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Language Death and Urgency to Retain its Pure Variety

By Swati Jha

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Language Death and Urgency to Retain its Pure Variety

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Abstract- Language Death is a process that affects speech communities where the level of linguistic competence that speakers possess of a given language variety is decreased. Language death may affect any language idiom, including dialects and language. Khortha or Kharostha Bangla is enigmatic in nature because of its varied varieties and features like ergativity, language switching, code mixing and convergence. Language Shift leading to language death is a sociolinguistic phenomenon which can be widely observed in Khortha. The present paper highlights upon the various aspects of Language shift in Khortha. It will also focuses on the factors that may lead to the death of the original variety of Khortha. The paper also emphasizes on the need to see the urgency to maintain and retain the originality of Khortha so that it does'nt disappear or become a matter of past.

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I. Introduction

A language is an inextricable part of its cultural evolution and environment and as such it evolves until such time that culture exists. Although language and culture are inextricable, culture is the trough that nurtures and preserves language. You need language to express culture and you need culture to preserve and perpetuate that expression across generations. From this, it becomes clear in the Indian context that the continuing decline of almost all Indian languages owes to the decline in Indian culture Language death is the process by which a language stops being used by the people who previously spoke it.

David Crystal mentions "There are some 6000 languages in the world and of these, about half are going to die out in the course of the next century; 3000 languages, in 1200 months. That means, on average there is a language dying out somewhere in the world every two weeks or so." A 1999 survey has shown that 96% of the world's languages are spoken by just 4 % of the people.

'Language is really alive only as long as there is someone to speak it to. When you are the only one left, your knowledge of your language is like a repository, or archive, of your people's spoken linguistic past. If the language has never been written down, or recorded on a tape-and there are still many which have not-it is all there is. But, unlike the normal idea of an archive, which continues to exist even after the archivist is dead, the moment the last speaker of an unwritten or unrecorded language dies, the archive disappears forever. When the language dies which has never been recorded in some way, it is as if it has never been.'(David Crystal 2000).

'Death' is a term applied to living objects, but there are certain things which have life and which find birth, flourish and die out with time. Because *language has no existence without people*, a language dies when nobody speaks it anymore. When a language dies, it is as though it never existed - which ultimately endangers total culture. Languages have disappeared with the changing civilisation, but the present situation demands attention as languages are becoming extinct at a much faster rate than ever before.

II. Various Factors that Lead to the Death of a Language

The most common process leading to language death is one in which a community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual in another language, and gradually shift allegiance to the second language until they cease to use their original language. Speakers of some languages, particularly regional or minority ones may decide to abandon them on economic or utilitarian grounds, in favour of languages regarded as having greater utility or prestige.

1. Language dies when there is no intergenerational transfer of language. This is not usually a sudden event, but a slow process of each generation learning less and less of the subtleties of their native language. Due to the transfer of fewer words, and an increased switch over to another language, the older population may remember many words, but younger people become deficient in their vocabulary. This situation occurred with the Manx language[1] but Manx, in addition to other languages, has been reintroduced in schools and in bilingual publications[2]
2. Languages can also die when their speakers are wiped out by genocide or disease.
3. Linguicideor language extinction is the intentional causing of the death of a language. It is also used as a derogatory term to describe unintentional death of languages through competition and other mechanisms. Perhaps the largest historical example

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[1] See UNESCO'S Atlas of the World's language in Danger of Disappearing, 2009.

[2] As mentioned in Krauss, Michael E, 1992, *Language, 68(1): 4-10*

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was the destruction of the Native American languages in the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

4. Language attrition, occasionally called language suicide, is a process of language obsolescence. Over generations, the speakers of the less prestigious language of two closely-related languages borrow so much lexis, pronunciation and syntax from the more prestigious language, that the less prestigious language becomes virtually indistinguishable from the prestigious one.

III. Globalisation and Language Change in India:

Being the world's largest democracy and hosting the world's second largest population, India is truly multicultural. It is growing at a faster pace than ever before post the 1991 reforms. Globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation have affected the daily life of every individual. The language component of our society has not escaped impact of these reforms and most of the people today have accepted English as a language of communication, not only in business but also in their personal interactions. While economically this is helping a certain strata of society, ethnographically we are getting poorer rapidly.

IV. Language Death in India

Indian constitution eighth schedule has 22 languages. Individual mother tongues in India number several hundred; the 1961 census recognized 1,652 (SIL *Ethnologue* lists 415). According to Census of India of 2001, 29 languages are spoken by more than a million native speakers, 122 by more than 10,000.

The rise and fall of languages is always visible in the history of mankind. From the undeciphered language on the walls of Harappa civilisation up to the present Hinglish is used in everyday advertisement, thus languages are constantly evolving. India has given shelter to people from all parts of the world and in doing so; it has provided an opportunity for exchange of culture, knowledge and of course language.

Of all the Indian languages, the tribal languages spoken in the eastern and central India are the most threatened ones. 'Definitely 10-20% of all Indian languages are in bad shape and on their death bed, but the tribal languages are the most vulnerable one'.

Over the last few decades, linguists have analyzed several tribal languages, but the majority are poorly studied and sparsely documented. Many have yet to be rendered into computer typefaces, unable to cross the digital divide.

As stated above, the tribal languages in India are the most vulnerable ones, they are more prone to changes, shifts and ultimately death. Khortha or Khotta is also one of the tribal languages which is spoken by the tribals as well as non-tribals of Hazaribagh and Giridih districts in Jharkhand. It is related to Magahi. In *Language and Literature* Shankarlal C. Bhatt (2006) has stated that Khortha is not a pure form, rather it a mixed form of language. In day-to-day affairs people use this form but in official communication they make use of Hindi.

While the official language of Jharkhand is Hindi many tribal languages are spoken in different parts of the state. . Khortha is being spoken by a majority of inhabitants in Dhanbad. Though the language is greatly influenced by the other languages being spoken in the state, but still there are some groups residing in the outskirts of Dhanbad, where one can find the untouched, pure variety of Khortha.

The language has seen a variety of changes in itself. The reasons can be many which also include Language in Contact, Language Convergence, literacy rate and the high rate of migration of the people from one place to another. Due to its vulnerable nature and many other influences this living language is at the risk of dying out. The present study hence will be focused on the various aspects of the language including the sociocultural aspects and morpho-syntactic aspects, the difference in speech based on gender, age, literacy rate and occupation. This paper will also highlight the factors that may lead to put Khortha into Endangered Language category.

The difference in the speech has been highlighted through the data collected from the respondents residing in the communities located in and around Dhanbad namely: Chaudhary Bandh, Sadhobaad, Kharni, Babudih, Manjhaladih, Saambalpur. The respondents were interviewed individually and in groups. The sentences of various categories and the word list were used as the tool for the data collection. The responses were noted and taped for future analysis. The data were collected from 150 respondents under the variables of age, gender, occupation and literacy rate.

While collecting the data it was observed that the speech of females and elderly are more close to pure variety. Mainly because the females and the elderly people spend maximum time at home. They hardly go out of their community. This is the reason why their language is untouched and pure in nature. The youngsters and working people have to go to the nearby cities and town for further study or for their occupation. They are exposed to the other varieties of languages which ultimately affect their Mother Tongue. It can be well explained through the data presented below:

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Table 1: Difference in speech/ words based on Gender

Sentences	Males	Females
Jisladke ne kaanchtodauskobulao (Call that boy who has broken the glass)	/je/ /gld3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:d^lkau/ /se/ /gld3ta:/ /ke/ /bula:/	/ je/ /gld3rta:/ /ka:nch/ /pho:rh3u/ /sei/ /gld3ta:/ /ke/ /daik/
Kaanch toot gayi (The glass has been broken)	/ka:nch/ /tu:t/ /gel3i/	/ka:nchta:/ /tu:it/ /gel3i/
Bachha ye khananahikahyega (The boy will not eat this food)	/i:/ /kha:na:/ /gid3rta:/ /n3hi:/ /khaeto/	/i://kha:yek/ /gid3rta:/ /n3ye/ /khaeto:/
Kal main chor se bahut maar khaya (Yesterday I was beaten brutally by the thief)	/ka:l/ /hum/ /chor/ /se/ /b3hUt/ /ma:r/ /kha:ye/	/ka:ilh/ /h3me//chor/ /se/ /b3di://ma:r/ /khaelho:/
Ye topisafed rang kihai (This cap is white in colour)	/i:/ /topi:/ /s3fed/ /hel3i	/i:/ /topi:/ /sa:da:/ /h3l3i

Response sheet of Males and Females

Table 2: Difference in speech based on Age

Words	Old	Young
Jhanda(flag)	/jhaanda/	./jh^nda/
Barish (rain)	/b^rsa	/pa:ni
Rasta (path)	/d3h3r/	rasta:/
Ghar (house)	/kh^nd	/ru:m/
Turant (immediately)	/ekh3ni:/	/tUr3te/
Mitaana / saafkarna (to clean)	/mita:e/	/sa:f/
Kapda(cloth)	/ pi:dh3na:/	/k^p3da:/
Chehra (face)	/thoth3na/	/s3k3l/
Ungali(fingers)	/a:ngUr/	/Ungri:/
Chabhi(keys)	/ka:thi:/	/cha:bhi:/
Sach(truth)	/nlshto/	/s^cche/
Gilas(glass)	/gllsa:/	/gila:s/-
Lamba(tall)	/da:nga:/	/l^mba:/
Chipchipa (sticky)	/la:tha:/-	/ch^t3k/
Ekjaisa(same to same)	/oh3te/	/eke r^k3m

Response sheet of a young boy and an adult

Table 3: Difference in speech based on Literacy Rate

Words/ Sentences	Educated	Semi-educated/ no education
Sari(traditional wear for females in India)	/sa:ri/	/lUgga:/
Dhul (dust)	/dhu:l/ dust	/dhu:ra:/
Dhoop	/dhu:p/	/r3uda:/
Kanghi(comb)	/k3nghi:/	/k3k3ba:/
Anda(egg)	/3nda:/	/di:m/
Bael(ox)	/bael/	/b3r3d/
Wahbaithebaithethakgaya(he is tired of sitting)	/u://b3ith3le/- /b3ith3le/ /th3k/ /gele/	/u:/ /b3is3le/ /b3is3le// thai:k/ /gel3i/-
Wahkabhinakabhijaruraayega(He will definitely come back some day)	/u://k3kh3no/ /n3/ /k3kh3no/ /z3ru:r/ /aeto/	/u:/ /k3kh3no/ /nae/ /k3kh3no/ /ghu:r/ /ke/ /aeto/

Response sheet of a literate and illiterate person

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The above data shows the difference in the language, selection of words among the speakers of the community. Influence of Hindi and English or mixing up Khortha with other langauges including Bengali, Maithili and Bhojpuri have affected the language a lot. Stephen Wurn(1998) has given different perspective about Language Endangerment. An analysis on Khortha has been done based on the levels suggested by Wurn. The five level classification of language endangerment are:

1. Potentially endangered languages: In this case the language are socially and economically disadvantaged, under heavy pressure from a larger language, and beginning to lose child speakers;
2. Endangered language: It has few or no children learning the language, and the youngest good speakers are young adults;
3. Seriously endangered languages: have the youngest good speakers at age 50 or older;
4. Moribund languages: have only a handful of good speakers left, mostly old;
5. Extinct/Dead languages: have no speakers left

As per the levels discussed by Stephen Wurn Khortha surely comes under the category of Endangered Language, because the small children, though exposed to Khortha as their Mother Tongue, are more prone to English and Hindi. At schools they meet with the speakers of other languages. Prabhat K Singh in his article 'Nurturing Linguistic Diversity in Jharkhand' (2014) throws the light on the education system prevailing in India, says 'that it is a well-known fact children understand concepts in their MT or in their first language; but the education system in India has largely failed to provide education to children in their own language'. He also adds to the point saying 'the tribal children are forced to study in the dominant regional languages like Hindi or English.' The question arises whether it is the forced one or the opted one, but the fact cannot be denied that the children first language is affected through other languages. The youngsters are more exposed to the technical advancements, to the speakers of other languages. During conversation in Khortha the sheer inability to make use of the words in his/her language and substituting it with Hindi or English is the most common problem. Though it appears to be a common problem but can be one step towards Language shift or death of the language. The situation is bad with the people going out for their job and business but it is worst with the young speakers who cannot even read and write in Khortha and rely on the English/Hindi translations of the words they make use of in their conversation. Just two generations of this dilution and we will have a large pool of the speakers who cannot even speak read or write in Khortha. With it, this successive march of incremental cultural deaths takes one step closer to total extinction.

Lyle Campbell, project Director of ELCat and linguistics professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, has developed a unique language Endangerment Scale called EGIDS, which can allow the researchers and also language experts to determine which of the world's living languages are at the risk of dying out and to what extent each individual language is endangered. ELCat's scale is different as it has got smaller set of criteria, focusing exclusively on endangered languages. On the basis of four criteria, ELCat's Language Endangerment Scale assigns six different levels of endangerment to each language ranging from 0(safe)- 5(critically endangered). G The criteria are discussed below:

- Intergenerational Transmission (How old are the youngest speakers and is the language passed on to younger generations?)
- Absolute number of speakers
- Speaker number trends (Is the number of speakers declining, stable or increasing?)
- Domains of use of the language (Is the language only used in certain (e.g. informal) contexts or for every domain in life from home to media, education and government?)

After applying the above discussed four criteria on Khortha we can have the following points:

a. *Intergenerational Transmission*: As has already been discussed earlier in the present paper language do transfer from one generation to the other generation, but in a filtered way. When talked with the school going boys and girls, they say that though they speak Khortha at home but they are more comfortable with Hindi language, because this is the linking language or the language that they make maximum use of.
b. *Absolute number of speakers:* Though Khortha has been spoken by large number of people in and around Jharkhand the data is presented below:

	Persons	Males	Females
Khortha/Khotta: Total	974,761	506,940	467,821
Urban	851,406	440,418	410,988
Rural	123,355	66, 522	56,833

(Source: Language & Literature, Land and People of Indian States & Union Territories, Vol.II. Jharkhand;2006Shankarlal C. Bhatt and Gopal K. Bhargave)

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For the present study the data has been collected from 15 villages [3] each village comprised of 70-80 family members, making it a total of approx. 1200 families. Each family has 6-7 members each making it a total of 8400 speakers which can be fairly distributed as:

Age	Gender	No. of speakers
Children (4-14 yrs)	Both males and females	2400
Youngsters (15-24 yrs)	Both males and females	1900
Middle aged (25-39 yrs)	Females	1000
Middle aged (25-39 yrs)	Males	1100
Elderly (40-59 yrs	Females	700
Elderly (40-59 yrs Old People (ranging from 60 yrs and above)	Males	900
Old People (ranging from 60 yrs and above):-	Both males and females	400

(The above number has been shared by the Sarpanch (Head of the village) and Block development officer of the villages)

From the above data it is quite clear that how the original variety of Khortha which is just retained with older people is on the verge of extinction. Out of 8400 speakers the pure variety is spoken by just 400 speakers. The language is more exposed to other languages including Hindi, English and other contact language through Children (2400 speakers), youngsters (1900 speakers) and Middle aged males (1100). The reason has already been discussed earlier in the paper.

If we discuss the third and fourth criteria of ELCat's Language Endangerment Scale we will find that Speaker number trends is declining. The speakers of the original and the pure variety of Khorthais perishing slowly. The older people and to some extent the females of the families have somehow tried to hold the fading tradition of the dying language.

If we consider the domains of the language use the language is just used in informal context. In schools and colleges the medium of instruction is either Hindi or English. As the village provides just the elementary level of education the students are bound to go out for their further studies. Most of the youngsters are putting up in hostels in Dhanbad or nearby places. The parents say that they have to educate their children they don't want them to suffer in villages and strive for their livelihood.

V. Measures to Safeguard Khortha

Language travels from one generation to other. The saying is perfectly right but it does not apply fully on Khortha. Undoubtedly it does reaches to the children but again the fact cannot be ignored that with youngsters it is losing its identity. It is high time now that the Khortha speakers and the government should realize the importance and urgency to retain its pure variety. Though some measures have been adopted by the Government[4] but the efforts have to multiply at a faster pace. Again the people who are putting up their efforts to safeguard the endangered languages believe the success of such expeditions largely depends on the willingness of communities to preserve their own mother tongue. With growing interest in language diversity, it may be possible for fading languages to get a new lease on life. Awareness of language preservation has steadily grown with the emergence of state funded language programs, introducing minor languages at the college level and establishment of new academic centers devoted to the study of endangered languages. Mr Ganesh Murmu, a Linguist in Ranchi University, believes most tribal communities will surely welcome the attention towards the safeguard of their language. He says "before there was a feeling that if you speak a tribal language you are in a lower social class". Though the people of the communities believe that "we too have status, we too have identity"[5] but slowly it is fading away.

The extinction of each language results in the irrecoverable loss of unique culture, historical and ecological knowledge. Each language is a unique expression of the human experience of the world. Every time a language dies, we have less evidence for understanding patterns in the structure and function of human language, human prehistory and the maintenance of the world's diverse ecosystems. The speakers of the language may experience the loss of their language as a loss of their original ethnic and cultural identity.

Khortha needs to be revitalized which is the demand of the current time, because if a language dies it takes away with itself a whole lot of culture, tradition and identity of the speakers of a particular community. The revitalization process includes the following suggestions:

a. Assessment of the language's current situation, number of speakers, context in which speaker's live,
b. Facts about their attitudes displayed, speaker fluency, accuracy, and age levels, rate of decline,

[3] List of the villages selected for the data collection: Chaudhary Bandh, Sadhobad, Kharni, Babudih, Manjhladih, Sanwalpur, Murradih, Kalyanpur, Budhwaser, KatanlaOjhadih, Birajpur, Jainagar, Pipratanda, Bogla Basti, Sawalpur.

[4] Introducing Khortha in the colleges at the post graduate level and as an optional paper in JPSC (Jharkhand Public Service Commission.) See Shankarlal C Bhatt, *Language and Literature, 2006* .Vo.12

[5] Singh, K.S. 1994. The Scheduled Tribes, Delhi.

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c. Cost involved in creating dictionary and educational books,
d. Fund raising for the language preservation program should be run in different communities.
e. Publicity campaigns and promotion of fresh public attitude towards languages
f. Community must sense the need to save the language
g. Culture should respect the minority languages
h. Political willingness to provide fund for research and development
i. Linguists need to do sufficient research and document/archive the language. There is a need to record, analyze and to script it down.

VI. Conclusion

With combined efforts of scholars from different streams, political leaders, academician, community leaders and the community can help in the revitalization and documentation of Khortha and henceforth the diverse culture of India.

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