Language Vitality And Endangerment: A Case Study of Mog Language of Tripura

Niloy Chakraborty *

1.INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in our life such that we can't think of our civilization without a language. Language is the forbearer of the ethnicity and cultural identity of a community. Just like our bi-pedal locomotive notion and breathing, language itself is so obvious to us that we hardly put any certain observation on to it in our day-to-day life. Whatever we do in our daily live whether we play, study, make love, or make any public appearance we speak. We live in a world of language (Fromkin, 2007:13).

But now days the major concern for the linguists, is the rapid endangerment of the lesser-known languages that again threaten the cultural identity of a community, their common beliefs, their ethnicity, customs etc. A language is tagged to be an endangered one when a fewer people claim to speak that language and the language can't pass to the next generation in an obvious way. But again, it is always not that much statistical, because having a good number of native speakers; if the language failed to pass to the next generation or have a restricted domain to speak, that language is also very much endangered. By some estimation, only 600 or so out of 6000 languages are threated of language extinction or called as 'safe'. But according to linguists and anthropologists, by the end of this century, the language world will be dominated by the small number of major languages such as English, Spanish, Chinese etc. According to the language activists, Language extinction can affect the environment as a large scale of destruction (Crystal, 2000:1—15) might lead to its impact on the survival through lack of communication to the world .

2. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The current study will concentrate on the issues of language endangerment in Northeast India, specifically referring the Mog language, based on UNESCO's framework on Language Vitality and Endangerment (2003).Apart from that the study will also try to examine the following objectives-

*** Research Scholar,Department of Linguistics and Tribal Languages Tripura University, Suryamaninagar**

a. To assess the degree of endangerment

b. Factors responsible for the endangerment of Mog

c. Also suggest the proposed steps for protection and preservation of the language.

3. METHODOLOGY

Both the primary and secondary sources of data were incorporated for this study. Books, journals, articles, documents, the internet etc. are being utilized as the source of secondary data. The primary data was conducted with the assistance of the interview method with the community speakers from Sabroom subdivision of South Tripura District, the data collection was mostly based on fieldwork conducted in March—April of 2024. Digital camera (Nikon D5300) and audio recorder (Zoom H4N Pro) were used to capture and digitize the data.

4. BACKGROUND

The study of endangered languages catches the eyes of the linguists in the recent past, in the late 80s and early 90s. It starts with the International Linguistics Congress in Quebec in 1992, when they attended the meeting and make a statement-

"As the disappearance of any one language constitutes an irretrievable loss to mankind, it is for UNESCO a task of great urgency to respond to this situation by promoting and, if possible, sponsoring programs of linguistic organizations for the description in the form of grammars, dictionaries and texts, including the recording of oral literatures, of hitherto unstudied or inadequately documented endangered and dying languages." (Crystal, 2000: vii)

To which, UNESCO did reply in the very next year at a Conference in November, 1993. As an outcome they (members of International Linguistics Congress) took two essential steps; firstly, they adopted 'Endangered Languages Project' and secondly, they formed 'Red Book of Endangered Languages' and also submit a progress report after few months. As per the report-

"Although its exact scope not yet known, it is certain that the extinction of languages is progressing rapidly in many parts of the world, and it is of the highest importance that the linguistic profession realize that it has to step up its descriptive efforts." (Crystal, 2000:vii)

According to Michael Krauss, Language Endangerment can be scaled from 'safe' to 'moribund'. He suggested 4 levels of danger i.e. Safe, Endangered,

Extinct and Moribund (a state where the language is not learned any more as a mother tongue) [Krauss 1992: 4]. Kincade (1991: 160-3) proposed 5 levels, distinguishing from 'safe' and 'not so safe'; viable, viable but small languages, endangered languages, nearly extinct languages, extinct languages. According to Stephen Wurm [1992:192] focuses on the weaker languages, and he also mentioned 5 levels as potentially endangered   languages, endangered languages, seriously endangered languages, moribund languages, extinct languages.

On the other hand, UNESCO also tried to categorize languages on the basis of endangerment as: Vulnerable, Definitely Endangered, Severely Endangered, Critically Endangered, and Extinct. According to the UNESCO (2003), A language is called to be Vulnerable when the language is used by some children in all domains or used by all of them in limited domains. Endangered language is when the language is restricted with the parental generation only. A language is Severely Endangered when the language is only spoken by the older generation, and the successor of the language only understand the language but can't speak among them or pass to their children i.e. the third generation. Critically Endangered is when the youngest speakers of the language are at age of grandparents or older, and they don't speak that particular language fluently and frequently. Lastly, an Extinct language is when there is no speaker left to speak or pass the language to anyone. In this scale or parameter, it will be tough or nearly impossible for the linguist to revive the language if it passes through the first two stages i.e. Vulnerable and Definitely Endangered.
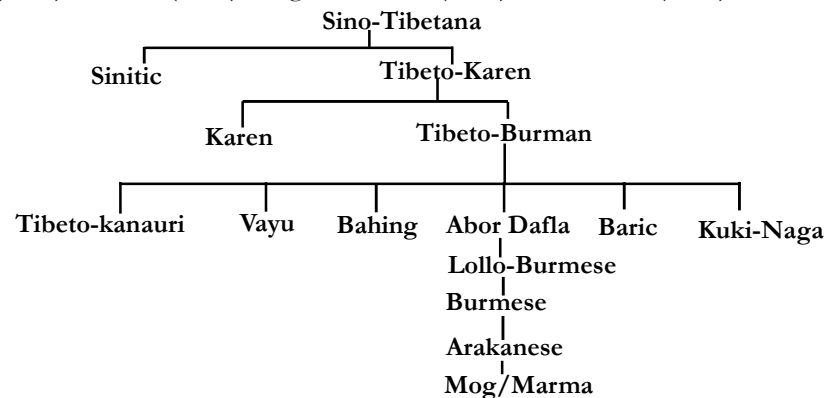
5. HISTORY OF THE TRIBE

According to many scholars, Mogs are the descendants of Mongoloid. In many parts they are known by different names, such as in Tripura the people of the language known as Mog, which has an origin to Bangla. But in Bangladesh the same people of the concerned language are known by Marma. Interestingly, the tribe and the language of the tribe are called by the same name, whether it is Mog in Tripura or Marma in Bangladesh. As Tripura is surrounded by Bangladesh from 3 sides i.e., on its north, south and west, so it is quite obvious that the Tribe might migrate from Bangladesh or more specifically from Chittagong Hill Tracts. The tribe has long and rich history about their migration. Almost every historian claimed that the tribe has come from Arakan, a part of Burma (Myanmar).

(Mongwaiching Marma, 2020:7)According to some scholars the word 'Marma' is derived from a Burmese word 'Myamm' and thus changes accordingly as: Myamma > Mamma > Mara > Marma. Some others have different opinions as, according to them the word 'Marma' is derived from a Chinese word 'Ming' or 'Mirma' and in China these two words are used to refer to the Burmese people of Myanmar. It is also evident from the old coins of Myanmar, where the people of Myanmar were referred as 'Meyama'. (MongwaichingMarma , 2020:7)

But there is also another story why the people of the language known 'Mog' in Tripura are also referred by the same in many literatures of Bengal. Because the tribe was infamous for their activities in the later part of sixteenth century when they were specifically become an object of threat for the Bengali traders as they were pirates at that time (MongwaichingMarma, 2020:26). So, the name 'Mog' is tagged with the tribe and there is one common phrase in Bangla as quoted by Suniti Kumar Chatterji, which means 'Moger muluk' (territories of Mog) to refer to the land of the inhabitants. However, the people of the tribe of Bangladesh opposed being called as 'Mog' as it is seemed to them as an insult.

Linguistically, the language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of Lolo-Burmese group. As there is no authentic source, so we try to place the language in the language family tree, Figure—1 denotes the tentative placement of the language in the family tree, after studying the classifications of various scholars— Needham-Robinson (1885), Benedict (1942), Shaffer (1955), Sergei Starostin (1996), Van Driem (2001) etc.

Figure—1: Genetic Classification of Mog[Needham-Robinson (1885), Benedict (1942), Shaffer (1955), Sergei Starostin (1996), Van Driem

6. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT

Various factors are involved in language endangerment; it is not a matter of suddenness, but a gradual decline. Some of the factors that are common in world languages are being described here with the reference to our concerning language Mog. Nine key criteria are used to evaluate language vitality, as stated in UNESCO's framework on Language Vitality and Endangerment. They are discussed below:

a. Intergenerational Language Transmission

b. The Absolute number of speakers

c. The proportion of speakers within the total population

d. Shifts in Domains of Language Use

e. Response to new domains and media

f. Materials for language education and literacy

The factors listed above are intended to concentrate on the current investigation in order to determine the extent and degree of endangerment in Mog.

6.1 INTERGENERATIONAL LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION

Fishman (1991:48) rightly pointed out as, the most commonly used factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next. Language Endangerment can be categorized on a scale from stability to extinction. Again, under Intergenerational Language Transmission, six degrees of endangerment can be distinguished such as—1 safe, there is an uninterrupted language transmission from one generation to the next and there is no visible threat from any other language; 2 stable yet threatened, though the language is spoken in most contexts and uninterruptional among the generations but multilingualism or one/two dominant language trying to usurped in some domain; 3 unsafe, a language is unsafe when it has some restrictions in its use or restricted to specific domains, as all the members of the community specially the new generation speakers do not consider it as their first language; 4 definitely endangered, the language is no longer used as mother tongue or first language in home domain, the most youngest generation of that particular language is the parental generation, at this stage though the parents use their mother tongue with their children but they are not always answer with the native tongue; 5 severely endangered, when the language spoken only by the older generation or the generation of the grandparents,

though the parental generation understand the language but found it difficult to speak; 6 critically endangered, when the language is only used by the great grandparents and again it is transmitted only to the grandparents stage. And the older generation does not speak the language on regular basis but use if when they find someone to speak on that particular language.

The villages of Sabroom, Monu-Bonkul, Baikhora (Ashu-Mog Para), Santirbazaar (Mohamuni), Hrishyamukh, and Paichong in the South Tripura District are home to the majority of Mog speakers. The language is not spoken by the speakers of all generations, and there is very little evidence of the language being passed down to the following generation. Thus, it is determined that the language is endangered. The Mog language is exclusively used at religious ceremonies and other customary activities; it is not spoken in other circumstances. Nonetheless, a number of non-governmental organizations have been established to encourage the younger generation to acquire and utilize the language. The use of the language among the younger generation is very restricted, not all the children use this language in all domains.Additionally, a school has been established where Mog is the method language. As a result, the language is fragile since not all speakers of the various age groups speak it in all domains especially the young speakers.

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
Safe	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
UnSafe	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
Definitively endangered	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.
Severely endangered	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
Critically endangered	1	The language is used by very few speakers, mostly of great-grandparental generations.
Extinct	0	There are no speakers.

6.2 ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF SPEAKERS

According to the 2011 Census report, the total number of Mog speakers in 37893. It is always problematic to provide the valid count of absolute numbers. The absolute number of speakers of Mog language is

unknown. However, we can estimate that there are about 4500 Mog speakers , including priests and younger students. Growth of the Language (Mog) from 1971 to 2011, is mentioned below:

Year	Persons who turned as their mother tongue	Decadal Percentage increase
1971	12378	
1981	17958	(1971-1981) = 41.06
1991	28135	(1981-1991) = 61.16
2001	30639	(1991-2001) = 8.90
2011	37893	(2001-2011) = 19.67

Table.1—Population Growth from 1971—2011, http://censusindia.gov.in

6.3 PROPORTION OF SPEAKERS WITH THE TOTAL POPULATIO

The number of speakers in relation to the total population of a group is a significant indicator of language vitality, where 'group' may refer to the ethnic, religious, regional or national group with which the speaker community identifies (Language Vitality and Endangerment, 2003:9).

The districts of Gomati, Dhalai, and South Tripura are home to the Mog speakers. The South Tripura district, which includes Sabroom, Monu-Bonkul, Baikhora, Santirbazaar, Hrishyamukh, Jolaibari, and others, is home to the majority of the speakers. Only a small percentage of individuals speak the language, mostly members of the priestly class and elder generations, with very few younger generations using it. So, the language can be assessed as a critically endangered language after looking at the proportion of speakers within its overall population in Tripura i.e., approximately 45, 203, 353.

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Proportion of speakers within the Total Reference Population
Safe	5	All speak the language
Unsafe	4	Nearly all speak the language
Definitively endangered	3	A majority speak the language
Critically endangered	2	A minority speak the language
Critically endangered	1	Very few speak the language
Extinct	0	None speak the language

6.4 SHIFTS IN DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE USE

When speakers have the opportunity to converse in their original tongue, at least within their own community or home domain, the language is deemed to be alive. The speakers of the minority language, however, become increasingly assimilated into the dominant language and culture as a result of the lack of prestige, which drives the less prestigious language speakers to switch to a different language in order to benefit from socioeconomic opportunities. Mog speakers also shifted to the majority language, Kokborok. The remaining senior members or speakers are not given the opportunity to speak, even in their homes, because the majority of speakers have already shifted to Kokborok, which is mostly used for chanting prayers or at religious rituals.

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Domains and Functions
Universal use	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions
Multilingual parity	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions
Dwindling domains	3	The language is used in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even homa domains
Limited or formal domains	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions
Highly limited domains	1	The language is used only in a very restricted number of domains and for very few functions
Extinct	0	The language is not used in any domain for any function

6.5 RESPONSE TO NEW DOMAIN AND MEDIA

The language itself finds no place in social domains such as school, college, any kind of institutions, market or any public places and also it is not found to be listed as the official language of the state. Therefore, the response to new domain is very marginal or more precise to say very restricted and only available on digital or social media platforms such as Facebook, You-tube, Instagram etc. If the communities do not meet the challenges of modernity with their language, it becomes increasingly irrelevant and stigmatized (Language Vitality and Endangerment, 2003:11).

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	New Domains and media accepted by the Endangered Language
Dynamic	5	The language is used in all new domains.
Robust	4	The language is used in most new domains.
Receptive	3	The language is used in many new domains.
Coping	2	The language is used in some new domains.
Minimal	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
Inactive	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

6.6 MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND LITERACY

Though Mog has its own script i.e. Burmese script, but they generally used Roman or Bangla Script for use; this is because many of the speakers don't aware of the fact that they have their own script. The language is not added to any educational system in larger scale, with the exception of 1/2 schools. The language even doesn't have its own dictionary so far and hardly any work done on grammar. As the language not being taught as a medium of instruction in the institutions in large scale that's why the language finds no importance in the curriculum in all domains.

Grade	Availability of Written Materials
5	There is an established orthography and a literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to be written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.
2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.
1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.
0	No orthography is available to the community.

7. REASONS FOR ENDANGERMENT OF MOG LANGUAGE

From the Socio-linguistic perspective, the factors that are responsible for the language endangerment vary from language to language. The aforementioned factors are responsible for the endangerment of Mog language.

a. A Language, irrespective of geographical boundaries, threatens mainly by two forces. Firstly, the external forces which includes-economic, political, religion, culture or educational subjugation and secondly, the internal forces which mainly focuses on the attitude of the native speakers towards their own language. In current situation, both the external and internal forces going hand by hand to endanger Mog language. For instance, a rapid urbanization which forced them to adopt a dominant language for job, education and daily communication in institutions. On the other hand, intermarriage also helps to endanger the language and the rising number in this case is also alarmingly high, which again forced the speakers of Mog language to habituate with the dominant language.

b. The generational gap between the older generation and younger generation can be responsible for the endangerment. However, for the better education and health facilities the Younger speakers of the language gradually shifting to the urban areas and the older people still find themselves in the rural, that's why the language's lexical items related to food, culture, flora-fauna, household materials are not found or carry forward with the young speakers.

c. As we have mentioned earlier, Mog is not yet considered as the medium of instruction in school or academic institutions. Thus, the young speakers are bound to adopt or learn a non-native language for educational purpose and slowly bring the endangerment.

d. Today's world is a multilingual world, and in this scenario, borrowing becomes a common phenomenon. It is common to all languages; there is hardly any language which is not influenced by borrowing. But the problem is, when a language is endangered the trend to borrow from other languages especially from a dominant language is become obvious. So, Mog has so many borrowed words from Kokborok, Bangla and English.

e. Practicing own cultural programs, tradition and rituals is always essential for an endanger language. It actually carries the authenticity of a particular language. But unfortunately, due to the urbanization the heritage is not carry forward to the current generation. That's why they somehow not connected with the root of their culture as well as the language.

8. OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Mog is one of the endangered languages of the North-East India, and due to the pressure of dominant languages, the intergenerational transmission is declining gradually. In the urban areas, the young speakers

are multilingual as for their daily communication purposes in various domains they need to depend on the popular languages. Same situation is also be seen in rural areas also, as Mog villages are surrounded by the speakers from different languages. Comparatively, in urban areas they hardly use Mog for communicative purposes. Due to the lack of facilities to learn and educate themselves in their native tongue, the young speakers are not availing themselves to learn the language properly in urban areas. So, here are some recommendations for save the language from further endangerment-

a. To create the awareness program about the language and its importance among the speakers.

b. Practicing their own rituals folk practices, cultural activities to preserve their own ethnicity and convince the young group of speakers about the necessity to preserve their own tongue and culture.

c. Government also takes some necessary steps like implementing Mog language in experimental stage in some primary schools so that the young speakers show some interest to learn and love their own language.

d. Native linguist or scholars of the language also need to take the initiative to preserve and create more literature in their own languages so that they can relate those stories to themselves.

e. News or digital platform can be a good option to spread the awareness regarding the language. Now a day's smart phones are easily accessible to everyone so if the young people genuinely try to popularize their own language with the help of Medias that can be the best way to revitalize the process of documenting and spreading the language and its culture.

f. Lastly, it will depend on the attitude of the Native speakers, if they take the matter seriously, they must look upon it and try their best to pass the language to the next generation. Because intergenerational transmission is the best way to preserve and safeguard an endangered language

9. CONCLUSION

The Mog language has a small group of speakers, yet it remained active in their own personal domain. It was on the verge of extinction from time to time and somehow revives itself wonderfully. Here the most crucial step was taken by the speakers of the community and their attitude to safeguard the language. The potential threat from other neighboring languages can only be stopped if the young speakers take the language as their pride and identity to make them unique from others because only by

the language we can differentiate a community from others. The Government and local authorities should stand side by side to safeguard the language from potential endangerment by addressing the language in rural schools and institutions, by actively involving in language and cultural activities, encourage folk culture such as proverb, folk songs, folk tales etc. in its oral tradition also. By preserving it we can preserve the culture of the Mog society. A positive and enthusiastic attitude can be very helpful to safeguard the language from potential endangerment.

Appendix Table of Endanger of Language

Factors	Grade	Reason
Intergenerational Language Transmission	4 (Unsafe)	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	4 (Unsafe)	Nearly all speak the language.
Response to New Domains and Media	1 (Minimal)	The language is used only in a few new domains.
Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy	2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.

END NOTES:

1. Language Death, David Crystal.

2. https://www.academia.edu

3. According to the villagers of Ashu-Mog Para, during the field in vestigation in Baikhora (South Tripura District) in 2024, April.

4. There is no authentic data regarding this, the proportion of speak ers within the total population has been given by the informants namely, Mailafru Mog (61), Newkra Mog (59), Angkyaching Mog (68), during the fieldwork i.e. March' 2024.

REFERENCES

1 Austin, P. & Simpson, A. Endangered Languages: Languages Loss and Community Response. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007. Print.

2   Aitchison, Joan. Language change: Progress or decay? 2ndedn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1991. Print.

3   Bauer, Laurie, and Peter Trudgill, eds. Language Myths. Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1998. Print.

4   Bauman, James A. A guide to issues in Indian language retention. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics. 1980. Print.

5   Crystal, David. Language Death. Cambridge: Cambridge Univer sity Press. 2000. Print.

6.   Haokip, Marykim. The Nature of Language Endangerment: A Case study of Thadou in M. Ganeshan(ed.), Language Endangerment in South Asia Vol. I. Annamalai University Publication No. 10.234—255. 2013. Print.

7.   Hale, Ken. On endangered languages and the safeguarding of di versity. Language 68. 1—3. 1992a. Print.

8.   Ladefoged, Pet.Another view of endangered languages. Language 68. 809—811. 1992. Print.

9.   Matisoff, James A. Endangered languages of Mainland Southeast Asia. In Robins and Uhlenbeck (eds.), 189—228. 1991. Print.

10.   Nettle, Daniel. & Suzanne, Romaine. Dying Words: The Extinc tion of World's Languages. Oxford University Press. 2000. Print.

11.   Nettle, Daniel and Suzanne Romaine. Vanishing voices. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001. Print.

12.   Nath, Arup Kumar. Revitalizing Tiwa Language: The Phenomena of Language Shift and Maintenance. Language Forum. Vol 37. 2020. Print.

13.   Turin, Mark. Linguistics Diversity and Preservation of Endanger ment of Languages: A Case study from Nepal. Kathmandu: ICIMOD. 2007. Print.

14.   Trudgill, Peter. Language maintenance and language shift: preser vation versus extinction. International Journal of Applied Linguis tics 1. 61—69. 1991. Print.

15.   UNESCO. Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Cultural Diversity Series. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2002. Print.

16.   Wurm, Stephen A. Language death and disappearance: causes and circumstances. In Robins and Uhlenback (eds.), 1—18. 1991. Print.