of Bilingualism, Blackwell Publishers, 2004.
2. Choudhury Mahanta, Subasana and Jayanta Kumar Borah (ed.): Bhasa-Sahitya Adhyanar Bibidh Dish, published by Register, Dibrugarh University, 1st Edition-2014.
3. Datta Barua, Phanindra Narayan: Adhunik Bhasa Bijyan Parisoi, Dibrugarh, Banlata, 1st Edition-2006.
4. Harmers, Josiane F. and Michel H (ed. All): Bilinguality and Bilingualism, 2nd Edition, 2000. 4. Konwar, Arpana: Bhasa Sahityar Bibidh Chinta, Dibrugarh, Banlata, 1st Edition-1997.