



Research Paper

Usage of the Assamese Language in Assam: Dialectal Varieties Vis-A-Vis the Standard Language

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ABSTRACT: Assamese or Asamiya or Axomiya is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language used mainly in the state of Assam, where it is an official language. Assamese of Old Indo-Aryan dialects, though the exact nature of its origin and growth is not clear yet. The Standard dialect which is considered as the Standard Assamese Language is an Indo-Aryan language designated as the official language of Assam, is a state located in the North-eastern part of India. In Assam, Standard Assamese is the formal written language used for education, media and other official purpose, while Kamrupi and Goalparia are the informal spoken dialects spoken in the Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam, respectively. The importance of Kamrupi dialect can be understood from early literature, wherein Kamrupi was documented as the first ancient Aryan literary language spoken both in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and North Bengal. This study is a comparative study between both the varieties. It also explores the usage of dialectal variety found in Kamrupi and Sibsagar dialects of Assam. Another area of interest is to find out whether the Kamrupi dialect is used in speaking or both for speaking and writing purposes in Assam.

KEY WORDS: Standard Language, Dialectal varieties, usage, speaking, writing

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I. INTRODUCTION

Assamese is a language spoken across the Brahmaputra valley. The language itself have different varieties of dialects spoken in different areas of Assam. According to Kakati(1941), the Assamese dialects are divided into two groups: the Eastern Assamese and the Western Assamese. However recent studies have shown that there are four dialect groups namely:

- The Eastern Assamese dialects spoken in the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur.
- The Central Assamese group of dialects spoken primarily in Nagaon and Morigaon districts.
- The Kamrupi group of dialects are spoken in the districts of Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta, Darrang, Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon.
- The Goalparia group of Assamese dialects are spoken primarily in the Dhubri and Goalpara districts.

It can be pointed out in this context that in the absence of a proper linguistic survey of Assam, the names of the dialects differ from study to study and the names used above are arbitrarily coined. Although a particular dialect is identified with a specific area in the discussion above, it must not be assumed that these areas are not characterized by pockets of diverse dialects of the language.

According to Deswal's Linguistics In North-East India (2017), it is generally believed that Assamese(Assam) and the Kamatapurelects (North Bengal and Assam) derived from the Kamrupa dialect of Eastern Magadhi Prakrit and Apabhramas, by keeping to the North of the Ganges; though some authors contest a close connection of Assamese with Magadhi Prakrit. The Indo- Aryan language in Kamrupa had differentiated by the seventh century, before it did in Bengal or Orissa. These changes were likely due to non-Indo-Aryan speakers adopting the language. The evidence of this language is found in the Prakritisms of the Kamarupa inscription.

The Standard Dialect is the Standard Assamese language, which is an Indo-Aryan language designated as the official language of Assam, located in the North Eastern part of India. In Assam, Assamese is the formal written language used for education, media and other official purpose, while Kamrupi and Goalparia are the informal spoken dialects spoken in the Kamrup and Goalparia districts of Assam, respectively. The importance of Kamrupi dialect can be understood from the early literature, where in Kamrupi was documented as the first ancient Aryan literary language spoken both in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and North Bengal.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a section of the middle class people from the lower Assam became conscious of the past glory and independence of the Kamrupi dialect. Associated with this group were Shyamal Barua, Amrit Bhushan Adhikari and Kaliram Medhi. They were also conscious of the basic morphological difference with the standard Sivasagar Dialect. According to them if any form of language can be standardized it must be the language used in the 'Namghosa': the words which are used only in the form of verse would become the language of the prose with little alteration and it was the language of old glorious Kamrupa and also the language practiced by Sankardeva, Madhav Kandali, Bhushan, and so on.

Assam from the ancient times was known as Kamrupa till the end of Koch rule in the 17th century, according to the renowned Assamese linguist Upendranath Goswami. In "A Study on the Kamrupi Language: A Dialect of Assamese" (1970), Goswami wrote "the Aryan language spoken first in Assam was the Kamrupi language spoken in Rangpur, Cooch Behar, Goalpara, Kamrup district and some parts of Nowgong and Darrang districts". "It is in this Kamrupi language that the early Assamese literature was mainly written", writes Goswami.

Selection of Sivasagar dialect as a Standard Language:

The currently prevalent Asamiya has its roots in the Sivasagar dialect of Eastern Assam as mentioned in Kakati's Assamese, its Formation and Development (1942). The Missionaries made Sivasagar in Eastern Assam the centre of their activities and used the dialect of Sivasagar for their literary purposes. The missionaries published the first Assamese – English press in Sivasagar in 1836 and started using the local Asamiya dialect for writing purposes.

The relationship of the Kamrupi and Standard language with other languages:

The Kamrupi dialect bears close relationship with the Goalparia dialect of the district of Goalpara in Western Assam and also with the language of North Bengal. The Rajbansi dialect resembles 'in many cases widely' with the Kamrupi dialect of Western Assam(Goswami,1978,p.16).

Dialectal Situation:

Rajbansi

Angthi 'a silver ring'
Gacha 'lamb-stand'
Boti 'knife for cutting vegetables or fish'
Hata 'ladle'
Bogari 'jujube'
Kodal 'spade'
Abo 'mother's mother'
Bohini 'younger sister'
Indur 'rat'

Kamrupi

Aunthi
Gasa
Bothi
Hata, Hatha
Bougri
Kadal
Abu
Boini
Indur, Idur

(Source:Goswami,1978,p.18,19)

The relationship of the Assamese language with the Cachar dialect in the district of Cachar and the Vishnupuriya language spoken in the same district is also worth mentioning. In the words of Bhattacharya (2003) "the Cachar dialect is closely related to the Kamrupi dialect and the Standard Assamese". A list of words showing resemblance among Vishnupuriya, Cachari dialect and the Assamese language is given below:

Vishrupuriya

Kamra 'biting'
Bapak 'father'
Aluwa 'ploughman'
Beli 'sun'
Pani 'water'

Cachari

Kamar
Bapek
Aluwa
Beli
pani

Assamese

Kamor, Kam:Kamar
Bapek, Kam. Bapak
Halowa, Haluwa(Goalpariya)
Beli
Pani

Mekur 'cat'	Mekur	Mekuri
Lowa 'iron'	Lowa	Lo, Kam:Lowa

Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the usage of the dialectal variety found in Sivasagar and South Kamrup districts.
2. To investigate whether the dialectal variety used by Kamrupi people is used for speaking only or for both speaking and writing purposes.

Research questions:

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the usage of the dialectal variety in Sivasagar and South Kamrup districts?
2. Do the Kamrupi people use the dialectal variety both for speaking and writing purposes?

II. METHODOLOGY

The present study has been carried out with the help of Survey Method. The investigators have employed simple random sampling to collect the relevant data. To elicit response from 100 respondents of Palashbari and Sivasagar, the investigators have employed open-ended and close-ended questionnaires.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected has been analysed and the following are the findings and discussion:

1. 45.5% of Kamrupi speakers can understand the Sivasagar dialect a little and at the same time 45.5% can understand it clearly. Hence, it is clear from the analysis that most of the Kamrupi speakers can understand the Sivasagar dialect.
2. 60% of the Sivasagar people, who speak the Standard Assamese, can understand the Kamrupi dialect which also makes it clear that most of the Sivasagar speaker can understand only a little of the Kamrupi dialect.
3. 71.4% of the Sivasagar people consider their dialect as a standard language.
4. 60% of the Sivasagar people do not consider the Kamrupi dialect as a non-standard dialect.
5. 33.3% speaker of Kamrup use their dialect while communicating with the upper Assam people as they do not have any inhibition of using their own dialect.
6. 50% of the Sivasagar speakers are able to communicate with the Kamrupi people.
7. 93.8% of Kamrupi speakers are found that they have no inhibition of using their own dialect.
8. 66.7% of Sivasagar speakers donot make fun of the Kamrupidialect as they have accepted it as a form of communication in lower Assam.
9. 81.8% of the Kamrupi speakers considers their dialect to be less important than the Standard Language as their dialect is not used in the written form.
10. 97% of the standard Assamese speakers do not think that the people of lower Assam speak a language which is of low standard since it is not used in written form.
11. In the analysis, which is based on certain number of Kamrupi respondents, it is found that the regular usage of the standard Assamese by the Kamrupi people is almost the same as 50% of the Kamrupi people regularly use the Standard Assamese and 50% do not use regularly; they use only when they require.
12. It has been found that 67.6% of the Kamrupi speakers are the regular users of the dialectal variety while the remaining 32.4% use the standard variety.
13. 67.6% of the Kamrupi speakers do not use their dialectal variety while writing. Hence, it is clear from the analysis that the Kamrupi speakers use their dialect only for speaking purpose.
14. 88.2% of the Kamrupi speakers understand the written form of the standard Assamese.
15. 67.6% of the respondents are of the opinion that they do not find difficulty in writing in the standard language which shows that Assamese is a common language for all the people of Assam irrespective of the area to which they belong.
16. 67.6% of the Kamrupi speaker finds difficulty while talking in standard language because of the intervention of their dialectal variety of the "regional pull".

IV. CONCLUSION

It is found that the Kamrupi people understand the written language and they do not find difficulty in writing in the Standard Language but finds difficulty in speaking, which shows that they have practice in the written languages as they use it in academic and official purposes from the very beginning.

The findings of this study also indicate that the Kamrupi speakers can understand the Sivasagar dialect, which is the Standard Language. On the other hand, the people from Sivasagar can understand only a little of the Kamrupi dialect, which shows that the Kamrupi people understand more of the Standard Language as it is the official language of Assam and used for writing purpose. With the spread of education, military service, newspaper and radio, better means of communication and urbanization, Standard Assamese is being used by more and more people while the dialect speakers are unconsciously and slowly abandoning some of the peculiarities of their speech. But there is no immediate danger of extinction of the Kamrupi dialect. The educated people, though speaks the standard language in public places and write in their compositions, yet they speak their native dialects at home. Moreover a tendency to preserve the dialects is being observed in the attempt to put forward by some people to publish folk-songs and folk-literatures in the dialect itself. No dialect can be considered as a non-standard dialect as each dialect have their own way of communication. Based on the results it is found that most of the Kamrupi people use their dialects while communicating with the Upper Assam people. It is also clear that the Sivasagar people are also able to communicate with the Kamrupi people, which shows that there is no communication problem between both the dialects.

In the regularity of using the Standard Language it is found that half of the Kamrupi people use the Standard Language regularly and half use only on the basis of their need. But from the findings it has been found that most of the Kamrupi people use their dialectal variety regularly. Based on certain number of respondents it is clear that the Kamrupi people do not use their dialect while writing but they use it only for oral purposes. The result shows that most of the Kamrupi people use their dialects with the family members but they do not use their dialect for official purpose.

The study of dialects is of immense importance for various reasons as it makes our knowledge of the origin of our languages more exact. It gives us valuable information about the date of acquisition of new words. The adequate records of all shades of our present day speech furnish good materials to the students of future for investigation and thereby help to draw general conclusions on language as a whole. Dialects also represent stages of development through which the literary language has passed and retain forms lost by the latter. In the words of Bloomfield "the local dialects are of paramount importance to the linguist, not merely because their great variety gives him work to do, but because the origin and history of the standard and sub-standard types of speech can be understood only in the light of the local dialects"(Goswami,1970)

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