



# Parental perspectives on language attrition in the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

The gradual loss of linguistic diversity among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is a pressing reality. Various reasons are being considered behind the language <sup>[1]</sup> crisis. Factors such as language shift <sup>[2]</sup> Socio-economic influences, religious changes, migration, the impact of modern education, the absence of a uniform language in the state, a lack of social interaction using the native language, etc, contribute to this issue. The present paper aims to examine the perspectives of the parents of the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh regarding the attrition of their native language among the younger generation, particularly addressing the dilemma faced by parents who bear the responsibility of transferring linguistic knowledge to their children, who are often the first generation to recognize the language attrition. To fulfill the objectives, the perspectives of parents from 60 households, 10 each from 6 villages in West Siang, have been collected.

**Keywords:** Languages, Linguistic, Native, Attrition, Parents

## Introduction

Language is a fundamental social phenomenon that binds people together. The identity of the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh is intrinsically tied to their linguistic diversity. Language attrition is the gradual decrease of native language performance that occurs with time (Gallo *et al*, 2021) <sup>[2]</sup>. The Galo tribe of Arunachal is the inhabitant of the West Siang, Lapa Rada, and Lower Siang districts. Their population is also distributed across the East Siang and Upper Subansiri. A section of them concentrated in the heart of the capital, Itanagar (Kamki, 2025). The language of the Galo tribe of Arunachal Pradesh is currently classified as vulnerable <sup>[3]</sup> by UNESCO Atlas of World languages in Danger, 2010. Given the urgency of taking concrete steps to preserve it, many community-based organizations, in particular, and the Galo tribe as a whole are working with state authorities to prevent their language from becoming extinct. Various factors, such as language shift, socio-economic influences, religious changes, migration, the impact of the modern education system, the absence of a uniform language in the state, along with a lack of social interaction using the native language, etc., are considered responsible for the gradual disappearance of the language from the Galo society.

At present, English is the first language in the education system of the state, but it is not usually spoken as a medium of communication in social contexts outside the educational institute. Followed by Hindi, which serves as the medium of communication among the different tribes. Over time, the gradual drifting of the younger generation of the Galo tribe from their linguistic roots is quite alarming. Indeed, in a

process of attrition of the language, the role of the parents is being questioned. There is a prevailing belief that because the elders of the society are not showing interest in their native tongue, the loss of language among the new generation has occurred. The parents, who bear the sole responsibility of teaching their children their linguistic heritage, are seen as ineffective in carrying it out. Yet, the case study on parental perspectives reveals a different side of the problem; they hold various views on the issue. Hence, the paper examines the dilemma of the parental role in the Galo tribe as facilitators of their linguistic essence to their children. The study identifies the hypothesis regarding parental perspectives on the attrition of the Galo language among the younger generation.

## Objective of the study

- To explore the parental perspectives of the Galo tribe on the attrition of the Galo language.
- To examine the parental role of the Galo tribe in facilitating their linguistic essence to their children.

## Methods and Materials

The present study employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to achieve its objectives. The focus is the West Siang district, inhabited by the Galo tribe. Data are collected through a case study addressing the causes and consequences of language attrition among the Galo tribe. A random sample of 10 households from each of the 6 villages in the West Siang district, namely Karga, Kambu, Kato, Dego, Libu Bene, and Kamki, was selected. Additionally, various regional and national literature related to the present study is reviewed.

### **Theoretical framework: the socio-cultural theory of language learning by lev vygotsky**

Social interaction is a key component of language development. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language learning emphasizes the significance of social interaction and cultural context in a child's cognitive development. The study highlights the necessity of both social interaction and cultural context for a child's cognitive growth. His theory advocates for cooperative learning through group activities like discussion, debate, and summarization. According to Vygotsky, the child makes an effort to absorb the tutor's (usually parents or teacher) acts or order, then rationalizes the knowledge and uses it to direct and control their own performance (Salahuddin,2021). To be precise, according to Vygotsky, the social and cultural environment of a child plays a vital role in language development, which enables the process of learning in a child. Children's ability to utilize their native language can be nurtured through social interaction. Therefore, the elders in the community must promote and use their native language; without it, children will struggle to learn and connect with their cultural heritage. The children of a certain society can only learn their mother tongue from a textbook after communicating in their language. Hence, while considering social interaction as the main tool of language acquisition, it also supports the importance of educational institutions as a framework through which a child can acquire both linguistic proficiency and a connection with the culture of their community. He emphasizes storytelling as the primary tool for developing a certain language skill among children. Thus, the theory also supports a bilingual education system. Hence, the primary reason for the attrition of the language is the gradual decline in the use of the native language for social interaction.

### **Perspectives of the parents**

The random case study from the six villages of the West Siang district. reveals that, in the process of transferring their native language to children, the parents are meant to feel guilty. This guilt arises for no offense against them. The dilemma of the parents shows that the elders of the community are well-equipped as facilitators of language for the next generation, but their efforts are overshadowed for various reasons, rendering them unable to achieve their objective. Ironically, the parents acknowledge that during the process, they are gradually succumbing to the objectives. The findings of the case study are as follows:

### **Fear of being excluded from conversations with their children and grandchildren**

Most parents consider that embracing contemporary forms of communication ensures they do not feel excluded in conversations with their children and grandchildren, who are mostly using Hindi as their means of communication. When their child could not express their feelings perfectly in their native tongue, leaving the parents helpless, only able to communicate in the language their children prefer, i.e, Hindi in place of their mother tongue. Moreover, the parents reveal that

not only parents, but even grandparents, try to adopt a language preferred by the younger at home to get included in conversation. Effectively communicating in Hindi with their children is seen as a marker of improved language skills among the parents.

### **To enhance their children's language development in modern society**

Further, the parents believe that adopting Hindi as a means of communication can enhance their children's language development in modern society. Promoting Hindi as a means of communication does not suggest any intention to neglect their native language. Instead, the parents aim to ensure that their children are not left behind in society due to a lack of proficiency in languages like English and Hindi. Parents emphasize the importance of learning other languages and feel pride when their tribal child speaks English or Hindi instead of their native tongue.

### **A sense of dissatisfaction and feeling of alienation among the younger generation towards the native language**

In addition, the parents informed that when children enter formal education in Arunachal Pradesh, they are often compelled to adopt English and Hindi as their primary languages of communication among peers. This abrupt transition hinders their cognitive development and undermines social interaction in their mother tongue. Over time, children began to develop feelings of shame regarding their native language, perceiving it as inferior to other languages. They prefer to speak only in Hindi within groups, even though these peer groups belong to the same community. Moreover, the teacher, who belongs to the same tribe, also communicates in Hindi or preferably in English with the students. Additionally, a growing insecurity about "how would they get a job, and what would people think of them?" (Fishman, J. 1996.) compounds this situation. Hence, to overcome this alienation, Galo children are choosing the dominant language over their native tongue. The teacher's role is pivotal in guiding students to master these skills engagingly. This sense of dissatisfaction and alienation compels the children to adopt English and Hindi at the expense of their native language.

### **Learning a language in a formal setting will be more effective**

The Parents emphasize the role of the school and the teacher in bringing positive changes among their children. Parents whose children are in government schools are found to be dissatisfied with the teaching and learning process of the newly introduced third language<sup>4</sup> subjects. Their views indicate that the mother tongue textbooks implemented in schools from grades VI to VIII are not taken seriously by either teachers or students. Unlike the NCERT, National Council of Research and Training syllabus for other subjects, the Mother Tongue subject is not considered for promotion to the next grade. Furthermore, some parents want the third language textbook to be implemented in private schools as well, since a larger population of children

from many villages attends boarding schools in private institutions where they are taught to learn and speak Hindi and English. Learning a language formally will be more effective because children regard it more seriously than the frequent urging of their parents to speak in their native tongue at home.

### **Lack of a positive attitude towards the native language among the younger generation**

The attitude of children plays a key role in developing language. Parents are of the view that children are made to consider their native language as unimportant compared to the dominant language. Society views English and Hindi as a gateway to better opportunities and career prospects, overshadowing the value of the mother tongue. This mindset has a significant impact on both children and their parents. The socio-economic value of English and Hindi cannot match the importance of their native tongue. Consequently, children gradually start to feel ashamed of speaking their mother tongue and begin to regard it as inferior to other languages. The daily routine of children often limits their exposure to Hindi or English, whether virtually or physically, leaving little time dedicated to their native language.

### **Lack of interest in the newly developed script of the Galo Language**

Furthermore, the parents have concluded the fact that their children are more confused when it comes to writing their language by using the Gallo Ennam. Mostly, they prefer to use the writing by using the Roman letters, considering it easier. Whereas the newly developed script, MRS, modified Roman language has a few modifications according to the language pronunciation. The motive behind the development of the script was to preserve and promote the dying language. Ironically, the younger generation found it more complicated and began feeling excluded from the elders of the society, those who are efficient and encourage the use of script.

### **The effect of technological gadgets results in a loss of social relations with parents and grandparents**

This problem is accelerated by the use of modern technological gadgets. One of the major concerns of parents is the increasing number of technological gadgets used by their children, along with the rising number of hours spent on these devices. Children are surrounded by a global language. Thus, the language attrition among their children is not an abrupt change. Rather, modern technological gadgets are currently replacing the quality of time children spend with their parents at home. The quality of social time spent with the family is gradually decreasing. While at home, they are mostly absorbed in their gadgets, and during various family or social functions, they are occupied with Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. This makes it challenging for parents and society to instill changes that would promote quality interaction with their children.

### **A new language has already emerged in Galo society in the form of Lingua Franca**

When languages lose their viability, it is not easy to regenerate their functionality, no matter how hard the governments and

people try (Unganer, 2014). Disappointed by their failed attempt to maintain a vibrant native language environment at home, the parents said, "By this time, it is too late, as a new language has already emerged in Galo society in particular and the state as a whole. Sadly, those said to be using their mother tongue are imbibing Hindi alongside their native tongue, resulting in the formation of a lingua franca<sup>6</sup>. So, the existence of fluent Galo language is hardly found among the older generation only."

### **Conclusion**

Nevertheless, following the recommendation of NEP 2020 on the significance of mother tongue in education, there is a positive shift aiming to foster interaction in native languages within the school environment. Various Elite groups of the Society <sup>[4]</sup> are promoting the language workshop and orientation programme within the community, engaging teachers, parents, and the younger generation. Meanwhile, several research studies are underway to find an effective solution for the pressing issue of language attrition among the Galo tribe in particular and the state of Arunachal Pradesh as a whole.

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