

VERBS WITHOUT NOUNS: A CASE OF GRADUAL DECLINE OF KUI LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The Tribal languages are facing the issue of obsolescence of vocabulary due to rapid change in materials being used around. This change in materials is due to increased needs, change in technology of housing, dress, forest use and traditional medicine. No demand for use is causing obsolescence. Oral form of language corpus also has risk of losing with passing of time and people. First materials go and the names follow the suit though not simultaneously. The tools to save the language range from documentation, creation of local repository, standardization of script and more prominently encouragement of creative writing in tribal and endangered languages with the native as well as other speakers.

KEY WORDS

Spoken Language, obsolescence, loss of names, materials, fashion change, local repository, language ownership, standardization of script, state language, creative writing.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital tool for the communication and used to express thoughts, emotions and creativity. It connects people, shape cultures and enable learning. Also, it plays a prime role in identity, social interaction and for the preservation of knowledge and traditions. The tribal language (native tongue spoken language) act as a crucial factor for the preservation of unique traditions, histories and world views. Kui is a Dravidian droup language which is the primary tribal language spoken in Kandhamal district of Odisha. Popularly Kui is nearly related to Kuvi and has some vocabulary similarity with Telugu. But, in 21st century Kui language faces threat of extinction due to declining speakers, modernization and lack of educational preservation efforts.

Our language is in danger.

The tribal languages are on the verge of extinction.

Such statements pop up a question: what are the reasons for decline of a language? A popular reply will be: non documentation, reduction in number of speakers, poor inter-generation transfer of vocabulary, education in language other than the mother tongue, etc. Going further, what consists a speech in the language? Perhaps, the people, materials, action and ideas in brief. The issue becomes of more concern when it is related to tribal languages. Tribal languages are more prone to extinction due to all the reasons indicated. This article, is an attempt to seek for an explanation for speedy decline of a tribal language with a reference to Kui Language (kxu), spoken in Kandhmal and other districts of Odisha as well as in Assam.

What shapes the words in a speech and which parts are more vulnerable to change? The reasons for change in speech are natural to adoption, acquisition, imposition and lack of alternatives. This change becomes more compulsory when the society has only the oral form of the language and swarmed by a change in technology, law and its institutions. Examination of few cases like house construction, Kitchen and fashion, will be helpful to demonstrate a clearer picture of loss words in popular use at one point of time.

House construction

Man needs a shelter for his safety and comfortable stay. Shape and structure is dependent upon the availability of materials and technology to build. Kui people earlier used to live in thatched and mud houses, constructed collectively by village people. On advent of Brick house and Tin/ asbestos roofing the number of thatched

houses has been reduced. So also, the technique of making a thatched house is also forgotten. Repairing a thatched house was an annual affair and the words were extensively used and the people doing the same (type of) job repeatedly became masters of the skills. For instance, while repairing a thatched house, the terms in use included:

ବେଗାମାଂଡ଼ିଙ୍ଗା,କାଂଶ୍ରାଙ୍ଗା,ସୀତାକା,ବୀଥା,ଜିଂଅଣି,ନାଂଡ଼ାମୁଟା, ଗାଂଚି, କଂଡ଼, କସ୍ତା , ତୁଲି ,ତୁଲି ଡ଼଼ପା, ଜଂମ୍ପ,ରୀଡ଼ା,ରୀଡ଼ା ପାଂଲା, କେଂଲେ,ପାଂରି ନଂସ୍ତ, ପାଲାଙ୍ଗ ନଂସ୍ତା, ଉଂସ୍ତା ନଂସ୍ତ, ନଂସ୍ତା ବେଂପା, ପିରୁ, କାଂଶ୍ରା କାତା, ପ୍ରୀବେଡ଼ି, ପ୍ରାହପା, ଆଞ୍ଜଡ଼ାଙ୍ଗା,

The advent of Tin/asbestos, RCC roofing also brought some new terms into local jargon are: clamp, rafter, nut, bolt, rod, etc. Tin/ Asbestos and RCC roofing having a longer life, say 20 to 50 years, the residents of that house need not to use those terms so often as in case of a thatched house. Gradually those materials and names will be pushed out of popular use and ultimately become dormant and lost.

Kitchen and Fashion

Kitchen in Kui culture is women’s domain. Women are keener to updating and style. In a traditional Kui kitchen there happens to be a firewood hearth with two openings. There was a time when every house hold used to cook in earthen pots. Gradually, the earthen wares were replaced with aluminum and other metals. Only the rich could afford brass ware for dinning. For the poor families brass wares were a prized possession. The aluminum and brass wares are replaced with steel wares now a days. The ware names got a prefix of metal name and could be recognized with a face value. For instance:

ତାଲେଡ଼ି (ପ୍ଲେଟ) : ରସ ତାଲେଡ଼ି ,ପିତଳ ତାଲେଡ଼ି , ଚିକଲ /ସ୍ତାଲ ତାଲେଡ଼ି ।

Gradually, the following items of day to day use are pushed into oblivion on advent of lighter materials:

ମୂଲା ମାଣ୍ଡି, ବଂସି,ନିଜୁ କାଂସୀ, ଦର୍ବ ଲଂକା,ପିତା ଲଂକା,ପଲ୍ଲୀ, ସାଂରୁ ଟେକି, ସାଂରୁ ନାଂଲା, ସନ୍ଦରୀ, ତୁମ୍ବୁ, ସାଂଲେଡ଼ି,ମୁଗି, ଡେଂବା, ସୁନ୍ଦା ବୁର୍କା, ବାଜାନ ଡାଂସି,ମାନଙ୍ଗା ଟଂପା ।

The metal used has been changed but few items like ତାଲେଡ଼ି,ମୁତା, ବଂସି, ଗିଲାସି , having no other competitors are being used without a prefix for recognition. The pottery items which were earlier in popular use are no more in use. The production of such items by village potters have been reduced or stopped and the potters are reduced to labourers. Few such items were:

ବାହା ଟେକି,ତାଖା,ଏଂଜୁ ଟେକି,ତାଖା ଟେକି, ସରା,କୁପି,ମାଟା,ରଞ୍ଜପାଙ୍ଗା ଟେକି, କିସା ଟେକି, ପଲମା, ସନ୍ଦରି,ଟେକି ସନ୍ଦରି ।

The exit of materials in use has also re-shaped sentences like:

ସତୁ ତାନି ଟେକି ଆଟାମୁ (Put the pot on the fire)

ଗ୍ୟାସ ଡାନି କୁକର ଆଟାମୁ (Put the cooker on gas)

ସତୁ(hearth) replaced by Gas(stove) and ଟେକି(pot) have been replaced with cooker, but the verb ଆଟାମୁ (to put on fire) still is in use. Similarly, gradual change in dress materials and fashion have pushed many words into oblivion. The clothes men and women have been changed. Dress materials viz, ମୁଣ୍ଡି ବନ୍ଦା (handloom made towel), ଡାବେଡ଼ି (female loin cloth), କୁପୁଡ଼ି(male loin cloth) are no more in use and so are the words from day to day vocabulary. Similarly, the gold and silver jewellery are in use but due to change in fashion, the items are not in use. For instance:

ଗୁଟାପାକା<, ରୁପା କିସେଡ଼ି, ସୁନା କିସେଡ଼ି,ଟପେରି,ମୁଦୁରି, ମର୍କଡ଼ି,କାନପୁଲ,ସୁନ୍ ସୁନେରି,ଲୁତଙ୍ଗା,ଗୁଣା,ସୁରସିଆ ପଂଡେକା, ତୁଲାଙ୍ଗା,ନାଂନୁ,ଡେଂଟି ସିକାଲାଙ୍ଗା, ଗଇତଡ଼,ବାଂଲାଙ୍ଗା, ଗାଗଲାକା, ଖ୍ଲାପା ଗାଗଲାକା ।

Few instances, as made above, will suffice to make a statement that with advent of new materials, fashion and techniques the old items are pushed into oblivion and new items take their place. It is interesting to note that this change takes a peculiar route. The entry of names(nouns) is quick into vocabulary of Kui language.

ଆଂନୁ ନେଂଞ୍ଜୁ ଖ୍ଲାଉ ମୁସା ମାଂଇ । (I have washed my hair)

ଆ>ନ୍ନୁ ନେ>ଞ୍ଜୁ ସାମ୍ପୁ ମୁସା ମା<ଇ । (I have washed my hair with sampoo)

In the first sentence hair is important but not the material used (hair washing with clay/soap) is not mentioned. In the second sentence, the new material, sampoo grabs prominence. But both the sentences retain the old verb “ମୁସା ମା<ଇ” (have washed). Gradually with popularity of sampoo, the sentence changes into:

ଆ>ନ୍ନୁ ନେ>ଞ୍ଜୁ ସାମ୍ପୁ ଗିଆ ମା<ଇ । (I have shampooed.)

2nd illustration :

ଆ>ନ୍ନୁ ଅ>ସଡ଼ିକି ସାଜା ମାସେ< । (I had gone for medicine)

ଆ>ନ୍ନୁ ଡାକ୍ତ ବାହାଜି ସାଜା ମାସେ< । (I had been to a Doctor)

ଆ>ନ୍ନୁ ଡାକ୍ତକାନା ସାଜା ମାସେ< । (I had been to hospital.)

While analysing the gradual replacement of material names, a natural question comes, why replacement? Any individual does not want to change his language if his tongue is capable of providing a suitable word for the new item or concept. Here comes the critical concept of “word generation” in a language. Can the language supply a word for the new concept which explains its meaning? For example, when computer was introduced to India, many languages used to tag it as “ଗଣିକ ଯନ୍ତ୍ର”, but computer proved that it is more than a mere calculating machine and the word computer has become popular in every language and people started to write the word in their own language and script. Kui language, having a minimum exposure to other languages lacks in speedy generation of new words in comparison to inflow of materials and ideas into Kui language. An example to note is: The Kui speaking people used to worship their Gods (ଲା>କା ସ>କା) with offering of materials like rice, turmeric powder, egg, chanting ritual rhymes and sacrifice of birds and animals. When Christianity came into this area, they introduced a material free worship of God i.e. by prayer. Prayer is a verbal mode of praising God or asking for a favour. Kui language had words for:

Praise : ଦଃପା Ask/beg : ଜା>ପା

So, both the words “ପେ>ନ୍ନୁଇ ଦଃପା” and “ପେ>ନ୍ନୁ ବାହା ଜା>ପା “ were accepted and used by Kui speaking people going to church. Here Kui language could provide words from its corpus for the purpose. But when “ଯଜ୍ଞ” “came to be organised by Kui speaking people, Kui language did not have an equivalent nor could generate a word to suffice the meaning. So “ଯଜ୍ଞ” is adopted into the language.

ପେ>ନ୍ନୁ ବାହା ଜା>ନାସୁ । (all Kui words)

ମାଇ ନା>ନ୍ନୁ ଯଜ୍ଞ ଗିନାସୁ । (mixed with Odia)

ପେ>ନ୍ନୁ କୁରା ସାନା । (all Kui words)

ମନ୍ଦିର ସାନା । (mixed with Odia)

Needless to say that penetration of Brahminical practices and Christianity, worship of Kui gods has also been reduces to minimum. The names of few Gods viz. *Loha penu, sandi penu, Turki penu, Dumaledi*, are easily forgotten and new concepts like *sraddh, swarga, narka, Chandan tika, sankirtan* and the names of Hindu Gods and goddesses vis. *Ganesh, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva* have become popular. Change in religion and worshipping practice has brought names, worship ritual and new Gods even in the fold of Hindu religion. The pantheon of Kui Gods will be recalled very seldom and gradually those Gods will make an exit from people’s mind.

The examples discussed above are just indicative. Such changes are taking place in every aspect of life, ranging from agriculture to medicine, ritual to enforcement, where the tribal language is not finding words for new items and concepts. The name of flora and fauna, which constituted a large bulk of words in Kui language, cannot be learned in a class room than in interaction and direct supervision. So when a Kui speaking young man stumbles

upon an old item or sees a tree cannot know its name or knows the name but cannot identify the object. Can education in language other than tribal language be the only scapegoat?

The Concern and Way Out

From the above discussion it can be drawn that language is more used in common place than in a classroom. When the materials used by people get replaced by goods made outside and language is not able to give them a name, then it has no option but to acquire and adopt. Can the material storm will sweep away tribal languages like Kui? There arises a need for a way out for protection and progress of the language.

Language Documentation

Kui Language has a wealth of traditional oral literature consisting of various genres. The task is to collect and document the folklore, speech, songs, riddles, games, stories, ritual chants and many more as research project work and individual endeavour. It is to be realised that the task of protecting the language lies on the educated persons from the language speaking community. The time is running out and concern is, the educated people have mostly moved out of the villages and their visit to village and link to native place is weakening over time. People have to realise the value of the language wealth so that with their modern gadgets like mobile phones they can record, take photographs or jot down by listening to elders so that the language resources being lost can be collected to a maximum extent.

Local Repository

After collection of language wealth, a safe repository is required. Kui language has drawn attention of linguists, research scholars, Phd seekers and students since long. The scholars undertake field visits and collect data on various aspects of Kui language, literature and culture. After collection and completion of their study/thesis, very few of their work gets published as books. The raw material collected from field goes to bin. Next time, when the same or new researcher goes to field, the previous resource person may not be available. So, there should be a legal provision that a research scholar collecting data should deposit a copy of his filed study collection in universities and local administration like District office of culture. The libraries in colleges should have a local language rack where books, manuscripts in local languages are collected and stored for reference. This will help the people from community, among them when an awareness and revisiting to their culture builds, they can have easy access to those resources.

Language ownership

Language is a community wealth. Sometimes, language is assigned to the largest among the speaking community. Is language the property of the numerically largest alone? A language is spoken over a geographical area by the people residing across caste and community. Kui language is not spoken by Kandhas alone. So assigning language to one community creates a polarisation which is not good for the progress of the language. It is often seen that linguistic research, making of lexicons, translation etc. done by the people outside the community. If anyone does not speak or know the language irrespective of the community cannot contribute to the betterment of the language. So language speaking community should allow use of language with a liberal and open mind. Language belongs to the person whoever speaks it.

Standardisation of The Script

Most of the tribal languages are in oral form and do not have a standard writing system barring a few. The speakers of the community try and develop a script not only as a necessity but also as an identity. Script is a visual and symbolic presentation of a sound (phoneme) arranged in a manner. So a script should properly represent the phonetic expressions of the language so that the gap between oral communication and written communication is minimised. A script so developed also has to go under a long trek of government approval to be used and recognised in the machinery of state. To simplify the process, can state language accommodate all the tribal languages like Kui through expansion of symbols to represent typical phonemes and pronunciation of tribal words? This sort of expansion will not only make learning easier, but also use existing resources, technology and facilities for production of printed material in the tribal languages. The race for separate script

for each tribal language has created log jams and administrative hiccups. Kui language, beginning from Stevenson's notes, was being written by using Telegu, English and Odia alphabet by different writers. Several individual and institutional attempts were made to design a script for Kui language. Bible Society of India used diacritical marks and Anuja Mohan Pradhan used (>,<) marks along with Odia alphabet in their publications to represent unique pronunciation of Kui language. In addition to Odia alphabet, > mark is used to indicate *long pronunciation* and < for *glottal stops* in Kui. Recently, a set of seven alphabets developed by different individuals presented before a jury appointed by an organisation and script developed by Shri Dinabandhu Kanhar is selected. Kui language originally does not have aspirates like Odia letter ଖ(kha), ଢ (dha), ଠ (tha) etc. Hence, Kui alphabet does not require aspirates. But this axiom proves wrong when Kui speaking people have to write words from other language, write names of their children viz. Gopinaath, places like Dharakot, Athamalik etc. This will create hiccups in translation and transliteration. Further, looking at the primary education syllabus in Odisha, languages like Odia, English, Hindi, Sanskrit are taught within class seventh. These languages have their set of alphabet and grammar. Adding one more script at the primary level will not only add burden school children may also brew parent's resistance. So, as seen with use of Roman script for European languages, use of Devnagari for Hindi and Marathi, use Bangla script for Bengali and Assamese, Perso-Arabian script (Nastaliq) for Urdu and so on. With addition of symbols as required, why Odia alphabet cannot be used for tribal languages of Odisha? This will definitely help the bureaucrats, health workers, teachers and village level functionaries to communicate and understand the problems of people. This will not only help the learners of that language alone but also study of inter-tribal literature.

Creative Literature

Literature is fruit of creative mind. It is the imagination of a person casted into words and tune. Be it a planting song, a story or an epic, it is contribution of a creative mind to the corpus of the language and literature irrespective of other recognition. Creation of new literature can only save the dwindling literature. Language needs expression. So today's creative literature will be the classics of tomorrow. Kui language has few writers but given assistance in publication and discourse, encouragement and recognition through prizes, scholarships and awards, the number of budding young writers will multiply.

Teaching of Tribal language

Under multi Lingual Education, state of Odisha started teaching tribal languages through OPEPA (Odisha Primary Education Project Administration). Kui was taught in some schools of Kandhmal district. Kui is also being taught in KISS, Bhubaneswar at primary level along with other tribal languages. The primer books has been prepared with Odia alphabet without any additional marks for unique pronunciation of Kui words. For example, for the letter ଥ a picture of a goat is given and ଥଡ଼ା is written. A Kui speaking child reads the picture as ଥ>ଡ଼ା where the letter ଥ is pronounced longer than ଥ in the word ଥଣ୍ଡା. Further, Kui word ଥଡ଼ା means "to purify, to be free from a taboo". It is the unique character of Kui language where all the vowels and consonants have standard, long and guttural pronunciation. There are scores of words where a slight variation in pronunciation gives a different meaning. Few examples:

କନ୍ତୁ -hen କ>ନ୍ତୁ -horn of an animal ସନ୍ତୁ-porcupine ସ>ନ୍ତୁ -carbuncle

ଡାକି -chest ଡ>କି-skull ବାଲି-sharp peg ବ>ଲି -heavy silver bangle

The point to reiterate that, education is more a matter of content than a script. The script should be familiar one and should not unnecessarily give additional burden on small children of primary classes as well as learners from outside the Kui speaking community. A gradual improvisation of texts in higher standard will help in value addition to Kui literature. The issues of linguistic technicality should not be decided by protests on the streets.

Need for Booming of Literary Associations

There are very few organisations and associations who are actively working for popularization and progress of Kui language and culture. Keeping consideration, the Kui speaking population in the state and outside, the number of associations is less than minimal. Any person interested to do something for kui and in Kui, the

organisations should reach and encourage the budding talents. Such organisations will organise events, discussion, publication, recognise dedicated people for the cause of language. They will be the channels for popularise new concepts and ideas. If any such channel creates a Kui radio or TV channel, its impact will be immense. In schools too there should be events of competitions in kui language so that the children spark an interest in the language.

CONCLUSION

In 21st century most of the tribal languages are often endangered due to globalization and dominant language. Now a days the protection of tribal language like Kui is very essential for maintaining cultural diversity and honouring the heritage of the native people. Language touches every aspect of life. Loss of language in any aspect affects the going of life. Education in Kui alone cannot compensate the loss of vocabulary unless it channelises into creative writing and word generation useful in every aspect of life.

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