

LANGUAGE SCENARIO OF MIZORAM

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Abstract : This paper deals with the language situation of Mizoram which has been studied by observing the seven major languages of Mizoram separately under the domains of education, literature, mass media, religious activities, administration and others. The languages studied are Mizo, Mara, Lai, Paite, Hmar, Riang and Chakma which generally cover the linguistic communities of that state.

As Mizo (Lushei) is the most dominant language of Mizoram, identity crisis of other linguistic communities in Mizoram comes into play. In fact, the expansion of the Lushei dialect appears to be a bar for the development of the dialects of the other linguistic communities in Mizoram. Hence, in this paper, language attitudinal study also plays a major role in describing the linguistic scenario of Mizoram.

Key Words: attitude, community, contact, development, identity

The language scenario of Mizoram is very interesting. There are several languages like Mizo, Mara, Lai, Paite, Hmar, Riang, Chakma and others which generally cover the major part of the linguistic communities of the state. Out of seven major languages mentioned above, six languages except Chakma, belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is to be noted that in Mizoram, Mizo is the most dominant language which is all pervasive whereas the languages of the other tribes of Mizoram are very much localized.

The area of Mizoram is 21087 sq. km with a population strength of 8,88,573. About 73% of the total population of Mizoram speaks in Lushei or Mizo language. Speakers of other major languages i.e. Mara(3.91%), Lai(2.8%), Paite(1.62%), Hmar(1.6%), Riang(1.9%) and Chakma(7.55%) are much lesser compared to the Mizo speakers.

Mizo and other languages like Mara, Lai, Paite, Hmar and Riang are considered as belonging to the Kuki-Chin group under the Assam-Burmese Branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of languages. Among them, Mizo (Lushei) came in contact with the missionaries first. All the above-mentioned communities except Chakmas, accepted Roman script for writing their languages, which the missionaries introduced for them.

On account of the missionaries' work particularly in the field of education, the development of Mizo over-shadowed the other communities and also their population was much higher than the other communities. Thus, Mizo achieved the dominant role among all other speech communities and plays the leading role in the language scenario of Mizoram. In fact, it is a common link language among all the tribal and non-tribal

people. Mizo language is used for most of the official purposes of Government of Mizoram within the state. Mizo language is used in every field viz. official, educational, social and commercial activities. This shows that Mizo language is the most dominant language in Mizoram. One may consider that the supremacy of Mizo language sometimes appears as a burden for the development of the other languages. As a result, a question of endangerment of the linguistic identity of the other tribal people of Mizoram comes into play. The identity crisis of the other linguistic communities, other than Mizo, shows that they are struggling for their own existence. A clear picture of the language situation of Mizoram has been studied by observing the usages of the seven major languages separately under the domains of education, literature, mass media, religious activity, administration and others.

Mizo

In Mizoram, as per data supplied by the School Education Department, more than 50% of primary schools use Mizo language as the medium of instruction. Almost all the primary schools are located in the six districts of Mizoram (Aizawl, Kolasib, Mamit, Champhai, Serchhip and Lunglei). In the other two districts viz. Lawntlai and Saiha, the medium of instruction at the primary level are Lai and Mara respectively. However, only four primary schools with Mizo medium lie under Chakma Autonomous District Council (hereafter referred to as CADC) in the district of Lawntlai.

In Mizoram, English is the medium of instruction from High School up to the University level. But students can take Mizo as a subject up to Higher Secondary courses in school education. Mizo is taught as a subject in the under-graduate and post-graduate levels. Students can even do their Ph.D. in Mizo language.

The literacy rate of Mizoram is 88.8% which is the second highest in the country and the highest in the North-East States. The Adult Education System plays a major role in eradicating illiteracy in Mizoram. The language of Adult Education in Mizoram is mainly Mizo. But under CADC, the language of Adult Education is Chakma. The other languages in Adult Education Programme are yet to be introduced, although they have a provision of primary education in their own mother tongue. All text books of Adult Education Programme are in Mizo language except the Chakma text books for Adult Education Programme under CADC.

The published literatures of Mizoram are mostly done in the Mizo language. The literary works published in Mizo language are narrative, lyrics, plays, songs, hymnal or sacred songs, short stories, novels, non-narrative prose, pre- and elementary school manuals and work books, non-narrative writings like devotional, political and social writings. There are also refined non-narrative prose like secondary school manuals and work books, political, social and scientific books of secondary level. The learned non-narrative

prose at the university levels are the university manuals and text books on Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc. and other non-narrative prose. Different types of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and even trilingual dictionaries are also available for Mizo speakers.

In Mizoram, there are two Radio Stations located at Aizawl and Lunglei. In all Radio Stations, Mizo language is used for all sorts of announcements. More than 70-80% programmes are conducted in 'Mizo'. There is only one TV station in Mizoram. Doordarsan Kendra, Aizawl transmits its programme from 17:30 to 20:00 from Monday to Friday and from 15:00 to 20:00 on Saturday and Sunday. Except Hindi lesson, Hindi songs, Western Music and News in English all the programmes are conducted in Mizo.

A very good number of newspapers, periodicals, bulletins, magazines and journals are published from Mizoram in the Mizo language. All the literary activities in Mizo language are basically performed centering Aizawl city.

In Mizoram, 98% of the total population practice Christianity. There are a large number of churches in Mizoram. Majority of the churches conduct their services in Mizo language except those churches which are particularly meant for the other tribes of Mizoram who are speaking in their own particular language. The Mizo churches conduct preaching, rituals and teachings in the Mizo language. They use Mizo hymns and songs for their prayer. Both Old Testament and New Testament are available in the language. Mizo language and literature were enriched and developed by the contributions of the missionaries and the churches.

Mizo language along with English is used for all official correspondence within the state government. But, for correspondence with the Central Government or other State or Union Territory Government and with the Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram, English is used. In internal written directions and regulations, Mizo language is also used along with English. In some cases, Hindi is also used.

In the State Assembly, both Mizo and English are used for debate and written proceedings. A member from other linguistic community who does not know Mizo or English may speak in his own language in the Assembly provided that he should submit his speech in writing to the speaker in Mizo or in English in advance.

In the district level Courts of justice, both Mizo and English are used almost in every aspect of court works like evidences, pleading, declarations and correspondences. The written proceedings of judgment is made in English only. In case of giving verbal evidences, other languages are permitted, depending upon the language of the clients. In case of High Court, all correspondences are done in English.

Both Mizo and English are used in every sphere of written works like publicity, labelling products, instructions on use of product, notices, bulletins, letters for

correspondence, messages etc. All verbal communication except some fisheries production under Autonomous District Councils is done in Mizo.

Mara

As per 2001 census, total population of Maras is 34,731 i.e. 3.91% of the total population of Mizoram. In Mizoram, Maras are mostly living in Siaha district in Mizoram having their own Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) where the most of the official activities are conducted in Mara only. They maintain their boundary, mentioning their area as Mara land. But, when the question of communication arises between the Maras and the others, then mostly, Mizo is the language for their communication. However, among the educated Maras, English also plays an important role for their inter-group communication. In fact, Maras have introduced their text books in the Mara language for Primary and Middle school. Previously Mizo was their medium of instruction in school which has been switched over to English as per the recent decision of the Government of Mizoram. In schools under MADC, Mizo is also taught as an optional paper. Even students can take Alternative English instead of Mizo, which the Mara students mostly prefer. Mara is used for all purposes of the day to day life of the common people.

Many literary works are also found in the Mara language in Saiha district of Mizoram. Bible in Mara is their most sacred holy book.

In the churches of Mara land, all the church services are done in Mara language except some Evangelical Churches of Mara land.

If the bilingualism pattern is to be considered as an indicator of the status of their language, then it is invariably, the Mizo in most of the cases, which is unidirectional from Mara to Mizo. The educated Maras also speak English and Hindi (limited). The majority of the Maras are bilingual in Mizo, whereas the Mizos are much less bilingual in the other languages of Mizoram. English is the most preferred second language for the country and Mizoram is no exception. The Maras also use English for their inter-group communication.

In case of communication with the other groups of Mizoram like Hmar, Paite, Mara, Lai, Chakma, Riang etc., Mizo is the common link language even if they understand a little bit of each other's language. But in case of educated groups, English is preferred as their language of communication.

Although there is a community radio station in Saiha, all programmes are run in Mizo in spite of the fact that Mara is the main language of communication in Saiha. Doordarshan Kendra, Aizawl does not transmit any Mara programme. AIR, Aizawl broadcasts Mara programme once in a week for about 40 minutes.

In District Council Courts, all the oral judgments, evidences and pleadings are done in the Mara language. But all the written judgments are in English.

With Central Government, the communication made by MADC is in English only. But they use both English and Mizo for the communication with the Government of Mizoram. With governmental bodies and other different institutions, the communication made by the MADC is in English only.

In District Council, all the communications like written agenda and resolutions are done in Mara only. If it is necessary, then only in some cases, they are translated into English. In case of non-Mara member in Saiha Mizo or English (if known) is used as a common language.

Lai

As per 2001 census, total number of Lai speakers in Mizoram is 24,900 i.e. 2.80% of the total state population. Lais are concentrated in the district of Lawngtlai in Mizoram having their own Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), where some of the official activities are conducted in Lai. But when the question of communication between the Lais and the others come, then mostly, Mizo is the language which is used. However, among the educated Lais, English also plays an important role for their inter-group communication. A significant feature of Lai language is that, many of the Lai people do not know Lai language.

If the bilingualism pattern is to be considered as an indicator of the status of their language, then it is invariably, the Mizo in most of the cases, which is unidirectional from Lai to Mizo. The majority of the Lais are bilingual in Mizo, whereas the Mizos are much less bilingual in the other languages of Mizoram. Mizo and English are the most preferred languages for their inter-group communication. Educated Lais prefer English as their language of communication.

Lai language is taught as a subject in the primary school and the middle school level i.e., from class I to VII in the school under Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). But most of the people do not know Lai, not even the younger generation. They can only speak in Mizo. Previously the medium of instruction was Mizo, but recently it has switched over to English.

Lai language is only used officially in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) at Lawngtlai. But this official use of Lai language is mainly restricted to oral form only. The written file work is done in either Mizo or in English mostly. Only the Department of Land & Revenue of LADC maintains all its official documents in the Lai language. Previously, the proceedings of the meetings were available in Lai along with Mizo and English, which is not available today for the lack of Lai knowing people.

The literature in Lai language is very limited in Mizoram. Only a few books are written in Lai by the native speakers. Lai hymns and songs and also the Lai folk tales are available in Lai dominated areas of Mizoram. They have a strong cultural heritage.

It is said that the Bamboo Dance of the Mizos and the proverbs of the Mizos, actually belong to the Lai community.

No newspaper in Lai is published from Mizoram. Lai periodicals or magazines are very rare in Mizoram.

The Lai people embraced Christianity. The Lai churches under the LairamIsua Krista Baptist Kohhran conduct the church services in the Lai language. Recently, Bible has been translated in Lai. In some churches in the Lai dominated areas, Mizo language is used while conducting the church services. But in some churches of Lai community, they use both Lai and Mizo languages. One of the Lai Churches in Aizawl is Kalvary Church, where all the church services are done in Lai.

Doordarshan Kendra, Aizawl does not transmit any such Lai programme. AIR, Aizawl broadcasts Lai songs once in a week for about 40 minutes.

Hmar

As per 2001 census, total number of Hmar speakers is 14,240 i.e., 1.6% of the total state population of Mizoram.

In Mizoram, most of the Hmar speakers speak Lushei or Mizo language. A large number of Hmar people speak Hmar language along with Mizo. They use Hmar in their day to day life. Although, Hmar literature, Hmar Grammar, Hmar Bible and Hmar Dictionary are available in Mizoram, these literary works are very rarely published from Mizoram. In the churches of Hmar people in Mizoram, preaching, songs and hymns are done in the Hmar language.

In meetings and sessions of the Sinlung Hill Development Council (SHDC), the Chairman and the members speak in Hmar. Written documents are done mainly in Mizo. Sometimes, in English also, but in their concerned part, documents are given in Hmar language officially. On 18.11.2009, in the session of SHDC, it was decided that all the correspondences within SHDC area be made in Hmar language and the members of SHDC should use Hmar at the time of meeting.

Hmar is neither taught as a subject at any level of education in Mizoram, nor used as a medium of instruction in the schools of Hmar dominated areas.

Doordarshan Kendra, Aizawl does not transmit any Hmar programme. Hmar songs are broadcast in AIR, Aizawl once in a week for about 40 minutes.

The Hmar community in Mizoram is mostly Christian and each Hmar village has its own church, where the church services are done in the Hmar language along with Mizo.

For Hmars in Mizoram, Mizo is their common link language. However, for educated Hmars, English also plays an important role for their inter-group communication.

Considering bilingualism, it can be said that the Hmars are much more bilingual than the Mizos. Almost all Hmars know Mizo. English is mostly preferred by the educated Hmars as a second language.

Paite

As per 2001 census, total number of Paite speakers is 14,356 i.e., 1.62% of the total state population of Mizoram. Paites are mainly concentrated in Champai district of Mizoram.

Most of the Paite speakers in Mizoram do not use Paite language even at home. Their common language is Mizo. Most of the Paite people know very little of Paite language. Even the younger generation do not know Paite, but they know Mizo. Paite language is not taught at any level in Mizoram. In the schools of Paite villages near the border of Manipur and Myanmar, the teachers generally explain the subjects in Paite, although, Paite language is not considered as medium of instruction in Mizoram. But in the Paite villages some people speak in the Paite language.

No literary works are published from Mizoram in Paite language except some periodicals. Even the Paite Bible which is available in Mizoram, was actually translated in Manipur.

There are Paite Churches where all the church services are done in Paite, at the same time, Mizo hymns and songs are sung. Evangelical Baptist Convention Church is purely a Paite Church, where all the church services are done in the Paite language.

Doordarshan Kendra, Aizawl does not transmit any Paite programme. AIR, Aizawl broadcasts Paite songs once in a week for about 40 minutes.

Chakma

The Chakmas speak their mother tongue in their daily life. In Mizoram, Chakmas are mostly living in the Lawngtlai, Lunglei and Mamit districts along the border of Bangladesh. As per 2001 census, total population of Chakma are 67,057 i.e., 7.55% of the total population of Mizoram. They have their own Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in the Lawntlai district of Mizoram, with the head quarter at Chawngte or Kamalnagar (as called by the native speakers). The schools under CADC teach Chakma as a subject in the primary school and the middle school level i.e., from class I to VII. Previously they used Bengali as a subject in place of Chakma. Recently the medium of instruction in the schools under CADC has been changed from Chakma to English as per Government policy.

There is no publication of newspaper or magazine in Chakma language in Mizoram. No literary books are available in Mizoram except the text books published by CADC up to class VII.

In District Council Courts under CADC, all the oral judgments, evidences and pleadings are done in the Chakma language. But all the written judgments are in English and sometimes in Bengali also.

In CADC, they use their own language for verbal communication, but written recordings are done in English and Mizo. In the recent years, they have introduced Chakma language in all their activities in CADC.

The Chakmas are the followers of the Hinayana sect of Buddhism. Chakma language is used in religious-preaching and the chanting is done in Pali. Chakma language has its own script.

English is their most preferred second language for communication. Chakmas are more bilingual than the Mizos, as the situation demands in Mizoram.

Riang

Riangs fall under Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman sub-family. As per 2001 census, the population of the Riangs is 16,909 in Mizoram. The majority of the Riangs are in Tripura.

Riang language is not promoted in Mizoram. They have no text books in Riang. Riang language is only spoken. There is no written use of the language. According to our field survey, no literary works in the Riang language is available in Mizoram except Bible. Bible in the Riang language is their only literature available in Mizoram. No publication, no newspapers and no magazines in Riang are available in Mizoram. Riang language is not taught anywhere at any level of education in Mizoram.

For the religious purpose, many of them follow a particular form of Hinduism; some are animists and many are Christians. It has been reported that they use their own language for prayer services.

Neither Doordarshan Kendra nor AIR, Aizawl broadcast any programme in Riang.

Attitudinal Study

The objective of the attitudinal study was formulated on the basis of the close observation of the communities with their language use, attitude and identity. It was noticed that other than Mizo, almost all the languages are spoken mostly at home or in close interaction networks. Lai, Mara and Chakma are partly used in education, literature and for communications in formal settings. Natural language acquisition is the result of their competence in mother tongue. But their competence in English depends on their formal education. However, competence in Mizo depends either on simultaneous acquisition of Mizo as second language or through interaction as a link language or as the degree of formal education. The smaller linguistic communities like Lai, Mara, Hmar, Paite, Chakma and Riang feel the pressure of the major dominant language Mizo due to the socio-economic functions of the Mizo language in their life. Thus, these smaller linguistic communities present interesting cases of the use of their mother tongues, Mizo and English. They possess different attitudes towards their language-use.

We prepared a questionnaire (a schedule) for the collection of data about language attitudes. The schedule consisted of attitudinal questions, each of which was to be responded. But since our data was limited we have not taken the venture of statistical

analysis of the data. Therefore, summary of the findings of this exercise has been presented.

The use of their mother tongues, Mizo, English and Hindi raises interesting issues of language competence and language acquisition, which need further investigation, considering the categories of age, sex and occupation as variables in characterizing the differences among the respondents.

Attitude towards language use in family

The role and relationship include interaction with wife, children, relatives, friends and other speakers. Here, it is described as the patterns of attitudes towards language use in the above said relationships among the seven linguistic communities.

It has been observed that the respondents strongly favour the use of mother tongue in all relationships mostly, barring a few exceptions. Sometimes, the attitude towards the use of mother tongue is not favourable in case of Hmar, Paite and Lai in urban set up. They often use Mizo in their family. It may be mentioned that Mizo as an umbrella language would displace their use of mother tongue in close relationship after a certain period of time. It is true that these languages have existed for a long time but pressure of Mizo has been felt more strongly during the last 50 years than before due to social and political reasons.

As regards attitude towards the use of English, it is quite clear that the educated respondents highly favour English as a complementary use.

All categories of respondents have highly favourable attitudes towards their mother tongue. Although, highly favourable attitudes towards Mizo do not imply any displacement of mother tongue, but, in case of actual use of these languages, entirely opposite picture is seen. Mizo wins over the majority in actual use of the language.

However, it is to be mentioned that the Maras are more assertive in using their mother tongue in most of the domains. As a result, the Mara language is more maintained compared to the other linguistic communities. Lai comes next to Mara in having a positive attitude towards maintaining their mother tongue. But in actuality the Lai language is not maintained by all the sections of the community. In case of Hmar and Paite, they are not very assertive in using their mother tongues in Mizoram as they have strong reference groups in Manipur.

In case of Chakma, they strongly favour their mother tongue for all purposes. Although, most of them know Mizo, they want to introduce their own language in every field and in all domains, including their own Burmese based script.

The attitudinal survey of Riang was not successfully possible as they were very much dispersed being busy fighting for their language identity. Only some of the individuals were interviewed but not the community as a whole. The main concentration of Riang lies in Tripura.

Attitude towards language use in education

The question of language-use in education has acquired a significant role in the last two or three decades because of its far-reaching implications in the educational performance and mental growth of the children. The development of language structure and its extensions in the context of language planning and again social identity in the context of language maintenance and shift are equally significant in the field of education.

A distinction has to be made between the use of a language as a medium for teaching all the subjects and its teaching as a subject in school. In this regard, it is to be mentioned that although the minor linguistic communities in Mizoram favour their mother tongue, except Mara, the others have not shown their effort to develop their own variety of language in every aspect of education. Neither the Government of Mizoram nor the smaller linguistic communities have made much effort in this direction. Thus, the positive attitude regarding the maintenance and development of their languages are not reflected.

Although, they prefer mother tongues as their medium of instructions and also as subjects to be taught in school, for the higher education they prefer English rather than their mother tongues to be the medium of instructions in schools, so that they can compete with the world in the field of education.

Other than Mizo, the Maras are very much conscious of their own linguistic identity. They have developed some of the registral variety of their language for different purposes of language-use in the field of education, religion, etc.

Attitude towards language-use in mass media

AIR, Aizawl broadcasts most of the programmes in the Mizo language. But the programmes of other languages like Lai, Mara, Paite, Hmar, Chakma etc. are conducted by AIR, Aizawl once in a week for about 40 minutes, which are mostly songs. Doordarshan Kendra, Aizawl shows all the programmes in Mizo only. Some English programmes are also shown. But the programmes of other languages are not shown at all.

In Mizo, there is much progress in the field of periodicals, magazines, newspapers and all other publications. But no such progress is made in other six languages. Among the six, only the Maras have a better progress in the field of publications, newspapers, magazines or periodicals. In this regard, Lai comes next to Mara. The others could not make any progress in this regard. English is the most preferred second language for all the linguistic communities. Hindi comes in some specific cases.

The smaller linguistic communities have a very strong opinion regarding their language-use in different mass media like AIR, Doordarshan, etc. They also strongly feel that literary works, magazines, periodicals, news sheets etc. should be published in their own respective mother tongue, although they do not have any negative attitude towards the existing practices of using Mizo, English and Hindi languages in different mass-media.

Attitude towards language development and language use in literature and communication

All the minor linguistic communities want to develop their own mother tongue but in actuality, they prefer Mizo to be their link language in case of inter-group communication. The educated people prefer English as their second language. It is remarkable to note that all the linguistic communities accept Mizo as their common link language.

Again all the linguistic communities strongly favour creative writings in their mother tongue. But in actual use, their languages have not reached that level. Even the text books of different levels are not available in their languages. In fact, the process of standardization of these languages is also in rudimentary stage and the languages are mostly used for oral communication.

Identity status and instrumental function

Mother tongue speakers of all the linguistic communities consider their own language to be their symbol of identity. But simultaneously, they accept the supremacy of Mizo as their common language.

The function of mother tongue as a token for identity at the regional level is not very sharply defined, though its significance cannot be ignored. Increasing use of Mizo in most of the domains is considered as a threat to the distinctiveness of a community as a whole. Almost all the linguistic communities of Mizoram feel so, according to our field survey.

Majority of the six linguistic communities consider their mother tongue to be an obstacle for the future academic situation. They think that if they assert their linguistic identity then it would not be appreciated by the Mizo community.

Many of them know very little of their language. They do not know how rich their language is and hence they are not in a position to develop their languages. They admit to the Mizos easily.

The Mizos consider the other linguistic communities belonging to the Kuki-Chin group like Lai, Mara, Paite and Hmar to be Mizos only. They claim that others do not have their own separate identity but they fall under the Mizo umbrella.

The smaller linguistic communities like Chakma and Lai live like a good neighbour in the same district Lawngtlai. They have indifferent attitude towards each other's language.

The Maras and Lais are the distant neighbours having neutral attitude towards each other's language. Similarly, Paite and Hmar linguistic communities remained neutral towards each other's language.

Although the Chakmas speak the Indo-Aryan speech they accepted the supremacy of Mizo due to socio-economic and political reasons. Since the Riangs do not get any favour from the Mizos for the development of their language, they have unfavourable attitude towards the Mizo linguistic community.

But all of these linguistic communities want their mother tongues to flourish, which is a positive attitude towards their own language.

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